RELIGIOUS TOLERATION AND POLITICAL POWER IN THE ROMAN WORLD

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By

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

MASTER OF ARTS (2008) McMaster University

(Classics) Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Religious Toleration and Political Power in the Roman World

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SUPERVISOR: Professor Evan Haley

NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 68

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines religious toleration in the Roman world throughout the republic and empire and its connection to Roman political power. While studies have examined the role religion played in Roman political success, few have looked at the reactions of the Romans in multiple situations involving religious groups that were incompatible with Roman society in order to draw broad conclusions about the nature of Roman religious toleration and how it was meant to maintain Roman supremacy. By examining a number of such groups, this study aims to outline the place of religion in the Roman political system, to show why certain religious groups were met with various forms of hostility, and finally to consider what these incidences reveal about Roman religious toleration and the place of religion in Rome's political landscape. This study finds that Roman religion had very specific characteristics and was a pillar of the Roman state, so that when a religious group caught the attention of the Roman authorities and did not fit the requirements of the Roman state religion, it was perceived as a threat to Rome's position of power. Each group examined received different treatment from Rome depending on other stresses endangering Roman political stability and the structure and practices of the group in question. Those that could be made into acceptable Roman cults were permitted to exist in their new form while others were completely rejected. Allowing groups to continue in any form, though, was done so under the supervision of the senate or emperor which shifted power back to the Roman state and re-established its control over the religious and hence political sphere. Such treatment of religious groups should not be called toleration and this thesis helps to correct such misjudgements which deny the importance that religion played in Roman political power.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must first thank my advisor, Dr. Evan Haley, for agreeing to supervise such a broad thesis and for his invaluable research suggestions and grammatical corrections. I am convinced that there is no topic concerning the Roman world that evades his scope of knowledge. Thanks to my committee members, Drs. Claude Eilers and Alexandra Retzleff, for also not shirking a thesis with many topics and for helping me "cut off some limbs". I am grateful to all of my colleagues in the classics department who support each other and always lend an ear.

A special thanks goes to Michael who always believed in me and faithfully listened whenever I needed to discuss ideas and for always managing to make sense out of my confused dribble. Without his unfailing support, understanding, and patience, which were given without complaint, I know I would have given up long ago. Thank you to my brother for remaining convinced that I am brilliant and talented and for being proud of me. I'm so thankful that I have someone like you to talk with.

Finally, thank you especially to my mother. I don't even know where to begin thanking her; I must thank her for her financial support, without which I could not have focused solely on school. I think, though, that I am most grateful for her love and emotional support which have absolutely no limits. No matter what choices I made or will make, she always makes sure that I know that she is there for me and that she is proud of me. Thanks for listening, making suggestions, comforting me, taking me for walks, making sure I eat healthy, letting me make my own decisions and helping me to pick up the pieces when those decisions don't work out, and for being so strong. I strive everyday to be the kind of person you are.

I dedicate this work to my father, who instilled in me a passion for knowledge and is constantly on my mind.

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From the beginning of the Roman republic to the end of the empire, a theory of religious toleration never existed to give the people ruled by Rome a choice as to which deities and rituals they wanted to believe in. While the Romans and those they conquered were polytheistic for the most part, it did not equate that any deity or ritual brought into Rome or that the Romans encountered in the provinces was automatically accepted. Whatever course of action was taken in religious situations, in the Roman context it could rarely be termed toleration.

Ritual and tradition used in government and religious matters were vital to the way in which the Roman state functioned. Through the participation in rites, citizens living far from the center of the state identified with the larger political forces that could only be seen in symbolic form.[1] In Rome for example, religious rites were especially used for this purpose and were funded and arranged by the state. They were performed in highly structured, standardized sequences at specific places and times making them very repetitive, and these factors served as important means of directing emotion, thought, and loyalty.[2] If these rites were disrupted by any other rites which caused citizens to identify themselves with an entity other than the Roman state, the complete power of the state over its citizens was seen as compromised, which was not tolerated.

The word toleration is used when trying to define how far, short of some standard, someone is willing to fall, or how much someone will put up with a particular situation which could, in theory, be corrected.[3] Toleration is an active concept with those in power deliberately not taking action against a perceived threat and is not the opposite of intolerance, but rather indifference.[4] The following five elements are determined by Crick as necessary in any situation for toleration to apply: (i) The society must feel threatened by something (ii) There must be power to give or withhold (iii) Moral disapproval must exist against whatever embodies the threat (iv) There is some reasonably accurate knowledge of the character of the threat (v) The threat must be accepted.[5] These parameters of toleration have been used by both J.A. North in his article "Religious Toleration in Republican Rome" and Peter Garnsey in "Religious Toleration in Classical Antiquity" to show that the popular view of the Roman world as tolerant to foreign religions is false. Examples of persecution against such groups as the Druids, Jews, and Christians are typically listed as being the exceptions to an otherwise tolerant paganism.[6] There is little extant scholarship which compares and contrasts these examples in an attempt to discover what generally caused Roman religious toleration to

[1] David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 1.

[2] Kertzer (1988), 9.

[3] Bernard Crick, "Toleration and Tolerance in Theory and Practice," *Government and Opposition* 6, no. 2 (1971): 145.

[4] Crick (1971), 149.

[5] Crick (1971), 156-157.

[6] Ramsey MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 2; See also Jill Harries, "The Rise of Christianity," in *The Roman World* Volume II, ed. John Wacher (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), 796-811, at 800.

break down and there is even less, as Garnsey notes[7], that actually deals with the concept of religious toleration in Roman-style polytheism.

The articles by North and Garnsey each provide a solid starting point when considering Roman toleration in religious matters, yet neither compares and contrasts very many exceptions to toleration which would allow for solid conclusions to be drawn about its limits. In my thesis, then, I will compare and contrast the exceptions of the suppression of the Bacchanalia, the cult of Isis, astrology, magic, the Druids and certain aspects of the worship of Baal in North Africa, the Jews and the Christians to Roman religious toleration These examples will show that what the senate typically claimed forced it into action were situations involving rituals and cult organizations which were seen as irreconcilable with traditional Roman religion and, by extension, politically subversive. Regardless of whether or not religion was the actual reason for the suppression of many religious groups, in most of the cases listed above, the ancient sources claim that it was at least a major motive. Rather than try to decipher religion as the true cause for violence, this paper will pick out the, often common, offensive characteristics attributed to each group that was suppressed and examine them in light of the first chapter concerning religion's place in the Roman world.

The first chapter examines the inner workings of Roman religion to show that the proper functioning of the Roman state depended on religion being supervised by Roman authorities and new deities and cults being approved by the leading political institution, the senate or the emperor. Roman religion can be described as "the sum of all cults, mystery and non-mystery, directed at deities that had a place in the Roman pantheon."[8] Later chapters are concerned with Roman reaction to deities and their cults that did not have a place in the Roman pantheon such as Ba'al Hammon, Isis, the Jewish god, and Jesus, as well as the cultic practices of Bacchus' followers, the Druids, and magicians and astrologers. Each chapter refers back to the claims set forth in the first chapter and adds supportive arguments to show that Roman-style polytheism was a pillar of the Roman state and any perceived threat to that religion had to be removed to ensure the state's continued existence.

The second and third chapters examine a number of situations where the Romans brutally suppressed religious groups. Religion and politics were hardly separable for the Romans, so control of religion was perceived to be necessary in order to have full control over people. Certain characteristics of religious groups might have been allowed to continue, but not those that were understood to be standing in the way of bringing a group under the supervision of the Roman authorities and this chapter aims to outline some of those characteristics.

Although the time line I will be dealing with is extensive due to the various dates at which each of these groups were persecuted, taking such an expansive view with many examples will allow a common thread to be found that unites each one and makes the point that the Romans were not tolerant more irrefutable.

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[7] Peter Garnsey, "Religious Toleration in Classical Antiquity," in *Persecution and Toleration: Studies in Church History 21*, ed. W.J. Sheilds (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 1 n. 1.

[8] Sarolta Takács, *Isis and Sarapis in the Roman World* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1995), 8.

CHAPTER 1: Roman Religion and its Role in Political Control

Roman religion is such an elusive topic that one modern work of reference does not offer a definition of it, but simply a description: "Defining 'Roman religion' is harder than it might seem. The emphasis of scholars has generally been on the public festivals and institutions, on the ground that they provided the framework within which private rituals were constructed."[9] Roman religion was a state religion, which meant that the state oversaw the worship of specific deities for the success of the state as a whole. As such, simply listing the various gods, rituals, and festivals associated with them does not give a complete understanding of the role that religion played in the functioning of the state. However, looking at the key characteristics of Roman religion, some of the religion's more important priests and their interaction with the senate, and the treatment of foreign deities by Rome gives a clearer picture of the place religion occupied in the Roman state.

Roman religion cannot be compared to some standard right or wrong form of religion to which its condition at any particular moment in time might be judged. Such a judgment depends on believing in a good, honest, rural Italic religion, representing the true Roman tradition and that any departure from such a core becomes a loss and any addition to it becomes a corruption. It can not be assumed that 'change' is basically the same as 'decline'.[10] The modern tendency to use these two words interchangeably when discussing religion at Rome stems from perceiving religion as an area independent of other parts of civic life, which allows it to therefore carry on unchanged through political revolutions.[11] Roman religion, however, did adapt itself to political changes because religion and politics were inextricably linked. This connection is very important when considering most aspects of ancient Rome, especially that of foreign religions and Rome.

Pagans had a very limited sense of an individual relationship to the gods and believed that as long as the gods were respected, it did not really matter how moral your life was. Public religious ceremonies were organized by the state, that is priests and the senate, and those who led these ceremonies earned much dignity and authority because religion was a central part of the Romans' own concept of their city.[12] Yet, a person was not chosen to lead religious ceremonies because of their morality since an individual's morality was not really perceived as something that could trigger the gods' wrath, unless it endangered the city, or it affected worshipping and showing respect to the gods. The gods were not perceived as supervisors of morality and it seems that Roman morality was sanctioned to only a limited extent by the expectations of divine reward or punishment.[13] Cicero illustrates the understanding of the role of morality in Roman religion, saying,

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[9] Simon Price, "Religion, Roman," in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary Third Edition*, eds. S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1306.

[10] J. A. North, "Religion and Politics, from Republic to Principate," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 76 (1986): 252.

[11] North (1986), 257.

[12] Andrew Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 182.

[13] J. H. W. G Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 39.

> Nobody ever accounts his own virtues as a gift from God...When we prosper in our public or private life, or experience some stroke of luck, or escape some calamity, then we give thanks to the gods and take no credit for ourselves. But did anyone ever thank the gods that he was a good man? No, he thanks them for his honours, or his wealth, or his personal safety. Men name Jupiter as the best and greatest of the gods, not because he makes us just or temperate or wise but because he keeps us safe and sound in health and wealth.[14]

Clearly it was not the examples of the gods that upheld some form of a moral code in Rome, but instead Romans looked to other areas of life for moral guidance such as family tradition, public opinion, and historical examples.[15] The maintenance of morality was essential for the well-being of the republic, but it was not presented as part of religious duties and, with few exceptions, moral offences were not treated as offences against the gods.

The Romans worshipped a wide range of gods. There were the greater anthropomorphized gods of Roman state religion such as Jupiter, Juno, and Mars, and lesser divinities like Castor, Hercules, and Flora. The Lares and Penates were worshipped by individual households as the protector divinities of individual families, along with non-anthropomorphized divinities of the environment such as the spirits of streams, fountains, woods, and diseases affecting men, animals, and crops. Abstractions such as Concord, Hope, Mind and also mortals who were deified after their death, Julius Caesar for example, all received worship at Rome.[16] Most of the greater anthropomorphized gods of Roman state religion resemble the Olympian gods of Greek mythology, while some were essentially Roman, like Janus and Vesta, the hearth goddess, who bears little resemblance to the Greek Hestia.[17] These deities were not honoured in substantially different ways than those of people the Romans viewed as barbarians, since people everywhere made sacrifices, prayers, vows, celebrated games, and built sanctuaries to their gods. What made the religions of the world at that time different, though, were the small governing rules, details, and choices which gave each system its originality.[18] As Rome grew more powerful, its success was attributed to the will of the gods and both the success of Rome and the will of the gods were attained by the Romans through their exceptional reverence of the gods. The Romans felt that their success proved that it was their right to judge which religious rituals courted the gods' favour and which did not.

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[14] nimirum recte; propter virtutem enim iure laudamur et in virtute recte gloriamur; quod non contingeret, si id donum a deo, non a nobis haberemus. at vero aut honoribus aucti aut re familiari, aut si aliud quippiam nacti sumus fortuiti boni aut depulimus mali, tum dis gratias agimus, tum nihil nostrae laudi adsumptum arbitramur. Num quis, quod bonus vir esset, gratias dis egit umquam? at quod dives, quod honoratus, quod incolumis; Iovemque Optimum et maximum ob eas res appellant, non quod nos iustos, temperantes, sapientes efficiat, sed quod salvos, incolumis, opulentos, copiosos. Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods*, trans. Horace C.P McGregor (England: Penguin Books, 1972), 3, 87.

[15] Liebeschuetz (1979), 40.

[16] Valerie Warrior, *Roman Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 9-10.

[17] Warrior (2006), 10-11.

[18] J. Scheid, "Greco ritu. A Typically Roman Way of Honoring the Gods", *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 97, *Greece in Rome: Influence, Integration, Resistance* (1995): 18.

Men who were members of the senate were the Romans who specifically decided what was acceptable or not in religious worship. The senate oversaw religion on the state's behalf just as in each family the *paterfamilias* was in charge of his family's religious activities and all other aspects on his estate.[19] By ensuring that all of the priesthoods were running smoothly and all of the proper rituals were being performed to keep the gods benevolent towards Rome, the senate tried to maintain a prosperous place where Roman families that worshipped their ancestral gods according to tradition could thrive. In the prologue to his play *Pot of Gold*, Plautus has the Lar, the protecting deity of the house, address the audience in a speech that articulates the contractual nature of the envisioned relationship between humans and gods and the speech emphasizes the need for the family to keep its own particular gods placated, as the senate and the priests did for the state.

