

# *Religions of Rome*

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VOLUME 2

A Sourcebook

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## 5 Festivals and ceremonies

Ritual solemnity, formal processions, prayers, sacrifice. All these had an important part to play in Roman religious festivals. But so also (just as in our own culture) did less solemn activities: theatrical performances, racing, gift-giving, eating and drinking. Roman festivals were, in fact, strikingly diverse. Some were part of the regular cycle of celebrations prescribed in the Roman calendar (see **chap. 3**); others (although taking place on specific dates, at regular intervals) were never included in that formal calendar of festivals; some were public affairs, involving widespread popular participation; others took place privately, with no 'official' ceremonial; some had an origin lost in the earliest history of the city; others were 'invented' in much more recent, well-documented times. There was no one type of Roman religious celebration.

This chapter concentrates on the festivals that took place in the city of Rome itself: starting from major celebrations of the official religious calendar (5.1–4), and the contradictory images of conservatism and innovation in those celebrations (5.5), it moves on to the ceremonies of 'oriental' deities (5.6), to the religious ceremonial of the games (5.7) and the triumph (5.8). These specifically *Roman* celebrations were, however, just one small part of the religious rituals of the Roman empire as a whole and they were not systematically exported to (or imposed on) conquered provincial communities. Roman soldiers and some Roman citizens resident in the provinces would probably have observed the major religious festivals of the capital with some sacrifice or celebration (note, for example, the religious observances of the Roman *coloniae* – 10.2; or of army units – 3.5). But generally a visitor to a provincial town in Greece or Gaul would not have found the festivals of the city of Rome reproduced on provincial territory; instead a varied range of local ritual customs were practised even under Roman political control.

See further: for brief discussion of all major traditional festivals, Warde Fowler (1899); Scullard (1981)\*; for full citation of ancient sources for each regular festival, Degrassi (1963); for *Roman* celebrations outside Rome, Vol. 1, 320–39.

### 5.1 The Parilia

The festival of the Parilia took place annually on 21 April (see 3.3). It was a ritual concerned with the well-being of flocks and herds, and also, by the late

Republic, associated with the anniversary of Rome's foundation – as the birthday celebration of the city itself. It is tempting to think of this double significance in terms of a chronological development, from pastoral to political ceremony, and, if that is the case, it shows clearly how an individual festival could take on radically new meanings, even when there was no marked change in the details of the ritual performed. But in fact, the political aspect of the festival may be as old as its pastoral aspect.

See further: Vol. 1, 174–6; Beard (1987); on the deity Pales, Dumézil (1969) 273–87; (1970) 380–5; on the myth and 'reality' of an early Roman pastoral society, Ampolo (1988).

#### 5.1a *The festival and its origins*

Ovid here describes some of the rituals of the Parilia, claiming that he himself has performed the ceremony. His description appears to refer both to ceremonies taking place in the city (at which he himself participated) and those celebrated at a local or village level. Ovid also offers various explanations for the origin of the Parilia – ending with an allusion to Rome's foundation.

Ovid, *Fasti* IV.721–46, 783–806

Night has gone and dawn is appearing. I am called upon to tell of the Parilia – and not called in vain, if kindly Pales grants her favour.<sup>1</sup> Kindly Pales, please grant your favour to one who sings of shepherds' rites, if I show dutiful respect to your festival. I can assure you, I have often myself borne along, with loaded hands, the ashes of the calf and the beanstalks – the sacred materials of purification; I can assure you, I have personally leapt over the fires, arranged three in a row, and the moist laurel has sprinkled its drops of water over me.<sup>2</sup> The goddess is moved and grants her favour to my work. My ship is leaving its dock; now my sails find their fair wind. Go, people, and bring from the virginal altar the materials of purification. Vesta will provide them; by Vesta's generosity you will be pure. The blood of a horse will make up those materials, together with the ashes of a calf; the third ingredient will be the empty stalk of a hard bean.<sup>3</sup>

(735) Shepherd, purify your well-fed sheep as dusk first falls.<sup>4</sup> First sprinkle the ground with water and sweep it with a broom; decorate the sheep-pen with leaves and branches fastened upon it; deck out the door and cover it with a long garland. Make blue smoke from pure sulphur, and let your sheep bleat when she is touched by the smoking sulphur. Burn up the wood of male olive trees, pine and juniper; and let the laurel singe and crackle in the middle of the hearth. Put a basket of millet with the millet cakes; the country goddess takes especial pleasure in this kind of food. Add her favourite morsels and a pail of milk, and when the morsels have been cut up, pray to sylvan Pales, with an offering of warm milk.

<After the words of the prayer (asking Pales to protect the cattle and sheep) and further description of the ritual, including the leaping

through the flames of the bonfires, Ovid considers the origins of the festival.>

(783) I have described the custom; it remains for me to set out its origin. The multitude of explanations causes a doubt, and holds back my project at its very start. Devouring fire purifies everything and burns the impurities out of metals; so for that reason it purifies the sheep and their shepherd too. Or is it because those two irreconcilable deities, fire and water, are the opposing principles that make up everything? And for this reason our ancestors joined these elements together and thought it right to touch the body with fire and drops of water? Or is it because the origin of life is contained in these elements, that people regard them as particularly important – and because the exile loses them, because they turn a bride into a wife?<sup>5</sup> I hardly believe so. There are those who would imagine that the reference is to Phaethon<sup>6</sup> and Deucalion's flood.<sup>7</sup> Some also say that, when shepherds were striking rock against rock, a spark suddenly sprang forth; the first spark died, but the second was caught in straw. Is this the reason for the flame at the Parilia? Or did this custom rather derive from the piety of Aeneas, who was given a clear passage by the flames even in his defeat?<sup>8</sup> Or is it not closer to the truth that, when Rome was founded, orders were given that the household gods be transferred to the new houses; and that, in changing their homes, the farmers set fire to their country houses and the cottages they were about to leave and leapt through the flames with their cattle too? It is a practice that continues even now on your birthday, Rome.<sup>9</sup>

1. The deity associated with the festival is here treated as a goddess (though other accounts imply that Pales was male). Compare the uncertainty over the sex and character of Robigo, 2.2b.
2. The ceremony appears to involve lighting bonfires, scattering materials of purification in the flames and leaping over the fires.
3. *Ideally* (though it could not have been the case in practice, at least not for all participants) the material of purification was supposed to be made by the Vestal Virgins (see 8.4). The ingredients included the ashes of the unborn calves (sacrificed at the ceremony of Fordicidia, 15 April – 3.3a n.4) and the dried blood of a horse (sacrificed at the ceremony of the October Horse, 15 October).
4. At this point, with the address to the 'Shepherd', Ovid seems to move on to the rural version of the festival; see Vol. 1, 175.
5. A man exiled from Rome was formally 'deprived of fire and water'; when the new bride entered her marital home, she was offered fire and water.
6. In Greek mythology, the son of Helios (the sun); he attempted to drive his father's chariot, but was unable to control it and would have set the world on fire had not Zeus/Jupiter put him to death with a thunderbolt.
7. The Greek 'equivalent' of Noah; according to mythological accounts, he survived a world flood by building an ark.
8. Aeneas escaped safely from the blazing city of Troy.
9. Ovid has by now worked round to explanations connected with the founding of Rome. In the following passage he offers a lengthy account of the story of Romulus and Remus.

### 5.1b *Pastoral festival to political celebration*

Here Plutarch attempts to rationalize the different associations of the Parilia. He suggests two chronological changes: (a) the development of a *pre-Roman* pastoral festival into a festival commemorating the foundation of the city; (b) the introduction of animal sacrifice into a festival which had originally been 'bloodless' (see 6.4).

Plutarch, *Life of Romulus* 12.1

Now it is generally agreed that the foundation of the city took place eleven days before the Kalends of May <21 April>. And this day is celebrated by the Romans with a festival, which they call the birthday of their country. In the beginning, so it is said, they sacrificed no living creature – but thought that they should keep pure and bloodless the festival commemorating the birthday of their country. However, even before the city's foundation, they had a herdsman's festival on that day and they called it 'the Parilia'.

### 5.1c *The Festival of Rome*

In the second century A.D., the Parilia gained the alternative title 'Romaia' ('Festival of Rome' – see 3.3d and 3.5, both under 21 April). In this passage Athenaeus evokes the noisy celebrations that accompanied the rituals of Rome's birthday.

See further: for the developments under Hadrian, Vol. 1, 257–8; Beaujeu (1955) 128–33.

Athenaeus, *Table-talk* VIII.361 e-f

While the conversation was continuing in this kind of way,<sup>1</sup> right then throughout the whole city was heard the resounding note of the pipes, the clash of the cymbals and the beat of the drums, accompanied by singing. It turned out that it was the festival of the Parilia, as it used to be called – now known as the Romaia, to commemorate the foundation of the temple of the Fortune of the City of Rome by the universally greatest and most cultured emperor Hadrian. That day is celebrated each year as a special occasion by all the inhabitants of Rome and by those staying in the city.

1. The dramatic setting is a dinner-table conversation in a house at Rome.

## 5.2 *The Lupercalia*

The festival of the Lupercalia (marked in calendars on 15 February) presents us with even more difficult problems of interpretation than the Parilia. Ancient accounts of what happened during the ritual do not vary much – though they do not agree on the route taken by the naked, or near-naked runners, who raced around the city. But writers offer very different, sometimes contradictory,



accounts of the religious significance of the ceremonies. These differences were themselves a cause of interest and bafflement to those Romans who looked on their own religious traditions with an antiquarian or academic eye. But it would be wrong to imagine that for most participants at the festival 'problems of interpretation' were at issue. At any celebration (of this or any other festival) there was no doubt a profusion of individual views, understandings and explanations. That profusion only becomes 'problematic' if we (or the Roman analysts) attempt to reach a single authoritative account of the significance of the ritual.

See further: Vol. 1, 47 and n.143; Harmon (1978) 1441–6\*; Hopkins (1991)\*.

### 5.2a *The peculiarities of the Lupercalia*

Besides describing some of the (to him) stranger aspects of the festival, Plutarch offers two different explanations of its significance: that it is a ceremony of purification; and/or that it is a commemoration of the myth of Romulus and Remus and their suckling by the wolf.

