Religions of Rome

Volume 2
A Sourcebook

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Conventions and abbreviations

ILS  Inscriptioes Latinae Selectae, ed. H. Dessau (Berlin, 1892–1916).
JRS  Journal of Roman Studies.
MEFRA  Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome: Antiquités.
Vidman, Sylloge  L. Vidman, Sylloge inscriptionum religionis Isiacaet Sarapiacae (Berlin, 1969).
ZPE  Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik.

1 Early Rome

What was the character of the religion of the Romans in the period of the kings— from Romulus, the legendary founder in the eighth century B.C., to Tarquin the Proud, whose expulsion was said to have led to the foundation of the Republic at the end of the sixth century B.C.? This chapter sets out some of the evidence that has been used to answer that question. The material raises different, in some ways more difficult, problems than does the rest of the book: for these early phases of Rome's history we have no contemporary literary evidence, only the speculations of Romans living hundreds of years later, combined with the evidence of archaeology and a few early documents that set formidable problems of their own. A few of these survive in their original context (e.g. 1.6b; 1.7b), but most come down to us, quoted, or often misquoted and misunderstood, by later writers.

Modern scholars have sought to plug this gap by bringing into the discussion theories about the development of early societies in general, to try to make sense of the surviving clues. We start this chapter (1.1) by reviewing the evidence for one of the most famous of those theories: that the earliest Roman religion was a form of primitive 'animism', in which divine power was seen as widely diffused through natural phenomena, not located in superhuman beings (gods and goddesses); and that Rome only gained a mythology, with fully anthropomorphic gods and goddesses, by 'borrowing' them from the outside world (particularly Greece). We continue with a Roman account of the origins of their religious organization (1.2), followed by a series of texts which may preserve traces of some of the oldest rituals of Roman religion (1.3 and 4). The next sections explore different contexts of early Roman religion: first (1.5) literary and archaeological evidence for the religion of the early Latins (the inhabitants of the central Italian region of Latium, of which Rome was a part); secondly (1.6) the religious traditions associated with the Roman gens (family or clan). The final sections (1.7–9) are concerned with the evidence for the later regal period. Here we are now far better informed than earlier generations of historians, because of a whole series of dramatic archaeological discoveries which have shown that sixth-century Rome was a far more advanced and cosmopolitan society than anybody had suspected; and that the religious developments of this period must be seen in this cosmopolitan context, influenced both by the religion of the Etruscans and of the Greeks.

See further: Vol. 1, 1–18; Wärde Fowler (1911) 1–247; Dumézil (1970);
I Earliest Rome


1.1 Before the gods?

One of the most influential theories of religion, fashionable earlier this century, held that anthropomorphic deities (almost wherever they were found) were a secondary development in the history of religion; the result of the animistic powers, that were once perceived as diffused through the natural world, gradually ‘separating out’ to form individual gods and goddesses, with particular names, genders and (eventually) life-stories. Roman religion, it was argued, represented an exception to this standard pattern; for it became atrophied before reaching the more ‘advanced’, anthropomorphic stage of the evolutionary process, remaining in essence animistic. In other words, the gods and goddesses that we may think of as defining Roman religion (see chap. 2) were not a native Roman phenomenon, but merely the result of a process of importation (mostly from Greece) still going on well into the Republic; while the original, native Roman tradition must be sought in surviving traces of an animistic conception of divine power.

This idea is to be found even in quite recent books, despite the fact that the evolutionary theories on which it was based were abandoned by anthropologists decades ago; and despite the fact also that the Latin words for ‘god’ and ‘goddess’, as well as the Latin names of at least some of the gods and goddesses, belong to the very earliest stages of the history of the Latin language, and must in fact go back to the Indo-European ancestors of the Romans. The very first Latin speakers in central Italy, that is, must already have had a vocabulary for superhuman beings of some kind, long before Rome itself was founded. The passages that follow have often been used in support of an animistic theory of early Roman religion – but, as we show, can be interpreted in quite different ways.

See further: Vol. 1, 10–18; Wace Fowler (1911) 1–63; Rose (1926) 43–62; Rose (1948) 9–49; Dumézil (1970) 18–46*.

1.1a Gods without images

In this passage, Augustine (writing in the fifth century A.D.) quotes the words of the Roman antiquarian Varro (first century B.C.), claiming that in the earliest period of their history Romans had no cult-statues or images of the gods and goddesses. This does not, however, prove (as it has sometimes been said to) that Rome originally had no gods; for, as Varro himself shows, it is perfectly possible to have the conception of gods but not to have physical representations of them. Besides, interpretation of the passage as ‘evidence’ for early Roman religion is complicated by the nature of arguments that underlie it: Varro himself is using an image of primitive Roman life as part of philosophical theorizing on the nature of the gods; while Augustine is quoting Varro in order to make his own Christian points, interweaving his exposition of pagan philosophy with a Christian critique of it.

See further: Vol. 1, 10–11; Taylor (1931); Dumézil (1970) 25–8; Martin (1987) 11–53.

Augustine, The City of God IV.31 (= Varro, fr. 13 (56) and 18 (59) Carduans)
The same acute and learned author <Varro> says also that the only people to understand what god is are those who believe him to be the spirit governing the universe, through motion and reason. In this respect, Varro fell short of the truth, because god is not in fact himself a spirit, but the author and creator of spirit, as of everything else. But even if Varro did not free himself from the bias imposed by tradition, he did at least recognize and recommend that men ought to worship a single god, the governor of the universe through motion and reason. The only issue between us and him concerns his saying that god is a spirit, and not saying the truth – that he is the creator of spirit. Varro also tells us that the Romans worshipped the gods without any images for a hundred and seventy years. ‘Had that custom been retained,’ he says, ‘the worship of the gods would be more reverently performed.’ And among the evidence for this, he quotes the Jewish people.