> I am the household god of that family from whose house you saw me come. For many years now I have possessed this dwelling, and preserved it for the sire and grandsire of its present occupant. Now this man's grandsire as a suppliant entrusted to me, in utter secrecy, a hoard of gold: he buried it in the center of the hearth, entreating me to guard it for him... After the death of him who had committed the gold to my keeping, I began to observe whether the son would hold me in greater honor than his father had. As a matter of fact, his neglect grew and grew apace, and he showed me less honor. I did the same by him: so he also died. He left a son who occupies this house at present, a man of the same mould as his sire and grandsire. He has one daughter. She prays to me constantly, with daily gifts... Out of regard for her I caused [her father] Euclio to discover the treasure here so that he might the more easily find her a husband.[20]

This excerpt shows that personal and private worship of the gods mirrored that of public worship by the state. As with the state, so in private, if the ancestral gods were not properly worshiped, the state or a family could not expect to thrive.

The gods and the way that they were worshipped were passed down to the Romans along with numerous institutions, customs, and practices that they had inherited

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[19] J. A. North, *Roman Religion, Greece & Rome: New Surveys in the Classics No. 30.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 18.

[20] ego Lar sum familiaris ex hac familia unde exeuntem me aspexistis. hanc domum iam multos annos est cum possideo et colo patri avoque iam huius qui nunc hic habet. sed mi avos huius obsecrans concredidit thensaurum auri clam omnis: in medio foco defodit, venerans me ut id servarem sibi. is quoniam moritur—ita avido ingenio fuit—numquam indicare id filio voluit suo, inopemque optavit potius eum relinquere, quam eum thensaurum commonstraret filio; agri reliquit ei non magnum modum, quo cum labore magno et misere viveret. ubi is obiit mortem qui mihi id aurum credidit, coepi observare, ecqui maiorem filius mihi honorem haberet quam eius habuisset pater. atque ille vero minus minusque impendio curare minusque me impertire honoribus. item a me contra factum est, nam item obiit diem. is ex se hunc reliquit qui hic nunc habitat filium pariter moratum ut pater avosque huius fuit. huic filia una est. ea mihi cottidie aut ture aut vino aut aliqui semper supplicat, dat mihi coronas. eius honoris gratia feci, thensaurum ut hic reperiret Euclio, quo illam facilius nuptum, si vellet, daret. Plautus, *The Pot of Gold*, trans. Paul Nixon (Loeb, 1916), 1-27.

from their ancestors which were greatly valued due to their antiquity. There was a determined conservatism in both Roman cult and practice with the result that religious changes were not simply replacements for the old, but a set of coexisting innovations.[21] Cornell explains that the Romans' "consciously traditionalist ideology made Rome a kind of living museum, in which the past was continuously on display."[22] This display especially included keeping the ancestral masks (*imagines)* of a family's ancestors at home to be worn at funerals by relatives in order to stimulate the young to imitate their ancestors' achievements and to worship the same household gods that had permitted their ancestors to attain distinction.[23] A desire to keep the past in the present might seem surprising in a society which developed from a small, agrarian community into a vast empire and displayed an incredible ability to accept innovation and flexibility in adapting to change. This paradox can be explained by the fact that the Romans were experts at retaining the form of institutions while changing their substance and they liked to leave existing structures as they were and superimpose new ones, rather than reform the old ones.[24] The best example of this in religion is the position of the *rex sacrorum*, a priest whose task it was to perform the religious functions of the former kings. This 'priest-king' was an obscure figure in the later republic whose ritual duties, sacrifices, and announcements connected to the calendar had become mere formalities.[25] The *rex sacrorum* was prohibited from holding political office and from membership in the senate, a unique restriction not imposed on other priests, and he was subordinated to the authority of the *pontifex maximus*.[26] These deliberate guards against the *rex sacrorum* obtaining any political power must have been a direct decision of the senate of the early republic to separate the title of 'king' from the exercise of political power.[27] Thus, the position of the *rex sacrorum* was maintained throughout the republic, but his duties and powers were undoubtedly changed and restricted over time to suit and reflect the ideology of the republic.

The role of the *fetiales*, priests concerned with the procedures and laws declaring wars and making treaties, provides another clear example of how Roman religion adapted to Rome's growth, yet sustained traditions. This college of twenty members advised the senate on issues of peace and war, and when war was declared, the *fetialis* traveled to the boundary of the enemy state and threw a symbolic spear into the enemy territory. The consequence of these proceedings was that a just war (*bellum iustum*) was declared.[28] As Rome's enemies changed from their neighbours in and around Italy to states great distances away, the *fetiales* stopped traveling to perform their ceremonial spear-throw into enemy territory and by the late republic this ritual took place inside Rome on the ground near the temple of Bellona ritually regarded as non-Roman. This change does not

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[21] Alan Wardman, *Religion and Statecraft Among the Romans (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1982)*, 170.

[22] T.J. Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 25.

[23] Lintott (1999), 169.

[24] Cornell (1995), 25.

[25] Cornell (1995), 233.

[26] Livy, trans. Evan T. Sage and Alfred C. Schlesinger (Loeb, 1938), 40.42.8.

[27] Cornell (1995), 233.

[28] Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *The Roman Antiquities,* trans. Earnest Cary (Loeb, 1937), II.72.

indicate a decline in the prominence or influence of the college of *fetiales,* but rather exemplifies the innovative–conservative dichotomy that was characteristic of Roman religion.

The opposite to changing the ritual while maintaining its significance also existed in Roman religion, which was maintaining the ritual while losing the significance behind the actions. This is seen in Ovid's *Fasti*, VI. 319-348, where Ovid unsatisfactorily explains the reason behind certain odd rituals for Vesta, which involved giving donkeys a day off and stringing loaves of bread around their necks. This example shows once again that aspects of religion had to change as Rome went from an agrarian based city to an over-populated metropolis. Religious principles that had once supported farmers became meaningless to city dwellers, yet in an attempt to retain the traditions that were important to their ancestors, Romans continued to practice ancient ceremonies. This resulted in the large and perplexing number of cults, festivals, and ceremonies evidenced in the historical and archaeological records, which continued to be observed for so long that they became obscure and obsolete.[29] The continuity of rituals honouring beliefs lost due to necessary change was the essence of the Romans who looked to the past through their religion, thus creating a traditional religion that evolved with society.

There is clear evidence that the religious atmosphere at Rome was open to innovation and adjustment at almost all periods, but also that Roman attitudes were deeply conservative and desired tradition. These two conflicting characteristics were able to exist at the same time because evaluating and accepting a new deity or cult was part of Roman tradition since Rome had always expanded to borrow, absorb, and incorporate new deities, ideas, and cults.[30] Under the republic and the principate, the state religion was forced to adapt itself in the face of challenges posed by the arrival of new mystery and personal religions, especially those of eastern origin.[31] Accepting new deities and cults was part of Roman tradition and was therefore consistent with previous actions.[32] Innovation should not be seen as a random or accidental characteristic of Roman religion, but instead as a means by which religious life could adjust itself to change in other areas. From 300-44 BC, Rome was changing quickly, which caused everything, especially religion, to adapt to the constantly changing social conditions. Thus, the religious system had to be open to innovation in order to survive.[33] Political turning points corresponded very closely to important changes in religious life because religion had to adapt in order to accommodate new values in a changing society. For example, sacred law was not included in the Twelve Tables because in the fifth century B.C., the patricians held most of the authority in Rome and did not see sacred law, which was an extension of the state, as the concern of the plebeians.[34] But in 300 BC, the priesthoods had to adjust their

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[29]Cornell (1995), 26.

[30] Wardman (1982), 2.

[31] Peter Garnsey, Richard Saller, *The Early Principate: Augustus to Trajan, Greece and Rome: New Surveys in the Classics No. 15* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 39.

[32] North (2000), 56.

[33]North (1986), 252.

[34] Alan Watson, *The State, Law and Religion: Pagan Rome* (Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1992), 2.

criteria for eligibility in order to accommodate the implementation of the *lex Ogulnia.* This law permitted for the first time plebeians to be pontiffs, corresponding to the increased power the plebeians were gaining in society.[35] Thus, the struggle for power between the patricians and plebeians in political life was reflected in religion in the form of more priestly positions and influence for plebeians. Roman religion was an incredible system that was able, for the most part, to meet the needs of citizens and the state and therefore survive due to its ability to retain those traditions that were most important and gradually take on the new ones that were unavoidable.

The people who officiated religion in Rome were priests; however there were many categories of Roman priests and they had a very different role than Christian priests because Roman priests were essential in the running of the state. A place in a priestly college was highly coveted because the judgments of the colleges about sacred law and their interpretations of events were respected by the senate in taking their decisions.[36] Although the senate relied on the priestly groups for their religious knowledge and expertise, the senate was still the center of religious power and authority. The majority of the most important acts of public religion were performed by the elected magistrates, not by priests, but each priestly college had charge of a certain area of religion.[37] By assigning each priestly college defined areas of specialty, and restricting priests from belonging to more than one college, responsibility was divided which ensured that religious authority was diffused as widely as possible.[38] The major colleges that religious power was divided among were the *pontifices*, *augures*, and *decimviri* and these groups of priests were frequently called upon by the senate to give their judgment when some unusual event happened or there was a religious problem.[39] The judgment of priests was very important to the senate because almost all Roman priesthoods were traditionally established under the kings and this connection to the past earned them great respect and authority in the state. Even though the priests were not sole arbiters, they occupied a critical position in Roman political life from an early period since they were consulted during controversies over points of ritual and religious procedure.[40]

One such group of priests that was frequently consulted by the senate was the pontifical college and the importance of this college steadily grew during the republic. From 300 BC to the end of the republic the college, together with augurs, had as its members the dominant figures in the ruling elite. Members of the pontifical college were the best known Roman religious experts who exercised supervision of both religion and religious officials, including the choice of successors to vestals, *flamines,* and the *rex sacrorum.* It was also their responsibility to make sure that traditional practices were followed and for this reason, they were also in charge of maintaining documents and

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[35] Watson (1992), 9.
[36] North (2000), 27.
[37] Lintott (1999), 185.
[38] North (1986), 257.
[39] Lintott (1999), 186.
[40] Mary Beard, John North, Simon Price, *Religions of Rome: Volume 1, A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 30.

records, including those housed in temples and sanctuaries.[41] The *pontifices* were not believed to have direct communication with the gods, but rather their power rested in mediating between the senate, the center of Roman religion in form, and the citizens.[42] In relation to the individual citizen, these priests were designated as representatives of the central religious power and on the senate's behalf determined the religious conduct of citizens.[43] For example, the *pontifices* advised families about adoption, burial practices, and made sure that citizens did not work on festival days.

The leading member of the pontifical college was the *pontifex maximus* who acted as a spokesman, particularly in the senate. Any line of action that had been decided by the *pontifices* and was proposed to the senate by the *pontifex maximus*, however, was only advisory in nature. Like all other colleges, the pontifical college played a subordinate role to the senate in religious decisions since their rulings (*decreta, responsa*) had to be put into effect by magistrates or the assemblies. The mediating role of the pontifical college should not be underestimated though, since the pontiffs represented a wealth of religious knowledge on which the senate could consult when a complex matter required specialist religious advice.[44] This advisory role is best exemplified in the example of Cicero's house when Cicero directs his argument for the return of his land to the pontifical college because the senate left it to the pontiffs to hear Cicero's speech and investigate whether his land, which had been consecrated while he was in exile, should be returned to him.[45] They judged that the consecration had not been performed properly and that the land should be returned to Cicero. Taking this judgment into consideration, the senate decided that the land must be returned. This example shows the pontifical college in the position of something resembling a subcommittee of the senate. As most *pontifices* were also senators, as a group, they relieved their 'parent committee' of specific specialist areas of concern and recommended proceedings that were not likely to be overturned.[46] While the pontiffs never had the power of final decision, the senate relied on them to represent the state when dealing with citizens and keep the senate informed about the religious happenings of the Roman people in general. The senate also relied on the pontiffs to maintain their religious expertise in order that they were able to best advise the senate on complex religious issues and for performing all of their duties, as members of the pontifical college were regarded as among the most dignified and powerful men in Rome.

The augurs were official Roman diviners which formed one of the major colleges of priests. Unlike the *pontifices*, these priests fulfilled a mediating role directly between men and gods, which gave them alone the power to interrupt an assembly in progress by declaring signs sent by gods.[47] These signs were called *auspicia*, which means 'the

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[41] Richard E. Mitchell, *Patricians and Plebeians: The Origin of the Roman State* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 72.

[42] Mary Beard, "Priesthood in the Roman Republic," in *Pagan Priests: Religion and Power in the Ancient World*, eds. Mary Beard and John North (London: Gerald Duckworth &co. Ltd., 1990), 36.

[43] Beard (1990), 39.

[44] Beard (1990), 38.

[45] Cicero, *On His House*, trans. N. H. Watts (Loeb, 1923), i. 1; lviii. 147-155.

[46] Beard (1990), 38-39.

[47] Beard (1990), 40.

watchings of birds', but the term was applied to various types of divination including signs from the sky like thunder and lightning, from quadrupeds, like a wolf eating grass, and from unusual, threatening occurrences. The augurs were not concerned with every kind of communication with the gods, so, for example, it was instead the concern of the officials known as *haruspices* to read the will of the gods from entrails at sacrifices. Only augurs could officially conduct the auspices, but any person could use the auspices and because of this, there was a division of the auspices into private and public. The public auspices were administered by the magistrates who had the right and were expected by the senate to actively seek omens which indicated divine approval or disapproval of an action. Augurs frequently responded to questions posed by the senate and the senate was free to accept or to reject the advice. For example, after Marcellus was elected consul in 215 BC, a clap of thunder was heard just as he was entering office and the senate called upon the augers to give their expert opinion on what it meant. They concluded that some procedure had not been carried out correctly in his election, which lead the senate to decide that the gods were not pleased to have two plebian consuls and so Marcellus was replaced with the patrician Q. Fabius Maximus.[48] Clearly the augurs were distinguished by their special ability to discern the will of the gods, yet in relation to the power of the senate, these priests were subordinate.