Plutarch, *Life of Romulus* 21.3–8

The Lupercalia, to judge from the time of its celebration, would seem to be a festival of purification. For it is performed on the inauspicious days<sup>1</sup> of the month of February (a name which may be explained as meaning 'purificatory') – and in early times they used to call the day itself 'Febrata'. But the name of the festival has a sense equivalent to the Greek 'Lycaea' <feast of wolves>, and because of that it seems to be exceedingly ancient, going back to the Arcadians under Evander.<sup>2</sup> In fact this is the generally accepted explanation; for it is possible that the name is derived from the she-wolf <'lycaina'>.<sup>3</sup> Moreover we see that the *luperci*<sup>4</sup> start out on their circuit of the city from the place where Romulus is said to have been exposed.<sup>5</sup> But what actually happens in the festival makes it hard to hazard a guess about its origin. For they sacrifice goats; then two boys of noble family are brought forward – and some touch their foreheads with a bloody knife, and others immediately wipe off the blood using wool soaked in milk. Once they have been wiped, the boys must laugh. After this, they cut the goat skins into strips and run about naked but for a belt around their waist, striking anyone in their path with the thongs. And women of childbearing age do not try to escape the blows, believing that they help towards fertility and easy childbirth.<sup>6</sup> A distinctive feature of the festival is that the *luperci* sacrifice a dog as well.

(6) A certain Butas,<sup>7</sup> who wrote of the mythical origins of Roman customs in elegiac verse, says that the followers of Romulus, once they had defeated Amulius,<sup>8</sup> raced joyfully to the spot where the she-wolf suckled the twins when they were babies; and that the festival is conducted as an imitation of that race, and that the boys of noble family run:

Striking those they meet – as long ago, with sword in hand,  
From the town of Alba, Romulus and Remus ran.

And he suggests that the bloody sword is applied to their foreheads as a symbol of the

slaughter and danger of that time; and the cleansing with milk is a reminder of how the twins were nourished. Caius Acilius,<sup>9</sup> on the other hand, writes that before the foundation of the city Romulus' companions once lost their flocks; they prayed to Faunus and then ran off to find them – naked, so that they should not be troubled by sweat. And this, he suggests, is the reason that the *luperci* run around naked. As for the dog, one might say (if it really is a purificatory sacrifice) that it is sacrificed as a means of purification. For the Greeks also in rituals of purification bring out puppies and in many places practice what they call 'periskylakismoi'.<sup>10</sup> But if they perform these rites as a thank offering to the she-wolf, for the saving and nourishing of Romulus, it is not without reason that a dog is sacrificed. For the god is the enemy of wolves – unless, by Zeus, the animal is being punished for annoying the *luperci* when they run their course.

1. The days marked N (*nefastus*) in the calendar; see 3.1.
2. According to Roman myth, the first king to settle on the site of Rome; he had migrated from Arcadia in Greece. The Romans regarded this 'pre-Roman' Rome as the origin of some of their most ancient religious traditions; see Vol. 1, 2–3.
3. The wolf who suckled the twins.
4. The priests who conducted the ceremony; they formed two colleges, the '*luperci Quinctiales*' and the '*luperci Fabiani*'. Their total number and length of service is unknown. By the late Republic they included not only men of high status (such as Mark Antony, see 5.2b), but also ex-slaves.
5. Plutarch implies here that the *luperci* ran in a circle around an area of the city (probably the Palatine hill, the limit of the earliest Roman settlement), starting from the so-called 'Lupercal' (the cave where Romulus and Remus were found by the wolf). This circular course has suggested to many scholars that the ceremony was the equivalent of a 'beating the bounds' of the earliest city. But see 5.2d.
6. Some scholars have seen this association with fertility as the central significance of the festival.
7. A Greek poet whose history of Rome has not survived.
8. The usurper king of Alba Longa, who exposed the twins.
9. Second-century B.C. Roman author, who wrote a history of Rome (now lost) in Greek.
10. The Greek term means a ritual in which a puppy ('skylax') was carried *around* ('peri').

### 5.2b *Caesar and the Lupercalia*

The most famous celebration of the Lupercalia took place in 44 B.C., when Mark Antony used the occasion to offer Julius Caesar a royal diadem – and so also the title and position of king. It is possible that Antony chose the Lupercalia as the time to make his offer simply because it was a well-attended festival, where some of the many onlookers might be expected to applaud the gesture. But it is also possible that there was a more specific reason for his choice of the Lupercalia. Some modern scholars have suggested that in earliest times the festival was concerned with the conferral and confirmation of royal power, and that Antony's actions in 44 B.C. indicate a recollection of that original significance.

See further: Gelzer (1968) 320–2\*; Dumézil (1970) 349–50; Weinstock (1971) 331–40; Alföldi (1974) 86–106; Dumézil (1975) 157–60.

Plutarch, *Life of Caesar* 61.3–4

Caesar was watching these ceremonies,<sup>1</sup> seated on the *rostra* on a golden throne, dressed in triumphal costume.<sup>2</sup> Antony was one of the runners of the sacred race; and in fact he was also consul. So he rushed into the Forum – the crowd parting to make way for him – and offered to Caesar the diadem<sup>3</sup> he was carrying, entwined with a wreath of laurel. There was some applause, not very hearty, but desultory and contrived. But when Caesar pushed it away, the whole people burst into applause; and a second time just a few applauded when Antony repeated the offer, but everyone did when Caesar refused it. So the experiment failed,<sup>4</sup> and Caesar rose and ordered the wreath to be taken to the Capitoline temple.<sup>5</sup> But it was noticed that his statues were dressed up in royal diadems. So two of the tribunes, Flavius and Marullus, went and tore them off; then they searched out those who had first hailed Caesar ‘king’ and carried them off to prison.

1. The Lupercalia.
2. That is, the costume of a victorious general on the day of his triumph – see 1.9a; 5.8.
3. Diadems were the distinctive attribute of kings of the Hellenistic Greek East – a symbol of foreign monarchy, in conflict with the traditions of republican Rome.
4. The implication is that this event was staged by Antony and Caesar to test public opinion.
5. That is, he sent the diadem to Jupiter Optimus Maximus – whom he said (according to Dio, XLIV.11.3) was the ‘only king of Rome.’

### 5.2c *The Lupercalia as a festival of the dead*

The Lupercalia fell within the period of the Parentalia (13–22 February), the major Roman festival concerned with the dead. Some comments by ancient authors (such as this passage of Varro on the derivation of the name ‘February’) suggest that the Lupercalia could be seen in the context of the underworld and of the spirits of the dead.

See further: Michels (1953)\*.

Varro, *On the Latin Language* VI.34

Two months were added to these:<sup>1</sup> the first is called ‘Januarius’ after the god who comes first in order;<sup>2</sup> the second, as the same writers claim, is called ‘Februarius’ after the gods of the underworld <*di inferi*>, on the grounds that these deities are offered sacrifice at this time of year. I prefer to think ‘Februarius’ is named after the Day of Purification <*dies februatus*>, because the people are purified <*februatur*> on that day – that is the naked *luperci* go round the ancient Palatine city, which is surrounded by human flocks.<sup>3</sup>

1. That is, to the original ten months of the Roman year, March to December.
2. Janus; for his priority in ritual see, for example, the invocation (starting from Janus) in 6.6a.
3. This sentence has been the subject of much discussion. It has commonly been seen as a reference to the circular course of the *luperci* around the city, purifying (by striking with the lash – see 5.2a) the people who stood round about. Michels (1953), however, not accepting the circular route (see 5.2d), suggests that the ‘human flocks’ are to be

understood as the flocks of *the dead*, who during February ‘besieged’ the city. The purification performed by the *luperci* was thus the purification of the city from the pollution of the dead.

### 5.2d *The route of the luperci*

The idea that the Lupercalia represented a ‘beating of bounds’ around the ancient city limits of Rome depends on assuming that the *luperci* ran literally in a circular course *around* the area of the earliest settlement. Several ancient sources, as we have seen, imply that route. But here Augustine refers to their running *up and down* the Sacred Way. The different route suggested involves a different view of the ritual’s meaning.

See further: Michels (1953)\*.

Augustine, *The City of God* XVIII.12

For people also<sup>1</sup> explain the ascent and descent of the *luperci* along the Sacred Way<sup>2</sup> in this way, saying that they represent the men who made for the mountain tops on account of the floods, and returned again to the low-lying ground when the floods subsided.

1. Augustine has been discussing cults instituted to commemorate the deliverance of the human race from flood.
2. The road running through the Forum up to the Capitoline. Michels (1953) lays much stress on the fact that the Forum was the ancient burial ground of the city – see 5.2c.

### 5.2e *The Lupercalia and the Christians*

The Lupercalia continued to be celebrated into the fifth century A.D. At the very end of that century, the bishop of Rome prohibited Christians from taking part; but his ruling was contested by some Christians who considered that the traditional ritual should continue to be carried out. In this passage the bishop replies to his critics among the Roman elite, accusing them of inconsistency.

See further: Vol. 1, ix–x, 388; Green (1931); Pomares (1959); Holleman (1974); and (on whether the bishop concerned is, as is usually assumed, Gelasius I or his predecessor Felix III) Y.-M. Duval (1977).

Gelasius, *Letter against the Lupercalia* 16

But what do you yourselves say – you who defend the Lupercalia and claim that it ought to be celebrated? You yourselves are devaluing the festival; you are making its cult and its solemnity cheap and common. If the spurning of the Lupercalia has brought adversity upon us,<sup>1</sup> the fault is yours; for although you consider the festival particularly beneficial, you reckon it is to be celebrated carelessly, and with much less reverence and piety than your ancestors in paganism celebrated it. For in their day nobles themselves took part in the running, and married women received the lash, appearing naked in public. It is you who committed the first offence against the Lupercalia. It would have been better not to

carry it out at all, than to celebrate it wrongly. But you have abandoned this cult that you think is so venerable and important for our well-being to common, vulgar characters, the down-and-outs, men of the lowest birth.

1. One of the main arguments used by the bishop's opponents was that the banning of the festival had brought disaster on the city.

### 5.3 The Saturnalia

The Saturnalia (marked in the calendar on 17 December) had both a public and a well-known private aspect. Alongside the formal sacrifice and banquet at the temple of Saturn (7.3a n.8), the festival involved private parties (sometimes extending over several days) and the exchange of gifts. The festival remained popular in the third and fourth centuries A.D. – and its customs became incorporated into the Christian celebrations of New Year and Christmas.

See further: Vol. 1, 50 and n.154; Balsdon (1969) 124–6\*; Dupont (1992) 203–5\*; Versnel (1993) 136–227.