1. The view here attributed to Varro is that of the Stoics, who identified a single divine entity as the principle behind the working of the universe.
2. Varro dated the foundation of Rome to 753 B.C., so he means approximately 575 B.C. as the year of the introduction of the first image. It is possible that he is referring to some specific dated event; but in any case, this date for the first images (however Varro claimed to know it) corresponds very roughly to the period of the first statues known to us. (See 1.7.)
3. For Varro’s knowledge of the Jews, see Nock (1959) 6 and 12.6a.

1.1b The ‘numen’

The word numen, meaning ‘shod’ or ‘divine power’, is used by Roman poets of the early Empire, such as Ovid, to indicate the mysterious presence of godhead in natural or man-made objects, in this case the boundary-stone – the terminus. According to animistic theories of Roman religion, Terminus was an example of the earliest form of Roman deity: it was never represented in human style, but always seen as the divine power residing in the boundary-stone. And the word numen itself, following these theories, was the standard Latin term for the pre-antropomorphic ‘divinities’ of the early period. In fact, the word hardly occurs in what survives of early Latin; and it is much more likely that it came to mean ‘divine power’ only in later literature, having had nothing at all to do with early forms of the gods.

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like Numa and that these would go to war themselves, he protected the royal rituals from being thus neglected by creating a *flamen* permanently devoted to Jupiter; he marked the office by a grant of special dress and an official chair of state <sella curulis> like the king’s. He added two more *flamines*, one for Mars, one for Quirinus and also chose virgin priestesses for Vesta. This priesthood originated at Alba and was not therefore alien to the founder of Rome. So that these priestesses should be able to devote their whole time to temple service, he provided them with an income from public funds; he conferred a special sanctity on them by ritual obligations, including the keeping of their virginity. He also chose twelve *Salii*, to serve Mars Gradivus; these were distinguished by an embroidered tunic with a bronze breastplate worn over it; their duty was to bear the heaven-descended shields, the *ancilia* as they are called, and to process through the city chanting hymns in time to a ritual triple-rhythm dance.

(20.5) Next, Numa appointed as pontifex Numa Marcius, son of Marcus, from among the patricians. He gave him full solemn written instructions about the ceremonies, specifying for each sacrifice the proper victims, the proper days and the proper temples and the way in which money should be raised to meet the expenses. He then subordinated all the other public and private religious ceremonies to the decision of the pontifex in order that the plebeians should have somewhere to seek advice; so he prevented confusion in the sacred law whether through the neglecting of the inherited rituals or by the adopting of foreign ones. It was the task of the pontifex to instruct, not just about the heavenly rites, but also about the forms for burying the dead and for placating the departed spirits, and also for recognizing and dealing with prodigies, whether from the lightning or from other signs.⁴

1. There is a problem here with Livy's arithmetic. The republican Roman year was in fact 354 days, 11 short of the right number. Livy evidently thought the right number was 12 × 30 = 360 days; he therefore reckoned, wrongly, that it was 6, not 11, days short.
2. Although ‘intercalation’ (the practice of inserting extra days into the calendar to keep it in line with the solar year) was part of the republican calendrical system (see 3.2.7), it is not likely that this goes back to the period of Numa.
3. This explanation for the origin of the days marked *fasti* and *nefastis* must be a later guess. Compare 3.1 (with 3.2 n.5), which offers a more intricate scheme of days.
4. For the *flamines* see Vol. 1, 19, 28–9; 8.1. 8.2d.
5. For the Vestals see Vol. 1, 51–4, 56–8; 8.4.
6. The settlement at Alba Longa was founded, according to Roman tradition, by Iulus, the son of Aeneas – and it was seen as the ultimate origin of a number of later Roman institutions. See 1.5a.
7. For the *Salii* see Vol. 1, 1, 43, 216; 5.4.
8. For the *pontifices* see Vol. 1, 24–6; 8.1a; 8.2a; 8.3. In fact, they have little to do with prodigies in the later Republic: for the usual procedures, Vol. 1, 37–9; 7.3.

1.3 The archaic triad: Jupiter, Mars, Quirinus

The three *flamines* created by King Numa (priests of Jupiter, Mars and Quirinus) have suggested that these three gods formed an ancient triad, who
would have been the leading gods of Rome until they were displaced by the, now more familiar, 'Capitoline' triad of Jupiter, Juno and Minerva (1.9b). This passage, confused and hard to interpret though it is, specifically links Jupiter (Feretrius), Mars and (Janus) Quirinus, and suggests that in the earliest period of the city's history these three gods may have been the recipients of the victory spoils, later to be monopolized by the Jupiter of the Capitol. (See, for example, the role of Capitoline Jupiter at the ceremony of triumph, 1.9a: 5.8.)

The information comes from an entry in an ancient dictionary which quotes directly from the records of the priests (the pontifices books) and from a law attributed to King Numa. However, the author of the entry seems to misinterpret the quotation: in part of the passage not given here, he implies a series of dated historical occasions on which Roman generals killed enemy leaders with their own hands and hence won the right to celebrate the special dedication of the spoils (spolia opima). But the words he quotes make it clear that this was wrong; they seem to be describing either a single ritual sequence in which a succession of offerings was made; or (more probably) three different rituals to be used in different situations. Whichever is the case, the recipients of the dedications are the three gods of the old triad, Jupiter, Mars and Quirinus, joined together in some specific sequence; and the dedicators who won the spoils from enemy leaders.

See further: Vol. 1, 14–16; Dumézil (1941–5); Charles-Picard (1957) 131–3; Dumézil (1970) 166–8; Rüpke (1990) 217–23; for a similar triad of male gods elsewhere in Italy, see 1.4b; for flamines see 8.1 and 8.2d.

