

# *Religions of Rome*

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VOLUME 2

A Sourcebook

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## 2 The deities of Rome

Throughout Roman history, Roman religion was polytheistic: numerous deities were worshipped. Modern scholars, like the Romans themselves, may speculate on the origins of the very earliest of these gods, on how the polytheistic system began, or on what might have preceded it (see **chap. 1**). But this speculation should not obscure two clear and important facts: first, that there was already a complex system of polytheism as far back as we can trace the city of Rome; second, that at every period of (pagan) Roman history the Romans invented or imported new deities – while, at the same time, neglecting or even forgetting others.

This chapter starts from the most familiar image of Roman deities – the (super-) human form and character of the major gods and goddesses (2.1); but it moves on to consider other types of divinity within traditional Roman cult (2.2; 2.3) and Roman debates and disagreements on the character of the gods (2.4), taking Vesta as a case-study of the variety of interpretations that could surround a single deity (2.5). The second part of the chapter is concerned with change and innovation. It looks at the different ways new deities were introduced to Rome (2.6), and in particular at the case of one eastern deity – Magna Mater (Cybele) (2.7); and it examines ideas surrounding the ‘deification’ of outstanding mortals (2.8). The final sections focus on Rome’s incorporation of ‘barbarian’ deities from the western half of the empire (2.9) and different forms of monotheism in the Roman world (2.10).

### 2.1 Gods in human form

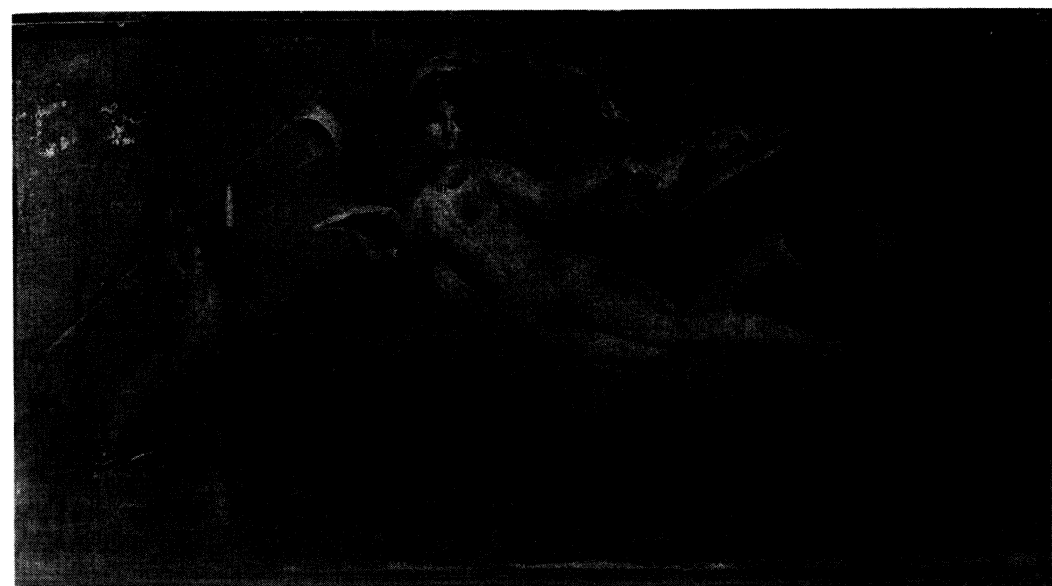
The standard modern image of Roman deities is as superhuman men and women. Endowed with life-like attributes, motivations and passions, they intervene (for good or ill) in the world of mortals – while also playing their part in a range of colourful myths and legends (mostly borrowed or adapted from the rich repertoire of Greek mythology). This is a crude picture of the character and activities of Roman gods and goddesses. It is not ‘wrong’; but, as we shall see, it is only one facet of the picture that the ancient evidence presents.

See further: for visual representations of Roman deities in painting and sculpture, Turcan (1988) 1; Simon (1990).

#### 2.1a *Painting of Venus from Pompeii (third quarter of first century A.D.)*

The goddess of love is here shown almost as a female ‘pin-up’, displayed on the garden wall of a wealthy Pompeian house (‘The House of Marine Venus’). The particular pose and setting allude to the myth of the Greek goddess Aphrodite, born from the foam of the sea. Height of painting, 2.43 m.; width 4.54 m.

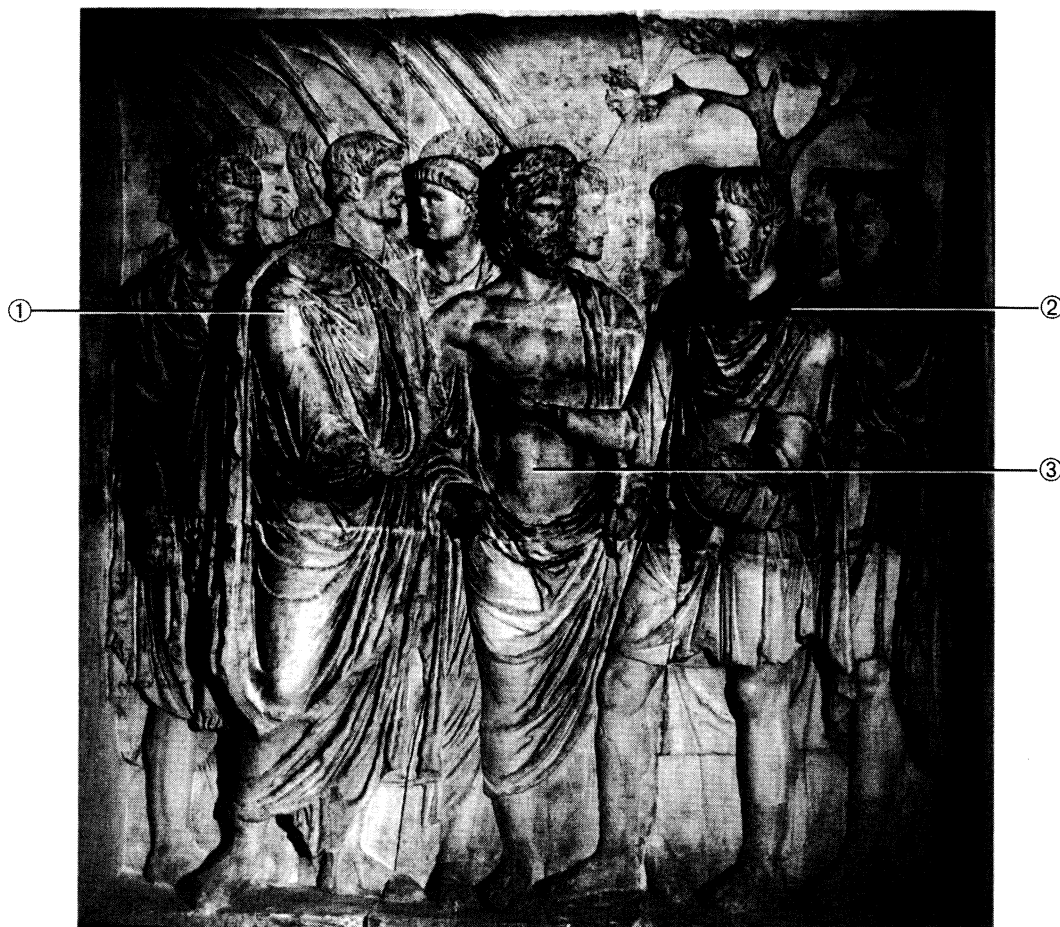
See further: for discussion of the Roman Venus and her ‘equivalence’ with Aphrodite, Dumézil (1970) 421–2\*; Schilling (1982) 197–294; for the range of representations of Venus at Pompeii, where she was patron of the Roman *colonia*, M. Grant (1971) 92–5\*.



#### 2.1b *Jupiter and the emperor Trajan, from Trajan’s arch at Beneventum (South Italy), A.D. 114*

Gods and goddesses were regularly associated with the vows, sacrifices and rituals accompanying Roman warfare. Although Roman historians only rarely suggest that the gods directly participated in the action, their supportive presence could be imagined and sometimes portrayed. On this panel (height 2.49 m.; width 2.67 m.) from Trajan’s arch at Beneventum, Jupiter is shown literally standing alongside the emperor, sanctioning a treaty between Rome and barbarians.

See further: Vol. 1, 31–2; Fears (1981) 917–18\*; Simon (1981) 5–6 and 12, n. 48; for the monument in general, D. E. E. Kleiner (1992) 224–9\*; for an analysis of gods as ‘citizens’, and of their relations with magistrates, Scheid (1984) 51–7.



1. Trajan – figure now badly damaged. Right arm originally outstretched to join hands with barbarian leader opposite.
2. Barbarian (probably German) leader, distinguished by his beard, tunic (not toga) and laced boots.
3. Jupiter, naked to the waist, holding a thunderbolt in his left hand. (For Jupiter's role in the solemnization of treaties, see Livy, *History* 1.24.3–9 with Ogilvie (1970) 110–12.)

### 2.1c Mercury introduces himself

Gods sometimes appeared as characters on the Roman stage. Here, in the prologue of his play *Amphitryo* (c. 195 B.C.), Plautus offers a teasing, humorous portrayal of a god. Mercury is speaking; starting in mock formal style, he lists the benefits he offers to his audience, before explaining (more colloquially) who he is and why he has come.

See further: Dumézil (1970) 439–40, 492–3\*; Combet-Farnoux (1980); for the role of the gods in Plautus' comedies, Schilling (1955).

### Plautus, *Amphitryo* 1–25

According as you wish me, gladly granting you favour, to endow you with profit in all the purchasing and purveying of your wares, and to assist you in all your affairs; and according as you wish me to speed a happy outcome for you all in your matters of business both at home and in foreign lands and to increase for evermore with fine and glorious profit those endeavours which you have begun and those which you are about to begin; and according as you wish me to endow you and yours, every one, with glad tidings, bringing before you and proclaiming only those things which may contribute best to your common weal (for verily you have long known that it is an honour granted and bestowed upon me by the other gods that I should hold sway over messages and profit); according as you wish me to bless these matters, to strive that eternal riches may forever be in store for you . . . then let's just have a bit of hush for the show and you'll all give it a fair hearing. No short change here.

(17) Now I will tell you on whose orders I am here, why I have come – and at the same time I'll introduce myself. I'm here on Jupiter's orders; Mercury's the name. My father sent me here to beg a favour from you – or I suppose you might say 'issue a command', because he knew that you would do whatever you were told. After all, he's well aware that you fear and dread him – as you're bound to fear Jupiter. All the same he asked me to put this request to you as a favour, ever so nicely, really politely.<sup>1</sup>

1. The favour turns out to be that they ensure the dramatic prizes are awarded fairly and there is no hired applause for any individual actor – particularly as Jupiter himself is to appear as a character in the play.