#### 5.3a *The topsy-turvy world of the Saturnalia*

Religious festivals sometimes gave licence to disrupt (temporarily) the established social rules and hierarchies. One of the best-known aspects of the private Saturnalia was the privilege of wining and dining that was briefly extended to household slaves. In this passage, Macrobius interrupts the dialogue of his *Saturnalia* (whose dramatic setting was – as the title suggests – this particular festival), with news of the slaves' dinner party.

Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.24.22–3

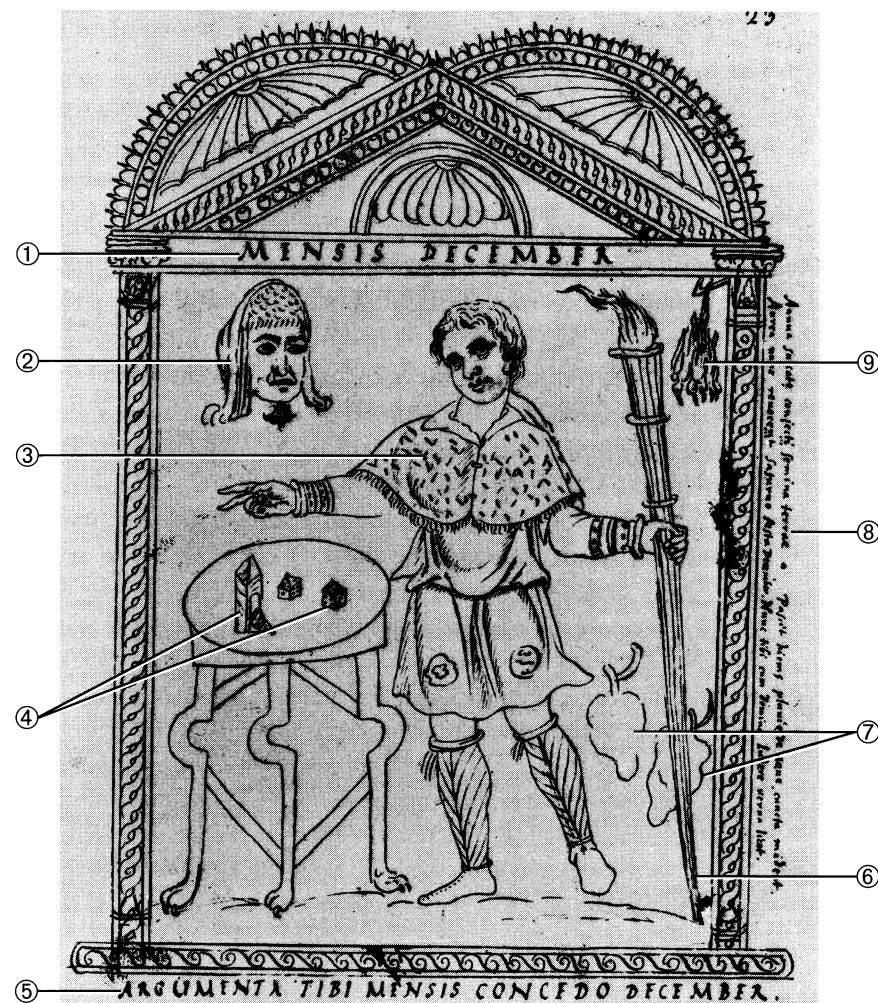
Meanwhile the head of the slave household, whose responsibility it was to offer sacrifice to the Penates, to manage the provisions and to direct the activities of the domestic servants, came to tell his master that the household had feasted according to the annual ritual custom. For at this festival, in houses that keep to proper religious usage, they first of all honour the slaves with a dinner prepared as if for the master;<sup>1</sup> and only afterwards is the table set again for the head of the household. So, then, the chief slave came in to announce the time of dinner and to summon the masters to table.

1. Some ancient writers even suggest that the masters waited on the slaves at this meal.

#### 5.3b *The party spirit*

In the calendar of Filocalus (see 3.3d) the illustration for the month of December depicts a Saturnalian party-goer. This version is taken from a seventeenth-century manuscript copy of the calendar. Height of figure, c. 0.20 m.

See further: H. Stern (1953) 283–6; Salzman (1990) 74–6\*.



1. 'The month December'.
2. Mask – alluding to games of disguise played at the festival. Although the mask resembles a theatrical mask, there is no evidence of any public theatrical performances at this time.
3. The costume of this male figure has been variously interpreted. The short tunic has been taken to indicate a slave – and so one of the principal participants of the festival. Alternatively, he has been seen as dressed simply in the normal winter costume of a country dweller.
4. Dice with the dice-tower, through which the dice were thrown – a reference to the gaming and gambling associated with these celebrations.
5. 'I grant the subjects of the month of December to you.'
6. The torch alludes to the night-time (as well as day-time) celebration of the Saturnalian parties.
7. Heart-shaped objects, not clearly identifiable.
8. Four lines of verse:  
'Behold winter nourishes the seed thrown each year into the ploughed earth; all is wet with rain sent from Jupiter. Now let December call once more the golden festival for Saturn. Now you, slave, are allowed to play with your master.'
9. Birds hanging – the catch of winter-hunting; perhaps also a Saturnalian gift.

### 5.3c *Escaping the Saturnalia*

Not everyone at Rome enjoyed holidays. For some, in fact, it was a mark of status to parade a detached attitude to this kind of popular jollification. Here Pliny, describing the layout of his villa, offers his own view of the Saturnalia.

Pliny, *Letters* II.17.23–4

Then there is an ante-chamber and a bedroom built to face the sun, which catches the first rays in the morning and keeps the light (albeit obliquely) until past midday. When I retreat into these rooms, I feel that I am really quite away from my own house; and I take great pleasure in this – particularly at the Saturnalia, when the rest of the place resounds with merry shouts in the free spirit of the holiday. For in this way I do not interrupt my household's amusements, nor they my work.

### 5.4 The Salii and their rituals

Some religious festivals at Rome were connected with Rome's activities in war. The priests known as the *Salii* performed their ritual dances and songs through the streets of the city over several days in both March and October – months which marked (in the primitive community of early Rome) the beginning and end of the annual campaigning season. These ceremonies continued even when Roman military operations extended well beyond the summer months.

See further: R. Bloch (1960) 134–41\*; Ogilvie (1970) 98–9\*; for a critique of the idea of a 'war-cycle' of rituals, Rüpke (1990) 22–7; for the rituals on the declaration of war, see 1.4a; 5.5d, and on military victory 5.8.

#### 5.4a *Dancing warriors*

Dionysius describes the costume and dances of the *Salii*. Writing primarily for a Greek audience (and in order to argue that Roman religious institutions derived from Greece – see 5.7a), he attempts to show that the rituals can best be explained by relating them to Greek myth and practice.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* II.70.1–5

The sixth part of his religious legislation was devoted to those whom the Romans call *Salii*.<sup>1</sup> Numa himself appointed them from among the patricians, choosing the twelve most handsome young men. Their sacred objects are kept on the Palatine hill, and they themselves are known as the *Palatini*. For the *Agonales*, who are called by some the *Salii Collini*, and whose sacred repository is on the crest of the Quirinal, were appointed after Numa's reign by the king Hostilius, in fulfilment of a vow that he made in the war against the Sabines.<sup>2</sup> All these *Salii* are a kind of troupe of dancers and singers of praise in honour of the gods of war. Their festival takes place around the time of the Panathenaea,<sup>3</sup>

in the month called 'Martius' <March>. It is conducted at public expense, over many days, during which the *Salii* lead their dances through the city to the Forum and the Capitoline hill, and to many other places, both public and private. They are dressed in embroidered tunics clasped with bronze belts, and crimson-striped robes edged with purple, fastened with brooches; these robes are called 'trabeae', a distinctively Roman garment and a mark of the greatest honour amongst them. On their heads are set so-called 'apices', high caps narrowing into the shape of a cone, that the Greeks call 'kyrbasiai'. Each one of them has a sword hanging from his belt, and in his right hand wields a spear or a rod or some other such weapon, and in his left holds a Thracian shield. This is like a diamond-shaped shield, drawn in at the sides to form two hollows<sup>4</sup> – just like those carried, it is said, by the men amongst the Greeks who perform the sacred rituals of the *Kouretes*.<sup>5</sup> And the *Salii* are, if you translate the title into Greek, *Kouretes*; at least that is my opinion. Their Greek name derives from their time of life, because they are 'young men' <Greek: 'kouroi'>; their Roman name from their spirited movements. For the Latin word for 'to jump' and 'to leap' is *salire*. And for the same reason they call all other dancers *saltatores*, deriving the word from the *Salii* – because in their dancing there is much leaping and springing. Whether I have made a correct interpretation in giving them this title, anyone who wants will be able to judge from the actions they perform. For in their armour they make rhythmic movements to the sound of the flute, sometimes in unison, sometimes in turn; and they sing some traditional hymns while dancing. And it was the *Kouretes*, if we are to judge from ancient stories, who first established dancing and displays of movement under arms and the ringing that comes from shields struck by daggers.<sup>6</sup>

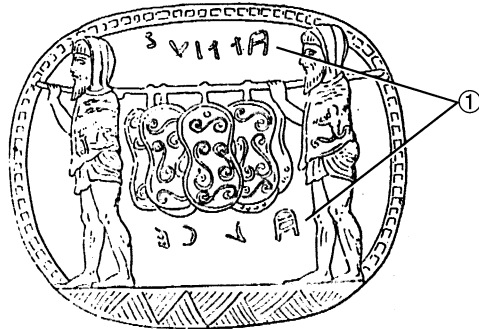
1. This passage is part of a review of the religious foundations of Rome's second king, Numa (1.2) – listed under eight separate headings.
2. Dionysius refers to the two sub-groups of *Salii* (*Palatini* and *Agonales/Collini*), whose origins were attributed to two different kings – the second group to Tullus Hostilius, the third king of Rome, following his victory over the enemy Sabines.
3. Dionysius uses the title of the great Athenian festival of the goddess Athena to refer to the Roman Quinquatrus (19–23 March), the festival of Minerva (the Roman equivalent of Athena).
4. See 5.4b.
5. A cult association from Mt Ida on the island of Crete, who brandished shields, performed war dances and sang ritual chants.
6. Dionysius is here referring to the *mythical* Kouretes (the legendary antecedents of the Cretan cult association). According to tradition, they protected the infant god Zeus by banging and clashing their shields – so drowning his cries and concealing his whereabouts from his father Kronos, who was intent on swallowing him.