The reporting of a sign which involved the dismissal of a popular assembly had to be made personally by the magistrate who had seen it to the magistrate who was to preside over the assembly.[49] This obstructive reporting of omens (*obnuntiatio*) became a political tactic in the late republic since it allowed magistrates to obstruct undesirable measures.[50] For example, when the consul Metellus wished to hold an election and the tribune Milo wanted to prevent it by *obnuntiatio*, Metellus tried to avoid Milo so that he could not formally deliver the notice of his observation to Metellus.[51] Thus, a sign had to be formally recognized and announced by a proper official for it to be effective. The importance of the tradition of taking the auspices is emphasized by Cicero as he reports that "No public business was conducted without taking the auspices first."[52] Since the gods' will had to be sought before any public business was conducted, be it political or military, this exemplifies how dependent the state was felt to be on the gods' goodwill and thus the augurs who had the power to decipher the gods' will.

Like the augurs, members of the college of the *quindecimviri sacris faciundis* were also a kind of diviner who directly interpreted signs from the gods. This college was in charge of protecting and consulting the Sibylline Books by order of the senate in times of crisis. The Romans believed that these books first came to Rome in the reign of Tarquinius Priscus, who was believed to have bought three books from the Cumaean Sibyl and placed them in the care of the priestly college of the *quindecimviri sacris faciundis,* to be consulted only at the command of the senate, particularly in response to prodigies or other disasters. The senate ordered the quindecimvirs to consult the Sibylline

[48] Livy, 23. 31, 13-14.
[49] Liebeschuetz (1979), 24.
[50] Lintott (1999), 103.
[51] Cicero, Letters to *Atticus,* trans. E. O. Winstedt (Loeb, 1912), 4. 3.
[52] Cicero, *On Divination,* trans. W. A. Falconer (Loeb, 1923), 1. 3.

Books and give advice "when the state [was] in the grip of party strife or some great misfortune [had] happened to them in war, or some important prodigies and apparitions [had] been seen..."[53] The books seem to have contained sets of *remedia,* which were rituals that suggested how danger might be averted and how to regain the gods' favour if it had been lost. Being appointed to consult these oracles, then, must have placed much importance on these priests and earned them great respect. These books and so also these priests were vital components in legitimating change in the state religion since the books were understood as being very old, yet recommended introducing new deities and rituals, which will be discussed in more detail below.[54] The senate took into consideration the interpretation of the quindecimvirs about what a particular prodigy meant and what should be done to correct it, but as with the judgment from any priesthood, the senate made the ultimate decision concerning what should be done.

The senate took the major role in overseeing both sacred and secular state practices and regularly gave precedence to religious matters over political affairs.[55] For example, the state committed much of its funds to major state funded public festivals which were organized by public officials, first the aediles and later, during the empire, a praetor. Festivals were days "dedicated to the gods; on working days people may transact private and public business; and the half-festivals are days shared between gods and men. Thus on the festival days there are sacrifices and banquets in honor of the gods, public games, and 'rest days'."[56] As the funding and organizing of such days set aside for the gods was done by the state in order to maintain a beneficial relationship with the gods, this provides an example of the state's involvement in religion. If the regular games and sacrifices were not felt to be enough to placate to gods, the senate had the power to resolve any problem. For example, in 62 BC, P. Clodius Pulcher supposedly snuck into the ceremonies of the Bona Dea, a women's only event, thus disrupting the traditional and correct form of maintaining the gods' benevolence. It was the senate that organized the Vestal Virgins and the college of *pontifices* to investigate the incident and put the suspected man on trial.[57] Although this case was clearly religious in nature, the senate dictated what should be done, showing that senatorial powers stretched throughout the political and religious realms in ancient Rome causing these areas for the most part to be one and the same.

Roman priests stood apart from the political order in the state only in exceptional circumstances. There is hardly ever a sign of a clash between 'church' and 'state', between priestly interests and the dominant political hierarchy that is familiar in later Christian societies because during the republic records indicate that members of the major priesthoods came from leading noble families, usually assuming a priesthood at the

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[53] Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *The Roman Antiquities,* 4. 62.

[54] Beard, North, Price (1998), 63.

[55] Mitchell (1990), 64.

[56] Macrobius, *The Saturnalia,* trans. Percival Vaughan Davies (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 1.16, 2-4.

[57] Cicero, *Letters to Atticus,*, I. 13.

beginning of a political career. [58] For example, Julius Caesar, who came from an old patrician family, became a pontiff in his early twenties and was elected *pontifex maximus* before he even held a major civic magistracy.[59] Cicero also explains that men who participated in the political world tended to hold a position in a priestly college, saying

> Among the many divinely-inspired expedients of government established by our ancestors, there is none more striking than that whereby they expressed their intention that the worship of the gods and the vital interests of the state should be entrusted to the direction of the same individuals, to the end that citizens of the greatest distinction and the brightest fame might achieve the welfare of religion by a wise administration of the state, and of the state by a sage interpretation of religion.[60]

These examples show that religion and politics were completely intertwined and since many politicians held a position in a priestly college, this explains why the religious decisions of the senate tended to follow the advice of the priests.

The college of *pontifices* had active religious authority over the sacred rites which gave them general oversight of state religion. They supervised events such as festivals, they maintained the calendar, and they kept the *annales maximi*, a summary of the major events of each year that included wars, battles, grain shortages, and prodigies.[61] Control over these areas of the state could translate into the power to postpone controversial legislation, interfere with elections, and even remove officials from office on religious grounds. Clearly then, political manipulation of religion could have a powerful impact in the legal sphere since laws might be annulled because it was claimed that they were carried through by force or against the auspices.[62] However, the sittings of the republican senate were never, as far as we know, interrupted on such religious grounds.[63] Since the interruption of an assembly meeting was justified on the grounds that the particular assembly was being conducting against the gods' will, the exception of the senate to such disturbances reinforces its central position in religious matters. No interruptions during senate meetings implies that, as the body which formed the focus of communication between gods and men, the senate could not be seen as conducting business against the desires of the gods and so could not be logically interrupted by an ill omen sent by the

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[58] Mary Beard, John North, *Pagan Priests: Religion and Power in the Ancient World*, eds. Mary Beard and John North (London: Gerald Duckworth &co. Ltd., 1990), 1-2.

[59] Warrior (2006), 46.

[60] cum multa divinitus, pontifices, a maioribus nostris inventa atque instituta sunt, tum nihil praeclarius quam quod eosdem et religionibus deorum immortalium et summae rei publicae praeesse voluerunt, ut amplissimi et clarissimi cives rem publicam bene gerendo religiones, religiones sapienter interpretando rem publicam conservarent. quod si ullo tempore magna causa in sacerdotum populi Romani iudicio ac potestate versata est, haec profecto tanta est ut omnis rei publicae dignitas, omnium civium salus, vita, libertas, arae, foci, di penates, bona, fortunae, domicilia vestrae sapientiae, fidei, potestati commissa creditaque esse videantur. Cicero, *On His House*, 1. 1.

[61] Cornell (1995), 14.

[62] Watson (1992), 13.

[63] Beard (1990), 32.

gods.[64] While the authority of the priests was quite influential in religious matters, the final decision in such matters lay with the senate since they were endowed with this power by the gods themselves.

The principal purpose of the state was to safeguard the *pax deorum*, thus ensuring the safety and prosperity of the community. By their very nature then, religious actions had political overtones and visa versa.[65] Such overtones are represented in the power that the senate had over the process of dealing with portents and prodigies. When a particularly strange occurrence was reported, the senate would decide whether or not to recognize the phenomenon as a prodigy. It was a principle of Roman divination that a sign only became significant if it was recognized and accepted by the senate.[66] If the senate voted to recognize a sign then it either ordered some immediate action of expiation or the job of interpreting the prodigy was formally entrusted by the senate to the *haruspices* or to the quindecimvirs.[67] After the priests presented their findings and proposed remedial measures to the senate, the magistrates or priests were instructed by the senate to carry out the prescribed reparation. The senate was thus able to control and even manipulate the report of prodigies, advancing or prohibiting the process as they saw fit.[68] Polybus certainly recognized the importance of the senate's involvement in religious decisions and concluded that "...the sphere in which the Roman constitution seemed to show its superiority most decisively is in that of religious belief. Here we find that the very phenomenon which among other peoples is regarded as a subject of reproach, namely superstition, is actually the element which holds the Roman state together."[69] The involvement of the senate in religion ensured that religious decisions would not disrupt the state since religion was simply one sector of the government. This power of final decision was especially important when Rome's attitude to foreign cults is considered.

Part of the tradition of accepting new deities and cults involved only accepting those that would not disrupt Roman society and peace or the authority of the senate. The subjects of Rome were free to act as they liked, provided that they respected Rome's authority and paid their taxes.[70] In a similar fashion, foreign influences and importations were only allowed in Rome if they remained matters of private interest and did not disrupt public life, violating tradition or endangering the state.[71] For example, Mithraism established itself in the west during the empire and was not persecuted by Roman authorities. Mithraism won its following among soldiers and slaves, roles in which

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[64] Beard (1990), 33.

[65] Eric Orlin, *Temples, Religion and Politics in the Roman Republic* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1997), 4.

[66] Liebeschuetz (1979), 24.

[67] Beard (1990), 31.

[68] Warrior (2006), 49.

[69] Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire,* trans. Ian Scott-Kilvert (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1981), 5.56.

[70] G. H. Stevenson, *Roman Provincial Administration till the Age of the Antonines* (New York: G. E. Stechert & Co., 1939), 1.

[71] Donald Earl, *The Moral and Political Traditions of Rome* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), 41.

submission to authority was particularly important, and rather than endangering the state by encouraging followers to be devoted to the deity instead of the state, belief in this foreign deity helped to strengthen adherence to the Roman state because it fostered acceptance of the status quo.[72] Private cults were to be observed in the same way as the ancestors, so that "No one shall have gods to himself, either new gods or alien gods, unless recognized by the state. Privately they shall worship those gods whose worship they have duly received from their ancestors".[73] Most of the Roman deities and cults were Romanized versions of Greek and other eastern deities, which has led to the conclusion that the Romans were tolerant of other religions.[74] It is not true that the Romans allowed most of the foreign deities of the people they conquered or that made their way into Italy with immigrants to stay. The Romans were very selective about the nature of the deities that were acceptable and the activities used in worshipping these deities. We are told that

> ...notwithstanding the influx into Rome of innumerable nations which are under every necessity of worshipping their ancestral gods according to the customs of their respective countries, yet the city has never officially adopted any of those foreign practices...but even though Rome has, in pursuance of oracles, introduced certain rites from abroad, she celebrates them in accordance with her own traditions, after banishing all ridiculous nonsense.[75]

Thus, new gods and rituals were expected to become compatible with the customs already in place, or cease to exist.

During the Second Punic War (218-201 BC), several religious innovations were introduced by the senate in response to prodigies that apparently coincided with military crises. After the Roman defeat at Trasimene (217 BC), the Sibylline Books recommended a number of expiations including the building of a shrine to Venus of Eryx, Eryx being a town in northwest Sicily whose central deity, Astarte, was the Carthaginian equivalent of Venus.[76] The Romans probably feared the defection of this area of Sicily, which had been a stronghold of the Carthaginians during the first Punic War (264-241 BC), and believed that including Eryx's patron deity in Rome's pantheon would help to ensure Eryx as an ally. Venus of Eryx is thus the first known example of a foreign deity to be brought inside the *pomerium*.[77] Certainly foreign gods had been brought to Rome previously, such as Aesculapius from Epidaurus 291 BC, but their temples had been

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[72] Garnsey, Saller (1982), 39.

[73] Cicero, *On the Laws*, trans. Clinton Walker Keyes (Loeb, 1928), 2. 8, 19.

[74] See Ramsey MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 2.

[75] καὶ ὅ παντον μαλιστα ἔγωγε τεθαύμακα, καίπερ μυρίων ὅσων εἰς τὴν πόλιν ἐληλυθότων ἐθνῶν, οἷς πολλὴ ἀνάγκη σέβειν τοὺς πατρίος θεοὺς τοῖς οἴκοθεν νομίμοις, οὐδενὸς εἰς ζῆλον ἐλήλυθε τῶν ξενικῶν ἐπιτηδευμάτων ἡ πόλις δημοσίᾳ, ὅ πολλαῖς ἤδη συνέβη παθεῖν, ἀλλὰ καὶ εἴ τινα κατὰ χρησμοὺς ἐπεισηγάγετο ἱερά, τοῖς ἑαυτῆς αὐτὰ τιμᾷ νομίμοις ἅπασαν ἐκβαλοῦσα τερθρείας μυθικήν. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *The Roman Antiquities*, 2. 19, 3-4.

[76] Warrior (2006), 82.

[77] Orlin (1997), 108-109.

established outside of the *pomerium.*[78] That the Sibylline Books were the agent of change in the official adoption of a foreign god is an indication of the control exercised by the senate and the religious authorities.[79] The Sibylline Oracles exhibit the characteristic attitude of the Roman state, to be open to innovation, but that innovation had to be carefully controlled by the senate itself and it had to be acceptable within the Roman context.