Festus p. 204 (Lindsay) s.v. Opima spolia

[...?spoils taken from the enemy leader are] not [always] placed at the temple of Jupiter Feretrius: the evidence of this is in the pontificial books, which say that the public sacrifice for the first spolia should be an ox; for the second, the solitaurilia; for the third, a lamb; there is also a law of King Numa Pompilius on the spolia opima, as follows:

The man under whose auspices the spolia opima are won in full battle should dedicate them to Jupiter Feretrius; he should sacrifice an ox; let him who took them [give three] hundred in bronze. For the second spoils, let him sacrifice solitaurilia, whichever he wishes, at the altar of Mars in the Campus Martius. For the third spoils, let him sacrifice to Janus Quirinus a male lamb; let him who took them give one hundred in bronze. Let the man under whose auspices they were taken make the piacular offerings to the gods.

1. There is a break in the manuscript at this point; before the break the subject had been particular occasions of the dedication of the spolia opima.

2. The so-called 'first', 'second' and 'third' spolia were probably distinguished by the rank of the dedicator (see n. 4), as well as by the identity of the god who received the dedication. The author of this passage seems to be particularly concerned with where the sacrifices took place, although the pontificial books, as quoted, only specify the victims to be sacrificed. (The nature of the solitaurilia is not known, but it must be a specific combination of victims — maybe another version of the suuvetaurilia (the sacrifice of a pig, ram and bull); see 6.3a.)

3. This clause seems to refer to a gift of bronze, but it is not clear who is being said to ‘take’, or what he ‘took’.

4. This law suggests that only the first spoils — the opima — were won and dedicated by the commander under his own auspices; the other two ought then to be those of lesser officers or common soldiers, fighting under the auspices of a superior officer: but the piacular offerings (that is those made to compensate for an error or mistake) are to be made by the commander, whatever the rank of the dedicator.

1.4 Early rituals

The ritual practice of early Roman religion is for the most part completely obscure. But occasionally a later writer (as in 1.4a) quotes the words of a ceremony, claiming that they reflect the words used at a much earlier date. Or occasionally (as in 1.4b) the chance discovery of an inscription may throw some light — directly or indirectly — on the rituals of the early city.

1.4a Ritual of the 'fetiales'

The featial priests were concerned with rituals that marked the declaration of wars and the making of treaties. In this passage, Livy supplies a specific context for the origin of some of their priestly duties and law (the ius fetiale), by making King Ancus (Rome's fourth king; reigning, according to tradition, 642–617 BCE) the inventor of their rituals for the declaration of war, and associating the invention with an ancient war against Rome's Latin neighbours. In fact, the text of the formula given here is very unlikely to go back to early times and is probably reconstructed by an antiquarian writer on the basis of the later ritual. But, with its set formulae to be performed at fixed points (boundary, town-gate etc.) it strongly recalls the ritual programme of (e.g.) 1.4b; and the antiquity of the procedure in general (as opposed to the details of this account) seems to be confirmed by its similarity to the procedures of early Roman civil law. (Livy ascribes the origin of the featial rituals for treaties to the reign of Tullius Hostilius (the third king); Livy, History 1.24.)

See further: Bayer (1935); Latte (1960) 124; Ogilvie (1970) 127–36; Buat (1978) 175–8; Rüpke (1990) 97–117; Watson (1993); for the later history of the featial rituals, 5.5d.

Livy, History 1.32.6–14

When the legate arrives at the frontier of those from whom restitution is demanded, he covers his head with a fillet (the covering is of wool) and says: 'Hear thou, Jupiter, hear ye, boundaries of — naming whatever nation they belong to — let divine law hear! I am the official herald of the Roman people; I come lawfully and piously commissioned, let there be trust in my words.' Then he sets forth his demands, after which he takes Jupiter to witness: 'If I unjustly and impiously demand that these men and these goods be surrendered to me, then never let me be a full citizen of my fatherland.' He recites these
words when he crosses the boundary-line, again to the first person he encounters, again when proceeding through the town-gate, and again when he enters the market-place, with only slight modification to the form and wording of the oath. If his demands are not met, at the end of 33 days – for such is the customary number – he declares war as follows: ‘Hear thou, Jupiter, and thou, Janus Quirinus, and all ye heavenly gods, and ye terrestrial gods, and ye infernal gods, hear! I call you to witness that this people – naming whatever people it is – is unjust and does not render just reparation. But regarding these matters we will consult the elders in our fatherland, how we may acquire our due.’ Then the legate returns to Rome for the consultation. Without delay the king would consult the senators with words approximating these: ‘having regard to those goods, disputes and causes of which the pater patratus of the Roman people gave due notice to the pater patratus of the Ancient Latins, and to the men of the Ancient Latins, having regard to those things which they have neither rendered, nor fulfilled, nor discharged, speak – turning to the man whose opinion he would ask first – ‘What think you?’ Then he would reply: ‘I hold that these things ought to be sought by a war of justice and sacred duty. So I agree and with my vote approve.’ The others were then, in order of rank, asked the question; and when the majority of those present voted for the same opinion, war had been agreed upon. The usual procedure was for the fratria to carry to the boundary of the other nation a spear of iron or fire-hardened cornel-wood, and in the presence of not fewer than three adult males, to say: ‘Forasmuch as the tribes of the Ancient Latins and men of the Ancient Latins have committed act and offence against the Roman people, and forasmuch as the Roman people have ordained that war be declared on the Ancient Latins, and the senate of the Roman people has affirmed, agreed, and with their votes approved that there be war with the ancient Latins, I, therefore, and the Roman people, declare and make war on the tribes of the Ancient Latins and the men of the Ancient Latins.’ Having said this, he would hurl the spear across their boundary. This is the manner in which at that time redress was demanded of the Latins and war was declared, and it has been accepted by subsequent generations.