### 2.1d Christian ridicule of pagan gods

Christian polemicists poured scorn on the apparently *human* characteristics of traditional deities, on the inconsistencies of their portrayal, and on the immorality of the myths attached to them. Immoralities of pagan gods are a particular theme of 12.7a (i–ii). Here Minucius Felix pedantically tries to expose the absurdities in the presentation of those traditional deities.

See further: Vol. 1, 227, 261, 310; R. P. C. Hanson (1980) 920–4\*.

### Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 22.5–23.1

What? Don't their very forms and features betray the absurdity and indignity of your gods? Vulcan is lame and crippled; Apollo for all his years is beardless; Aesculapius sports a full beard even though he is the son of the ever-youthful Apollo. Neptune has blue-green eyes; Minerva eyes like a cat; Juno like an ox. Mercury has winged feet; Pan is hoofed; Saturn<sup>1</sup> has his feet in chains. Janus in all truth has two faces, as if he could walk backwards. Diana is sometimes a huntress with her skirt tucked up high; while at Ephesus<sup>2</sup> she is loaded with breasts and teats; and as Trivia<sup>3</sup> she is a dreadful creature with three heads and many hands. Why, your own Jupiter himself sometimes stands beardless,



sometimes is set up bearded. And when he goes under the name of Hammon<sup>4</sup> he has horns; when he's Capitolinus, then he wields thunderbolts; when Latiaris,<sup>5</sup> he is drenched in blood; when Feretrius, he is not heard.<sup>6</sup> In fact, not to go through the whole crowd of Jupiters any longer, his strange manifestations are as numerous as his names. Erigone hanged herself with a noose, to shine as Virgo <the Virgin> among the stars.<sup>7</sup> Castor and his twin die in turn so that each may live.<sup>8</sup> Aesculapius is struck by lightning so that he may rise to godhead. Hercules, to cast off his human mortality, is burnt up on the fires of Oeta.<sup>9</sup> (23) These are the stories and falsehoods that we both learn from ignorant parents, and (worse still) elaborate ourselves, in our own studies and learning – especially in the works of poets, who have used all the influence they can to distort the truth itself.

1. According to Graeco-Roman myth, the father of Jupiter – overthrown as 'king of the gods' by his son. In the course of the conflict, Jupiter bound his feet.
2. For images, and discussion, of 'many-breasted' Diana (Greek Artemis) of the Ephesians, see Fleischer (1973).
3. For Diana as Trivia (Greek Hekate), see 1.5c(ii); Virgil, *Aeneid* IV.511; Alföldi (1960).
4. A native deity of Egypt and North Africa commonly identified with Jupiter. Representations of Jupiter-Hammon show him with ram's horns.
5. Jupiter Latiaris was a major deity of the Latins, worshipped at the Alban Mount (1.5). Christian writers claimed that a human victim was sacrificed to him at the *Feriae Latinae* (12.7a(ii); Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 30; Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 1.21).
6. The Latin text is uncertain here. According to Roman tradition (see Livy, *History* 1.10), a victorious general who had killed an enemy commander in single combat dedicated his spoils to Jupiter Feretrius in his temple on the Capitol. See 1.3.
7. According to myth, she killed herself when she found the body of her murdered father; she was then taken into the sky as the constellation Virgo.
8. In one version of their myth, Castor and Pollux were said to have 'shared' immortality with each other, alternating half the year in the Underworld and half on Mount Olympus.
9. The gods Aesculapius and Hercules were believed to have been born mortal – Aesculapius gaining immortality only after being struck by Jupiter's thunderbolt; Hercules after being taken up to heaven from his funeral pyre on Mount Oeta.

## 2.2 Deities of different types

The character of Roman deities was much more varied than any simple picture of larger than life personalities, with their almost human attributes and adventures, might suggest. Some deities had no closely defined personality and remained outside the traditions of myth and legend. Although, to us, they may seem more 'shadowy' for that reason, they were not necessarily less important in Roman terms.

### 2.2a Statuettes of the Lares

Lares, protecting spirits of place, were worshipped in various contexts: in the house, at the crossroads, in the city (as guardians of the state). The Lares 'familiares' (gods of the house and its members) are the best known of these –

## 2.2 Deities of different types

receiving offerings, sacrifices and prayers within the household, and commonly appealed to as the protectors of its safety and prosperity. But no mythological stories attached to them; nor were they defined as individual personalities.

Small statuettes of Lares were a common feature of Roman houses – presumably standing in the *lararium* (see 4.12). The standard, hardly varying, form of these statuettes serves to emphasize the group character of the Lares and their broad homogeneity, rather than any personal individuality.

See further: Vol. 1, 185; Dumézil (1970) 340–4\* (on the history and significance of the Lares); for details of the statuettes illustrated (left, from Gaul, ht 0.14m.; right, from Italy, ht 0.15m.), see Turcan (1988) I nos. 117 and 115.



1. *Rhyton* (drinking horn).
2. *Patera* (libation bowl).
3. Dog-skin tunic, often associated with Lares (see Plutarch, *Roman Questions* 51).

2.2b *A prayer to Robigo*

Many Roman deities were associated with traditional agricultural activities, with the protection of crops and the prosperity of flocks and herds. Among these was Robigo – the personification of mildew (or wheat ‘rust’) which damages the growing wheat. In describing this goddess’s festival in April (the Robigalia, see 3.3a and 3.3b n.12) Ovid includes a version of a prayer to Robigo. This prayer implies that what mattered about the goddess was essentially her potentially destructive power that demanded propitiation. She was not defined by a complex set of attributes, activities and legends. In fact, even her gender remained indeterminate – other Roman authors treating ‘her’ as a *god*, Robigus.

See further: Vol 1, 45–7; Scullard (1981) 108–10\*.

Ovid, *Fasti* IV.905–32

When I was once returning to Rome from Nomentum on this day <25 April>, a crowd of people dressed in white blocked my path in the middle of the road. A *flamen* was on his way to the grove of ancient Robigo,<sup>1</sup> to throw the entrails of a dog and the entrails of a sheep onto the sacrificial flames. I went up to him straightway, to find out about the rites that he was to perform. Your *flamen*, Quirinus,<sup>2</sup> uttered these words: ‘Cruel Robigo, do not injure the young wheat; let its tender tip quiver on the surface of the ground. I beg you allow the crop, nurtured under heaven’s propitious stars, to grow until it is ripe for harvest. Yours is no gentle power. The wheat which you have marked, the sorrowful farmer counts as already lost. Neither winds nor rain harm the wheat so much, nor does the nip of the white-glistening frost so fade it, as when the sun scorches the wet stalks. Then is the occasion for your anger, dread goddess. Forbear, I pray you, and take your rough hands from the harvest; and do not harm the farmer’s work. It is enough that you have the power to do harm. Attack first not the tender crops, but harsh iron. Destroy first what can destroy others. It would be more useful for you to seize on swords and harmful weapons. There is no need for them; the world is at peace. Now let the hoe, the hardy mattock and the curved ploughshare – country tools – gleam bright; but may the weapons of war be stained with rust, and when anyone tries to draw a sword from its sheath, may he feel it stick through long disuse. But do not ravage the wheat; and may the farmer always be able to pay his vows to you in your absence.’

1. The festival of Robigo took place in a sacred grove (see 4.5 and 4.11) on the road leading north-east from Rome to the town of Nomentum (see 3.3b n.12).

2. The priest who conducted the rites was the priest of the god Quirinus (*flamen Quirinalis*): see 1.2 and Vol. 1, 15–16, 19.

2.2c *The deities of the marriage bed*

In theory every activity at Rome might be protected by its own minor deity. Augustine parodies this tendency by listing all the trivial gods and goddesses

that oversaw the Roman wedding and the consummation of marriage. The passage (intentionally) makes the divine involvement look absurd. But there is in fact no reason to suppose that the deities listed here played any significant part in everyday Roman religious experience. Most of them are not known from any other source. Augustine may well have found them all collected in the work of some pagan scholar – as part of an academic exercise in theology, rather than as any reflection of everyday practice.

Other extracts from Augustine’s critique of pagan deities are given at 13.9.

See further: Vol. 1, 227, 261, 310; Warde Fowler (1911) 158–64; Dumézil (1970) 33–8\*.

Augustine, *The City of God* VI.9

When a man and a woman are joined in marriage the god Jugatinus <from *jugare* = to marry> is called in. That may be tolerable. But then the bride has to be led home. So the god Domiducus <from *domus* = home; *ducere* = to lead> is called in too. And to keep her at home, there’s the god Domitius. To see that she stays with her husband, the goddess Manturna <from *manere* = to stay> is thrown in as well. Is anything more needed? Spare our human modesty! Once some decent privacy has been arranged, just let the natural urge of flesh and blood do the rest. Why is the bedroom packed with a crowd of deities, when even the bride’s attendants withdraw? The reason for this crowd is not to increase our concern for modesty by their imagined presence, but so that with their help the bride may lose her virginity without any difficulty – even though she has the weakness of the female sex and the timidity of any novice. That’s why the goddess Virginiensis <from *virgo* = virgin> turns up, and father-god Subigus <from *subigere* = to tame, subdue>, mother-goddess Prema <from *premere* = to overpower>, the goddess Pertunda <from *pertundere* = to penetrate>, and Venus and Priapus. What is this? If a man needed to be helped by the gods at all as he laboured away at this task, would not one god be enough, or just one goddess? Would Venus on her own not do? She after all is said to derive her name from the fact that a woman cannot cease to be a virgin without violence.<sup>1</sup> If there is any shame among humans, unlike gods, won’t the married couple be so overcome by embarrassment when they think that so many deities of both sexes are around, that he will fail to perform, while she struggles all the more? Besides, if Virginiensis is there to untie the virgin’s girdle; if Subigus is there to make her give in to her husband; if Prema is there to keep her down, once she has been overpowered, so that she doesn’t move; what is there for Pertunda to do here? She might as well blush and make her exit. Let the husband have something to do too. For it’s a real disgrace that anyone apart from him should perform the act <i.e. penetration> that is her name.

1. Augustine refers to a derivation of Venus’ name from *vis*, ‘force’ or ‘violence’.

### 2.3 The deification of abstract ideas

From at least the fourth century B.C., and probably much earlier, a range of deities was introduced who personified particular qualities or forces in Roman life: Concordia (Concord); Fides (Faith); Spes (Hope) etc. These were commonly represented visually in anthropomorphic form (2.3b); but in other respects they remained unpersonalized abstractions.