In accordance with such a policy follows the example of the importation of the Magna Mater, or Cybele. As the Second Punic War dragged on, the senate ordered the consultation of the Sibylline Books again in 205 BC. This time the books prophesized that if ever a foreign enemy should invade Italy, he could be defeated if "the Idean Mother" were brought from Pessinus to Rome.[80] This goddess was worshipped extensively in Asia Minor and some of the 'exotic' eastern rituals and practices associated with her worship, such as self castration, were not in accordance with traditional Roman religion.[81] When the goddess was brought to Rome in 204 BC, however, there were no signs of the inappropriate exotic elements of her worship, as shown in Livy's account of the goddess' arrival (Livy 29), and so she became the second known foreign deity to be brought within the *pomerium.*[82] It was soon discovered that the cult of Magna Mater was in conflict with the *mos maiorum* due to the orgiastic practices, self castration, and self flagellation that her worship entailed, so the senate enforced measures that made it acceptable in Rome, which meant making it illegal for native-born Romans to celebrate her rites in the Phrygian manner and even controlling the method of worship performed by her priests. The importation of the goddess was an act of public policy, deliberated on and carried out by the senate because religion was conceived as only one as aspect of the government of the republic, so the senate was in charge of it.[83] By allowing Magna Mater to come inside the *pomerium*, the senate emphasized its superior role in the state, thus visibly reinforcing the traditional bonds between leader and led.[84] Rome was a society which sought to control the effects of religious experience on crowd behavior and was very wary of collective worship that was not authorized by the same priests that the senate looked to for advice.[85]

With all religious innovations and importations, the test to see if they could fit into the existing Roman political-religious system was if they could be made to conform to the *mos maiorum*. Those that could were accepted, and those that could not were suppressed or expelled, not tolerated.[86] The large number of temples evidenced in the archeological record at Rome has led some to argue that there was an inherent Roman tendency to introduce any and nearly all new cults encountered. Wissowa, for example, argued that

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[78] Ovid, *Metemorphoses,* trans. Michael Simpson (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts, 1934), 15. 622-745.

[79] Warrior (2006), 82.

[80] Livy, 29. 10, 5-6.

[81] Dionysius of Halicarnassus. *The Roman Antiquities.* 2. 19, 4-5.

[82] Beard, North, Price (1998), 97.

[83] Earl (1967), 42.

[84] Sarolta Takács, *Isis and Sarapis in the Roman World* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1995), 11.

[85] Wardman (1982), 21.

[86] Earl (1967), 42.

Rome's tendency to introduce new gods to their pantheon was an integral part of the Roman religious system. The key to Roman polytheism's tolerance, he said, was not to offend any divinities and to ensure that this did not happen, the Romans vowed temples to foreign deities and accepted their cults in Rome.[87] The problem with this theory is that the Romans did not recognize the divine claim of every god they encountered since the archaeological record does not show enough temples to foreign gods to support it. If the Romans believed that the more gods they worshipped the better, then why did they not import every deity they came across?[88] An answer to this question is provided when Maecenas counsels Augustus on how to direct the religious situation at Rome, saying

> Those who attempt to distort our religion with strange rites you should abhor and punish, not merely for the sake of the gods (since if a man despises these he will not pay honour to any other being), but because such men, by bringing in new divinities in place of the old, persuade many to adopt foreign practices, from which spring up conspiracies, factions, and cabals, which are far from profitable to a monarchy. Do not, therefore, permit anybody to be an atheist or a sorcerer. Soothsaying, to be sure, is a necessary art, and you should by all means appoint some men to be diviners and augurs, to whom those will resort who wish to consult them on any matter; that there ought to be no workers in magic at all. For such men, by speaking the truth sometimes, but generally falsehood, often encourage a great many to attempt revolutions.[89]

This speech specifically shows that the Romans connected political authority and religion, so that if the traditions of Roman religion were disrupted, political authority could also be lost. It can also be deduced from this speech that the Romans did not carelessly accept any new cults they encountered as they expanded their territorial possessions and that the introduction of foreign cults and rites was left up to whoever had political authority, the senate, or, in this case, the emperor.

The religious practices that the Romans permitted in and outside of Rome were well established ones, except where such religions were overtly dangerous or hostile to Roman religion and thus the Roman state. Until the middle republic, no specifically religious groups had grown so large and disruptive that they provoked a response from the senate. This means that no autonomous religious groups with their own special value systems, ideas, or beliefs to defend or advocate represented a force for advocating change

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[87] Georg Wissowa, *Religion und kultus der Romër* (Munchen: C. H. Beck, 1912), 38-46.

[88] Orlin (1997), 18.

[89] Τοὺς δὲ δὴ ξεςίζοντάς τι περὶ αὐτὸ καὶ μίσει καὶ κόλαζε, μὴ μόνον τῶν θεῶν ἕνεκα, ὧν ὁ καταφρονήσας οὐδ' ἄλλου ἄν τινος προτιμήσειεν, ἀλλ' ὅτι καὶ καιςά τινα δαιμόνια οἱ τοιοῦτοι ἀντεσφέροντες πολλοὺς ἀςαπείθουσιν ἀλλοτριονομεῖν, κἀκ τούτου καὶ συνωμοσίαι καὶ συστάσεις ἑταιρεῖαί τε γίγνονται, ἅπερ ἥκιστα μοναρχίᾳ συμφέρει. μήτ' οὖν ἀθέῳ τινὶ μήτε γόητι συγχωρήσῃς εἶναι. μαντικὴ μὲν γαρ ἀναγκαία ἐστί, και πάντως τινὰς καὶ ἱερόπτας και οιωνιστας ἀποδειξον, οἷς οἱ βουλόμενοί τι κοιώσασθαι συνέσονται. τους δὲ δὴ μαγευτὰς πανυ οὐκ εἶναι προσήκει. πολλοὺς γαρ πολλάκις οἱ τοιοῦτοι, τὰ μέν τινα ἀληθῆ τὰ δὲ δὴ πλείω ψευδῆ λέγοντες, νεοχμοῦν ἐαίρουσι. Dio, *Roman History,* trans. Earnest Cary (Loeb, 1917), 52. 36, 1-4.

or reform.[90] The religious and political significance of foreign cults in Rome did not really depend on their traditional, local origins, but on their function as alternatives to the official state religion. If foreign religions seriously set themselves apart from the state religion in their practice of ritual initiation and of congregational worship, in their claims to salvation and their different kind of priesthood as the examples in the following chapters did, they were not accepted in Rome or the provinces and were often persecuted.

[90] Beard, North, Price (1998), 42.

CHAPTER 2: SUPPRESSION OF NON-JUDAEO-CHRISTIAN CULTS

As the first chapter has demonstrated, religious activities affecting the *res publica* were controlled by the leading political authorities of Rome, be it the senate, the emperor, or both. Those in charge of the state organized its religious system and made decisions which guided the religious behaviour of the citizens.[91] Any person living under the control of Rome that partook in unsanctioned religious activities that attracted the attention of the Roman authorities faced the threat of persecution. What typically concerned the Roman authorities about the particular cults which will be examined in this chapter was their size because a large number of people could mean a better chance at political subversion. If a group garnered the attention of the authorities, it meant that the group was big and obvious, which was why, in some cases, worship was permitted to continue in small groups that were non-threatening. Concerning another characteristic of the religious cults that Rome persecuted, it was not their foreignness that posed a problem, but their inherent incapability to fit the mould of Roman cults. Since the senate had not pointedly structured the following cults nor supervised them, they were not made to be like the cults of the Roman state religion and conform to the *mos maiorum* which ensured that control over religion and politics stayed in the hands of the government. Regardless of whether or not the following groups of people actually had the subversion of the Roman state in mind, that was one of the reasons put forward by the Roman authorities for suppression, which reveals how important religion was to the Romans and how intertwined it was with politics and power. The authorities also tended to circulate stories detailing the monstrous rites that persecuted groups practiced which acted to increase support for suppression and showed people living under Rome's command specific practices that were unacceptable. Controlling the religious practices of the groups examined in this chapter helped to create a strong collective religious identity and thus a high degree of conformity and therefore authority for the government of Rome.[92] By putting down religious groups which were portrayed as threats to the state, the Roman government regulated the religious order and hence the political order.[93]

The following sections are arranged in approximate chronological order and deal with the suppressions in the western parts of the Roman world of the Bacchanalia, the cult of Isis, the druids, magicians and astrologers, and the cult of African Saturn.

Bacchanalia

An examination of the situation which involved severely restricting the worship of Bacchus will show that the Roman authorities did not simply permit any kind of religious behaviour or practice, even when it involved a god of the Roman pantheon, and offers

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[91] Erich S. Gruen, *Studies in Greek Culture and Roman Policy* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1990), 55.

[92] J. B. Rives, *Religion and Authority in Roman Carthage from Augustus to Constantine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 13.

[93] Richard Gordon, "Religion in the Roman Empire: The Civic Compromise and its Limits", in *Pagan Priests: Religion and Power in the Ancient World*, eds. Mary Beard and John North (London: Duckworth, 1990), 255.

valuable insight into the means by which the senate exercised religious control in order to gain political control. While no official listed religious criteria existed in Rome to explain what was or was not acceptable, the Bacchanalian suppression affords the opportunity to pinpoint specific characteristics of a religious group that were deemed unacceptable because before and after its suppression in 186 BC, the cult of Bacchus was allowed to operate.[94]

One of the main sources for the details leading up to the Bacchanalian suppression and the action taken by the senate in 186 BC is Livy. His account is one of a sudden discovery of the cult and centers around a drama about a boy, Aebutius, who is tricked by his mother into being initiated into the disgraceful Bacchic rites. When Aebutius tells his mistress, Hispala, about his upcoming initiation, she warns him of the dangers as she had been previously initiated and Aebutius goes to his aunt for help who notifies the consul, Postumius.[95] This narrative describing how the cult came to the attention of the consul is hardly believable if for no other reason than that a prostitute was the only person in all of Rome who was able to solve the mystery of the strange noises that the cult made at night.

There are, however, other more concrete reasons to discount Livy's dramatic narrative which deal with his claim that the cult was suddenly discovered in 186 BC. Although Livy makes it seem as though the Bacchic cult was new and unheard of in 186 BC, references in Plautus' plays contradict that notion and show that the cult was clearly established before 186 BC since the casual references in his plays imply prior knowledge in the audience.[96] Even Livy seems unsure that the revelation of the cult was a complete surprise to the senate because he says that the senators' reactions on hearing the consul's news included fear in case their own relations were involved.[97] A bronze tablet that includes a *Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus* confirms some of Livy's narrative, but not the dramatic parts and implies that cult-centers existed all over Italy making it difficult to believe that such an organization remained a secret for long. Since Livy's narrative of a sudden discovery is false, the senate could not have discovered a new, unacceptable cult, but rather decided to subdue a well known cult that could no longer be tolerated.[98] From Euripides' *Bacchae*, it is clear that Bacchic worship included intense and ecstatic experiences for Bacchus' followers, particularly during initiation ceremonies which set the initiate apart from the rest of society. This was probably a reason why

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[94] I accept the argument of Rouselle that the persecution of the Bacchic cult was not an indirect attack on the Scipios, nor that is was conducted because many consulars feared Greek culture. For details of Rouselle's argument see *The Roman Persecution of the Bacchic Cult 186-180 BC* (State University of New York at Binghampton: Dissertation, 1982), 71-96; Since this paper is concerned with the religious factor of persecutions, other factors that probably played a role in the violent reaction of the senate to the Bacchanalia, such as the effects that the Second Punic War had on the senate, will not be covered. For an in depth look at other factors see Rousselle (1982), 117-159 and Erich S. Gruen, *Studies in Greek Culture and Roman Policy* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1990), 65-78.

[95] Livy, trans. Evan T. Sage (Loeb, 1936), 39. 11, 2-7.

[96] Plautus, *Amphitryo* 702-704; *The Pot of Gold* 406-412; *The Braggart Warrior* 854-858, 1016; *The Two Bacchises* 53, 371-372; *Casina* 978-982.

[97] Livy, 39. 14, 4-5.

[98] J.A. North, "Religious Toleration in Republican Rome," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, 25, no.5 (1979), 88.

people were attracted to the cult because it offered membership to a group where social status was not the same issue it was in the civic community. Bacchic practices were essentially un-Roman and, as such, would have aroused the suspicions of the state authorities.[99] Although Livy's narrative is most probably fictional, the authorities may have created it since the senate took a dangerous course of action in 186 BC and might have felt that they needed to create a sense of emergency to justify their brutal actions.[100]

One of the reasons the senate probably reacted very forcefully in 186 BC was because the current cult of Bacchus seemed to be a perversion of the cult of Liber, an ancient Italic deity, and by implication the Aventine triad of Ceres, Liber, and Libera. It is emphasized in Livy that the particular problem with the cult of Bacchus was that it could no longer be characterized as a cult that was performed according to ritual accepted by their ancestors.[101] The regulations ordered by the senate were likely an attempt to bring the Bacchic cult into line with the cult of Liber and that of the Aventine triad. The threat that the senate sensed to the Aventine triad is understandable since all three deities shared the same temple, and some of the rites were held for all three gods at once.[102] Hispala describes the original cult of Bacchus to the consul Postumius as being at first "a ritual for women, and it was custom that no man should be admitted to it. There had been three days appointed each year on which they held initiations into the Bacchic rites by day; it was the rule to choose the matrons in turn as priestesses."[103] There is similarity between this description of the original cult of Bacchus and what is known about the cult of Liber and the Aventine triad in Rome.[104] For example, in the Roman cult of Liber, Varro tells us that priestesses and matrons played the major role.[105] Another similarity is that the Bacchic cult had three initiations of women a year and the cult of Liber one initiation of women during daylight.[106] Thus, Hispala's description of the original cult of Bacchus closely corresponds with the Roman cult of Liber which likely caused many people to regard Liber and Bacchus as the same. This equation worried the senate which feared that the new cult and its practices would replace that of Liber, infringing on the *ius divinum*, the series of rituals and cult acts owed to the gods by the Roman state to ensure the state's continued existence, and disrupting the *pax deorum*.[107]

There were other changes in the cult of Bacchus that the senate felt could no longer be ignored. These charges included alleged orgies, crime, and violence, and were said to be consequences of "men mingling with women and the freedom of darkness

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[99] Valerie Warrior, *Roman Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 86.

[100] Mary Beard, John North, Simon Price, *Religions of Rome Volume I: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 93. Livy's dramatic narrative could also have been a showcasing of the author's narrative skills.

[101] Livy, 39. 16, 4-10.