#### 5.4b *The Salian shields ('ancilia')*

The most distinctive feature of the *Salii* were their figure-of-eight shields (*ancilia*) – which, according to a later passage of Dionysius (*Roman Antiquities* II.71.1), were worn by the priests themselves and also (as shown on this fourth- or third-century B.C. gemstone, 0.013 m. × 0.017 m.) carried along by their

servants, suspended on rods. The shields were apparently identical; but amongst them was one which, according to tradition, had fallen directly from heaven into the palace of Numa – the others being made to match in order to confuse potential thieves.

See further: Beard (1989) 42, 49; for archaeological details and other representations, Schäfer (1980).



1. In Etruscan script, 'Appius alce' ('Appius gave this'). The use of Etruscan language could suggest that the gem-engraver had in mind one of the groups of Salian priests that existed in other towns of central Italy, rather than those of Rome itself.

#### 5.4c *The Salian hymn*

The hymn sung by the *Salii* in the course of their dancing had become by the first century A.D. a byword for archaism and unintelligibility – as this passage from Quintilian's handbook on rhetoric remarks.

See further: R. L. Gordon (1990a) 188–9, on the importance of unintelligibility; for the surviving Latin fragments of the hymn, K. Buechner, *Fragmenta Poetarum Latinorum* (Leipzig, 1982) 1–4.

Quintilian, *Education of an Orator* 1.6.40–1

But one should exercise restraint <in the use of archaic words>, neither employing them often, nor for show. For there is nothing more irritating than affectation. And they should not be dredged up from a period long gone and forgotten – words like *topper* <'forthwith'>, *antigerio* <'mightily'>, *exanclare* <'to endure'>, *prosapia* <'stock'>, and the language of the hymn of the *Salii*, which is now hardly understood by its own priests. But religion forbids those words to be altered, and we must treat them as holy objects.<sup>1</sup> But as for a speech, on the other hand, whose main virtue is clarity – how faulty must it be, if it needs an interpreter?

1. In fact there were changes in the formula: the senate decreed that the name of the emperor Augustus should be inserted; and Marcus Aurelius included the name of his dead son. These insertions are a clear indication that despite the unintelligibility (and despite Quintilian's strictures) the hymn retained symbolic significance. For the image of conservatism in Roman ritual more generally, see 5.5a.

### 5.5 *Ritual conservatism and innovation*

Roman religious ritual can be characterized as *both* rigidly conservative *and* extraordinarily open to innovation. Alongside a stress on strict adherence to the traditional rules of religious observance, the history of Roman religion was marked by novelty and change: not only the introduction of new festivals for particular deities or changes in the interpretation of festivals, but also new *forms* of ritual, and *adaptations* of ritual performance to fit changing circumstances. The passages that follow explore this paradox – starting from an expression of the importance of the exact performance of the prescribed ritual formulae, then contrasting this with two particular types of innovation in ritual, the *lectisternium* (5.5b and c) and changes in the fetal ritual (5.5d).

See further: Vol 1, 32–4; North (1976)\*.

#### 5.5a *Scrupulous observance*

In discussing the general question 'do words have power?', the Elder Pliny draws on examples from Roman religion. He notes, in particular, the importance attached to repeating the prescribed formulae of prayers or sacrifice without any alteration or omission. In principle at least, whole ceremonies could be required to be repeated if minor errors in pronouncing the formulae or in other ritual actions occurred.

See further: Köves-Zulauf (1972) 21–34; North (1976) 1–5\*.

Pliny, *Natural History* xxviii.10–11

In fact a sacrifice without a prayer is thought to have no effect, or not to constitute a proper consultation of the gods.<sup>1</sup> Besides, one kind of formula is used in seeking omens, another in averting evil, another for praise. We see too that senior magistrates make their prayers using a precise form of words: someone dictates the formula from a written text to ensure that no word is omitted or spoken in the wrong order;<sup>2</sup> someone else is assigned as an overseer to check <what is spoken>; yet another man is given the task of ensuring silence; and a piper plays to prevent anything else but the prayer being audible. There are records of remarkable cases of both types of fault – when the actual sound of ill omens has spoilt the prayer, or when the prayer has been spoken wrongly. Then suddenly, as the victim stood there, its head <that is, a part of the liver> or heart has disappeared from the entrails, or alternatively a second head or heart has been produced.<sup>3</sup>

1. Suggesting public belief in the *power* of words.  
2. See, for example, 5.7b line 123; 6.6a; 10.1c.  
3. These abnormalities of the entrails would make it an ill-omened sacrifice – simply because (as Pliny claims) the prayer had been incorrectly recited. See 13.2.



5.5b *The first 'lectisternium'*

The *lectisternium*, a banquet given to, and in honour of, the gods was first celebrated in the early fourth century B.C. and was incorporated into several major festivals. It is likely that the custom was introduced to Rome from the Greek world, where such banquets were well known. Although Livy's description here of the first Roman celebration of a *lectisternium* does not make its origin explicit, various features of his account (some of the deities honoured and the role of the Sibylline Books – see 1.8; 7.5) strongly suggest a Greek background.

See further: Vol. 1, 63; Taylor (1935); Gag  (1955) 168–79; Dum zil (1970) 567–8\*; Ogilvie (1970) 655–8.

Livy, *History* v.13.5–8

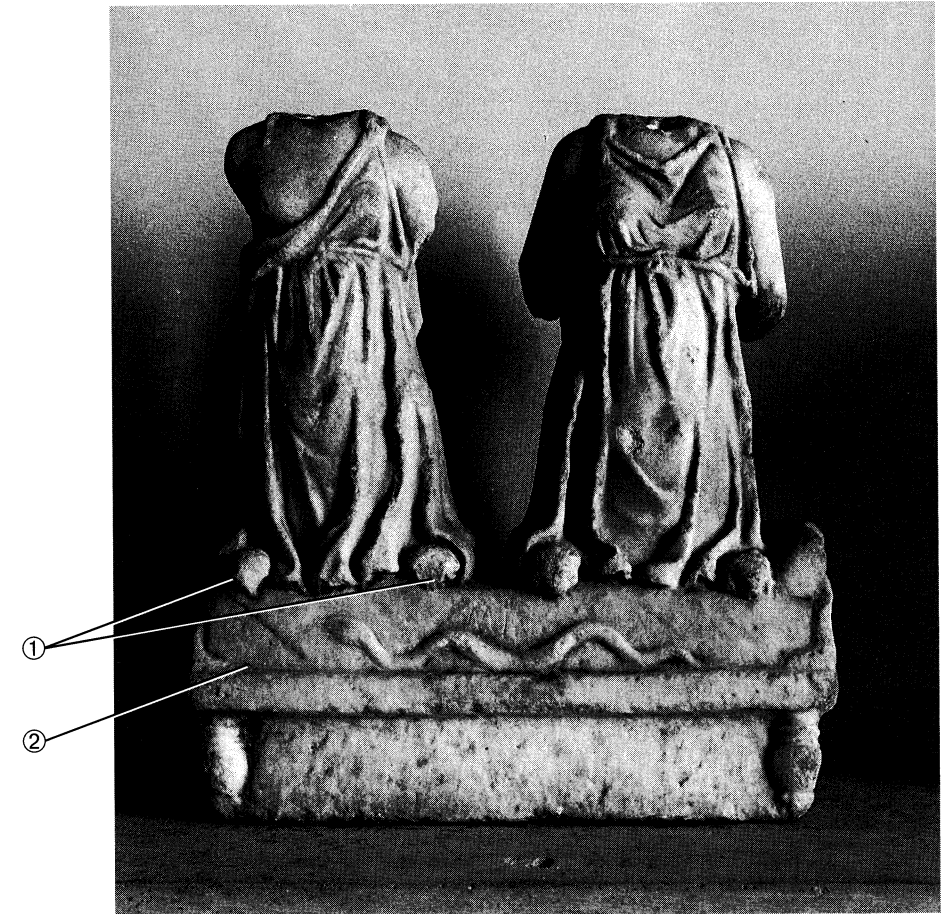
When they managed to find neither the cause nor any means of ending the incurable plague of that winter,<sup>1</sup> the Sibylline Books were consulted by decree of the senate. The *duoviri sacris faciundis*<sup>2</sup> celebrated the first *lectisternium* ever held in the city of Rome, and for eight days they appeased Apollo and Latona and Diana, Hercules, Mercury and Neptune,<sup>3</sup> with three couches spread as magnificently as it was then possible to furnish. The rite was also celebrated in private houses. Throughout the whole city doors stood ajar, everything was left out in the open to be shared by anyone who wished, and they say that all visitors – whether known or unknown – were welcomed hospitably, while people exchanged friendly and courteous words with their enemies, setting aside their quarrels and disputes. Prisoners too were freed from their chains for those days; and afterwards they felt scruples about imprisoning those whom the gods had helped in this way.

1. A plague had broken out in the middle of Rome's war against the town of Veii. All the earliest *lectisternia* were carried out in response to plague.
2. This priesthood of two men (*duoviri*) is the earliest form of the *quindecimviri sacris faciundis*.
3. The precise combination of deities is a puzzle. But note that Apollo and Latona (Greek Leto, Apollo's mother) is a distinctively Greek pairing; and that Apollo is commonly associated with healing and protection from plague.

5.5c *Goddesses at the banquet*

This marble sculpture probably represents two goddesses at a *lectisternium*. Although discovered in the region of Praeneste (near Rome – see 4.9), the deities have been tentatively identified as the two *Fortunae* (Fortunes) associated with the neighbouring town of Antium. Height, 0.50 m.

See further: Brendel (1960); Champeaux (1982–7) I.152–5.



1. Each goddess is supported on two poles – on which they would have been carried.
2. Probably the couch (*pulvinar*) for the sacred banquet. However, the presence of the snake (often a religious symbol of the home – see 4.12) has suggested other interpretations – for example, that this is intended to represent a marriage bed, under the protection of the *Fortunae*.

5.5d *Changes in the fetial ritual for declaring war*

The fetial ritual for the declaration of war (see 1.4a) provides a striking example of radical change in the performance of a particular ritual. The traditional procedure involved the fetial priests travelling to the borders of the enemy territory and hurling a spear into it. As Rome's territories grew and her enemies became more distant (often hundreds of miles away across the sea), this practice could hardly be sustained. This passage (taken from an ancient commentary on Virgil's *Aeneid*) reflects the later character of the fetial ritual, while offering a perhaps fanciful explanation of how exactly the change was made.