See further: Vol. 1, 62, 69, 90; Mattingly (1937); Dumézil (1970) 397–406\*; Fears (1981)\*.

#### 2.3a Why abstract qualities are deified

In Cicero's dialogue *On the Nature of the Gods* the character of Balbus offers the following explanation of 'personified abstractions'. It is part of an argument (based explicitly on Stoic philosophy) which is intended to prove not only that the gods exist, but also that they care for mankind.

See further: for Stoic theology, Long and Sedley (1987) 323–33\*; Gerson (1990) 154–67.

Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* II.60–2

The wisest men of Greece as well as our own ancestors defined and named many other kinds of gods after the great benefits they bestow – with good reason. For they believed that whatever brought great advantage to the human race could come about only through divine benevolence towards men. So sometimes they called what was produced by a god by the name of the deity itself – as when we refer to 'wheat' as Ceres, or to 'wine' as 'Liber'. This explains that line of Terence <*The Eunuch* 732>:

without Ceres and without Liber Venus is cold.

Or sometimes, conversely, a deity is named after a particular quality that contains some powerful force, like Fides <Faith> and Mens <Mind>. We can see shrines on the Capitol recently dedicated to this pair by Marcus Aemilius Scaurus, while Fides had been consecrated before that by Aulus Atilius Calatinus.<sup>1</sup> You can see the temple of Virtus <Virtue> as well, and the temple of Honos <Honour> restored by Marcus Marcellus, but dedicated many years before in the Ligurian War by Quintus Maximus.<sup>2</sup> And what of Ops <Wealth>, what of Salus <Safety>, what of Concordia <Concord>, Libertas <Liberty>, Victoria <Victory>? In the case of all these things, because they have such force that they could not possibly be controlled except by a god, the quality itself has been designated divine. In the same category the names of Cupido <Desire> and Voluptas <Pleasure> and Venus Lubentina <Venus of Pleasure> have been consecrated. They may be corrupting and unnatural qualities (although Velleius<sup>3</sup> thinks otherwise), yet those very vices often have a stronger impact on our character. Accordingly, those deities who gave rise to various benefits owed their deification to the size of the benefits

they bestowed; and indeed those names that I just mentioned make clear the power that resides in each god.

1. Cicero does not make the sequence of events entirely clear here. It seems that Scaurus had recently *restored* these two temples, both founded in the third century B.C. (the temple of Fides by Calatinus). According to tradition, there was a yet earlier temple of Fides (perhaps on the same site) founded by King Numa (see, e.g., Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* II.75.2; Plutarch, *Life of Numa* 16.1). See Platner and Ashby (1929) 209, 339; Richardson (1992) 151, 251.
2. Cicero is referring here to what was by his day a joint temple of Honos and Virtus. Marcellus added an extra shrine of Virtus to the existing temple of Honos; the dual foundation was dedicated in 205 B.C. For the controversy over this dedication, see Vol. 1, 105.
3. Velleius, another character in the dialogue, represented the Epicurean point of view – often parodied as simple hedonism and the pursuit of pleasure.

#### 2.3b Coin (denarius) showing Honos (Honour) and Virtus (Virtue), 70–69 B.C.

Honos and Virtus (and other idealizing abstractions) could be seen as the personification of the special qualities of the Roman elite – Honos symbolizing success in a political career, Virtus the valour associated with military prowess. Their representation here no doubt served to advertise the excellence (in their own eyes) of the magistrates who issued the coin. The reverse of the coin (not illustrated), showing a personification of Italy and Rome, probably celebrated the final reconciliation of Rome with her Italian allies after the Social War (91–87 B.C.).

See further: Crawford (1974) 413, no. 403; Turcan (1988) I no. 128; for an earlier pairing of Honos and Virtus, see 2.3a, with n.2.



1. Ho: abbreviation of 'Honos'.
2. Kaleni: shortened form of Q. Fufius K/Calenus, one of the magistrates who issued the coin. The name of the other issuing magistrate appears on the reverse.
3. Vitr: abbreviation of 'Virtus'.

### 2.4 Roman debate on the character of the gods

Discussion of the nature of the gods, and vehement criticism of supposedly naive views on the character and activities of pagan deities, were not restricted to Christian polemicists. From at least the first century B.C., pagan Roman writers engaged in debate on the gods' form and appearance, on their intervention in human affairs, on their moral standing, even on their very existence. This debate was partly influenced by the intellectual challenge of the different

'schools' of Greek philosophy, which were increasingly well known in Rome from the late Republic on. But it was in part a debate inherent in the traditions of Roman polytheism itself: the existence of numerous deities of very different types encouraged speculation on how these deities were to be classified, ranked and understood.

Other extracts of philosophical discussion of this kind are given at 13.2.

See further: Vol. 1, 150–3; Rawson (1975) 230–7\*; Rawson (1985) 298–316; Brunt (1989).

#### 2.4a *An argument for the anthropomorphic form of the gods*

The character of Velleius (see 2.3a, n.3) in Cicero's dialogue *On the Nature of the Gods* argues, from the standpoint of Epicurean philosophy, that the form of the gods must resemble the human figure.

See further: (for discussion of Epicurean theology) Long (1974) 41–9\*; Long and Sedley (1987) 139–49.

Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.46–9

Concerning the appearance of the gods we have both the hints offered by nature as well as the teaching of reason. It is clearly due to nature that all people of all races conceive of the gods in none other but human form. For in what other shape do they ever appear to anyone, either awake or asleep? But not to reduce everything to the most basic concepts, reason itself proves the same thing. For it seems logical that what is naturally the highest form of existence, whether because of its supreme happiness or because of its immortality, should also be the most beautiful. And what arrangement of limbs, what cast of features, what shape or form can be more beautiful than the human? You Stoics at least, Lucilius,<sup>1</sup> (for my friend Cotta<sup>2</sup> here says now one thing, now another) tend to portray the skill of the divine creator by describing not only the utility but also the beauty of all the parts of the human figure. But if the human figure is superior to the form of all living things, and a god is a living thing, then a god surely has the most beautiful form of all; and since it is agreed that the gods are supremely happy, and that no one can be happy without virtue, and that virtue cannot exist without reason, and that reason can be found nowhere but in the human figure, then it must be conceded that the gods have human form. But this form is not really corporeal, but merely resembles a human body; it does not have blood, merely the semblance of blood.

1. Lucilius Balbus; see 2.3a.

2. The third main character, C. Aurelius Cotta (see 2.4b).

#### 2.4b *Arguments against the anthropomorphic form of the gods*

Later in the same dialogue the character of Cotta criticizes Velleius' views. Cotta speaks from the standpoint of a philosopher of the Academic school, committed to sceptical enquiry rather than to attaining certain knowledge.

See further: Beard (1986); for particular discussion of the sceptical stance of the Academic school of philosophy, Long (1974) 88–106; Wardman (1976) 161–4\*; Schofield, Burnyeat and Barnes (1980).

Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.77, 81–2

Consider now what each argument amounts to. For it seems to me that in your own arbitrary fashion you are leaping to an entirely improbable conclusion. First of all has there ever been anyone so blind in investigating these matters as not to see that human shape has been assigned to the gods for one of two reasons: either by the cunning strategy of philosophers, so they might more easily turn the minds of the ignorant away from improper conduct and towards the observance of the gods; or else by superstition, so that in worshipping statues devotees might believe that they were approaching the divine presence itself? But poets, painters and craftsmen have fostered these ideas too. For it was not easy to depict gods in movement or in the throes of action except by imitating the human form. And another contributory factor may have been that common belief about man's superior beauty over other species. But do you not see, as a student of the natural world, what a plausible matchmaker nature is, almost a pimp of her own charms? Do you imagine there is any creature on land or sea that is not most attracted by its own kind? If this were not so, why would a bull not long to couple with a mare, or a stallion with a cow? Do you think that an eagle or a lion or a dolphin prefers any shape to its own? Is it any wonder then if nature has taught man in the same way to think nothing more beautiful than their own kind? And this is the reason that we think gods resemble human beings . . .

<Various arguments against the anthropomorphic form of the gods are produced.>

(81) Besides, Velleius, what if it turns out to be a completely false assumption that the only form that suggests itself to us when we think of god is the human form? Will you still in that case go on defending your absurd position? Maybe it is true that we Romans have that image of god, as you say; because from childhood we have been familiar with Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, Neptune, Vulcan, Apollo and the other gods in the form that painters and sculptors have chosen for them; and not only in overall form, but also in attributes, age and dress. But this is not the case for the Egyptians nor the Syrians nor almost all the barbarian races. For amongst them you would find beliefs about the divinity of certain animals more firmly established than our own reverence for the most holy temples and statues of the gods. For we have seen many shrines despoiled by our people, and statues of the gods removed from the holiest sanctuaries, but no one has ever even heard tell of a crocodile or an ibis or a cat dishonoured by an Egyptian. What then do you conclude? Presumably that the Egyptians regard that holy Apis bull of theirs as a god? Just as much, I'd swear, as you believe in the divinity of that Juno Sospita of your own native town – the one you never see, not even in your dreams, without a goat-skin,

spear, shield and shoes turned up at the toe.<sup>1</sup> But the Argive Juno does not appear like that, nor the Roman. So it follows that Juno has one appearance for the Argives, another for the people of Lanuvium, another for us. And in just the same way the appearance of our Jupiter Capitolinus is quite different from the Africans' Jupiter Hammon.<sup>2</sup>

1. Velleius came from Lanuvium (a town 30 km. south-east of Rome), where there was a famous cult of Juno Sospita (the Saviour), represented in the guise of a warrior; see Vol. 1, 82–3. For illustrations, see Turcan (1988), 1 nos. 23–8.
2. See 2.1d, n. 4.

### 2.4c Where do the gods live?

Epicurean philosophy held that the gods existed, but that they were remote from the human world, and not concerned with humankind. Lucretius' poem *On the Nature of Things*, written in the first century B.C., was devoted to explaining the main tenets of that philosophy. Further extracts from the poem are given at 2.7e and 9.6a.

See Long (1974) 41–9\*; Long and Sedley (1987) 139–49.

Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* v.146–67

This too it is impossible for you to believe – I mean that the holy dwellings of the gods exist in any part of our world. For the nature of the gods, fine as it is and far removed from our senses, can only barely be discerned by the intelligence of the mind. And since it eludes any touch or blow from our hands, it should not be able to touch anything that we can touch. For what cannot itself be touched, cannot touch. So therefore their dwellings must also be different from our own dwellings, fine to match their bodies – as I shall prove to you later at some length. To go on to say that it was for the sake of human beings that the gods decided to fashion the glorious structure of this world, and that it is proper for that reason to praise it as a work of the gods which is deserving praise; and to think that it will be everlasting and eternal, and that it is wrong ever to disturb from its place by any force what was established for the human race in perpetuity by the ancient wisdom of the gods, or to attack it with argument and to overthrow it from top to bottom – to invent this, Memmius,<sup>1</sup> and other errors of this type, one after another, is an act of sheer folly. For what benefit could our gratitude confer on those immortal and supremely happy beings that they should attempt to carry out anything for our sake?