1. Janus was the god of doorways and beginnings, and Janus Quirinus, in this context (cf. 1.3), is the god of the beginning of war. Augustus in his achievements (13) boasts that the doors of the temple of Janus Quirinus were closed three times during his Principate, meaning that peace was three times established in the empire.
2. A senator appointed as ‘father’ (pater) of a deputation to a foreign power.
3. The Ancient Latins (Prisci Latini) were the ancient peoples of the plain of Latium, who were believed to have attacked Rome shortly after the beginning of Ancus Marcus’ reign. Their name is included here merely as the original example of Rome’s enemies; when the formula was used on other occasions the appropriate name would be in inserted. For Rome’s relations with the Latins in general, see 1.5.

1.4b The Rituals of Gubbio

The Romans shared much of their ritual (as they did their language) with their immediate neighbours, the Latins (see 1.5); but we also have knowledge of more remote communities in other parts of Italy who had similar religious traditions. The rituals translated here are recorded on bronze tablets of late republican date from Iguvium (now Gubbio) in Umbria about 150 km. north of Rome. They are written in the Umbrian language which is distinct from Latin, but close to the language (Oscan) of Rome’s southern neighbours, the Samnites. All the same, the rituals described in such detail seem to show strong similarities with the accounts of early Roman practice (compare, for example, these formulae for establishing a templum with those in 4.4 and, more generally, the structure of the prayers with 1.4a, 5.7b and 6.5). Moreover, the Jupiter to whom this ritual is addressed formed part of an triad (Jupiter, Mars, Vulcanus – all three with the additional title ‘Grabovius’) which is reminiscent of the Roman triad, Jupiter, Mars, Quirinus (1.3). Our knowledge of Umbrian is far from perfect and much of the translation, including, for instance, the names of the various birds mentioned, is uncertain. The possibility cannot therefore be ruled out that modern interpretations of the texts have been influenced by knowledge of Roman practices; that these interpretations do not, in other words, provide independent evidence for early Rome.


Iguvine Tablets V1a.1–31

The ars furtur shall begin this ritual with observation of the birds – a green woodpecker and a crow on the right, a woodpecker and a magpie on the left. He who shall go to observe the calling birds’ shall, seated, command the ars furtur from the hut as follows: ‘Demand that I observe a green woodpecker on the right, a crow on the right, a woodpecker on the left, a magpie on the left, birds on the left, sacred calling birds on the left.’ The ars furtur shall make the demand in these words: ‘There observe a green woodpecker on the right, a crow on the right, a woodpecker on the left, magpie on the left, birds on the left, sacred calling birds on the left, for me, for the city of Iguvium, for this station which has been established.’ While the one who goes to observe the calling birds is seated in the chair, no one is to make a sound and no one else is to sit in the way until he who has gone to observe the calling birds has returned. If there is a noise or if anyone else sits in the way, he shall make the ceremony null and void.

(8) The templum where the ars furtur remains for the sake of purifying the Mount, when established, is defined as follows: from the lowest corner, which is closest to the altar of the gods, to the topmost corner which is closest to the stones of augury, then from the topmost corner at the stones of augury to the city boundary, from the bottom corner at the altar of the gods to the city boundary. Then he shall make observances on both sides of the city boundaries.

(12) The city boundaries: from the stones of augury to the exits, to the observation post, to the fore-area of Nurpius, to the Vale, to the temple of Smurcia, to the house of
Miletina, to the third tower of the rampart; from the stones of augury to the avenue of Vesticius, to the garden of Rufer, to the house of Nonia, to the house of Salius, to the avenue of Hoius, to the gate of Padella.  

15. Below these boundaries which have been written down above, he shall watch for a green woodpecker on the right, a crow on the right. Above these boundaries, he shall observe a woodpecker on the left, a magpie on the left. If the calling birds sing forth, he shall make the following announcement seated in the hut, and he shall call the arsaurtus by name: 'A green woodpecker on the right, a crow on the right, a woodpecker on the left, a magpie on the left, birds on the left, sacred calling birds on the left, for you, for the city of Iguvium, for this station which has been established.' In all these rites for the lustration of the people and for the purification of the Mount, he shall hold the ritual rod. The vessels at the Trebulan Gates which shall be shown for the sake of purifying the Mount, he shall show them in such a way that fire be given to be kindled from fire. Likewise at the Tesenacan Gates, likewise at the Veian Gates.

22. Before the Trebulan Gates he shall sacrifice three oxen to Jupiter Grabovius. He shall speak these words as he presents the sacrificial cake: 'Thee I invoke in invocation, Jupiter Grabovius, for the Fisian Mount, for the city of Iguvium, for the name of the mount, for the name of the city. Be favourable, be propitious to the Fisian Mount, to the city of Iguvium, to the name of the mount, to the name of the city. In the sacred rite, I invoke thee in invocation, Jupiter Grabovius, in reliance on the sacred rite I invoke thee in invocation, Jupiter Grabovius. Jupiter Grabovius, thee I invoke with this yearling ox as a propitiatory offering for the Fisian Mount, for the city of Iguvium, for the name of the mount, for the name of the city. Jupiter Grabovius, by the effect of the <ox>, if fire has arisen on the Fisian Mount or in the city of Iguvium due rites have been neglected, let it count as not intended. Jupiter Grabovius, whatever of your ritual has been omitted or sinned against or transgressed or injured or ignored, if in your ritual there is a failing seen or unseen, Jupiter Grabovius, if it be right that with this yearling ox purification be accomplished.' Jupiter Grabovius, purify the Fisian Mount, purify the city of Iguvium, purify the elders, the priests, Jupiter Grabovius, the lives of men and beasts, the crops. Be favourable and propitious with your peace to the Fisian Mount, to the city of Iguvium, to the name of the mount, to the name of the city. Jupiter Grabovius, keep safe the Fisian Mount, keep safe the city of Iguvium.'