See further: Vol 1, 132–4; McDonald and Walbank (1937); Oost (1954); Rawson (1973a); Rich (1976) 56–60, 104–7\*; R pke (1990) 105–7.

Servius, *On Virgil's Aeneid* IX.52

When thirty-three days had elapsed after they had demanded redress, the fetial priests used to hurl a spear against the enemy.<sup>1</sup> But later, in the time of Pyrrhus,<sup>2</sup> the Romans were going to wage war against an overseas enemy and could find no place for the *fetiales* to perform this ritual for declaring war. So they arranged for one of Pyrrhus' soldiers to be captured, and they made him buy some land in the area of the Circus Flaminius<sup>3</sup> in order to fulfil the proper procedures for declaring war on, as it were, enemy land.<sup>4</sup> Later a column was consecrated on that land, in front of the temple of Bellona.

1. The commentator has been explaining why in the *Aeneid* the prelude of war was marked by the hurling of a spear.
2. King of Epirus (Greece), engaged in war with the Romans during the 270s B.C.
3. In the city of Rome.
4. The idea was that this land should be treated as hostile territory for the purpose of throwing the spear – so avoiding sending the priests on a lengthy sea voyage.

## 5.6 Ceremonies of Magna Mater and Isis

Some of the festivals of 'oriental' deities – with their strange, brightly coloured costumes, strident music and elaborate, gaudy processions – struck Roman observers as flamboyantly 'different' from the rituals of state religion. To us, the rituals of the Lupercalia and the Salian dances may seem just as 'odd' as the 'oddest' ritual of Isis; and it is clear (as 5.6b shows) that there was no rigid dividing line between state festivals on the one hand and 'oriental' festivals on the other. But standards of 'oddity' are culturally determined, not objective; and the *difference* of 'oriental' rituals was a prominent theme in ancient writing on these religions.

Other aspects of the cults of Magna Mater and Isis are presented in 2.7; 6.7; 8.7 and 8; 12.4.

See further: Vol.1, 164–6, 196–8, 264–6, 287–8; Graillot (1912) 70–149; Witt (1971) 165–84\*; Vermaseren (1977a) 96–125\*; Turcan (1989) 42–61, 114–20; Beard (1994).

### 5.6a *Fresco depicting a celebration of Magna Mater, from Pompeii*

This painting of a procession in honour of Magna Mater was found on the outside wall of a small shop in Pompeii. A matching painting on the other side of the shop entrance depicted Venus; and above the entrance were paintings showing Apollo, Jupiter, Mercury and Diana. Width, 1.65 m.

See further: Spinnazola (1953) 213–37; Fröhlich (1991) 182–4.



1. Musicians, holding cymbals and pipes.
2. Small shrine containing a bust of the god Dionysus.
3. Central group of the procession. Note the distinction between the three (probably) male figures dressed in white – perhaps priestly officials – and the other participants, female and dressed in coloured robes. Each of the participants carries a musical instrument or cult object. The central figure of the priestly group holds a large container, perhaps (as in 8.7c) for the most sacred cult objects.
4. Statue of Magna Mater on a litter (*ferculum*) with carrying poles, surrounded by four porters. We are to imagine the statue of the goddess having been carried in procession out of her temple, surrounded by her worshippers. Note the distinctive lions at Magna Mater's feet (see 2.7c and e).
5. Altar and candelabra.

### 5.6b *The Spring festival of Magna Mater*

This passage illustrates a striking overlap between the festivals of 'oriental' deities and the 'official' authority of the Roman state, as well as suggesting widespread popular involvement in such 'foreign' rituals. Herodian is describing a procession that formed part of the cycle of ceremonies in honour of Magna Mater and Attis that took place annually in March – probably the procession associated with the Hilaria (Day of Rejoicing, 25 March), celebrating the rebirth of Attis. Although on this particular occasion the religious ritual was to be used to conceal an assassination attempt on the emperor Commodus (A.D. 176–92), the story presupposes that the emperor and the symbols of imperial power were regularly an integral part of the festival.

See further: Sfameni Gasparro (1985) 56–63.

Herodian, *History* I.10.5–7

On a particular day at the beginning of spring each year, the Romans hold a procession in honour of the Mother of the Gods. And all the tokens of private wealth and the treasures of the imperial house – wonders of material and craftsmanship – are conducted in procession before the goddess. And complete licence is given to everyone for all kinds of sport; and anyone can play the part of whatever character he likes. There is no position so high or exclusive that anyone who chooses cannot get dressed up and play at it, disguising his real identity – so that it is not easy to recognize who is himself and who play-acting. Maternus decided that this was an excellent opportunity for carrying out his plot undetected. For he hoped that if he himself put on the costume of a member of the praetorians<sup>1</sup> and armed his followers in the same way, he would be able to join in with the crowd of soldiers and be taken for a member of the procession; then, with everyone off their guard, he would suddenly fall upon Commodus and kill him. But he was betrayed by some of his followers who went ahead to the city and gave the plot away. (It was self-interest that provoked them to do this – the thought that they would have an emperor on the throne, instead of a robber chief.<sup>2</sup>) Before the day of the festival arrived, Maternus himself was arrested and beheaded; and his accomplices were punished as they deserved. Commodus sacrificed to the goddess and promised thank-offerings. He then celebrated the festival, and joyfully walked in the goddess' procession. During the festival the people held a public celebration for the well-being of the emperor.

1. That is the Praetorian Guard, who acted as the emperor's bodyguard.
2. The sense is not entirely clear. The point is probably that these men were so corrupt that they preferred having a fellow villain on the throne (i.e. Commodus) rather than a decent emperor.

### 5.6c *A procession of Isis*

In Apuleius' novel, *Metamorphoses*, the hero Lucius (who was turned into an ass at the beginning of the story, through his curiosity to learn about magic) is finally turned back into human form by the intervention of the goddess Isis. Here, just before regaining his human shape, he witnesses an Isiac procession set in Kenchreae (one of the ports of Corinth). His description of events no doubt evokes the atmosphere and particular details of festivals of the goddess. But at the same time it is part of the complex narrative structure of the story – and some elements of the description (see notes 1, 3 and 10) are constructed as an ironic commentary on the predicament of Lucius, or as a joke about (or perhaps against) the cult.

See further: Griffiths (1975) 181–215; Winkler (1985) 8–11, 204–47 (on the complex narrative structure of the novel). Other extracts from the work are given at 8.8 and 12.4b.

Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* XI.9–10

While the people were enjoying these hilarious entertainments all over the place,<sup>1</sup> the actual procession of the saviour goddess started out. Women,<sup>2</sup> resplendent in their white robes, happily carrying different kinds of emblems and decked in spring flowers, strewed the ground with blooms, drawn from their breasts, along the path that the holy company trod; other women held shining mirrors behind their backs, facing towards the goddess as she advanced, to show their devotion to her; others, carrying ivory combs, waved their arms and twisted their fingers as if they were combing and styling the queen's hair. There were those too who sprinkled the streets with various kinds of unguents and pleasant balm, shaken out in drops.<sup>3</sup> A great number of people, besides, both men and women, carried lamps, torches, candles and other kinds of artificial lights to win the favour of the goddess who is the origin of the stars in the sky.<sup>4</sup> Then came the sweet strains of music, and the pipe and flute played in a lovely melody. They were followed by a delightful choir, made up of a select group of young men, radiant in their splendid white garments. They were singing over and over again a lovely song, which a clever poet had composed for music, with the blessing of the Camenae <Muses>; and the subject of this song partly represented a musical prelude to the major vows that were to follow. Then came the pipers too, dedicated to great Sarapis;<sup>5</sup> they played a traditional tune of the temple and its god on a slanting pipe, held across their face towards their right ear. And there were many whose job it was to proclaim that the route be kept clear for the sacred rites.

(10) Then the crowds of those already initiated into the sacred mysteries poured in, men and women of every rank and every age, shining in the pure whiteness of their linen robes. The women had swathed their hair, dripping with perfume, in transparent veils. The men had shaved their heads completely to leave a glistening pate.<sup>6</sup> All together they shook their sistrums,<sup>7</sup> that were bronze, silver, even gold, to make a piercing rattle. And the terrestrial stars of the great religion joined in too, those leading priests of the sacred rites, who wore white linen stretched tightly around their breasts, reaching to their feet, and carried the extraordinary emblems of the mightiest deities. The first of these held out a lantern that sparkled with a bright light, not like those lamps of ours which light up our night-time feasting, but a golden vessel that threw up quite a big flame from its central opening. The second priest was dressed in similar fashion, but in both hands he carried an altar, that is 'a source of help' – a distinctive name given in recognition of the providential aid of the supreme goddess.<sup>8</sup> The third went along carrying a palm branch, delicately leaved in gold, and a herald's staff like Mercury.<sup>9</sup> The fourth displayed a symbol of justice, a deformed left hand, its palm open. This seemed to be better suited to justice than the right hand, because of its natural slowness and lack of cunning and shrewdness.<sup>10</sup> The same man also carried a golden vessel rounded into the shape of a breast, from which poured libations of milk.<sup>11</sup> The fifth held a golden winnowing basket,<sup>12</sup> woven out of laurel twigs; and another, an amphora.