1. The addressee of the whole poem; probably Gaius Memmius (*praetor* 58 B.C.).

## 2.5 Interpretations of the goddess Vesta

Individual Roman deities could be interpreted in a great variety of different ways. A god that for one Roman was simply the hero of a series of extravagant mythological exploits could for another symbolize the most abstract of philo-

sophical principles; or, more likely, the same person could give the same deity quite different senses in different contexts. Ovid's account of the goddess Vesta well illustrates the range of possible interpretations. It is, of course, a highly literary treatment: very few Romans in 'real life' would ever have thought all these things about Vesta – certainly not all at the same time. But it gives a clear sense of how widely diverse the 'meanings' of a deity could be.

See further: Brelich (1949); Dumézil (1970) 311–26\*; Guarducci (1971); Hommel (1972).

Ovid, *Fasti* vi.249–300, 319–48

Vesta, grant us your favour. It is in homage to you that we now open our mouths, if we may come to your sacred festival. I was deep in prayer. I felt the presence of the heavenly deity, and the glad earth radiated a purple light. Not of course that I actually saw you, my lady (none of the usual poets' lies here!), and it was not in any case proper that a mortal should look upon you; but my ignorance and my errors were corrected spontaneously, without the aid of any instructor.

(257) It is said that Rome had celebrated the Parilia<sup>2</sup> forty times when the goddess, the guardian of the flame, was received in her temple. It was the work of the peaceful king, the most god-fearing character ever born in the Sabine land.<sup>3</sup> The buildings you now see roofed in bronze, in that long distant time you would have seen roofed in thatch, and the walls were woven with tough osiers. This little spot which now supports the Hall of Vesta was then the great palace of unshaven Numa. Yet the shape of the temple, as it still exists today, is said to have been the same as in those early days, and a good reason underlies that choice of shape.

(267) Vesta is the same as the earth. Perpetual fire constitutes them both. Earth and the hearth both stand for her dwelling place.<sup>4</sup> The earth is like a ball, resting on no support; its enormous weight hangs on the air that stretches beneath. Its own rotation keeps the sphere in balance, and it has no angle that might push it in one direction. And seeing that it is placed in the centre of all things and touches no side more or less, if it were not spherical in shape, it would be nearer to one side than another, and the universe would not have the earth as its central weight. It is just like that globe that stands suspended by Syracusan skill in its enclosed space, a small model of the vast vault of heaven; and there too the earth is equally distant from top and bottom – its spherical shape ensuring that position.<sup>5</sup> The appearance of the temple <of Vesta> is the same: it has no projecting angle; a dome protects it from the showers of rain.

(283) Why, you ask, is the goddess tended by virgin priestesses?<sup>6</sup> I will discover the proper reasons for this also. It is said that Ceres and Juno were born of Ops<sup>7</sup> from the seed of Saturn; Vesta was the third daughter. The first two married; and both are said to have borne children. Of the three only one remained who refused marriage. Is it surprising if a virgin goddess delights in a virgin priestess and allows only chaste hands to enter her sacred rites? Think of Vesta as nothing other than living flame, and you see that

no substance is born of flame. Rightly, therefore, is she a virgin goddess – who produces no seed, nor takes any, and loves the company of virgins.

(295) Fool that I was – for a long time I believed that there were statues of Vesta. Then I learned that there are none under the curved dome. An undying flame is hidden in that temple, but there is no image of Vesta herself nor of the fire. The earth stands by its own force. The name Vesta comes from ‘vi stando’ <‘standing by force’>. The explanation of her Greek name may be similar.<sup>8</sup>

<Ovid continues with more etymologies of the goddess Vesta and of the hearth (*focus*). Then he describes the rituals of Vesta – including the custom of hanging loaves on an ass; and he offers the following explanation.>

(319) Shall I pass on, or shall I tell of your disgrace, red-faced Priapus?<sup>9</sup> It’s a short story – but a big laugh. Cybele,<sup>10</sup> whose brow is crowned with a coronet of towers, invited the immortal gods to her party. She invited the satyrs too, and those rustic deities, the nymphs. Silenus<sup>11</sup> was there, though no one had asked him. It is forbidden – and it would take too long – to tell of the banquet of the gods. The night was spent in heavy drinking, without sleep. Some of them wandered here and there in the valleys of shady Ida, others lay down and rested their limbs on the soft grass, some played, some were overtaken by sleep, others linked arms and stamped the green grass with the triple beat of their swift feet. Vesta lies down; and carefree takes her peaceful rest, just as she was, her head laid on the turf. But the red-faced keeper of the gardens<sup>12</sup> is chasing nymphs and goddesses; backwards and forwards he turns his wandering steps. He spots Vesta too. It is not clear whether he thought she was a nymph, or knew it was Vesta; he himself says he did not know. Anyway, he gets up hopes of sex and tries to creep up on her secretly, tiptoeing forward with racing heart. As it happened, old Silenus had left the ass, on which he had ridden, on the banks of a gently murmuring stream. The god of the long Hellespont<sup>13</sup> was just going to lay hold of her, when the ass let out an ill-timed bray. Frightened by the deep voice, the goddess jumped up. The whole crowd rushed over, but he managed to escape through the midst of the hands that wanted to catch him. It is the custom in Lampsacus to sacrifice this animal to Priapus, saying, ‘We give to the flames the innards of the tell-tale ass.’ It is he, goddess, that you adorn with a necklace of loaves, in memory of his services. Work ceases; the mills are empty and silent.<sup>14</sup>

1. The Latin here is a pun – which could equally be translated ‘*long live* the poets’ lies’. The joke is that in other parts of the poem Ovid himself tells just such lies – claiming a direct sighting of (even interview with) a deity. (See, e.g., *Fasti* VI.1–100.)
2. That is forty years after the foundation of the city. See 5.1.
3. Numa, who reputedly came from Sabine country.
4. Here, and throughout this passage, Ovid plays with different etymologies of the goddess and her attributes. So, for example, ‘fire’ constitutes both ‘the hearth’ (literally) and ‘the earth’ (etymologically – the Latin ‘terra’ (earth) deriving from ‘torrere’ (to roast, parch, burn)). He is also probably alluding to the role of fire as a ‘designing principle’ in Stoic explanations of the world and world order (see Long and Sedley (1987) 274–9).

5. The Greek scientist Archimedes constructed a model which showed the relative movements of the sun, moon and planets. Originally at Syracuse, in Sicily, it was brought to Rome in 212 B.C.
6. See 8.4.
7. Goddess associated with abundance of crops. See Pouthier (1981).
8. Ovid suggests that the name of Hestia (the Greek equivalent of Vesta) may derive from the verb ‘hestanai’ (to stand).
9. God associated with fertility. Commonly represented with a large erect phallus and reddened face.
10. See 2.7.
11. Like the mythical satyrs, part-man, part-animal. Often pictured as a drunken follower of Bacchus.
12. Statues of Priapus were commonly placed in gardens.
13. Priapus had a famous cult at Lampsacus on the Hellespont.
14. Reference to the celebrations of the festival of Vesta (Vestalia), which included a holiday for bakers and millers.

## 2.6 The incorporation of new deities

It is a distinguishing feature of Roman religion that it constantly incorporated new gods and goddesses. This was not necessarily the consequence of the Romans perceiving some inadequacy in their existing deities – the consequence of a simple search for a more ‘satisfying’ religious experience. It is better seen as a feature of the flexibility and adaptive capacity of an ‘open’ polytheism: new deities reflected Rome’s changing social, political and military circumstances; they responded to new manifestations and new interpretations of divine power.

See further: Vol. 1, 61–4, 79–84; North (1976)\*.

### 2.6a The ‘*evocatio*’ of Juno of Veii

The process of Roman conquest often involved the Roman assimilation of the gods of the conquered people. One particular ceremony (known as *evocatio*, literally a ‘summoning away’) attempted to win over to the Roman side the protecting deity of an enemy city *before* the Romans had conquered. The Roman general would offer the enemy god a cult and temple in Rome – so depriving the enemy of their divine protection, while at the same time incorporating a new deity into the Roman pantheon. Here Camillus in 396 B.C. addresses the patron deity of the Etruscan city of Veii – known to the Romans as Juno. For a later example of *evocatio*, see 10.3b.

See further: Vol. 1, 34–5, 62; Basanoff (1947); Dumézil (1970) 424–7\*; Ogilvie (1970) 673–5\*; Le Gall (1976); Rüpke (1990) 162–4.

Livy, *History* v.21.1–7

A huge crowd set out and filled the camp. After consulting the auspices, the dictator<sup>1</sup> went out and ordered the soldiers to take up arms. ‘It is under your leadership,’ he said,



'Pythian Apollo, and inspired by your majesty, that I proceed to destroy the city of Veii. And I vow to you a tenth part of the spoils. To you also, Juno Regina, who now lives in Veii, I pray that after our victory you will accompany us to our city – soon to be your city – to be received in a temple worthy of your greatness.'<sup>2</sup> Following these prayers, he proceeded to attack the city with vast numbers from every side, in order to distract attention from the real danger that threatened them from the tunnel.<sup>3</sup> The inhabitants of Veii were unaware that they had already been abandoned by their own seers and by foreign oracles; unaware too that already some of the gods had been invited to partake of the plunder, while others had been entreated to leave their city and were turning their eyes towards the temples of the enemy for their new homes, and that they themselves were now living the day that was to be their last. Not having the slightest suspicion that the walls had been undermined by a tunnel and that the citadel was already teeming with the enemy, they ran armed to the ramparts, each man for himself, wondering why it could be that, when for so many days no Roman had moved from his station, they should now be recklessly rushing at the walls, as though struck with sudden madness.

1. Camillus, holding the short-term, emergency office of 'dictator'.
2. As Juno Regina (Queen Juno), after the Roman victory, she received a temple and cult on the Aventine hill at Rome.
3. The Romans were undermining the city wall of Veii.

### 2.6b *The 'speaking god'*

The incorporation of a new deity could be a matter of debate or controversy – as in this story (part history, part myth) of the introduction of the 'speaking god' in 391 B.C. The controversy here is concerned with social status – particularly with the religious authority of a man outside the governing class that traditionally controlled Rome's relations with the gods.