[102] Rouselle (1982), 104, 106.

[103] Livy, 39. 13, 2-9.

[104] Rouselle (1982), 109.

[105] M. Terentius Varro, *On the Latin Language,* trans. Ronald Kent (The Loeb Classical Library, 1951), 6. 14.

[106] Cicero, *Cicero: On the Commonwealth and On the Laws,* trans. K. Ziegler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 2. 37.

[107] Rouselle (1982), 101.

added no form of crime, no sort of wrongdoing left untried."[108] The fact that these transgressions were occurring proved to the Roman authorities that the *ius divinum* had been disrupted and that the *pax deorum* was at risk of being lost. Certainly the risk of losing the benevolent will of the gods disturbed the senate, but there were still other disturbing characteristics of the cult. One such characteristic was that the changes to the cult had been made on the advice of the god to a Campanian priestess and not through the official Roman channels, such as the Sibylline books.[109] When changes were implemented through the official Roman channels, the senate retained full control since they could then decide if and what changes should take place. Only those changes that did not compromise the senate's authority were generally permitted. Keeping this in mind and considering that the Bacchic cult was essentially a *coniuratio*, a group of people who had sworn oaths to each other without the permission of the senate,[110] it becomes understandable why the cult was perceived as having "control of the state" as its ultimate objective.[111]

Regulations were placed on the cult of Bacchus as it existed in 186 BC in order to bring it in line with the *mos maiorum* and the cult of Liber. Once the senate decided on specific regulations to impose on the cult, the *Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus* was relayed throughout all of Italy and every city was ordered to "engrave [the regulations] on a bronze tablet" and ensure that any who transgressed against the decree had a capital charge brought against them.[112] The regulations prevented any, except those with express permission from the Urban Praetor at Rome and the senate, to have a shrine of Bacchus or go to a meeting of the Bacchantes which was larger than five people. No man could become a priest nor was anyone to make any man or woman an official. A treasury and rites held in secret were prohibited.[113] The senate may have feared that a treasury could allow a group to attract more followers by hosting feasts and games or to bribe Roman officials.[114] To guard against the fear of the *coniuratio*, it was prohibited for members to make vows or pledges of loyalty to each other.[115] These restrictions reveal that the cult had previously been based on a highly structured group basis and that this structure was the threat that the senate wanted most to destroy. The Bacchanalian cells used comparable structures to *collegia* with hierarchical leadership and administrative organization, but an initiate's occupation and background did not matter, and people were admitted into the mysteries with elaborate initiation ceremonies and held with solemn oaths. The cult combined an intense religious commitment with a carefully designed system independent of, and unregulated by, public authority.[116] While the ritual activity of the followers was emphasized by Livy as highly outrageous, it was the form and

[108] Livy, 39. 13, 10.
[109] Livy, 39. 13, 9.
[110] Rouselle (1982), 110.
[111] Livy, 39. 15, 2-4.
[112] CIL I. 2. 581, lines 24-25. Trans. William F. Richardson, 2004. www.forumromanum.org/literature/sc/sc_bacch.html. (Accessed February 8, 2008)
[113] CIL I. 2. 581, lines 3-9, 11-15. www.forumromanum.org/literature/sc/sc_bacch.html.
[114] Rouselle (1982), 111.
[115] CIL I. 2. 581, lines 14. www.forumromanum.org/literature/sc/sc_bacch.html.
[116] North (1979), 93.

structure within which that ritual took place that the senate sought to control.[117] Since these prohibitions were put in place to make the worship of Bacchus consistent with the *mos maiorum*, which included the senate retaining overall control of religious life, the senate ensured that those people who felt compelled to worship the god because of tradition were allowed to do so and that any ancient altars or images of Bacchus were left standing in accordance with maintaining the *pax deorum*.[118] The ultimate outcome of the *Senatus Consultum* made the cult of Bacchus a public rather than a private cult and therefore under the control of the senate, like all official Roman cults.

The *Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus* makes it clear which aspects of a religious cult were unacceptable. Even if the Bacchants were innocent of the offensive characteristics and crimes that they were charged with, the fact that Livy and the senate included such accusations and claims means that these were viewed as offensive enough to warrant a brutal reaction. Also, the discussion of the cult in Livy reveals legitimate and believable concerns of the senate, even if they were not the real reasons for the suppression, because the concerns were presented to the public. The consuls, Sp. Postumius Albinus and Q. Marcius Philippus, called an informal meeting of the people to announce the conspiracy and the measures the senate had decided to take to suppress it. During their speech, the consuls said that the situation facing members of the Bacchanalia would be "less serious if their wrongdoing had merely made them effeminate – that was in great measure their personal dishonour..."[119] This statement confirms that the Romans were likely to ignore, purposely or obliviously, practices that did not attract attention and were therefore not felt by the authorities to be a threat to the established order. As long as the traditional cultic practices were exercised properly, the political order and Rome's ideologies were not undermined, new cults would not be attacked.[120] One reason for this was that if a religious group that was not regulated by the Roman state gained their attention, the authorities would know that the gods were unhappy since civic peace was being disrupted and having peace meant that the will of the gods was benevolent for the Romans. The consuls explained this when they said "[the gods] because they were indignant that their own divinity was being polluted by acts of crime and lust, have dragged these matters from darkness into the light, nor have they willed that [the matters] should be discovered in order that they might be unpunished, but that they might be coerced and suppressed."[121] Thus, in order to regain the gods' will, the Romans needed to either bring the notorious group in line with traditional religious practices that had always earned the gods' benevolence because the Romans had always prospered when they followed the *mos maiorum*, or suppress the group altogether.

Since religion and political supremacy were inseparable in the minds of Romans, the Bacchanalian affair served to further affirm the senate's dominance over the

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[117] Beard, North, Price (1998), 95.

[118] CIL I. 2. 581, lines 3-4. www.forumromanum.org/literature/sc/sc_bacch.html.; Livy, 39. 18, 7-8.

[119] Livy, 39. 16, 1-2.

[120] Sarolta A. Takács, "Politics and Religion in the Bacchanalian Affair of 186 BC," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 100 (2000), 303.

[121] Livy, 39. 16, 11-12.

regulation of religion and thus everything else. This is seen in the terms of the *Senatus Consultum* which did not lay emphasis on the elimination of the cult, but on its subordination to senatorial will. Furthermore, the discovery of a copy of the *Senatus Consultum* in southern Italy shows the growth of the senate's power beyond the 100th milestone from Rome. Significantly, this discovery shows that in seeking to expand Rome's power, the senate sought to do so by gaining control over religion across Italy. In and around Rome, the procedure for Bacchants to continue worshipping entailed consulting the *praetor urbanus* and gaining formal consent of the senate,[122] thus openly proclaiming submission to senatorial dictate.[123] The senate adopted dramatic measures like the death penalty and publicly holding prosecutions to terrify the Bacchants and scatter their groups so that their role as guardian of the state, especially against alien worship, was legitimized and secured.[124]

In addition to the restrictions above, the senate ordered the destruction of Bacchic shrines in Rome and Italy "except for any ancient altar or statue consecrated there."[125] In this way, the shrines that had been established before the arrival of the new forms of Bacchic worship were spared, which shows that the intention was not to eliminate the cult completely, but rather to impose stipulations that would curb the excesses that threatened traditional Roman practices.[126] Since Bacchus was an older, well established Roman deity, his association with early Rome meant that he was part of Roman tradition and completely eliminating his cult might have been seen as disturbing the *pax deorum*, which the state was in charge of keeping, and going against a fundamental part of Roman society, namely the *mos maiorum*. The efforts of the Roman authorities were not meant to erase the worship of Bacchus completely, but rather to make it conform to the rest of Roman state religion. Bacchus was an older, well established god whose cult activities had become a threat to the functioning of the republic. The deity himself was not a foreign introduction, but just the behaviour of his followers, and for this reason, it was the followers, not Bacchus, who suffered.

Cult of Isis

The goddess Isis of the Egyptian pantheon was the sister of Osiris, the mother of Horus, and eventually Sarapis became her companion. In ancient Egyptian, the word for throne is *aset*, which is transliterated as Isis. The goddess Isis then was the Egyptian throne personified and deified and her son Horus was thus the god with whom the king of Egypt became identified, the living manifestation of his divinity on earth.[127] Promoting oneself as the embodiment of the king of the gods probably helped many rulers to

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[122] CIL I. 2. 581, lines 3-22. www.forumromanum.org/literature/sc/sc_bacch.html.; Livy, 39. 18, 8-9.

[123] Gruen (1990), 75.

[124] Takács (2000), 302.

[125] Livy, 39. 18, 7.

[126] Warrior (2006), 87.

[127] Barbara Lesko, *The great Goddesses of Egypt* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 156.

validate their claim of absolute power and therefore must have provided the ruler with a more stable and effective mechanism of political control. Roman emperors clearly thought that there were benefits to be gained by employing the idea of divine kingship always associated with Egypt's pharaohs, since many favoured the cult of Isis and Sarapis.[128] This complex deity is invoked by Apuleius as Ceres, Venus, Diana, Proserpine,[129] and "the holy and eternal saviour of the human race, ever beneficent in helping mortal men."[130] The Greeks had long equated Egyptian deities with Greek ones, such as Isis with Demeter, and cults of Hellenized deities like Isis and Sarapis were eventually founded in Greece.[131] From the third to the first centuries BC, the deities of the Delta spread with ease throughout the Hellenic world, especially in the islands and the ports and inevitably (though not as easily) into Rome due to Roman expansion in the east. The import of slaves from the east and Italian merchants who visited Delos, in particular, helped to bring Egyptian beliefs and gods into Campania in the early first century BC.[132] Upon her arrival in Italy, Isis became an attractive deity to many Romans since, among other things, she offered a bright future after death, and it was not just non-Romans and Romans of the lower-strata that worshipped Isis. Emperors like Caligula, Vespasian, and Hadrian, all succumbed to the lures of Isis showing that her attraction could appeal to anyone.

As with the worship of Bacchus, the cult of Isis involved initiation and offered a more personal appeal than traditional Roman religion, consequently encountering opposition from various authorities.[133] During the politically turbulent years of the late republic, numerous orders were given to demolish shrines of Isis in Rome since after each time they were destroyed, worshippers rebuilt them. The worship of Isis did not include the emotional outbursts of the Bacchanalia, or the brutal rites of the cult of Magna Mater, which probably enabled the cult to exist without drawing too much unwanted attention and making it possible for the cult to survive between disruptions by the state.[134] However, the lack of such characteristics, combined with its independent priesthood and its devotion to a personal and caring deity, could represent a potentially dangerous alternative society (like the Bacchic cult), out of the control of the Roman authorities.[135] While the senate reacted against the cult, perhaps it did not feel the need to make as large of a political statement with the cult of Isis as it had with that of Bacchus, but still felt the need to reinforce its power and believed this could be accomplished just by ridding Rome

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[128] Lesko, (1999), 193.

[129] Apuleius, *The Isis-Book (Metamorphoses, Book XI)*, trans. J. Gwyn Griffiths (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 11.2

[130] Apuleius, *The Isis-Book,* 11.25.

[131] Friedrich Solmsen, *Isis among the Greeks and Romans* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979), 24-27.

[132] Robert Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire*, trans. Antonia Nevill (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 83.

[133] Warrior (2006), 88-91.

[134] Sarolta Takács, *Isis and Sarapis in the Roman World* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1995), 30.

[135] Mary Beard, John North, Simon Price, *Religions of Rome Volume I: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 161. The potential of the cult of Isis to develop into an independent focus of loyalty is illustrated by the account of the cult in Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 11. 21-25.

of the goddess' holy places, not her followers. These sporadic actions, however, did not force a disintegration of the cult associations which rebounded every time.[136]

In 59, 58, 53, 50, and 48 BC, the senate took action against the cult of Isis and Sarapis primarily for political reasons. During these times the senate was no longer a single, coherent body and this period was marked by individuals struggling to establish themselves over others which weakened the power of the senate. The reactions against the cult can be seen as attempts by the senate to restore the traditional social system and the *pax deorum,* which meant that the senate was trying to re-consolidate itself as Rome's authoritative body.[137] For example, the political situation in Rome during 53 BC was very unstable and, in the Roman mind, this instability was proof of an upset of the divine equilibrium. It was decided that the only way to appease the gods was to get rid of unofficial deities inside the *pomerium* and a senatorial decree was made to that effect. As the senate had become politically weakened by 53 BC due to the triumvirate, it could not afford to lose any influence in the religious sphere and a disturbance among the gods was interpreted as such.[138] Following this sequence, the destruction of the goddess' temples in 48 BC followed the murder of Pompey in Egypt, the emergence of Caesar as dictator, and a number of terrible omens.[139] Once again, it was determined that the current political upheaval was a result of divine unhappiness caused by the presence of foreign, unofficial deities inside the *pomerium,* and, thus, the sanctuaries of the offensive deities had to be destroyed.[140] These actions against Isis and Sarapis came about at times when the senate was very weak and the proposals and reactions of the senators against the cult were reactionary attempts to regain political power by flexing whatever religious muscle they had left.[141]

After all of these formal suppressions, the Egyptian cult was to be honoured by the triumvirs with a shrine to the goddess in 43 BC. The cult was clearly popular and became even more so when Cleopatra was in Rome with Julius Caesar, which gave the cult of Isis and Sarapis much visibility since it was an essential part of Ptolemaic dynastic worship. Having spent a number of years with Cleopatra, Caesar's interest in Egyptian deities was probably peaked, so Mark Antony, Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, and Octavian authorized the construction of a temple for Isis and Sarapis in Rome as a symbolic gesture toward deified Caesar.[142] The number of supporters that might be gained from favouring this cult was probably what appealed most to the triumvirs; however, the plan never materialized. Following Antony's move to Egypt, he began presenting himself as a reincarnation of Osiris or Dionysus and Cleopatra was called the 'New Isis'. Octavian became increasingly hostile to Egyptian cults as Antony continued to align himself with them.[143] The subsequent breakdown of the triumvirate led to the defeat of Antony and the

[136] Takács (1995), 70.
[137] Takács (1995), 56-57.
[138] Takács (1995), 65; Dio Cassius, *Roman History,* trans. Earnest Cary (Loeb, 1932), 40.47.
[139] Dio, 42. 4; 20-21; 26.
[140] Takács (1995), 66.
[141] Takács (1995), 67.
[142] Takács (1995), 69-70.
[143] Sharon Kelly Heyob, *The Cult of Isis Among Women in the Graeco-Roman World* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 21.