1. The arsaurtus (the Latin equivalent would be asauros) is acting for the state and people of Iguvium and may be a magistrate, like the Roman consul or praetor, rather than a priest.
2. A second official, acting on demand from the arsaurtus, his role seems to correspond to that of the Roman augur (see 4.4), but he is not referred to by a title, but by a description of his role.
3. For the smpalium, see 4.4.
4. The Fisian Mount is probably named after the local god, Fiusus (who may have been concerned with the protection of oaths and pledges). Compare the role of the Alban Mount in the rituals of the Latins, 1.5a.
5. These places (whose precise location is now unknown) are being used to define the city boundary.

6. In Roman religion rites of lustration were a regular ceremony of purification.
7. These are punical sacrifices, see 1.3 n. 4.

1.5 Rome and the Latins

Early Rome had even closer religious links with her more immediate neighbours, the states who formed the 'Latin league'. These links are known to us (a) through myths implying that the foundation of Rome was linked with those of the nearby towns of Alba and Lavinium (Aeneas was said to have founded Lavinium, his son Iulus, Alba Longa, and their descendant Romulus, Rome itself; there was also a common mythical ancestor of the Latin peoples—King Latinus); (b) through the survival, into the late republican period and beyond, of religious rituals held in common between Rome and various Latin towns (such as the great festivals of all the Latins (Feriae Latinae) or the ceremonies carried out each year by the Roman consuls at Lavinium); and (c) through archaeological evidence (see below 1.5b for Lavinium).

The Latins seem to have met—religion as well as political or military reasons—at various sanctuaries, located outside different towns of the League (see 1.5a; 1.5b(ii); 1.5c; 1.5d). It is generally assumed (by both modern and ancient writers—see, for example, 1.5d) that the different location of these sanctuaries is to be seen as evidence that different states became leaders of the League at different points of history; but it may be, more simply, that the League (or some members of it) met at different places for different festivals.


1.5a Alba Longa

Alba Longa, founded according to Roman tradition by the son of Aeneas, was said to have been destroyed by the Romans under King Tullus, the third king of Rome (reigning, according to tradition, 673–642 B.C.). Its whereabouts is not known, but the sacrifice on the so-called 'Alban' Mount (now Monte Cavo) mentioned by Pliny in this passage continued into later times. Pliny's main point is to show how many once-flourishing cities had disappeared by his day (first century A.D.); but his list has been used by modern scholars to argue for an ancient 'Alban' League (centred on Alba Longa), which would have existed before the later 'Latin' League known to us in the fifth–fourth centuries.

Pliny, *Natural History* III. 69–70

... and together with these, the following were included among the 'Alban peoples', who were once accustomed to accept the sacrificial meat on the Alban Mount: Albani; Aesolani; Accienses; Abolani; Bubetani (and twenty-five other names). Thus of the peoples of ancient Latium, fifty-three peoples have disappeared leaving no trace.

1. Before this excerpt, Pliny has quoted some better-known names; the list of names from Albani onwards was evidently as unfamiliar to him as it is to us.

2. The sacrifice and the sharing of the meat must have been a symbolic expression of the community that shared in the festival, but did not necessarily imply any political unity.

1.5b  *Lavinium*

Unlike Alba Longa, the site of Lavinium is firmly identified (at modern Practica di Mare, 30 km. south of Rome). Excavations on the site have enabled scholars to link the mythical tradition of its foundation with the surviving remains.

See further: Vol. 1, 12, 13; Vol. 1, Map 5; Galinsky (1969) 141–90; Castagnoli (1972); Momigliano (1989) 59–61, 69–70.

1.5b(i)  *Aeneas’ arrival in Italy*

Lavinium was believed to have been founded by Aeneas when he landed in Italy. He was led there by a sow that bore thirty piglets (see Virgil, *Aeneid* III.389–93; VII.81–5; also, 4.3c), standing, it was sometimes said, for thirty member cities of the Latin League. The tradition followed by Dionysius, however, is that thirty was the number of years that would pass before the founding of a better city, Alba Longa, by Aeneas’ son Iulus.


Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* I.57.1

Aeneas sacrificed the sow with her young to his ancestral gods on the spot where now stands the hut which the Lavinians hold sacred and make inaccessible to others. Then after commanding the Trojans to shift their camp to the hill, he placed the images of the gods in the best part of it and immediately made preparations for the building of the city with the greatest enthusiasm.

1. The Penates, the household gods, that he had brought with him from Troy.

1.5b(ii)  *The Altars at Lavinium*

Excavations at the site of Lavinium in the 1950s and 60s revealed a row of thirteen imposing altars, stretching 50m. which would have stood in a great open sanctuary, outside the town. The earliest of these altars date back to the sixth century B.C. Not far away was a burial mound, which (at the end of the fourth century) was remodelled as a kind of shrine. This was probably the shrine, mentioned in literary sources, that was dedicated to Aeneas as founder of Lavinium. The archaeological evidence makes it very likely that this was an important cult-centre, connected with Lavinium’s role as a sacred place for the Latins. After the fourth century B.C., however, its use gradually declined.

See further: Vol. 1, 1–3; Castagnoli (1975); *Enea nel Lazio* (1981) 169–77; for the shrine of Aeneas, Cornell (1977)*.