See further: Basanoff (1950); Ogilvie (1970) 698\*.

Livy, *History* v. 32.6–7; 50.5

In the same year Marcus Caedicius,<sup>1</sup> a man of plebeian rank, reported to the tribunes that in the still of the night on the 'Nova Via' < 'New Street' >, where the shrine now stands, above the temple of Vesta, he had heard a voice, more distinct than that of any human being; and this voice, he said, ordered him to tell the magistrates that the Gauls were approaching. But the warning was ignored, as often happens, because of the lowly status of the informant and because the Gauls were a far distant race and so little known. And not only did they reject the warnings of the gods, as fate drew nearer, but they also sent away from the city the only form of human help they had with them – namely Marcus Furius.

<After the end of the war against the Gauls, Livy concludes his report of the 'speaking god'.>

(50) A proposal was brought forward to propitiate the voice that had been heard during the night before the Gallic War, announcing the disaster – and had then been disregarded. So a temple was ordered to be established on the 'Nova Via' to Aius Locutius <the 'sayer and speaker'>.

1. The name Caedicius means 'teller of disaster' (Latin 'dico', 'I tell' and 'caedes', 'disaster') – an appropriate invention, no doubt, to fit the story.

### 2.6c *The Sibylline Books and the introduction of Aesculapius*

A consultation of the so-called 'Sibylline Books' often lay behind the introduction of new deities during the Republic. These 'books' were a collection of written oracles often referred to after natural disasters or prodigies (see 1.8; 7.5). On several occasions (and particularly frequently during the third century B.C.) these oracles recommended the import of a god or goddess from the eastern Mediterranean, as a means of propitiating the divine anger that a prodigy implied. In 292 B.C. a consultation of the books led to the introduction of Aesculapius.

See further: Vol. 1, 69–70; Map 1 no. 27; Dumézil (1970) 443–4; North (1976) 8–9\*; Parke (1988) 136–51, 190–215\*.

Livy, *History* x.47.6–7; Summaries xi.

The year had been successful in many respects; but that hardly amounted to a consolation for one particular disaster – a plague that devastated both the city and the countryside. It was a calamity now more like a portent, and the Books were consulted as to what end or what cure the gods might offer for the disaster. The advice discovered in the Books was that Aesculapius should be brought to Rome from Epidaurus; but in that year, because the consuls were engaged with the war, nothing was done about it, except that a *supplicatio* to Aesculapius was held for one day.

<Two or three years later the plague still raged.>

(Summaries xi) Since the city was suffering from the plague, ambassadors were sent to bring the statue of Aesculapius from Epidaurus to Rome; and they carried off a serpent, which had slipped aboard their ship and which – so it was generally believed – contained the true spirit of the god. When it had gone ashore onto the Tiber island, a temple of Aesculapius was established in that very spot.

## 2.7 *Magna Mater (Cybele) and her cult*

One of the most notorious deities introduced to Rome from the East was Magna Mater (literally 'the Great Mother'), also known by her Greek name Cybele. A native deity of Asia Minor, her image (not an anthropomorphic

statue, but a black stone, probably a meteorite) was brought to Rome from her shrine at Pessinus (in Phrygia) in 204 B.C., during the war against Hannibal; it was accompanied by her cult officials, who included the eunuch (reputedly self-castrated) priests, the *galli* (8.7). Shortly after her arrival, the goddess was given a temple at the very heart of the city (on the Palatine hill) and her rituals were gradually incorporated into the official calendar (see 3.3a n.2; 3.3b; 5.6a and b; 6.7). Even so, for some Romans, Magna Mater and her priests became a symbol of terrible 'foreignness' – a warning perhaps that Roman willingness to import new religious forms had gone too far.

See further: Vol. 1, 96–8, 197–8; Map 1 no. 13; Graillot (1912); Vermaseren (1977a)\*; Sfameni Gasparro (1985); Turcan (1989) 35–75.

### 2.7a *The introduction of Magna Mater*

The introduction of the goddess followed a consultation of the Sibylline Books and of the oracle at Delphi, which had laid down that the goddess should be welcomed into the city 'with due hospitality' by the 'best man at Rome' (Livy, *History* XXIX.11.6). Livy's account of the arrival of her image from Asia gives us a rare glimpse of the kind of ceremonial that could accompany the incorporation of a new deity.

See further: Bremmer (1987); Thomas (1984) 1502–8\*; Gruen (1990) 5–53.

Livy, *History* XXIX.14.5–14

There followed a discussion on the reception of the Idaean Mother,<sup>1</sup> for not only had Marcus Valerius Flaccus, one of the envoys, arriving in advance, reported that she would be in Italy almost at once, but there was also recent news that she was already at Tarracina.<sup>2</sup> It was a decision of no trivial importance which occupied the senate: who was the best man in the state. Every man would certainly have preferred a clear-cut victory for himself in this contest to any military commands or civic distinctions, whether granted by vote of the senators or the people. They judged that Publius <Cornelius> Scipio (the son of the Gnaeus Scipio who had been killed in Spain) then a young man not yet of the age to become *quaestor*, was the best of the good men in the whole state. I would gladly pass on to later writers what virtues influenced them in this judgement, if only it had been handed down by those closest to those who remembered the events; but I will not interpose my own opinions by speculating about a matter obscured by antiquity. Publius Cornelius was ordered to go to Ostia with all the matrons to meet the goddess. He was to take her from the ship in person, and when she had been brought ashore, to hand her over to be carried by the matrons. After the ship had reached the mouth of the river Tiber, just as he had been ordered, he sailed out into the open sea on a ship, received the goddess from the priests and brought her to land. The leading matrons of the state received the goddess. Among them, one name – that of Claudia Quinta<sup>3</sup> – stands out.

Her reputation which, as tradition records, was previously doubtful, has made her chastity more famous because of her scrupulous performance of her duties. The matrons passed her <sc. the goddess' image> on from hand to hand, from one to the other without a break, while the whole city turned out to meet her. Incense burners had been set before the doors along the route that she was being carried, and burning the incense they offered prayers that she should enter the city of Rome willingly and propitiously. They brought the goddess into the temple of Victory which is on the Palatine the day before the Ides of April.<sup>4</sup> That day was a festival. Crowds of people brought gifts for the goddess to the Palatine, and there was a *lectisternium*, and games which were called the Megalesia.<sup>5</sup>

1. Title of Magna Mater, derived from Mount Ida, her traditional 'home', near Troy in Asia Minor.
2. Coastal town about 100 km. south of Rome.
3. See below 2.7b.
4. The black stone remained in the temple of Victory until her own temple was dedicated in 191 B.C.
5. For the Megalesian Games, see 3.3a (with n. 2) and b. The title 'Megalesian' is derived from the Greek 'Megale Meter' (= Great Mother).

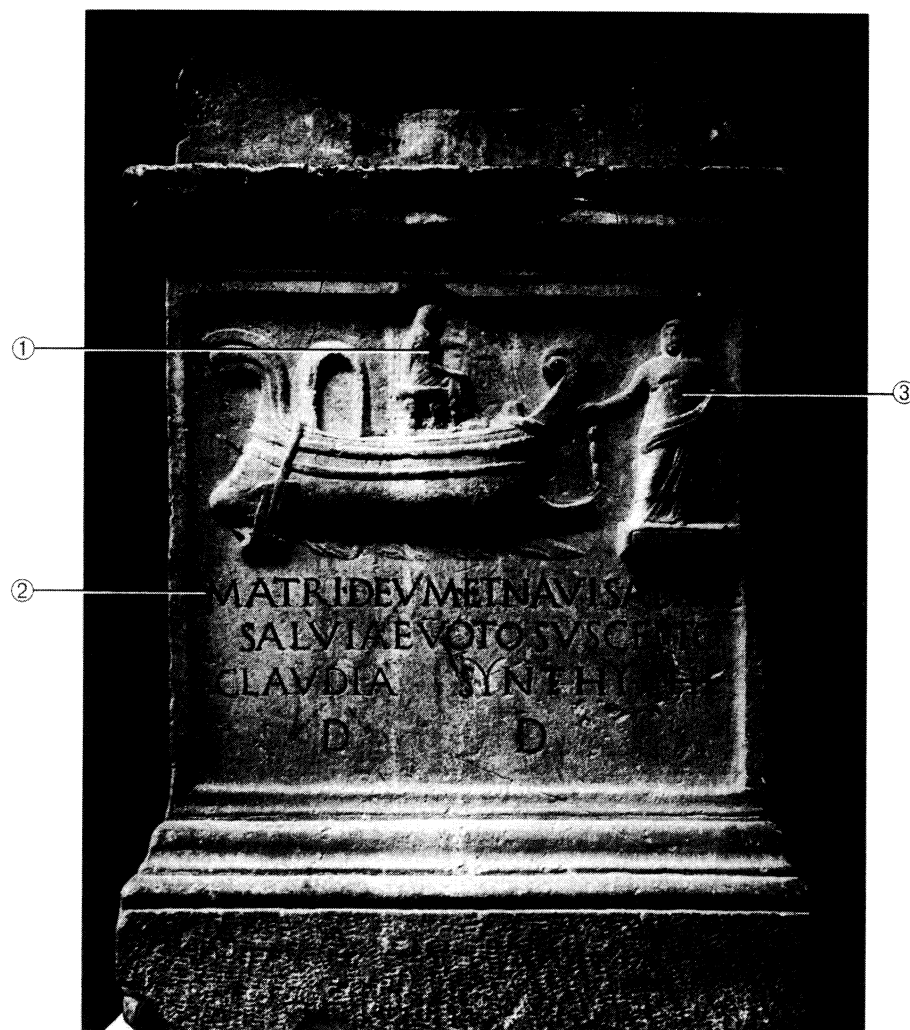
### 2.7b *The Miracle of Claudia Quinta*

The version of Livy (2.7a above) only hints at any very special role having been played by Claudia Quinta, regarding her as no more than one of the matrons, if a particularly scrupulous one. Cicero, writing earlier than Livy, also regarded Claudia as a matron but gives no indication that she had had a dubious reputation, rather contrasting her as a model of chastity with the unspeakable vices of Clodius' sister Clodia, whom he is attacking in the speech (*On the Response of the Haruspices* 27). In later versions, however, the story is developed more dramatically. For the Augustan poets, Claudia has become a lady with an unfair reputation for immorality, who redeems herself by miraculously pulling the goddess to safety, when the boat carrying the black stone is grounded on a sand-bank (e.g. Ovid *Fasti* IV. 247–348). In the final stage, Claudia becomes a Vestal Virgin, who had been suspected of breaking the rule of chastity, but whose miracle triumphantly vindicates her virginity. 'She took off her sash', wrote Herodian in the third century A.D. (*History* I.11) 'and threw it onto the prow of the ship with a prayer that, if she were still an innocent virgin the ship would respond to her. The ship readily followed, attached to the sash. The Romans were astounded, both by the manifestation of the goddess and by the sanctity of the Virgin'.