Egyptian deities by Octavian and in 28 BC Egyptian cults were once again prohibited inside the *pomerium*, signifying Octavian's victory over Antony and Cleopatra.

The situation in Rome in 28 BC was very fragile which required a confident, consistent person to reorder the political and religious environment.[144] Augustus' main concern was with the public and not the private sphere, as was typical of Romans in power (for example, the persecution of the African rite of sacrificing children to Baal Hamon was aimed only at destroying the public nature of it, not necessarily the private performance of rite itself), so his proclamation against the goddess was intended to relocate the cultic procession of Isis from the public streets to private locations. Augustus' pronouncement against Egyptian cults demonstrated a resolute political stand against something identifiable as Egyptian and this was in accordance with his earlier policy to outmanoeuvre Antony politically. This pronouncement also showed Augustus as protector of Roman values without provoking any deities or their worshippers since his restriction was tempered with caution. As Augustus' pronouncement worked to remove the cult of Isis from public view, thereby curbing possible public interest, it also drew attention toward his own political program which helped to secure it.[145] In 21 BC Egyptian cults surfaced again in Rome, so Agrippa took action against them in order to protect Augustus' policy and thus his authority.[146] This time harsher action was taken causing Egyptian cults to be banned within one mile of the city.[147] Agrippa's action, on Augustus' orders, effectively restricted Isis' devotees from moving freely and therefore congregating easily. As has been shown, it was the group aspect and its potential to disrupt that those in power disliked most. Augustus' measures basically restricted followers of Isis to temples and conformed to the anxiety about large groups because it enforced control and eliminated the attraction of crowds.[148]

The ascension of Augustus to the central social, political, and religious position of the state created a new political and ideological landscape for Romans. The ideology behind the position of emperor as an extraordinary man set apart from all others in the empire continued to develop with each subsequent emperor so that eventually the emperor was identified within the divine domain. Takács states that "With every successive Roman emperor the Egyptian model became more applicable and prepared the ground for a successful integration of Isis and Sarapis into the Roman pantheon."[149] Tiberius, however, did not identify himself with the concept of emperor in the way that future rulers would. His strong liking for traditional Roman values meant that he favoured a government in which the senate had an important and obvious role.[150] Tacitus tells of the dignity and power given to the senate and magistrates by Tiberius since public and private matters were debated in the senate, with leading men free to express their

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[144] Takács (1995), 75.
[145] Takács (1995), 75.
[146] Heyob, (1975), 22.
[147] Dio, 54. 6.
[148] Takács (1995), 77.
[149] Takács (1995), 72.
[150] Robin Seager, *Tiberius:* Second Edition (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 209-210; Barbara Levick, *Tiberius the Politician* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), 85; R.E. Witt, *Isis in the Graeco-Roman World* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1971), 223.

opinions.[151] Under Tiberius, Vellius exclaims that the senate and courts increased in dignity and power and Suetonius and Dio also record that Tiberius consulted the senate on every issue and made no complaints if his motions were not supported.[152] Since the cult of Isis fit well with the concept of emperor, it could have no place in a Rome that was trying to reinstate senatorial power, just as her cult had had no place in the republic when senatorial power was stronger. As the successor of Augustus, the shadow of the Republic still loomed over Tiberius who tried to get the senate more involved in decision making, but in failing to so, he actually strengthened the new political system and further legitimated the position of emperor for future rulers. [153]

The year AD 19 saw a lot of social instability in Rome's eastern provinces occasioned, among other things, by Germanicus depleting grain reserves in Egypt, causing grain prices to soar, and a war between the Armenians and Parthians. The resulting uprising in Rome due, in part, to high wheat prices threw the masses into disorder and, from a Roman point of view, the primary cause of problems affecting Roman society and the remedy was linked to the religious and moral sphere. Therefore, appropriate moral and religious countermeasures were needed to restore the desired status quo and stability.[154] Tiberius felt that the best way to correct any affronts to the gods was to rid Rome of anyone that could be offending them, so he singled out both Jews and followers of Isis and Sarapis, all worshippers of unsanctioned, non-Roman deities.

A story of scandal also survives from Josephus which might have served to tarnish the already poor reputation of Egyptian cults and further confirm Tiberius' actions against the cult,[155] as Livy's story did to the Bacchanalia. An equestrian, Decius Mundus, was in love with an aristocratic woman, Paulina, who was a devotee of Isis, but he could not win her over. In despair, Mundus went on a hunger strike and finally one of his father's freedwomen told him that she could get him a night with Paulina, but by means of deception. When Paulina was worshipping at the temple one day, a priest came to see her on behalf of the god Anubis who loved her and wanted to meet with her in the temple at night. Delighted, she told her husband who agreed since he knew that his wife was very virtuous. Paulina went to the temple at night and once inside with the lights out, Mundus came in pretending to be Anubis. Afterwards, Mundus boasted of his crime to Paulina who told her husband, who informed the emperor Tiberius. The emperor then had the priests who were involved crucified, Mundus exiled, the temple of Isis razed, and her idol thrown into the Tiber. It is likely that this story is a fabrication for a number of reasons: firstly, because the gullibility of Paulina is so ridiculous, yet it is surpassed by her husband who allowed her to go to the temple of Isis to have intercourse with another; secondly, Mundus' punishment and the reason that it lacked severity because Tiberius

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[151] Tacitus, *Annals*, trans. John Jackson (The Loeb Classical Library, 1937), 4. 6.

[152] Vellius Paterculus, *Compendium of Roman History*, trans. Frederick Shipley (The Loeb Classical Library, 1924), 2. 126; Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars: Tiberius*, trans. J. C. Rolfe (Loeb, 1913), 29-30; Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 57. 7-8.

[153] Levick (1976), 114-115.

[154] Takács (1995), 83.

[155] Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, trans. William Whiston (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1896), 18. 3.

"supposed that what crime [Mundus] had committed was done out of the passion of love" did not cohere with the punishments given to other conspirators or with the general policies of Tiberius;[156] finally, both Tacitus and Suetonius gave accounts of Tiberius' banishment of Egyptians and Jews in 19 AD, but do not recount the Paulina story as the cause of this exile.[157] Although this story may not have influenced Tiberius' actions against the followers of Isis, it does reflect the feeling of other writers and perhaps citizens that Isis and Sarapis were morally degrading additions to Rome. This story also shows that people may have viewed the clergy of Isis as holding extreme influence over her other devotees which they abused by allowing others to use this influence in order to accomplish their own goals.

Upon Caligula's succession, the principate was well established and seeing no need for a change in political direction, the new emperor pushed the principate toward despotism which further dissolved the illusion that republican modes were still at work.[158] As the great-grand child of Mark Antony and having spent his childhood surrounded by eastern princes, Caligula developed a deep fondness for Egyptian cults. Since the cult of Isis had long been connected to the concept of an all-powerful ruler and Caligula wanted to strengthen his rule, patronizing this Egyptian goddess was natural for the emperor, and so he included her among the *sacra publica* and built a temple for her on the *Campus Martius*.[159]

Claudius and Nero had no special like or dislike for Egyptian deities, and it was not until Vespasian that a particular imperial interest in Isis again emerges. The Egyptian Isis and Serapis were eventually accommodated in the Roman pantheon under Flavian patronage because the Flavians wanted to restore the inner order of the empire and to accomplish this they had to re-establish the *pax deorum*.[160] This meant that along with the official gods of the Roman pantheon, Isis and Sarapis also had to be appeased since Egypt guaranteed the economic and therefore the social stability of the empire. Furthermore, Vespasian had to show respect toward the main deities of the city in which he had been elevated to pharaoh, i. e. Alexandria. Shortly thereafter, Isis and Sarapis became linked with the emperor and his wife of the *domus Augusta*. Support of the Egyptian deities continued especially with the Antonines and Severi.[161] While personal motivations led some emperors to patronize Isis and Sarapis, their associations with these deities were due for the most part to their ever-increasing desire to realize their autocratic intentions by imitating Egyptian rulers. The establishment of the principate initially thrust the concept of a divine emperor into the background, but the internal dynamic of the principate evolved to reveal emperors as the intermediary between human and divine. With ambitious emperors encouraging Egyptian deities and the increasing centralization

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[156] R.M. Grant, *The Sword and the Cross* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), 29.

[157] Tacitus, *Annals*, 2. 85; Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 36; Horst R. Moehring, "The persecutions of the Jews and the adherents of the Isis cult at Rome A.D. 19," *Novum Testamentum* 3, no. 4 (1959), 299.

[158] Takács (1995), 73.

[159] Heyob (1975), 25.

[160] Peter Garnsey, Richard Saller, *The Early Principate: Augustus to Trajan, Greece and Rome: New Surveys in the Classics No. 15* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 39.

[161] Witt (1971), 224-239.

of the position of the *princeps* in the state structure, the goal of a living divine monarch gradually came within reach.[162] Although much had changed from the late Republic to the empire, the fundamental connection between political power and religion had not and this relationship is especially pronounced in the history of the cult of Isis in Rome. The treatment of the cult of Isis by the senate and emperors allows the inference that the actions against the cult in republican times and eventually for it during the empire were political in nature and that the need for political and social stability effected the sporadic actions against the cult.

Druids

In regard to the organization of the druids, it appears that they formed an institution, presided over by a head-druid who exercised supreme authority over them. The institution of the druids was composed of men from a privileged class who were exempted from taxation and usually took no part in warfare.[163] As to where druidism originated, Caesar says that "It is believed that their [the druids'] discipline (*disciplina*) was discovered in Britain and transferred thence to Gaul."[164] Pliny thought that the druids had gone to Britain from Gaul.[165] Regardless of their place of origin,[166] the druids are described as officiating over religious ceremonies involving human sacrifice and being extremely influential over some Gauls (probably those living north of the Pyrenees and Italy, and west of the Rhine[167]). The policy of active persecution taken by the Romans against the druids has been viewed as having a cultural motive due to this practice of human sacrifice. That is, that the Romans suppressed the druids because their practices were incompatible with those of Roman citizens.[168] However, the Romans' actions of actively suppressing the druids should be seen mainly on the ground of the druids' perceived subversive political influence and their extremely conservative Gallic nationalism and anti-Roman bias, not their participation in human sacrifice.[169] The political threat that the druids were seen as posing to the Romans came from the fact that Romans interpreted the druids as occupying a similar position in Gallic society as Roman priests did in Roman society.[170] This meant that while the druids probably at some point

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[162] Heyob, (1975), 26.

[163] Julius Caesar, *The Gallic War,* trans. H. J. Edwards (The Loeb Classical Library, 1917), 6. 13-14.

[164] Caesar, *Gallic War,* 6. 13.

[165] Pliny, *Natural History,* trans. W. H. S. Jones (The Loeb Classical Library, 1963), 30. 4.

[166] For different perspectives on the origins of druidism see Julius Pokorny, "The origin of Druidism," and Lewis Spence, "Theories Concerning the Origins of Druidism," in *The Druid Source Book: From Earliest Times to the Present Day,* ed. John Matthews (London: Blandford Press, 1996).

[167] Diodorus of Sicily, trans. C. H. Oldfather (Loeb, 1939), 5. 31; Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo,* trans. H. L. Jones (Loeb, 1949), 4. 4, 4; Caesar, *Gallic War,* 6. 13.Nora Chadwick, *The Druids* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1966), 15; T. D. Kendrick, *The Druids: A Study in Keltic Prehistory* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1966), 31.

[168] H. Last, "Rome and the Druids: A Note," *Journal of Roman Studies* 39 (1949): 4.

[169] Chadwick (1966), 5; Graham Webster, *The British Celts and their Gods under Rome* (London: B. T. Batsford LTD, 1986), 27.

[170] Stuart Piggott, *The Druids* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968), 98.

were very influential in the functioning of Gallic states, the Romans would have understood them as having the same amount of influence on their society as Roman priests did on Roman society in the late republic and empire. Since Roman priests were responsible for advising the senate on important political issues, the Romans naturally assumed the druids also had much sway over the politics of the Gauls. Furthermore, persecuting the druids because they were conducting human sacrifices would not be totally out of the question for the Romans, but this should not be regarded as the main reason for Roman persecution. It is likely that the ancient accounts concerning such sacrifice were embellished, as will be shown, and the Roman authorities would not have gone to such trouble just to extinguish a religious rite unless there was a political motive, as was the case with every religious persecution examined in this paper.

None of the ancient authors that dealt with the druids were certainly eye-witnesses and all sources appear to have relied heavily on earlier written sources, especially Posidonius.[171] This revelation means that the ancient writers likely exaggerated the gruesome details they used to describe the practices of the Gauls and the druids, which would have served, as it did during the suppression of the Bacchanalia, to justify any actions the Roman state took to crush the druids. Caesar's writings of the druids particularly fall under this suspicion as he relates the extreme power of the druids over the Gauls and the prestige of the druids as those "who decide in almost all disputes, public and private... determining rewards and penalties."[172] He also recounts the practice of human sacrifice employed by the Gauls which the druids had to oversee, and one such rite involved putting criminal victims in wicker cages then burning them; and if no criminals were available, the innocent were used.[173] The personal bias of Caesar needs to be taken into account when considering his report since he especially was in a circumstance that required impressing the Roman senate with the barbarism of the Gauls. An almost identical description of a Gallic human sacrifice overseen by druids is reported by Strabo as he describes a *colossus* of straw and wood into which animals and humans were thrown and then burnt as an offering.[174] The sense of this passage described by both Caesar and Strabo is strongly anti-Gallic and served a pro-Roman purpose as it was probably used as political propaganda against the Gauls. There was serious antipathy towards the druids in Rome which was probably due to their efforts to foster anti-Roman sentiment among Gallic and British tribal rulers and such rumours that the Gauls together with the druids practiced human sacrifice certainly helped to arouse hatred against them.[175]

Until the first century AD, records of the druids contain at least a hint of awe and present them as well respected intellectuals among the Gauls. For example, Strabo refers to the druids studying "in addition to natural philosophy...moral philosophy," and he says that "the druids are considered the most just of men, and on this account they are

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[171] D. Nash, "Reconstructing Posidonius' Celtic Ethnography: Some Considerations," *Britannia* 7 (1976): 111-126.