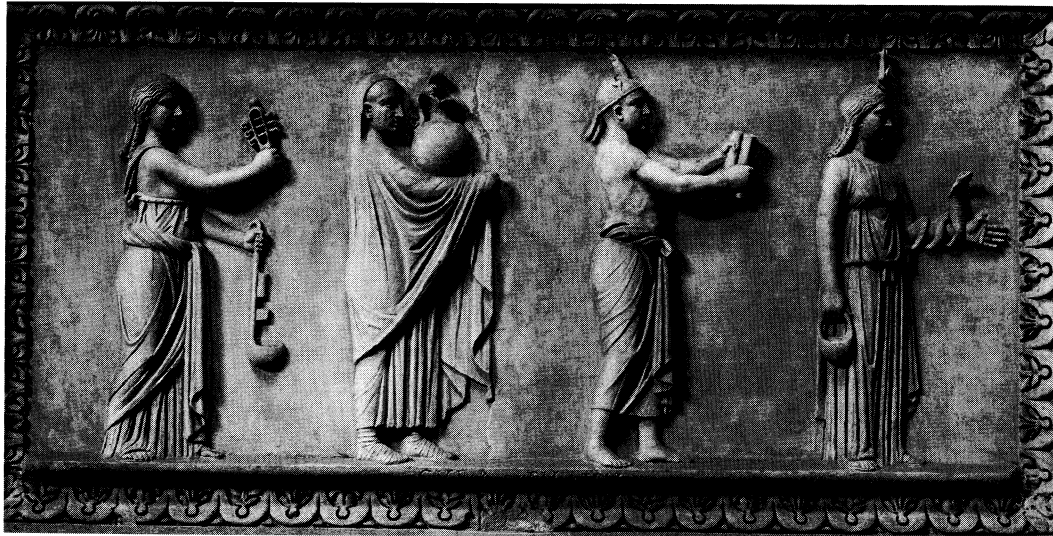


1. The preliminary part of the procession has included an array of fancy dress.
2. The procession is ordered so that the least (religiously) important people come first. Here at the very start are members of the general public – who presumably admire the cult, but are not formal initiates. Initiates and priests follow. For the role of women in the cult of Isis, see 12.4d.
3. All these actions are connected with the dressing and adornment of the goddess – who later appears in the form of a cow.
4. That is, Isis.
5. Egyptian god often associated with Isis.
6. Shaving the head was a distinctive mark of Isiac priests. See 5.6d; 12.4e, n.2.
7. See 5.6d n. 1.
8. For Isis' aid to mankind, see 12.4a and b.
9. The distinctive attributes of a priest of Anubis, the jackal-headed Egyptian god.
10. The precise significance of this object is unclear – but it is presumably an ironic comment on the cult to suggest that its symbol of justice was a *deformed* hand.
11. Numerous such vessels have been found in Egyptian cult contexts.
12. Versions of the baskets or sieves used for winnowing – that is, separating the grain from the unwanted chaff – were commonly used in religious ritual.

#### 5.6d Sacred objects of the Isiac cult

Visual images of Isiac celebrations can complement and clarify Apuleius' imaginative account of such proceedings. This relief sculpture from Rome shows four officials of the cult carrying various of its sacred objects in procession (height, 0.73 m.; width, 1.47 m.).

See further: Malaise (1972) 234–5.



①                      ②                      ③                      ④

1. Woman carrying a rattle (*sistrum* – the distinctive musical instrument associated with the cult) and ladle (*kyathos*) for sacred water (see 12.4d n.1).
2. Figure representing a senior official of the cult – the Prophet. Among his duties was the carrying of the sacred water vase (*hydria*) – in such a way that his hands did not directly touch the sacred object.

3. Sacred scribe (*hierogrammateus*), with a plumed headdress and carrying writing materials.
4. Woman, with a serpent entwined around her arm and carrying a water holder (*situla*).

#### 5.7 The games

Games (*ludi*) – whether horse and chariot racing (*ludi circenses*) or theatrical displays (*ludi scaenici*) – were an important element in Roman religious ritual. Some of the regular festivals included them as one part of their programme of celebration: the festival of Dea Dia in the Arval Grove, for example, regularly finished with chariot racing (see 4.5). In other festivals the games were (or gradually became) the central focus of ritual activity: the Megalesian Games (*ludi Megalenses*), for example, in honour of Magna Mater were best known for their dramatic performances (at which some of the surviving Roman comedies by Plautus and Terence were originally performed); the *ludi Romani* (or *ludi magni* – the ‘Great Games’) in honour of Jupiter Optimus Maximus were famous for their chariot racing in the Circus Maximus. It is perhaps not surprising that the games were an increasingly popular form of celebration – so that by the first century A.D. there were over sixty days marked specifically in the calendar as regular *ludi*, in addition to such celebrations which might occasionally be declared for special occasions (to mark, for example, military victory).

See further: Vol. 1, 40–1, 65–7, 201–6; Pignaniol (1923); Balsdon (1969) 245–8\*; Clavel-Lévêque (1984); (1986); Dupont (1992) 207–9\*.

#### 5.7a The procession at the Roman Games (*ludi Romani*)

The *ludi Romani* had become an annual event by the middle of the fourth century B.C.; originally a single day's celebration regularly held on the anniversary of the foundation of the Capitoline temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus (13 September), by the reign of Augustus they extended over half the month of September – with theatrical shows, as well as various types of horse and chariot racing.

In this passage Dionysius of Halicarnassus describes the procession that preceded the games. But he also has his own partisan point to argue – namely that the details of this procession help to prove that Rome was originally a Greek city, founded by Greek colonists. It is to support this argument (and, in particular, to meet the objection that the Greek features of the games were late introductions, following Rome's conquest of Greece) that he claims the most ancient possible authority for his account of the ritual: just before the start of this extract, he says that he has based his description not on his own observations of procedure in his own time, but on the work of Fabius Pictor, the earliest Roman historian, writing around 200 B.C. about the first celebration of the games in the fifth century B.C.

This is by far the fullest surviving account of this ritual, but it also raises many problems: how much of the description is in fact based on Fabius Pictor? how much did Pictor himself know of the earliest celebration of the games? how much of this account (even omitting, as we have done, most of Dionysius' lengthy comparisons between elements of Roman ritual and similar Greek practice) is coloured by his desire to trace Greek roots for Roman institutions? One thing seems clear, however: although there was certainly Greek *influence* in this, as in no doubt almost every other Roman ritual, Dionysius wildly exaggerated its extent.

See further: Thuillier (1975); Gabba (1991) 134–7.\*

Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* VII.72.1–13 (excerpts)

Before beginning the games, the chief magistrates organized a procession in honour of the gods, starting from the Capitoline, leading through the Forum to the Circus Maximus. At the front of the procession came first the Romans' sons who were on the verge of manhood and were of the right age to take part in the ceremony – on horseback if their fathers had the financial qualification to be knights, on foot if they were destined to serve in the infantry. The former went in troops and squadrons, the latter in divisions and companies, as if they were going to training school.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this was for strangers to see the flower of the city's youth that was approaching manhood, and to realize how numerous and fine they were. The charioteers followed after these, driving four horses or two, while others rode unyoked mounts. After them came the competitors in the light and the heavy events,<sup>2</sup> their bodies naked except for a covering over their genitals.

<Dionysius here argues that it was the earliest Greek practice to exercise not completely naked (as later), but with the genitals covered.>

(5) Following the competitors were numerous companies of dancers, divided into three groups: the first consisting of men, the second of youths, the third of boys. Directly behind these came the flute players, playing old-fashioned short flutes, as is done at the games even to this day; and the lyre players plucking their seven-stringed lyres of ivory and instruments known as 'barbita'.<sup>3</sup> Among the Greeks the use of these – though traditional – has died out in my time; amongst the Romans it is preserved in all their ancient ceremonies of sacrifice. The dancers were dressed in red tunics, fastened with bronze belts; swords hung at their sides, and they held spears shorter than normal length. The men also wore bronze helmets decorated with striking crests and plumes. There was one man to lead each group of dancers; and he gave the figures of the dance to the rest of them, and was the first to demonstrate the quick military steps, usually in a four beat rhythm.

<A discussion follows of Greek parallels for this armed dance.>

(10) After the armed dancing, groups of dancers dressed as satyrs came in procession, performing the Greek dance 'sikinnis'.<sup>4</sup> Those impersonating Sileni wore shaggy tunics,

known by some as 'chortaioi',<sup>5</sup> and swathes of all sorts of flowers; while those appearing as satyrs wore belts and goat-skins, and manes on their heads standing up on end, and other such things.<sup>6</sup> These mocked and mimicked the serious dancing that went before, turning it into a comic performance. The entry of triumphal processions also shows that a mocking kind of 'satyric' humour is an ancient, native Roman custom. For the soldiers escorting a victory procession are given the licence to mock and poke fun at the most distinguished men, generals included.<sup>7</sup>

<Dionysius then finds Greek parallels for this practice of jesting.>

(13) After these dancers, a crowd of lyre players and large numbers of flute players went past in procession. And after them, the men who carried along the whole route the censers in which perfumes and frankincense were burned; and the men bringing the gold and silver vessels on display, both those that were the sacred property of the gods, and those that belonged to the state. At the very end of the procession came the statues of all the gods, carried on men's shoulders – with much the same appearance as statues made by the Greeks, with the same costume, the same symbols, and the same gifts, which according to tradition each of them invented and bestowed on humankind.

1. The young men are ordered according to their census classification – that is, according to their wealth and so also according to their (notional) position in the Roman army. The cavalry (i.e. the wealthy) preceded the infantry (i.e. the poorer classes).
2. The 'heavy' events were boxing and wrestling; other athletic contests (races etc) were the 'light' events.
3. A stringed instrument similar to a lyre.
4. A dance traditionally associated with Greek satyrs (see n. 6).
5. A Greek term – derived from the Greek word for farmyard.
6. Dionysius makes a careful distinction here between two similar types of mythical creatures: satyrs, normally represented young, with mixed features of man and goat; Sileni, normally represented older, with horse-ears. Both are commonly found among the followers of Dionysus.
7. See 5.8a n.4.

### 5.7b *The Saecular Games*

There was a tradition at Rome, stretching back at least to the fourth century B.C., that the passing of a *saeculum* (the longest span of a human life – which came to be reckoned at 100 or 110 years) should be celebrated with *ludi*. The history of these games during the Republic is obscure – we do not know the exact intervals of their celebration, nor the details of the rituals performed. However, several of the saecular celebrations during the Principate are well documented.

By imaginative calculation, Augustus fixed the end of the *saeculum* in 17 B.C., and a stone inscription survives giving an elaborate account of the rituals carried out on that occasion. The following extract from the inscription omits the texts of the edicts establishing the celebration and some preliminary rituals, but includes the full surviving details of the main festival – including formal

sacrifices, theatrical performances, banqueting, choral singing and circus games.

See further: Vol. 1, 71–2, 111, 201–6; Pighi (1965); Wallace-Hadrill (1982); Zanker (1988) 167–72; for a translation of the inscription recording the games of A.D. 204, see Lewis and Reinhold (1951–5), II.558–60; new fragments from the start of the text (not reprinted here) are published in L. Moretti (1982–4).