This first-century A.D. altar from Rome shows Claudia Quinta pulling in the goddess' boat (height, 0.87m.; width, 0.59m.; depth, 0.51m.).

See further: Vol. 1, Map 2 no. 5; Bömer (1964) 130–51; Vermaseren (1977a) 41 and 57\*; Wiseman (1979) 94–9\*; Gérard (1980); Coarelli (1982) 42–6.



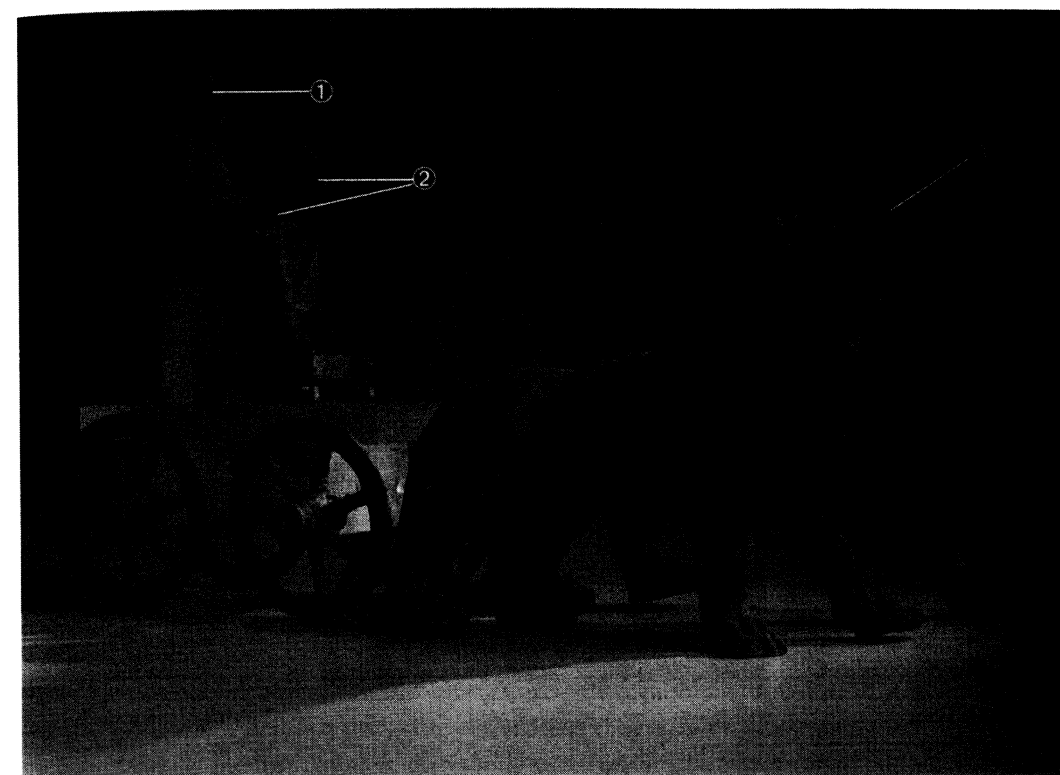


1. A seated statue, rather than the black stone of most accounts.
2. Dedicatory inscription: 'To the Mother of the Gods and to the Saviour Saviour <word repeated on the stone> Ship, having undertaken a vow, Claudia Synthyche gave this altar'. Even the ship itself that brought the goddess safely to Rome seems here to be treated as a deity – or at least is the recipient of the vow alongside Magna Mater herself.
3. Claudia Quinta.

### 2.7c *Magna Mater in her chariot*

There were many different forms in which Magna Mater was represented – from the celebrated black stone to the regal goddess shown in this bronze statuette from Rome, dating to the second century A.D. (height, 0.56 m.; length, 1.04 m.).

See further: Vermaseren (1977a) 71–6\*; (1977b) 39 (for full details of this piece); Turcan (1988) I nos. 82–6.



1. Turreted crown; a symbol of her role as protectress of cities. See 2.7e; Ovid, *Fasti* IV.219–21.
2. In her right hand she holds a *patera*; in her left a tympanum (see 2.7e, with n.5).
3. Lions – a standard accompaniment of the goddess, elsewhere shown on her lap or resting at her feet. See 2.7e; Ovid, *Fasti* IV.215–18.

### 2.7d *Attis*

Closely associated with Magna Mater is the figure of Attis – who (according to most versions of his myth) castrated himself after being driven into a frenzy by Magna Mater, jealous of his affection for another woman. He was not only the mythical prototype of the eunuch cult officials, the *galli* (8.7), but also the focus of a series of rituals that were part of public Roman ritual by the early Principate. For hymns to Attis, see 12.7e (iv).

It has been thought that Attis was introduced considerably later than Magna Mater; that it was only in the Empire that this aggressively 'oriental' deity was admitted to Rome. But excavations on the site of the Palatine temple of Magna Mater have produced numerous statuettes of Attis (such as those illustrated) from early phases (second to first centuries B.C.) of its occupation.

See further: Vol. 1, 97–8, 164–6; Lambrechts (1962), with review by North (1965); Vermaseren (1966); (1977a) 41–3, 113–24\*; for the archaeological material, Romanelli (1963); Vermaseren (1977b) 11–36.

a) height 0.12m.,  
width 0.04m.

(b) height 0.06m., width 0.05m.

(c) height 0.15m., width  
0.05m.

### 2.7e *Magna Mater as the Earth*

Like other deities, Magna Mater was interpreted in numerous different ways. Here Lucretius treats her as an allegory of the Earth and explains her attributes in terms of that allegory.

See further: West (1964) 103–14\*; Jope (1985).

Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, II.581–628

In this connection you should also keep in mind one other fact, sealed and treasured in your memory: there is nothing, whose nature is clearly visible to us, that consists of one type of element only, and nothing that is not formed from a mixture of different kinds of particle; and the more powers and qualities any particular substance has, so it shows us that there are within it elements of very many different types and shapes. First, the earth contains the primordial matter from which the springs, rolling down their coolness, constantly replenish the vast sea; and it possesses the matter that gives birth to fire. For in many places the earth's surface smoulders and burns, and from its depths the eruptions of Etna<sup>1</sup> blaze furiously. Then too it has the capacity to bring forth shining crops and bounteous orchards for the races of men, and to furnish rivers and leaves and bounteous pastures for the breed of wild beasts that roams the mountains. That is why this one

thing has been called Great Mother of the Gods, Mother of the Beasts, and creator of the human body.

(600) She it is whom the ancient and learned poets of Greece celebrated, as a goddess seated in her chariot, driving her twin-yoked lions; and so they taught us that the great world hangs in spacious air, and that the earth cannot rest on earth. They gave her wild beasts in her yoke – because children, however fierce, are necessarily tamed and subdued by the devotion they owe to their parents. And they surrounded her head with a turreted crown, because the earth, fortified in chosen places, upholds cities. So adorned with this emblem, the image of the divine mother is carried through the wide world with terrifying effect. She it is whom the different nations, by their ancient religious custom, hail as 'the Idaean Mother',<sup>2</sup> and they give her a retinue of Phrygians as her escort, because they claim that corn was first created in those parts <i.e. Phrygia> and spread from there over the whole world.<sup>3</sup> They assign her eunuchs as priests,<sup>4</sup> because they want to show that those who have defied the power of their mother and have been found ungrateful to their parents must be thought unworthy to bring forth living offspring to the realms of light. Taut drums thunder beneath their palms, and round about the curved cymbals crash; and horns blast in a raucous strain, while the hollow pipe stirs the heart with its Phrygian tune.<sup>5</sup> And they carry before them weapons, symbols of their mad frenzy, to strike awe into the ungrateful hearts and impious minds of the rabble with dread for the goddess' majesty. So, when first she rides through mighty cities, silently bestowing wordless benefaction on the human race, they strew every path of her route with copper and silver, pouring out riches in extravagant largess; and overshadowing the Mother and her retinue of attendants, they shower her with rose blossoms.

1. Sicilian volcano.

2. See 2.7a, n.1.

3. A Latin word play underlies this idea – 'fruges' = 'fruits of the earth' / 'Phryges' = 'Phrygians'.

4. A reference to the *galli* (8.7).

5. The rituals of Magna Mater were commonly accompanied by the loud music of tympana, cymbals and flute; see 2.7c.

## 2.8 From human to divine: becoming a god

Some Roman gods had a human origin. The pantheon not only expanded by incorporating new, 'foreign' deities. Other gods were created by *deifying* mortal men and women. The deification of the founders of Rome provided a mythical precedent for this crossing of the boundary between divine and human status; but it was only with the deification of Julius Caesar and the emperors who followed him that it became a regular practice.

See further: Vol. 1, 31, 140–9, 206–10, 253–6.

2.8a *Romulus – founder into god*

According to one well-known Roman tradition, Romulus (the legendary founder of the city of Rome) was incorporated at his 'death' among the gods. Livy records this tale, while also including other, more cynical, versions of the 'apotheosis'. The belief that Romulus became a god was at least as old as the third century B.C.; it is referred to, for example, in the writing of Ennius (239–169 B.C.). But it was a particular focus of interest and debate in the second half of the first century B.C., when it could be taken as a prototype (either as justification or critique) for the deification of Julius Caesar and, later, Augustus.

See further: Vol. 1, 4–5; Burkert (1962); Dumézil (1970) 247–9\*; Ogilvie (1970) 84–5; Weinstock (1971) 175–7\*; Porte (1981); for Ennius' account, see his *Annals* (in *ROL* 1) 63–4, 114–15, 116, 117–21.