[172] Caesar, *Gallic War*, 6. 13.

[173] Caesar, *Gallic War*, 6. 16.

[174] Strabo, *Geography*, 4. 4, 5.

[175] Chadwick (1966), 22; Webster (1986), 27.

entrusted with the decision, not only of the private disputes, but of the public disputes as well; so that, in former times, they even arbitrated cases of war and made the opponents stop when they were about to line up for battle."[176] In a similar fashion, Diodorus reports that "philosophers, as we may call them, and men learned in religious affairs are unusually honoured among them and are called by them Druids."[177] The writers of the first century AD no longer present the druids as a group of 'just men' who controlled public affairs, but instead as highly suspicious men who practiced forms of magic in seclusion.[178] This change in tone from Augustus onward can be explained, at least in part, by the policy of the emperors in legislation for the newly conquered Gauls, which involved a series of repressive measures directed against the power of the druids since druidism was understood to be a strong nationalist and anti-Roman force.[179] The first stage of Roman action against the druids took place under Augustus and began with a prohibition of the cult for Roman citizens, followed soon after by a proscription of the cult in the Gallic provinces themselves.[180] Later, perhaps after the Gallic revolt of AD 21, druidism was suppressed by Tiberius probably because it served as a focal point for nationalist feeling.[181] However, druidism persisted "in a cave or in a hidden mountain defile",[182] because in AD 54, "the savage and terrible Druidic cult...[was] abolished [by Claudius]."[183] The fear of druidism was strong during Claudius' reign, as is shown in the case of a Roman equestrian from Gaul who was put to death for keeping a talisman claimed by the druids to assure victory in law courts, and such fear must have contributed to Claudius' fierce action against the cult.[184] Although Claudius was praised for ridding the world of druids, his success was short lived, for, in AD 71, the druids were still inciting the Gauls to a great national rising by claiming that "the sovereignty of the world [will go to] the peoples beyond the Alps."[185] Not only did such chaos prove to the Romans that those who claimed to know the future were very dangerous to the established order, but also that the Roman authorities were correct in their brutal efforts to suppress such groups.

Magicians and Astrologers

The threat that magicians, astrologers, and many others who practiced similar rites, such as sorcerers, soothsayers, seers, *mathematici*, and Chaldeans, posed to the

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[176] Strabo, *Geography*, 4. 4, 4.

[177] Diodorus, *History*, 5. 31.

[178] Pliny, *Natural History*, 16. 95; Lucan, *Pharsalia: Dramatic Episodes of the Civil Wars*, trans. Robert Graves (Toronto: Penguin Books Ltd., 1956), 38 (1. 450-458).

[179] V. M. Scramuzza, *The Emperor Claudius* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1940), 206-208, 496; Kendrick (1966), 79, 92, 98.

[180] Beard, North, Price (1998), 234.

[181] Seager (1972), 125; Pliny, *Natural History*, 30. 4.

[182] Pomponius Mela, *Pomponius Mela's Description of the World*, trans. F. E. Romer (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998), 107 (3.19); Lucan, *Pharsalia*, 38 (1. 453).

[183] Suetonius, *Claudius*, 25.

[184] Pliny, *Natural History*, 29. 12.

[185] Tacitus, *The Histories*, trans. Clifford Moore (The Loeb Classical Library, 1931), 4. 54.

Roman authorities was somewhat different than all of the other groups examined in this paper. These groups of people generally did not form an association into which one was initiated and had to pledge one's loyalty, nor did they meet regularly in large numbers to worship together. Their practices, however, were at and beyond the fringe of traditional state and family religion, and so were regarded as a threat to the established order.[186] After driving both astrologers and magicians from Rome in 33 BC, Agrippa apparently advised Octavian that Rome needed prophecy and that he should "by all means appoint some men to be diviners and augurs, to whom those will resort who wish to consult them on any matter; but there ought to be no workers in magic at all. For such men, by speaking the truth sometimes, but generally falsehood, often encourage a great many to attempt revolutions."[187] Although composed in the third century AD, this quotation reflects feelings that existed in the first century BC, as will be shown, which were that astrologers and magicians were very dangerous and that they tended to be referred to in the same sentence. This was because the titles of magicians and astrologers were inconsistent and ideas surrounding the practices of each specialist were blurred so that astrologers were frequently called *magi*, a title often attributed to magicians, and there was a tendency to combine the threatening practices of prediction and magic.[188] This combination is understandable because, generally, men who claimed occult powers in one field often claimed them in all.[189] For these reasons, the following discussion involves some overlap between magicians and astrologers, but a separation of the two is necessary due to important differences concerning each group.

Magicians

Magic was held to be a foreign import as it had its origins in the east from the knowledge of the Magi (Persian priests).[190] The term *magus* is not found in Latin until the middle of the first century BC, nor is the term *magia*, which translates the Greek *mageia*. Their absence does not mean that the Romans had no concept of magic as a distinct category of thought and that they did not distinguish the rituals used in casting spells and necromancy from those sanctioned for proper religious observance.[191] As early as 450 BC in the Twelve Tables, the Romans penalized the use of what later came to be called *magia*. At this time, though, magic was conceived differently than in modern times, so that the violation of the right to property in order to cause harm to others or to enrich oneself at their expense was what was understood as magic and thus punished.[192] Accepted, traditional magical practices were not classified as magic, but as part of

[186] Warrior (2006), 94.

[187] Dio (1914), 52. 36, 3-4; 49. 43, 5.

[188] Tacitus, *Annals*, 2. 27; 12. 22; Pliny, *Natural History*, 30. 1.

[189] Ramsay MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order: Treason, Unrest, and Alienation in the Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 128, 129.

[190] Pliny, *Natural History*, 30. 2.

[191] Matthew Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 135.

[192] Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, trans. Franklin Philip (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 42.

religion or respectable folk custom and were not prohibited because their intent was not to harm someone, but to heal them and this was the difference between religion and magic. For example, a healing rite used by Cato recommends healing a dislocation by a specific incantation (*cantio*), and is supported by Pliny. [193] Today, this rite would be considered pure magic as no medical purpose can be seen in it; however, for Cato and his contemporaries, it was not magic at all because magic had the characteristic of malevolent intention, while Cato's rite did not.[194] The differences between religion and magic were numerous and included the fact that magic was believed to be manipulative, while religion relied on prayer and sacrifice; magic was usually practiced entirely for personal gain and outside the sanctions of society, whereas religion concentrated on the well-being of the community; magical practices were secretive and performed in private, typically at night, while religious rites took place during the day and in the open for all to see; magic was characterized by a kind of business relationship between practitioner and his client insinuating that a client could pay the magician to bring about whatever results the client wanted, whereas the relationship for religion involved a leader and a group of followers.[195] Under the republic, the *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficiis* was passed by Sulla in 81 BC and became the fundamental law for any legal action against magic. This law made a legal distinction between practices that attacked the honour of people or their property by ritual means (*malum carmen, in-, excantare, malum venenum, veneficium*) and other practices that were similar, but without harmful objectives.[196] Thus, magic existed in two forms, one which was accepted and even characteristic among good Romans, the other which was feared and unlawful.[197]

There were generally three outcomes that people turned to magic for: the misery or death of someone, love, and knowledge of the future. The first reason seemed to be the case in the death of Germanicus in AD 19, which he himself attributed to *venenum*, magic and poisoning. Upon closer inspection of the circumstances surrounding Germanicus' terrible illness and subsequent death, "explorations in the floor and walls brought to light the remains of human bodies, spells, curses, leaden tablets engraved with the name *Germanicus*, charred and blood-smeared ashes, and others of the implements of witchcraft..."[198] Magic took many forms including that of enchanted amulets intended to bring pain and sickness on its owner, curse tablets with the intended victim's name or image scratched on a piece of bronze with nails driven through, evil symbols beside the name of a victim, and verbal curses.[199] The governor of Syria, Gn. Calpurnius Piso, was accused of using all of these forms of magic along with poison to kill Germanicus, showing that the use of magic to commit murder was a serious offence that no one was permitted to practice.

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[193] M. Porcius Cato, *On Agriculture*, trans. W. D. Hooper (Loeb, 1934), 160; Pliny, *Natural History*, 28. 4, 21.

[194] Graf (1997), 47.

[195] Georg Luck, *Arcana Mundi. Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Collection of Ancient Texts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 3.

[196] Dickie (2001), 145-146; Graf (1997), 46

[197] MacMullen (1966), 126-127.

[198] Tacitus, *Annals*, 2. 69.

[199] MacMullen (1966), 103-105.

Using magic to instil love also carried the death penalty for anyone found guilty. This charge was apparently brought against Apuleius and his surviving defence speech of 158-159 AD reveals that the crime of magic was brought against him by his wealthy late wife's family. Apuleius was quite a bit younger than his wife, Pudentilla, and, thinking that he would get all of her money, the family accused him after she died of having enchanted her with magic. Apuleius defends himself against the claim that he was a magician because he possessed mysterious objects in the household shrine and against a letter written by Pudentilla in which she claimed she had been bewitched.[200] The underlying issue of this case is a challenge to the social structure: Apuleius was a man of meagre position and means compared to his bride, and his adversaries tried to explain his reversal of fortunes with magic.[201] This case shows the nature of many of the disputes surrounding magic which generally arose because much of the power and thus threat of magic resided in the fact that it went against established social norms.[202] Even if his accusers did not believe in magic, the fact that they knew charging Apuleius with such a practice would be taken seriously by a court shows that magic was seen as capable of bringing about revolutionary, and, hence, dangerous, changes in society otherwise the charge would not have been taken so seriously. While the recorded number of magic trials is not great, the fact that there were any at all shows the use of magic was a feature of life in the highest classes and one which was considered a public danger.[203]

Finally, Lucan relates that a person might turn to magic, as opposed to legitimate sources of information such as oracles and divination, in order to know the future.[204] During the civil war between Caesar and Pompey, Sextus Pompeius was desperate to know what would happen and was thus driven to consult the Thessalian witch Erichtho who was a foreigner and a woman who could undo the laws of nature and destiny, therefore making her the antithesis of rational and humane religious practices.[205] Lucan describes witches as the opposite of a proper citizen in every way: for example they used incantation, the opposite of public sacrifice, and made disgusting concoctions out of rotten bodies and foods instead of fresh produce from fields. Witches worked in the dark, filthy and childless, disturbing the natural order by drawing down the moon and summoning storms. They practiced necromancy in order to tell the future, a reversal of the proper procedures of divination and funerals.[206] The magician was the perfect example of what one was not to become, an anti-social being who refused all co-operation with others, all social intercourse, all human meaning, all proper hierarchy.

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[200] Apuleius, *Apuleius: Rhetorical Works*, trans. Vincent Hunink (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), *Apology* 29-65; 66-101.

[201] Graf (1997), 68.

[202] H. G. Kippenberg, "Magic in Roman Civil Discourse: Why Rituals Could be Illegal," in *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, ed. Peter Schäfer and H. G. Kippenberg (New York: Brill, 1997), 142.

[203] J. H. W. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 135.

[204] Lucan, *Pharsalia: Dramatic Episodes of the Civil Wars*, trans. Robert Graves (Toronto: Penguin Books Ltd., 1956), 6. 400-446.

[205] Beard, North, Price (1998), 220; Lucan, *Pharsalia*, 6. 400-446.

[206] Lucan, *Pharsalia*, 6. 491-570; 612-699.

Magicians represented the chaos that would ensue without the Roman state playing an important religious role. [207]

Apuleius' description of a *magus*, as someone who "by breathing out certain words and charms over boughs and stones and other frivolous things, can throw down all the light of the starry heavens into the deep bottom of hell, and reduce them again to the old chaos," referred to someone practicing precisely the threatening form of magic prosecuted by the state. [208] The fact that magicians were believed to be able to communicate directly with divinities meant that the governing body of Rome (be it the senate or the emperor) lost their privileged and powerful position as mediator between the realm of humans and that of the gods. The power of magicians to converse with the gods was also considered risky because magicians were suspected to have obtained an intimate relationship with a deity through prescribed rites to discover secrets and acquire some power over the deity in question, with intent to do harm. The power that enabled magistrates of Rome to communicate with immortals was, by contrast, perceived as the result of a pact freely concluded between both mortal and immortal parties, i.e. the Romans would ensure that the gods were properly worshipped and in exchange the gods would remain benevolent towards Rome (the *pax deorum*). Rome's magistrates were also understood as utilizing this legitimate relationship with the gods to further the wellbeing of all, not to do harm.[209] Therefore, consulting with magicians was believed to threaten and hence anger the gods which could result in peril for the state.

The Roman authorities were not against the idea of prophecy and consulting those who could instruct citizens on their futures, but this instruction had to come from sources that were not seen as threatening. The difference between augurs compared to magicians and astrologers was that the latter groups were not organized or supervised by the senate. This meant that any predictions and advice that magicians and astrologers gave were completely unknown to the senate and that neither group was obliged to adhere to any stipulations the senate might impose concerning what information they could and could not reveal. The danger that magicians posed to those in power was very similar to that of astrologers, since magicians were also thought to possess the power of prophecy and hence the ability to create chaos by tricking people to do what they said. Such a scenario befell the emperor Caracalla in AD 217 when his death was brought about by a soothsayer from Africa who informed Caracalla's praetorian prefect, M. Opelius Macrinus, that he was to succeed Caracalla as emperor. This news only left two options for Macrinus; he either had to kill Caracalla or be killed if Caracalla found out about the prophecy. Accordingly, Macrinus successfully arranged the assassination, after which disruption among the legions and in Rome followed.[210] As was the case with the clergy of Isis, the influence that magicians and astrologers had over individuals could be utilized

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[207] Richard Gordon, "Religion in the Roman Empire: the civic compromise and its limits", in *Pagan Priests: Religion and Power in the Ancient World*, eds. Mary Beard and John North (London: Duckworth, 1990), 253.