1.5b(iii)  *The Eastern Sanctuary; terracotta staue of Minerva*

On the other side of Lavinium, another sanctuary has produced further evidence of religious activity from the sixth to the third century B.C. Many fragments of terracotta statues of Minerva (Greek Athena) were found in 1977, of which this is the largest and most complete (height, 1.96m.). It may be Athena as the patron-deity of Troy, who according to Strabo, v.34.5, had a statue at Lavinium. But the details of dress, armour and above all the figure of the Triton (a man with a fish’s tail) at the goddess’ side, suggest that this was a very specific Greek type – derived from Athena’s sanctuary of Alkalomenai in Boeotia (central Greece) and evoking the legend of her birth from a stream called Triton close by.

1  Athena’s aegis (goatskin), with Gorgon’s head and serpents – her standard and characteristic clothing.
2  Shield, with crescent moons and serpents – probably a specific reference to the Boeotian cult.
3  Three-headed snake, probably also a Boeotian element.
4  The Triton.

1.5c The grove at Aricia

Another early league of Latin towns was based near Lake Nemi, in the territory of the ancient Aricia, 30 km. south-east of Rome in the grove of Diana, home to the slave-priest (rex nemorensis) celebrated in Frazer’s Golden Bough.


1.5c(i) The foundation of the Arician League

We know about this league of towns only because the foundation document was included by Cato the Elder in his history of the towns of Italy, written in the second century B.C.; although this work of Cato is mostly lost, this particular passage from it was preserved by the fourth-century A.D. grammarian, Priscian, because he was interested in the linguistic form of one word. It is uncertain whether the Romans were members of this league or not.

See further: A. E. Gordon (1934) 1–4; Sherwin-White (1973) 12–13.

Cato, Origins fr. 58 (Peter) = 28 (Chassignet)

Egerius Baebius of Tusculum, the dictator of the Latins,1 made the dedication of Diana’s lucus2 in the grove of Aricia. These peoples were the sharers: the people of Tusculum, Aricia, Lanuvium, Laurens3, Cora, Tibur, Pometia, Rutulan Ardea . . .

1. The title ‘dictator’ means the leading magistrate or commander; it may be significant that he comes from Tusculum not Rome, though the office might have been held by each member-city in turn.
2. Lucus probably means a sacred clearing in a wood; see 4.5: 4.11.
3. ‘Laurens’ refers to the people of Lavinium (1.5b).
4. Priscian stopped his quotation here because it was the form of this name on which he wished to comment; so the list might originally have been longer and might have included Rome as a member.

1.5c(ii) Coin (denarius) showing Triple Diana (43 B.C.)

This coin probably shows the cult-image of Diana from the grove. The three figures may represent three different aspects of Diana: the goddess as Diana the huntress; as Hekate, goddess of the underworld; and as goddess of the Moon.

The coin was minted in Rome by P. Accoleius Lariscolus, whose family came from Aricia; on its obverse it carried an image of a bust of Diana.

See further: Alfoldi (1960); Crawford (1974) no. 486.

1. Cypress grove probably evoking the grove at Aricia.
2. Diana with bow, as huntress.
3. Diana with poppy, as the Moon.
4. Central Diana, as Hekate.
5. Horizontal bar links the triple goddess.
1.5d  The sanctuary of Diana at Rome

Rome attained hegemony of a Latin League reputedly in the time of Servius Tullius, sixth king of Rome (reigning, according to tradition, 578–535 B.C.). In Livy's account, it was the construction of a new federal sanctuary to Diana on the Aventine Hill — perhaps conceived as a rival to the sanctuary at Aricia — that secured the supremacy of Rome. It is an implication of the second half of Livy's story that the new order was sanctioned by divine approval, even though won by the priest's trickery.

See further: Vol. 1, 3; Vol. 1, Map 1 no. 19; Momigliano (1963a) 106–7; Alföldi (1965) 85–100; Ogilvie (1970) 181–3; Ampolo (1970); for the later influence of this sanctuary, 10.1.

Livy, History 1.45

When the size of the city had been augmented by the citizen body, and when domestic policy both civil and military had been shaped, Servius desired that Rome's power should be expanded not always by force but also by diplomacy. At the same time he sought to add something to the beauty of the city. Even by this early date, the temple of Diana at Ephesus was renowned; it was reputed to have been built by the contribution of the city-states of Asia. Servius lavishly praised this unanimity and associated worship in the presence of the Latin nobles, with whom he was diligently seeking to establish hospitable and friendly relations, both in an official and unofficial capacity. By force of constantly reiterating the same theme, he at last prevailed upon them, and a temple for Diana was built at Rome by the Latin peoples in conjunction with the Roman people. This was an admission that Rome was the principal city, a point which so many times had been disputed by force of arms.

(45.3) All the Latins seemed to have forgotten their preoccupation with this contentions after having been defeated so often in armed struggle, when one of them, a Sabine, thought he saw the opportunity of recovering supremacy by devising a private strategy. In Sabine territory there was a heifer born on the property of a head of family, a creature of astonishing size and beauty; her horns were fastened up for many ages in the vestibule of the temple of Diana as a monument to the miracle that she had been. The heifer was regarded as a prodigy and seers predicted that the city whose citizens sacrificed her to Diana would become the seat of imperial rule; this prediction reached the ears of the priest of Diana's temple. On the first day that seemed favourable for sacrifice, the Sabine conducted the heifer to Rome, led her to the temple of Diana, and stationed her in front of the altar. There the Roman priest, moved by the great size of the victim about which he had heard so much, remembered the prophecy and addressed the Sabine with these words: 'What are you intending, stranger?' he asked, 'To offer a sacrifice to Diana in impurity? Do you not intend abluting yourself first with running water? The Tiber flows down in the valley.' The stranger, conscience-stricken, and wishing to perform all acts according to ritual so that the prophecy might be fulfilled by the event, immediately went down to the Tiber. At once, the Roman priest sacrificed the heifer to Diana, an act which brought enormous pleasure to the king and to the city.3

1. The influence of the cult at Ephesus has often been dismissed as a later invention, but some contact with that cult or with a related foundation in the West (Marseilles (Massilia) is not impossible; recent discoveries (see 1.7 and 8) have indicated that sixth-century Rome was in touch with Greeks and other immigrants.
2. Servius' league centre may have been in rivalry with the league at Aricia, though it is much debated which came first. A bronze column stood within the precinct of the sanctuary of Diana, inscribed with regulations and with the names of the member communities; see Vol. 1, 3, 330.
3. For this element of trickery in dealings with the gods, see 7.1b, 7.1c.