Livy, *History* 1.16

When these deeds, worthy of immortality, had been accomplished, one day he gathered the men together on the Campus Martius, near the marsh of Capra, to hold a review of the citizens under arms. Suddenly a storm blew up with great claps of thunder and covered the king in such a thick cloud that he became completely invisible to the gathering. From that moment on Romulus was no more on earth. The Roman troops eventually recovered from their panic, when a bright and peaceful sunny day returned after the confusion of the storm. But when they saw that the king's chair was empty, although they believed the senators who had been standing nearby and claimed that he had been swept up aloft in the blast, they nevertheless kept a sorrowful silence for some time as though overcome with the fear that they had been left as orphans. Then, when a few men gave the lead, they all decided that Romulus should be hailed a god,<sup>1</sup> son of a god, king, and father of the Roman state. And in prayers they begged his grace, beseeching him to be favourable and propitious towards them and ever to protect his descendants. I believe that there were some men, even then, who privately claimed that the king had been torn apart at the hands of the senators.<sup>2</sup> For this story too, obscure as it is, has spread. But men's admiration for him, as well as the strength of their fear, has given the other version greater weight. And it is said that it received added credence by the device of one man. For, when the citizens were troubled by the loss of their king and in hostile mood towards the senate, Proculus Julius,<sup>3</sup> a man of considerable authority, so it is said, even though reporting a strange occurrence, came forward to address the assembly. 'Quirites,' he said, 'Romulus, the father of this city, suddenly descended from the heavens this morning at first light and made himself known to me. I was overcome with fear and awe, and stood in front of him beseeching him in prayer that it should be lawful for me to gaze upon him. And he said, "Depart. Proclaim to the Romans that the gods so wish it that my Rome should be the capital of the whole world. So let them foster the art of war and let them convey to their descendants that no human strength can resist

the arms of Rome." He made this pronouncement,' he said, 'then departed on high.' It is extraordinary how much credence was granted to the man's story and how the grief felt by the people and army for the loss of Romulus was assuaged by belief in his immortality.

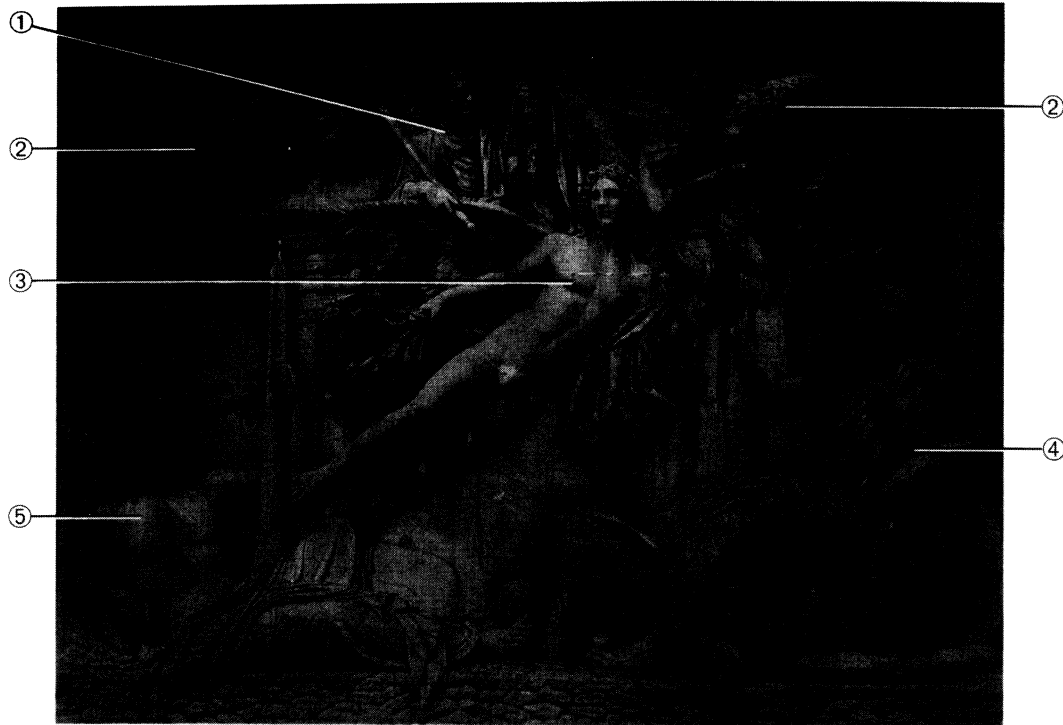
1. Romulus, in his status as a god, was given the title Quirinus – so identifying him with one of the oldest Roman deities (see 1.3; Vol. 1, 4–5, 148–9).
2. This detail could hardly fail to be reminiscent of the fate of Julius Caesar.
3. The prominence of Proculus *Julius* is significant – a (no doubt legendary) member of the Julian family, the family of Caesar and Augustus.

2.8b *The deification of the Emperor Antoninus Pius and his wife Faustina (A.D. 161)*

From the time of Caesar and Augustus onwards, emperors and some of the members of their immediate families were the most frequent category of recruits to the Roman pantheon (9.2; 9.3b; 10.5). After the death of an Emperor, the senate would take a vote as to whether or not he had been a deserving ruler, who should be formally recognized as a god, though of course the wishes of the dead man's successor would in reality have played a great role in making of the decision. From Caesar onwards, the name of the new god or goddess – *divus* Augustus, *divus* Claudius and so on – was formed by adding *divus* or *diva* to their name.

This relief (height, 2.47m.; width, 3.38m.) once stood at the base of a column erected in honour of the Emperor Antoninus Pius, who died in A.D. 161. In it, Antonius is depicted being carried upwards to join the immortal gods; with him is his wife Faustina, who had in fact died, and so become a *diva*, twenty years before him. They are seen together being transported upwards on the back of a strange figure with huge wings, leaving the symbols of the city of Rome beneath them. For the great sequence of Roman temples to the *divi*, see Vol. 1, 253; the new *divus* and *diva* had their joint temple in the Forum, where it still stands; see 4.7 n.1.

See further: for the apotheosis and deification of emperors, Vol. 1, 206–10, 318, 348–63; Hopkins (1978) 197–242\*; Price (1987); for the sculpture, and the (lost) column, Vogel (1973); D. E. Strong (1988) 197–8\*; D. E. E. Kleiner (1992) 285–8\*. Note also the sculpture showing the apotheosis of Sabina, the wife of the emperor Hadrian: Vogel (1973) pl. 47; Price (1987) 94, fig. 16; D. E. Strong (1988) illustration 111.



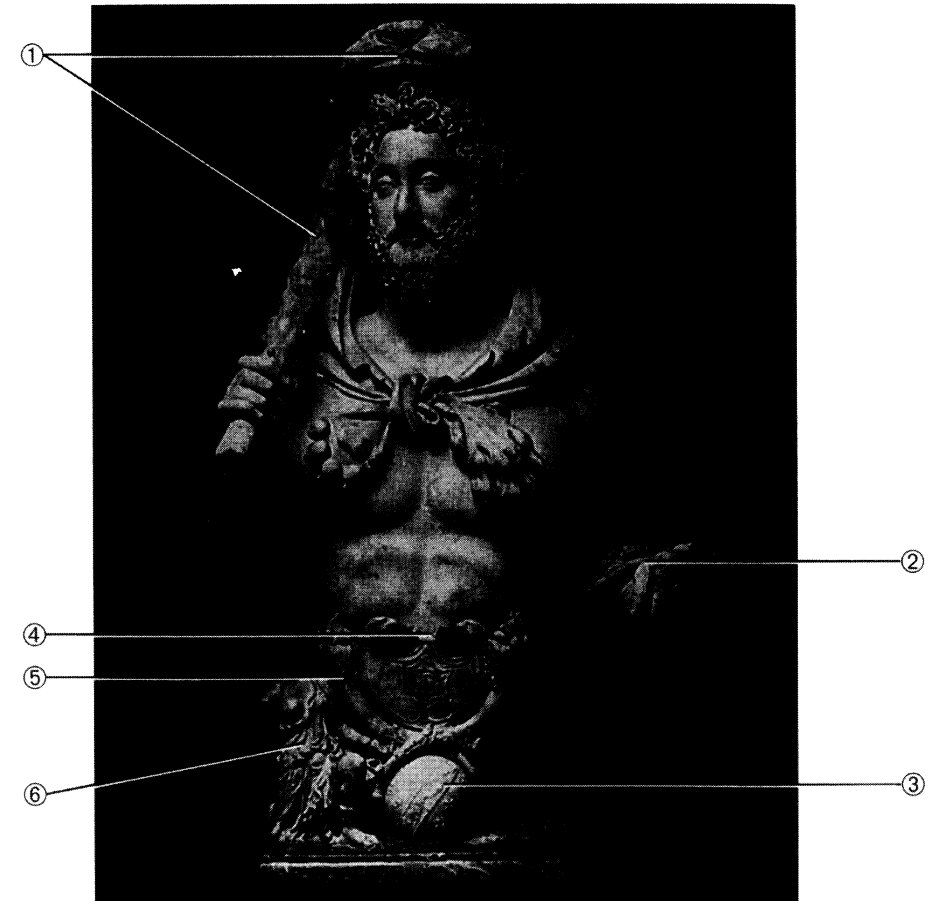
1. Antoninus and Faustina. Antoninus carries a sceptre with an eagle at its head – an attribute of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, and carried by a general on the day of his triumph. The sceptre in Faustina's hand is a modern restoration.
2. Two birds, their heads restored (probably correctly) as eagles. As well as being a symbol of divine and imperial power, eagles were commonly released from the top of the funeral pyres of emperors and were believed to take the ruler's soul to heaven (9.3b).
3. Winged figure transporting Antoninus and Faustina to the heavens. He carries a globe, zodiac and snake – the zodiac displaying the signs of March, the month of the death and consecration of Antoninus. His exact identity is uncertain. See Vogel (1973) 33–8.
4. Female figure in military dress, probably a personification of Roma (Rome). For the goddess Roma, see 10.3a, and Vol. 1, 158–60.
5. Figure, perhaps symbolizing the Campus Martius in Rome, the usual location of imperial funerals. He carries an obelisk, which may be intended to represent the obelisk at the centre of Augustus' great sundial – a distinctive monument in the Campus Martius.

### 2.8c *The emperor Commodus (A.D. 176–192) as Hercules*

Although they received 'official' deification only after their death, Roman emperors were often very closely associated with gods, even during their lifetime; their status merged with that of the divine. This statue of Commodus (which originally stood in one of the emperor's properties in Rome) may well have been produced in his lifetime. He is represented with the attributes of Hercules – suggesting a close connection between emperor and god, or (if the viewer chose to take it that way) that, in some senses, he really 'was' the god. Hercules was a particularly appropriate symbol of the ambivalence of the

emperor's divine status; for Hercules himself was originally, so it was said, a mortal hero who *achieved* the rank of a god at his 'death'. Height, 1.18 m.

See further: for the association of Commodus and Hercules, Vol. 1, 210; Beaujeu (1955) 400–10; Speidel (1993); for the sculpture and its context, Stuart Jones (1926) 139–42\*; Fittschen and Zanker (1985) 85–90; *Tranquille dimore* (1986) 37–56, 88–91; D. E. E. Kleiner (1992) 276–7\*.