Note: the inscribed stone has suffered some damage and in several places the general sense of the text has had to be reconstructed on the basis of other evidence about the celebrations; the major reconstructions are marked in the text below by square brackets [ ]. The summaries given in diamond brackets < > at the start of each section are intended as guides to the complex ritual; they did not form part of the ancient text.

ILS 5050; CIL VI.32323 lines 90–168 (with amendments of Pighi (1965))

<Night of 31 May: Augustus sacrifices to the Fates; lines 90–9>

On the following night, on the Campus Martius, next to the Tiber, [the emperor Caesar Augustus sacrificed] according to the Greek rite<sup>1</sup> [nine female lambs to the divine Moirai<sup>2</sup>] as whole burnt offerings; and by the same [rite he sacrificed nine female goats as whole burnt offerings and spoke the following prayer:] ‘Moirai. As it is [prescribed for] you in those books<sup>3</sup> [ – and for this reason may every good fortune attend the Roman people, the *Quirites* – let sacrifice be made to you with nine] female lambs and nine female goats burnt whole for you. I beg you and pray that] you may increase [the power and majesty of the Roman people], the *Quirites*, in war and peace; [and that the Latins may always be obedient;<sup>4</sup> and that you may grant eternal safety], victory and health [to the Roman people, the *Quirites*; and that you may protect the Roman people, the *Quirites*, and the legions of the Roman people], the *Quirites*; [and that you may keep safe and make greater] the state of the Roman people, [the *Quirites*; and that you may be] favourable and propitious [to the Roman people], the *Quirites*, to the college of the *quindecimviri*,<sup>5</sup> [to me, to my house, to my household; and that] you may accept [this] sacrifice of nine female lambs and nine [female] goats, to be burnt whole for you in sacrifice. For these reasons be honoured with the sacrifice of this female lamb, become favourable and propitious to the Roman people, the *Quirites*, to the college of the *quindecimviri*, to myself, to my house, to my household.’

<Theatrical shows and sacred banquets; lines 100–2>

When the sacrifice was completed, games were celebrated by night on a stage, without the additional construction of a theatre and without the erection of seating. One hundred and ten matrons,<sup>6</sup> who had been designated by decree of the *quindecimviri*, held *sellisternia*,<sup>7</sup> with two seats set out for Juno and Diana.

<1 June: Augustus and Agrippa sacrifice to Jupiter Optimus Maximus; lines 103–7>

Kalends of June <1 June>, on the Capitoline, the emperor Caesar Augustus sacrificed a bull to Jupiter Optimus Maximus burnt whole for him, and in the same place Marcus Agrippa<sup>8</sup> sacrificed a second. They spoke a prayer, as follows:

‘Jupiter Optimus Maximus. As it is prescribed for you in those books – and for this [reason] may every good fortune attend the Roman people, the *Quirites* – let sacrifice be made to you with this fine bull. I beg you and pray.’ The rest as above.

At the sacred vessel<sup>9</sup> were Caesar, Agrippa, Scaevola, Sentius, Lollius, Asinius Gallus, Rebilus.<sup>10</sup>

<Theatrical shows and sacred banquets; lines 108–10>

Then the Latin games<sup>11</sup> were celebrated in a wooden theatre which had been erected on the Campus Martius next to the Tiber. And in the same manner women who were mistresses of households held *sellisternia*, and the games which had begun to take place at night were not interrupted.

<Edict suspending mourning; lines 110–14>

And an edict was issued: ‘The *quindecimviri sacris faciundis* decree: Since, insofar as it accords with proper custom, and in like manner has been observed in numerous precedents, whenever there has been a rightful cause for public celebration, it has been decided that the mourning of women should be suspended; and since it seems that it is appropriate both to the honour of the gods and to the remembrance of their worship that that should apply to the time of solemn rites and games and that it should be scrupulously observed – therefore we have decided that it is incumbent on us to issue to women a decree by edict, that they should suspend mourning.’

<Augustus sacrifices to Ilythia; lines 115–18>

Then by night, next to the Tiber, the emperor Caesar Augustus made sacrifice to the divine Ilythiae<sup>12</sup> with nine cakes, nine *popana*, nine *phthoes*;<sup>13</sup> he spoke the following prayer:

‘Ilythia. As it is prescribed for you in those books – and for this reason [may every good fortune attend] the Roman people the *Quirites* – let sacrifice be made to you with nine *popana*, nine cakes, nine *phthoes*. I beg you and pray.’ The rest as above.

<2 June: Augustus and Agrippa sacrifice to Juno; lines 119–22>

Four days before the Nones of June <2 June>, on the Capitoline, [the emperor Caesar Augustus] sacrificed a cow to Juno Regina burnt whole for her, [and in the same place] Marcus Agrippa sacrificed [a second,] and spoke a prayer as follows:

‘Juno Regina. As it is prescribed for you in those books – and for this [reason may every good fortune attend the Roman people, the *Quirites* – ] let sacrifice be made to you with a fine cow. I beg you and pray.’ [The rest as above.]

<Prayer of mothers to Juno; lines 123–32>

Then [?Marcus Agrippa] dictated to the one hundred and ten married women, mistresses of households, who had been commanded [to assemble on the Capitoline,] the formula of prayer as follows:

‘Juno Regina. If there is any better fortune [that may attend the Roman people, the *Quirites*, we one hundred and ten mistresses of households of the Roman people, the *Quirites*,] married women on bended knee, [pray] that you [bring it about, we beg and beseech that you increase the power] and majesty of the Roman people, the *Quirites* [in war and peace; and that the Latins may always be obedient; and that you may grant] eternal [safety], victory [and health to the Roman people, the *Quirites*; and that you may protect the Roman people, the *Quirites*, and the legions of the Roman people], the *Quirites*; and [that you may keep safe and make greater] the state [of the Roman people, the *Quirites*; and that you may be favourable and propitious to the Roman people], the *Quirites*, to the *quindecimviri sacris faciundis*, to us, [to our houses, to our households. These are the things that we one hundred and ten mistresses of households of the Roman people, the *Quirites*], married women on bended knee, [pray, beg and beseech.]’

At the sacred vessel were Marcus Agrippa [ . . . ]

<Games; line 133>

Games were held as on the previous day [ . . . ]

<Augustus sacrifices to Terra Mater; lines 134–7>

Then by night, next to the Tiber, [the emperor] Caesar Augustus [sacrificed a pregnant sow, as a whole burnt offering, to Terra Mater, and spoke the following] prayer:

‘Terra Mater. As it is prescribed for you in those books – and for this reason may every good fortune attend the Roman people, the *Quirites* – let sacrifice be made] to you with a pregnant sow of your own, [as a whole burnt offering. I beg you and pray.’ The rest [as above.]

<Sacred banquet; line 138>

The matrons held *sellisternia* on this [day in the same manner as on the previous day.]

<3 June: Augustus and Agrippa sacrifice to Apollo and Diana; lines 139–46>

Three days before the Nones of June <3 June>, on the Palatine, the emperor Caesar Augustus and Marcus Agrippa made sacrifice [to Apollo and Diana with nine cakes,] nine *popana*, nine *phthoes* and they spoke a [prayer] as follows:

‘Apollo. As it is prescribed for you in those books – and for this reason may every good fortune attend the Roman people, the *Quirites* – let sacrifice be made to you with nine *popana* and nine cakes and nine *phthoes*. I beg you and pray.’ The rest as above. ‘Apollo.

Just as I have offered *popana* and prayed to you with a proper prayer, for this same reason be honoured with these sacrificial cakes. Become favourable and propitious.’ The same was said concerning the *phthoes*. To Diana in the same words.

<Hymn sung by boys and girls; lines 147–52>

When the sacrifice was completed, the twenty-seven boys, who had been commanded, their fathers and mothers still living, and the same number of girls, sang the hymn. And in the same manner on the Capitoline. The hymn was composed by Quintus Horatius Flaccus.<sup>14</sup> The *quindecimviri* were present: the emperor Caesar, Marcus Agrippa, Quintus Lepidus, Potitus Messalla, Caius Stolo, Caius Scaevola, Caius Sosius, Caius Norbanus, Marcus Cocceius, [Marcus] Lollius, Caius Sentius, Marcus Strigo, Lucius Arruntius, Caius Asinius, Marcus Marcellus, Decimus Laelius, Quintus Tubero, Caius Rebilus, Messalla Messallinus.<sup>15</sup>

<Chariot races; lines 153–4>

When the theatrical games had ended at the [ . . . ] hour, close by that place where sacrifice had been made on previous nights and a theatre had been set up and a stage, turning posts were set up and chariot racing was presented; and Potitus Messalla presented trick riders.

<Edict announcing further theatrical shows; lines 155–8>

And an edict was issued in the following words:

‘The *quindecimviri sacris faciundis* decree: We have added seven extra days of games to the holy rites of the games, and we shall commence them on the Nones of June <5 June> with: Latin plays in the wooden theatre which is next to the Tiber at the second hour; Greek shows in the theatre of Pompey at the third hour; Greek stage plays in the theatre which is in the Circus Flaminius at the fourth hour.’

<4 June: Break in the proceedings; line 159>

There was a gap in proceedings on the day before [the Nones of June <4 June>.]

<5 June: Theatrical shows; lines 160–1>

On the Nones of June <5 June>, [seven extra days] games were commenced: [Latin plays] in the wooden theatre; Greek shows [in the theatre of Pompey; Greek stage plays in the theatre which is in the Circus Flaminius.]

<11 June: Edict announcing animal hunt; lines 162–3>

Three days before the Ides of June <11 June>, an edict was issued in the following words:

‘The *quindecimviri sacris faciundis* decree: On the day before the Ides of June <12 June> we shall present a hunting display [in . . . and we shall commence circus games.]

<12 June: Chariot racing and hunt; lines 164–5>

On the day before the Ides <12 June>, a procession was led past, and [squadrons] of boys [older and younger played the Trojan Game.] Marcus Agrippa [presented] the chariot racing [and a hunting display was performed in . . .]

<Conclusion; lines 166–8>

All these things were conducted by the *quindecimviri sacris faciundis*: the emperor Caesar Augustus, Marcus Agrippa, Quintus Lepidus, Potitus Messalla, Lucius Censorinus, Cnaeus Pompeius, Caius Stolo, Caius [Scaevola, Caius Sossius, Caius Norbanus, Marcus Cocceius, Marcus Lollius, Caius Sentius, Marcus Strigo, Lucius Arruntius], Caius Asinius Gallus,<sup>16</sup> Marcus Marcellus, [Decimus Laelius, Quintus Tubero, Caius Rebilus, Messalla Messallinus].