1.6  Religion and the Roman gens

In early times the gens (family or clan) was probably a major focus of social, military and religious life. Although the religious traditions of the Roman gens seem later to have declined in importance, they did not die out altogether. For example, the religious associations of the gens Julia (the family of Caesar and Augustus) took on great importance again in the first century B.C. (see 1.6a).

1.6a  Vedius and the Julii

The inscription on this late republican altar gives us one of our few substantial indications of the religious traditions of the aristocratic clans. The Julii claimed descent from Iulus, son of Aeneas and the founder of the royal line of Alba Longa (see 1.5a). Here the Julia, acting as a clan, record a dedication or sacrifice to the god Vedius. It seems likely that Vedius represented, at least for the Julii, the divine form of their founder, Iulus; for it was a Latin tradition that when founders were deified, they took on a new name — so, Romulus became the god Quirinus (2.8a); Aeneas, at least at Lavinium, became Indiges; Latinius the founder of the Latins became Jupiter Latiares.

The inscription was found at the small town of Bovillae, which was believed to be near the site of Alba Longa; after the destruction of Alba itself, its cults were supposed to have been transferred there.

See further: Vol. 1, 89; Vol. 1, Map 5; Weinstock (1971) 8–12*.

ILS 2988; ILLRP 270

(On the front) Members of the Julian clan to Father Vedius
(On the side) Altar for Vedius
(On the back) Dedicated by the Alban Law
1.6b  A dedication from Satricum

This inscription was found on a roughly worked stone (the inscribed face about 80 cm. by 15 cm.), discovered in excavations on the site of the temple of Mater Matuta at Satricum (about 50 km. south-east Rome). Probably dating to around 500 B.C., it records a dedication to Mars by the companions (sodales) of Poplios Valeos (in later Latin spelling, Publius Valerius). The text seems to suggest (as in 1.6a) that Valerius’ kinsmen and retainers were acting as a group, making a religious dedication on that group’s behalf; and it has been related to passages in Livy (e.g. 11.49.5) which imply that the members of a gens together with their clients might form a unit, moving around or even fighting battles together, perhaps sometimes outside the control of any particular city.


AE (1979) 136

The companions of Poplios Valeos set this up for Mars.

1. The word sodales does not mean simply ‘friends’, but it does not refer exclusively to family members either; and it often means members of the same club or group or even priestly college. So here ‘retainers’ or ‘clients attached to him on a permanent basis’ is the likeliest interpretation.

2. A man of this name, Publius Valerius (Publicola), was the first consul of republican Rome; but it cannot be proved that this is the same man. The man named in this inscription may have come from Rome, Satricum or any other Latin city.

3. We do not know if there were any special links between Mater Matuta (a goddess associated with the dawn) and Mars in Satricum; but it is not unusual to find dedications to different gods in the same temple.

1.6c  Potitii and Pinaritt

According to Roman tradition (see Livy, History 7.12–14), one of the most important cults of early Rome, that of Hercules at the Ara Maxima in the Forum Boarium, had originally been in the charge of two clans, the Potitii and the Pinaritt, then of the Potitii alone. In this passage, Livy tells of a reform in the last quarter of the fourth century B.C., placing it in public charge. Although the development that Livy suggests, from family to public control, is historically plausible, the details of the story are not; and, in fact, the clan of the ‘Potitii’ – far from being a prominent family in early republican Rome – is otherwise unknown.


Livy, History IX.29.9–11

It was on Appius’ advice that the Potitii, a clan in which the priesthood of Hercules at the Ara Maxima had been hereditary, instructed public slaves in the rites of that worship so as to turn over to them the maintenance of the cult. After this, as tradition has it, something extraordinary occurred, something that might well create religious terror about ever changing rituals from their established order; for although at the time of the reform there were twelve families of the Potitii, of which adult males numbered thirty, yet within a year every one of them, the entire clan, had died out. Not only was the name of the Potitii extinguished, but even the censor Appius was, owing to the enduring indignation of the gods, struck blind a few years later.

1. Appius Claudius Caecus (Caecus = ‘the blind’); held the office of censorship in 312 B.C., the consulship in 307 and 296. The end of this story (see also n. 2) offers an explanation for his name Caecus.

2. The story of the punishment visited on both the gens and the leading political figure suggests that the reform was resisted and resented; it would also (as Livy implies) have provided a useful warning against further religious reforms.

1.7  Greeks and Greek influence in Rome

Archaeological evidence, much of it newly discovered, shows that by the sixth century B.C. the Romans were exchanging cults, artistic skills and ideas with Greeks, Etruscans, even Carthaginians. These discoveries have overturned a view that scholars commonly used to hold, that Rome in its early centuries preserved in a pure form the original unchanging religion of the Latin race. The overall picture of Rome’s foreign contacts at this date remains hard to reconstruct; but even the fragmentary state of the evidence provides important information on the history of individual sites.