1. Club and lionskin of Hercules.
2. In Commodus/Hercules' hand, the golden apples of the Hesperides – which Hercules retrieved as one of his labours.
3. Globe, surrounded by a zodiacal band – showing Taurus, Capricorn and Scorpio. The exact reference of these signs is uncertain; they presumably alluded to particularly important dates in Commodus' life and career. See Hannah (1986).
4. Crescent shield, with points ending in eagles' heads: a type particularly associated with Amazons, the mythical race of warrior women. Towards the end of his life Commodus took the title Amazonius.
5. Crossed cornucopiae, heaped with fruit, symbolizing plenty.
6. Female figure, perhaps an Amazon; the matching figure on the right is lost.

2.8d *Euhemerism: a theory of the human origin of the gods*

One strand of ancient philosophical thinking argued that all the major gods of mythology had a human origin; that the gods had been great kings or benefactors, deified on their death by a grateful people. This idea was particularly associated with the name of Euhemerus, whose Greek account of the mortal descent of the gods (written 311–298 B.C.) was translated into Latin by the poet Ennius. 'Euhemerism' later, of course, played into the hands of Christian opponents of paganism, who saw it as a pagan admission that their gods were not really gods. Here the Christian Lactantius quotes a 'euhemeristic' account of the death of Jupiter.

See further: Drachman (1922) 110–13\*.

Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 1.11.44

So if we grasp the fact that – judging by his deeds and character – Jupiter was a man and ruled as king on earth, it only remains now to investigate his death as well. In Ennius' *Holy History*, once he has described all the deeds carried out by Jupiter during his life time, he has this to say at the end: 'Then, after Jupiter had travelled around the earth five times, divided his rule between his friends and relations, bequeathed laws and customs to men, provided corn and done many other good deeds, he was endowed with immortal glory and renown and left his friends eternal memorials of his reign. In extreme old age, he departed this life in Crete and went away to join the gods; and his sons, the Curetes, tended and adorned his body. His tomb is in Crete in the town of Cnossus, a place said to have been founded by Vesta; and on his tomb there is an inscription in archaic Greek letters, reading ZAN KRONOU – that is, in Latin, "Jupiter son of Saturn".'

## 2.9 Rome and 'barbarian' deities

The expansion of the Roman empire beyond the Graeco-Roman heartland of the Mediterranean brought the Romans into contact with a yet wider range of 'native' deities. This contact between Roman and native religions often resulted in the merging of the different traditions and their various gods and goddesses. This process (now sometimes referred to as 'syncretism') was not new. The early contacts between Rome and the Greek world had, after all, resulted in that range of equivalences between Roman and Greek deities that we now take for granted (Zeus and Jupiter; Aphrodite and Venus; Hermes and Mercury etc.). But wider expansion of the empire led to a process of syncretism on a much wider scale.

See further: Vol. 1, 339–48; Février (1976); R. L. Gordon (1990c)\*.

2.9a *Caesar's view of Gallic gods*

To many Romans it no doubt seemed self-evident that 'native' gods fulfilled the same functions as their own; and it was in these terms that they made sense of the often very different, 'foreign' religious traditions of their newly conquered territories. In this passage describing native Gallic religion, Caesar writes of the gods of the Gauls as if they were just the same as Roman gods.

For an alternative Roman view of the independence and difference of native deities, see Tacitus, *Germania* 43.3.

See further: Vol. 1, 117; Clavel-Lévêque (1972); P.-M. Duval (1976); Carré (1981); Wightman (1986)\*; for the character of Caesar's account of Gaul in general, Drinkwater (1983) 10–11\*.

Caesar, *Gallic War* VI.17

Among the gods, they worship Mercury<sup>1</sup> in particular. There are numerous images of him; they claim that he is the inventor of all crafts, the guide for all roads and journeys; they consider that he has especial power over money-making and trade. After him, they worship Apollo<sup>2</sup> and Mars<sup>3</sup> and Jupiter<sup>4</sup> and Minerva.<sup>5</sup> On these deities they have roughly the same views as the other nations – that Apollo dispels sickness, that Minerva bestows the principles of arts and crafts, that Jupiter holds sway in heaven, that Mars controls wars. It is to Mars that, after deciding to enter battle, they normally vow whatever spoils they may take in the conflict.

1. The Gallic god Teutates.
2. The Gallic god Belen.
3. The Gallic god Esus.
4. The Gallic god Taranis.
5. The Gallic 'equivalent' is uncertain.

2.9b *Dedications to Mars Alator and Nudens Mars from Roman Britain*

Syncretism was not an innocent process. Its effect was, at least in the long term, to erode the identity of the native deity – to *submerge* rather than merge. These two dedications to Mars in combination with a British god display very different degrees of 'Romanness' in their layout, iconography and artistic style. But both are written in Latin and both suggest (with their reference to the standard Roman practice of fulfilling a vow) that the native deity is being subsumed within Roman traditions.

See further: Henig (1984) 50–5\*.

(i)



Pectillus<sup>1</sup> gave to the god Nudens Mars<sup>2</sup> the votive offering which he had promised.

RIB 307

Bronze plaque (original height 0.11m., width 0.6m.) from Lydney Park, Gloucestershire.

(ii)



To the god Mars Alator Dum<sup>3</sup> Censorinus, son of Gemellus<sup>4</sup> willingly and deservedly fulfilled his vow.<sup>5</sup>

RIB 218

Silver plaque (height 0.19m., width 0.10m.) from Barkway, Hertfordshire.

1. Though given a Latinized form, a native name.
2. The Latin text abbreviates 'Mars' to just the letter 'M'.
3. The sense of 'Dum' is unclear. Perhaps it is another title for the deity; or perhaps a shortened form of another name of the dedicator (?Dumerius).
4. Both Censorinus and Gemellus are well attested Latin names.
5. The final phrase is written as a standard Latin abbreviated formula – VSLM, 'votum solvit libens merito'.

## 2.10 One god: pagans, Jews and Christians

It was always possible within the traditions of Roman paganism to regard one deity as supreme above all others – whether Jupiter, Isis, some abstract concept of 'fate', or whichever. This might amount just to a fairly crude rank ordering of deities (Jupiter was the most 'important' god, the 'father' of gods – see

12.6a), but it could involve much more philosophical ideas of divine power or of a single divine spirit in which all the various gods and goddesses, even all living things, shared. Modern scholars have called these ideas 'henotheism', from the Greek *heis theos*, 'one god'. Henotheism was in some respects similar to Jewish or Christian 'monotheism', but there was a crucial difference. Henotheism merely implied particular devotion to one god or divine power, without denying the existence of the others. Both Judaism and Christianity insisted that their god was the only god; no others existed.

See further: Vol. 1, 255–9, 286–91; Nock (1933); Liebeschuetz (1979) 277–91; MacMullen (1984) 17–24; Lane Fox (1986) 34–5\*; Versnel (1990).

### 2.10a 'What is god?'

These verses, written in Greek, were discovered inscribed high up on the city wall of Oenoanda (in modern Turkey). They date to the third century A.D. and were apparently the words of an oracle (probably the oracle of Apollo at Claros – also in Turkey) responding to the question: 'What is god?'. Despite their similarities with Christian ways of conceptualizing god, these are the words of a pagan deity and pagan priests.

See further: Robert (1971); Hall (1978); Lane Fox (1986) 168–71\*.

G. E. Bean, 'Journeys in Northern Lycia', *Denkschrift Oesterr. Akad. der Wiss. Phil-Hist Kl.* 104 (1971), no. 37.

'Self-born, untaught, motherless, unshakeable,  
Giving place to no name, many-named, dwelling in fire,  
Such is god: we are a portion of god, his messengers.'  
This, then, to the questioners about god's nature  
The god replied, calling him all-seeing Ether:<sup>1</sup> to him then look  
And pray at dawn, looking out to the East.

1. In Greek 'ether' was the pure air of the highest atmosphere, where the gods lived. In several Greek accounts of the origins of the world, ether is also one of the elements out of which the universe was formed.

### 2.10b The ass-headed god

Some pagans ridiculed both Jewish and Christian notions of god, claiming (for example) that the Christians worshipped the sun, an ass' head or the wooden cross as their deity. This graffito (height 0.39m., width 0.35m.) from part of the imperial palace on the Palatine (probably third century A.D.) appears to make fun of a Christian called Alexamenos – showing him worshipping a figure with an ass' head on a cross. For Christians at the imperial court, see 12.7c(i).

See further: Dinkler (1967) 150–3; Clarke (1974) 216–18\*.



V. Väänänen, *Graffiti del Palatino* (Helsinki, 1966), I no. 246



1. Text (in Greek) 'Alexamenos worships god'.

### 2.10c One god, invisible

Here Minucius Felix responds to pagan criticisms of the Christian god.

See further: Wilken (1984) 83–93, 102–4, 181–3\*; on particular aspects of the arguments offered, Altmann (1968) – man as the image of god; Ferguson (1980) – the 'spiritualization' of sacrifice.

Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 32.1–6

Do you imagine that we are hiding the object of our worship if we have no shrines and altars? What image of god could I make, when, rightly considered, man himself is an image of god? What temple could I build for him, when the whole of this world that is crafted by his handiwork could not contain him? And should I, a person living in rather

more spacious surroundings, imprison the force of his majesty, so great as it is, within a little temple? Surely it is better that he should find a shrine dedicated to him in our minds. Surely it is better that he should find a place consecrated in our hearts. Shall I offer to god sacrifices and victims which he provided for my use, and so throw his generosity back at him? That is a mark of ingratitude, since the offering that is acceptable to god is a good heart, a pure mind and innocent thoughts. So, to cherish innocence is to pray to god; to cherish justice is to make a libation to god; to refrain from deceit is to propitiate god; to save another man from danger is to slay the best victim. These are our sacrifices, these our holy rites of the Lord. In our religion justice goes hand in hand with faith.

(4) But, you argue, the god that we worship we neither show nor see. In fact that is the very root of our faith in god – that we are able to perceive him without being able to see him. For in his works and in all the movements of the world, we recognize his ever present virtue: when it thunders, when it lightens, when the flashes strike, when the clear day returns. Nor should you be surprised that you cannot see god. For everything is driven, shaken and set in motion by the wind and the breezes, and yet the wind and the breezes are invisible to our eyes. We cannot look upon the sun, which gives the capacity of sight to everyone. Our vision is dazzled by its rays, the observer's power of sight is blunted, and if you look at it too long, all eyesight is destroyed. Well? Could you possibly bear to look upon the very creator of the sun, that source of light, when you turn yourself away from his flashes, and hide from his lightning? Do you desire to see god with the eyes of your body, when you can neither observe nor hold your own soul, thanks to which you live and speak?