1. The clearest distinguishing mark of the so-called 'Greek rite' was that the sacrificant officiated with his head bare (not covered by the toga as in the 'Roman rite'); see also 7.5a Here the 'Greek rite' accords with the numerous Greek aspects of the festival – including the fact that the whole ceremony was supposedly prescribed by the Sibylline Books (see 1.8; 7.5), and the Greek titles of the deities invoked. See Scheid (1996).
2. The Greek title of the Roman 'Parcae' (Fates).
3. Sibylline Books.
4. A traditional formula referring to Rome's control over her neighbours, the Latins; see 1.4.
5. The *quindecimviri sacris faciundis* (who had charge of the Sibylline Books) played a central role in the ceremony.
6. One for each year of the *saeculum* (here reckoned at 110 years).
7. The equivalent of a *lectisternium* (5.5b and c), but the gods sat on chairs (*sellae*) rather than reclining on couches.
8. Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, Augustus' son-in-law, here prominently associated with the emperor leading the rituals.
9. That is 'participating in the sacrifice'.
10. All members of the *quindecimviri*.
11. That is, plays in Latin.
12. Greek goddesses of childbirth.
13. *Popana* and *phthoes* were both particular varieties of Greek sacrificial cakes.
14. The text of this hymn is preserved (under the title *Carmen Saeculare*) among the works of the poet Horace (Quintus Horatius Flaccus). It evokes many of the deities honoured in these sacrifices.
15. In the Empire, the so-called '*quindecimviri*' ('Fifteen men') regularly included more than fifteen men.
16. The name of C. Asinius Gallus, who fell from favour in the reign of Tiberius (A.D. 14–37), was later erased from the stone.

## 5.8 The ceremony of triumph

Just as the rhythms of warfare were associated with ritual celebrations (5.4), so also Roman military victory was marked by rituals that gave honour to the gods as well as to the successful commander. A formal 'triumph' could be

granted by vote of the senate to a general who had achieved a victory in which at least 5,000 of the enemy were killed. The general, dressed in the costume of Jupiter Optimus Maximus ('god for a day' – see 1.9a), processed on a chariot through the city, accompanied by the leading men of the state, by his victorious army and by his captives and spoils. The destination of the procession was the temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline, where sacrifice was offered to the god.

See further: Vol. 1, 44–5; Versnel (1970); Weinstock (1971) 60–79; Künzl (1988).

### 5.8a *The triumph of Aemilius Paullus, 167 B.C.*

From relatively simple beginnings, as Roman victories brought more and more wealth into the city and the power of Roman generals grew, the triumph became an increasingly lavish celebration. Here Plutarch describes the triumph of Aemilius Paullus (following his victory over King Perseus of Macedon) – a magnificent display lasting three days. Similar, sometimes even more lavish, celebrations were to follow – notably the triumph of Pompey in 61 B.C. and Caesar's four-day extravaganza in 46 B.C.

See further: Errington (1971) 222–6; Dupont (1992) 50–3\*.

Plutarch, *Life of Aemilius Paullus* 32–4

The triumph is said to have been conducted in this way. The people put up platforms in the horse-racing stadia (which the Romans call 'circuses') and around the Forum, and they took up position in other parts of the city that gave a good view of the procession; then, dressed up in clean white clothes, they watched the spectacle. Every temple was open and filled with garlands and incense; and numerous officials and *lictors* held the people back from streaming together into a disorderly crowd and rushing about in all directions – and so kept the streets free and clear. The procession was divided over three days. The first was scarcely long enough for the display of the captured statues, paintings and colossal figures, transported on two hundred and fifty chariots. On the next day, the finest and most valuable of the Macedonian weapons were carried along in numerous carts. These weapons glistened with their newly polished bronze and iron, and they were arranged in artful combinations to look just as if they had been heaped up indiscriminately, just as they fell: helmets against shields, breastplates against greaves, Cretan bucklers and Thracian shields and quivers mixed up with horses' bridles, and naked swords emerging through all these, with long pikes fixed among them. The weapons were packed so loosely that they crashed against each other as they were carried along and made a harsh and fearful sound, and the sight of them – even though they were spoils from a defeated enemy – was not free of terror. After the carts carrying the armour, 3,000 men came in procession bearing silver coin in vessels that each contained three talents<sup>1</sup> and were carried by four men. Others bore silver bowls, drinking horns, dishes, and cups, all of them arranged to be easily viewed, remarkable for their size and the depth of their engraved decoration.



(33) On the third day, immediately it was dawn, trumpeters came out – not playing a stately processional tune, but the kind of music the Romans use to urge themselves on to battle. Following these, 110 stall-fed oxen, with gilded horns, were driven past, decked with ribbons and wreaths. Leading the animals in their procession to sacrifice were young men wearing aprons with fine purple borders, and boys carrying silver and gold offering cups. Then, after these, came those bearing the golden coin, divided like the silver into vessels of three talents. And the number of vessels was eighty less three. Straight after these followed those who carried the sacred bowl which Aemilius had had made out of ten talents of gold and precious stones, and those who displayed the Antigonids, Seleucids and Thericleians<sup>2</sup> as well as the whole of Perseus' golden dinner service; and straight after these the chariot of Perseus with his weapons, and lying on his weapons his crown. Then, after a short gap, the children of the king were led as slaves, and with them a crowd of guardians, teachers and tutors, all weeping and stretching out their hands to the onlookers, and teaching the children to beg and plead. Two of the children were boys, one a girl; and because of their age they were not fully aware of the extent of their misfortunes. And for this reason the pity they evoked was in fact intensified by pity for the change in their awareness that would follow. So that Perseus walked a little behind hardly attracting attention, while the Romans from compassion fixed their eyes on the children. Many ended up shedding tears, and all found the sight a mixture of pain and pleasure until the children had passed.

(34) Perseus himself walked behind the children and their group of attendants, dressed in a grey cloak, with the traditional boots of his native country. The extent of his misfortunes made him seem completely dumbfounded and out of his mind with bewilderment. He too was accompanied by a group of comrades and friends, their faces weighed down with grief. And their weeping and continual gazing at Perseus gave the onlookers the sense that it was his fate that caused their lamentations, and that they were hardly concerned about their own situation at all. In fact Perseus had sent a message to Aemilius, begging not to be sent in the procession and asking to be left out of the triumph. But Aemilius, scorning what seemed to be cowardice and faintheartedness on the king's part, said that this had rested with Perseus before – and still did, if he wanted. He indicated, that is, suicide as an alternative to shame; but the coward could not face this and, instead, weakened by some faint hopes, became a part of his own spoils.

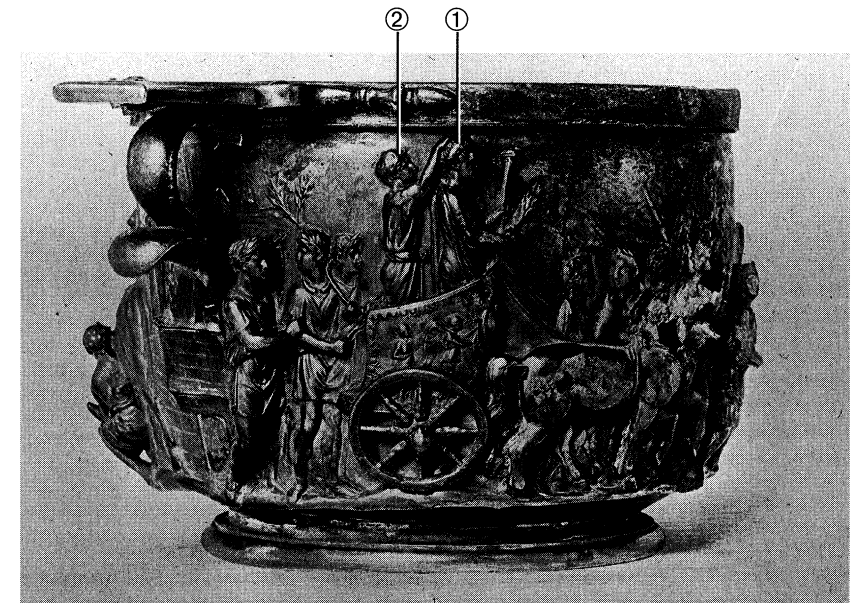
Following on these, were carried golden wreaths, 400 in total, which the cities had sent to Aemilius by embassy as prizes of victory. Straight after came the general himself, riding on a chariot magnificently adorned, a man worthy of admiration, quite apart from such pomp. He was dressed in purple robe shot with gold, and he held a spray of laurel in his right hand.<sup>3</sup> His whole army also carried laurel, following the general's chariot in their ranks and divisions; and they sang, for part of the time, traditional songs interspersed with ribaldry,<sup>4</sup> and, for the rest, hymns of victory and praise of the achievements of Aemilius – who was the object of wonder and admiration of all, while being envied by no one who was good.<sup>5</sup>

1. Greek unit of coinage, and of weight.
2. Different forms of drinking vessels.
3. This dress imitated that of the cult statue of Jupiter Optimus Maximus; see 1.9a.
4. It was the custom for the soldiers to sing ribald songs, apparently mocking their general, at his triumph.
5. Plutarch proceeds to offer the triumph of Aemilius Paullus as a moral example that human life does not allow total happiness – for (as he goes on to explain) Aemilius Paullus lost two of his sons around the time of his great triumph.

### 5.8b *The triumph of Tiberius (A.D. 12)*

By the middle of the reign of Augustus, the privilege of a full triumph was restricted to emperors or members of the imperial family. On a silver cup found at Boscoreale, near Pompeii, the triumphal procession of the future emperor Tiberius (then Augustus' chosen heir) is represented. The other side of the cup shows a sacrifice – probably that performed at the beginning of Tiberius' campaign. Height, 0.10 m.; diameter, 0.20 m.

See further: for a detailed description, Ryberg (1955) 141–4, though she is probably incorrect to treat the sacrificial scene as part of the triumphal procession – see F. S. Kleiner (1983).



1. Tiberius holding sceptre and laurel branch.
2. A slave, standing in the chariot, holds a crown over the triumphing general. During the procession this slave was said to have repeated over and over again 'Remember you are a man' to the general – dressed as he was in the costume of Jupiter; see Epictetus, *Discourses* III.24.85; Tertullian, *Apology* 33.