1.7a  Servius Tullius and the temple of Fortuna

Servius Tullius, the sixth king of Rome (reigning, according to tradition, 578–535 B.C.), was said to have founded a pair of temples in the city to Fortuna and Mater Matuta (see 1.6b n.3). Excavations near the Church of St Omobono between the Forum and the Forum Boarium have revealed a pair of temples of exactly the right date, which may well be those of Servius Tullius.


1.7af  A literary account of Servius’ temple

In this passage Dionysius describes a statue in the temple of Fortuna.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Roman Antiquities IV.40.7

Another prodigy demonstrated that he <Servius> was beloved of the gods; it was as a result of this that the mythical and incredible ideas about his birth, which I mentioned before, came to be accepted generally as the truth. For in the temple of Fortuna he had
brought himself, there stood a gilded wooden statue of him that survived undamaged when a fire destroyed everything else around. Even today, although the temple and its contents were all restored after the fire, it is obvious that they result from recent art, but this statue is of ancient workmanship, as it was originally. It is still the object of veneration by the Romans.

1. Roman Antiquities IV. 2; he was supposed to have been born after the miraculous appearance of a phallus in the hearth of the palace (see Vol. 1, 53).

1.7a(ii) Hercules and Minerva in the temple of Fortuna

1.7b Castor and Pollux

The divine twins, Castor and Pollux, were also known as the Dioscuri, a name derived from the Greek 'Dios kouroi', or 'sons of Zeus'; and according to Greek legend were native to the city of Sparta. This inscription on a bronze tablet is a dedication to them found at Lavinium near the monumental altars (see 1.5b(ii)). The text is written in archaic Roman letters (probably of the sixth to fifth centuries B.C.); but the form of the names and in particular the word 'kouroi' (virtually a transliteration of the Greek word 'kouroi') shows that it was to all intents and purposes a Greek inscription. It offers clear evidence of direct Greek influence in cult in central Italy in this early period, if not the presence of Greeks themselves at a major sanctuary.


1.7c The Volcanal

In the Roman Forum, at the west end, in the area known as the comitium (4.7 n. 6.), was an ancient shrine of the god Vulcan — the Volcanal. It was covered by a later paving of the Forum, but excavations have revealed here also clear Greek influence.

See further: Vol. 1, 12; Coarelli (1983–5) t.161–78.

1.7c(i) Reconstruction of the Volcanal

The surviving archaeological traces, combined with literary evidence, suggest this possible reconstruction of the sixth-century Volcanal: an altar (1) similar in form to those discovered at Lavinium (1.5b(ii)); next to it a column (2), which probably held a statue.
1.7c(ii) Hephaestus at the Volcanal
This fragment of a Greek (Athenian) pot, 570–560 B.C., is the most ancient of the objects to be found associated with the Volcanal. It depicts the Greek god Hephaestus—who (as has always been known) was eventually identified with the Roman Vulcan, as the god of fire and of metalworking—returning to Olympus, riding on a donkey. The presence of this fragment at the site suggests that the identification of the Roman with the Greek god, far from being late or literary, was made already in the sixth century B.C.

1. Hephaestus, carrying a cup.
2. The donkey’s head—note the ears.
literal truth of this claim, it is certain (from archaeological and other evidence) that Rome fell under increasing Etruscan influence at the end of the regal period. It is during this period that we notice for the first time the presence of the so-called ‘Capitoline triad’ of deities (Jupiter, Juno and Minerva), whose pre-eminence almost entirely effaced the pre-Capitoline triad of Jupiter, Mars and Quirinus (1.3).


1.9a The Roman triumph

The origin of the triumph celebrated by the victorious Roman general (5.8) goes back to this final period of regal Rome — probably replacing as a victory celebration the old dedication of spoils (1.3). In this passage Pliny refers to the custom of painting the body (probably just the face) of the triumphing general with red paint, in the same way as the cult statue of Capitoline Jupiter was painted. This suggests a connection, albeit temporary, between the triumphing general and the leading deity of the Capitoline triad.

See further: Vol. 1, 44–5; Gjerstad (1967); Versnel (1970) 59–60 and 78–84; Bonfante (1970)*; Scheid (1986b) 221–30*.

Pliny, Natural History xxiii.111–12

Verrius' lists authorities whom we must believe when they tell us that on festive days the face of the statue of Jupiter himself was painted with red lead and likewise the body of the triumphing general; that was how Camillus' had his triumph; according to this rule even in those days the red lead to be placed among the unguents at the triumphal banquet and the first duty of the censors was to place the contract for the red-leading of Jupiter.

1. Verrius Flaccus, the Augustan antiquarian (see 3.3b).
2. Roman general of the fourth century B.C.

1.9b The temple of Jupiter, Juno and Minerva

In the early centuries of the Republic, the centre of Rome was dominated by the great temple of Jupiter on the Capitol (jointly dedicated to Juno and Minerva), which seems to have been on a far greater scale than other early temples. It was an Etruscan building and must have been intended (as this passage of Livy suggests) to express the power and dominion of the ruling dynasty. The republican tradition, however, later tried to claim this temple as its own — suggesting that, although built by the kings, it was not actually dedicated by them, but in 509 B.C. by the first ever consul of the new regime.


Livy, History i.55.1

After the recovery of Gabii,1 Tarquin <the Proud> made peace with the Aequei, and renewed his treaty with the Etruscans. He then turned his attention to business at home. His first concern was that the temple of Jupiter on the Tarpeian hill2 should be left as the monument of his reign and of his royal line; of the two Tarquinian kings, the father <the Elder> had vowed it, the son would have completed it.3

1. An early rival of Rome, 20 km. to the east.
2. The old name of the Capitol.
3. For the dedication of the temple, see Livy ii.8.