[208] Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, trans. W. Adlington (Loeb, 1915), 2. 5.

[209] John Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 150-151.

[210] Dio, 79. 4.

for personal gain by anyone with enough money and since this power was outside the sanction of the Roman government, it could be used to carry out any plot.

Astrologers

It is difficult to pinpoint when an interest in astrology really developed in ancient Rome, since gazing up at the night sky and taking an interest in the patterns of stars was probably a pastime of many. Determining when star gazing was believed to have turned into using the solar system to predict the future is an easier task and was attributed by the Romans to foreigners in Rome (especially Greeks) beginning sometime in the third century BC.[211] In the first century BC, its progress was helped by the growing influence of Stoic philosophy[212] and the first Romans are found practising astrology in the later republic,[213] which coincided with the first expulsion of astrologers in 139 BC. This expulsion of astrologers apparently occurred "because they were profiteering by their lies and creating darkness in the minds of the fickle and stupid by their fallacious interpretation of the stars."[214] It is probable that this expulsion occurred not because the authorities were concerned that the lower classes were being taken advantage of, but because a specialized form of religious knowledge was possessed by these experts. Astrologers fell outside of the priestly groups of the city, just like magicians, and were perceived by the authorities as a separate and rival focus of religious power. The existence of a choice between consulting state diviners or astrologers during the late republic was particularly worrisome for the senate because during this period the republican constitution was beginning to collapse as political power was being wrested from the senate by ambitious individuals. Furthermore, astrology fit the ideology of kingship while state diviners belonged within the republic, as was similar with the cult of Isis. Traditional procedure in the republic involved only the gods' endorsement of an action or vague warnings of danger and this gave way ultimately to individual diviners taking over the role of adviser about all issues involving the emperor's future.[215]

Ancient astrology had two main types: judicial astrology, which predicted the future of the emperor or the republic/empire from celestial or meteorological events, and horoscopic astrology, which related to the character and fortune of an individual.[216] Only the latter of the two types was permitted by the Roman state as it was not seen as intrinsically dangerous. While astrology might support imperial power by regularly predicting an emperor's success, for example, it could be very threatening by predicting an emperor's downfall.[217] The latter was the case in AD 11 when Augustus felt he was nearing the end of his life and he passed a measure forbidding astrological consultations

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[211] Frederick Cramer, *Astrology in Roman Law and Politics* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1954), 44.

[212] Liebeschuetz (1979), 121.

[213] Cicero, *In Vatinium*, trans. R. Gardner (Loeb, 1958), 4. 14-15.

[214] Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings*, trans. Shackleton Bailey (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 1.3.

[215] Tamsyn Barton, *Ancient Astrology* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 38, 41.

[216] Georg Luck (1985), 372.

[217] Beard, North, Price (1998), 231.

to be made in private, or concerning anyone's death.[218] Prior to this, Augustus demonstrated his suspicion of astrology when he confiscated and burned more than 2000 books on the subject in 12 BC.[219] Later in AD 16, a *Senatus Consultum Ultimum* was issued against astrologers and magicians during Tiberius' reign after M. Scribonius Libo Drusus was charged with using both for treasonous purposes (*maiestas*), and from this point onward trials involving astrology and magic also cited *maiestas* as a charge.[220] Three years later Jews and devotees of Isis and Sarapis would also be banned from Rome for essentially the same reason as astrologers and magicians, which was that they had the potential to undermine the political structure and cause public disorder. Thus, imperial use of astrology carried obvious rewards and dangers and it was this fascination and fear on the part of emperors which caused astrology to be occasionally banned.[221]

The general reason that some forms of astrology were deemed illegal was because they threatened the stability of private families or the life of the emperor and, in this sense, anyone in general that claimed to know the future had the potential to undermine those in authority and create chaos.[222] For example, during the First Slave War, the slave Eunus used his reputed prophetic powers to gain followers by prophesising success for the slaves.[223] Then in 104 BC, Eunus' successor, Athenio, earned followers through his reputation as an expert astrologer and by insisting that "the gods forecasted for him, by the stars, that he would be king of all of Sicily."[224] Later in AD 45, a "magician" named Theudas persuaded a number of people to follow him to the river Jordan, claiming that he was a prophet and could divide the river. The procurator Fadus prevented the attempt with a force of cavalry, killing many including Theudas.[225] No ruler could look compassionately on these many visionaries who, from the later second century BC, increasingly spread unrest in towns.[226] Since astrologers knew the effects of stars on men in power from studying constellations and thus what the future would hold for Rome, they had the potential to disrupt the current order.

The force used to suppress unsupervised diviners shows that the Roman authorities saw the potential such groups possessed as major threats to their established power. It could be very dangerous if astrologers gave in to popular curiosity and revealed the identities of future leaders of the empire, especially in the event that a revolt or an emperor's death was foretold. On the other hand, an astrologer working solely for the emperor gave him the necessary advantage over his political rivals.[227] For example, Augustus had his horoscope published, which promised a long and prosperous rule, to

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[218] Dio, 56. 25, 5.

[219] Suetonius, *Augustus*, 31.1

[220] Tacitus, *Annals*, 2. 27; Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 25; Dio, 57. 15, 4; Velleius Paterculus, *Compendium of Roman History,* trans. F. W. Shipley (Loeb, 1924), 2. 129, 2; 2. 130, 3; Cramer (1954), 144.

[221] Peter Whitfield, *Astrology: A History* (London: The British Library, 2001), 70.

[222] Beard, North, Price (1998), 233.

[223] Diodorus of Sicily, trans. F. R. Walton (Loeb, 1967), 34. 2, 5-6.

[224] Diodorus, 36. 5, 3.

[225] Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20. 5.

[226] MacMullen (1966), 155.

[227] MacMullen (1966), 131.

legitimate his rule and to ensure that any further consultations about the emperor would be invalid.[228] Septimius Severus also published his horoscope and had all predictions foretelling his power represented in sculpture and painting because, like Augustus, he was in much need of legitimation.[229] The dangers of astrology were not lost on Severus either, however, so that when he had the prediction of his rule painted on the ceilings of the rooms in which he held court, he made sure to exclude "the portion of the sky which...'observed the hour'(i.e. the horoscope) when he first saw the light".[230] This omission ensured that no one could know his full horoscope and therefore use it for their own calculations of his death date.

The persecution of astrologers and magicians seems generally to have been related to a larger pattern of suppressing any rites felt to be foreign and non-Roman and performed for profit.[231] The knowledge of both groups was supposed to be confined to the private sphere, so that only divination concerning the destiny of the individual consulting the diviner was to be revealed and the treatment of illnesses by magic. Every time a private individual made use of an astrologer's or magician's skills in order to meddle in the affairs of the state, all practitioners of either craft were deported from Italy.[232] Roman anxieties about the power of magic and astrology may actually have fostered the very practices that were feared. Both practices offered power to those excluded from the hierarchy of the political and social order, and the deep fear of astrology and magic held by the Roman authorities probably exposed this source of power to the public.[233] The participation in astrology and magic of senators, consuls, emperors, and others of the governing class combined with the ever widening legislation against magicians and astrologers only exposed a different form of power that was clearly viewed as influential.[234]

Cult of African Saturn

When Phoenicians settled in North Africa in the 9th and 8th centuries BC, they brought their own gods, profoundly changing the social, economic, and religious institutions that existed. Centuries of assimilating with local Africa gods produced a distinctive social, cultural, and political order in Phoenician cities such as Carthage, which came to be called Punic.[235] Phoenician cults in Africa produced belief in a henotheistic cosmic order in which one all-powerful earth-sky-underworld god called Baal Hamon ruled and was especially worshipped, while other gods were acknowledged.[236] The only acceptable way to honour this Lord of everything was with

[228] Suetonius, *Augustus*, 2. 94, 12.
[229] Barton (1994), 46.
[230] Dio, *Roman History*, 77. 11, 1-2.
[231] Dickie (2001), 153.
[232] Graf (1997), 55.
[233] Beard, North, Price (1998), 220-221.
[234] MacMullen (1966), 127.
[235] Brent Shaw, "Cult and Belief in Punic and Roman Africa," *Princeton/Stanford Working Papers in Classics* (Princeton: 2007), 10. http://www.princeton.edu/~pswpc/pdfs/shaw/090705.pdf.
[236] Serge Lancel, *Carthage: A History*, trans. Antonia Nevill (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 195-199.

blood sacrifices of living beings, but offering only animals was not sufficient; the sacrifice of children (*mulk ba'al*) was also practiced and was seen as the ultimate offering that would ensure the favour of Baal Hamon.[237] The ancient sources give a number of occasions when the Carthaginians practiced this rite: in times of crisis, annually, and for private reasons by parents.[238] The main evidence for these sacrifices comes from sanctuaries like the one at Carthage. The *tophet*, a sacrificial cemetery devoted to the burial in urns of the cremated bones of sacrificed children and animals, at Carthage was the largest of a number of such sites.[239] It is clear from the archaeological, medical, and epigraphical evidence at many sites that animal and human sacrifice was an institutionalized, permanent, and normal part of the Punic cult.[240] Evidence from this Carthaginian precinct strongly suggests that children were sacrificed often and that this rite was not a casual or sporadic occurrence.[241] This overt acceptance of child-killing by the Phoenicians/Carthaginians was unusual in the ancient Mediterranean and shocked those who discovered it, like the Greeks and Romans.[242]

The Greeks made a connection between Baal Hamon and the Greek god Cronos, since myth held that Cronos ate his children and the Phoenicians in North Africa sacrificed their children to Baal. This connection was recorded in the 5th century: "For among foreigners, it has been the custom, from the beginning, to require human sacrifice to Cronos;"[243] and again in the late fourth century: "With us [Greeks], for instance, human sacrifice is not legal, but unholy, whereas the Carthaginians perform it as a thing they account holy and legal, and that too when some of them sacrifice even their own sons to Cronos, as I daresay you yourself have heard."[244] Following the Greeks, the Romans identified Baal with Saturn in the *interpretatio Romana*; however, this connection between the two gods did not destroy traditional Berber worship of Baal since archaeology shows that the sacrifice of children did not stop being performed until sometime after AD 200.[245] Both in the cities and the countryside, the traditional Punic religion survived alongside a significantly transformed version.[246] African Saturn was a special case among all of the divinities Rome encountered due to the position he occupied in the African Pantheon as is evidenced by the mass of documents attested to him in the

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[237] Lawrence E. Stager, "The Rite of Child Sacrifice at Carthage," in *New Light on Ancient Carthage*, ed. John Griffiths Pedley (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980), 6.

[238] Diodorus Siculus 20. 14, 4-7; Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 36.4, 39.

[239] Shelby Brown, *Late Carthaginian Child Sacrifice and Sacrificial Monuments in their Mediterranean Context* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 16. Other such sacrificial sites include Hadrumetum and Cirta in Africa; Motya and Lilybaeum in Sicily; Nora, Sulcis, Monte, Sirai, and Tharros in Sardinia.

[240] P. G. Mosca, *Child Sacrifice in Canaanite and Israelite Religion: A Study in Mulk and [Molech]* (Harvard: Ph.D. Dissertation, 1975), 97.

[241] For exact numbers of the remains found see Stager (1980), 3.

[242] Brown (1991), 170.

[243] Sophocles, *Tragicorum Graecorum fragmenta selecta,* ed. J. Diggle (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), *Andromeda* fragment 122.

[244] Plato, *Plato in Twelve Volumes* volume 9, trans. W.R. M. Lamb (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925), *Minos* 315B-C.

[245] Mosca (1975), 98.

[246] Susan Raven, *Rome in Africa* (London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1969), 114.

form of steles, which are documented in LeGlay's *Saturne Africain: Monuments*.[247] The god held a privileged position because he had held a following for many years and his divine composition was rich and complex. For example, his name is Roman, but not so much the reality of the cult because Carthaginian Baal Hamon had a large affinity with the Phoenician Pantheon and Greek Cronos.[248]

In cities that were Romanized at an early date, the traditional cult of Baal Hamon generally either disappeared or existed in such a vastly different form accepted by Rome that it basically disappeared, or was kept going only by the devotion of the poorer inhabitants. Excavation of the Punic *tophet* in Hadrumetum shows a decrease overtime in the number of urns containing the bones of children suggesting that the cult of Saturn there gradually declined as the town itself became more Romanized.[249] This means that the Roman presence in Africa did not by itself cause the sacrifice of children to stop since they had been in the area for years already, but that the Romans did make a definite impact against the practice in some places.[250] There continued to be, however, a religious conservatism mainly among those living in rural areas and who were not particularly involved in areas that were heavily influenced by the Romans.[251] Central Numidia remained one of the principle centers for indigenous resistance against Roman occupation and from the first century AD onwards, push for a return to indigenous ways is evidenced in the styles of steles and votives to divinities.[252] The epigraphy and decorations of very young children in the arms of priests being prepared for sacrifice on steles along with the urns containing the bones of children strongly suggest the occurrence of child sacrifice. In Mauretania, the Romanized cult of African Saturn was able to keep its Punic origins due to its ties to indigenous cultures that survived.[253] It seems that the Romanized Saturn remained more the Baal Hamon, Punic god for the majority of his devotees, than the Italic god, Saturn.

Apart from the mention in the ancient sources of the disgust at child sacrifice, the sources are quiet about the reaction of Rome to the practice.[254] There is, however, a section from Tertullian that does discuss the practice and a particular incident when action was taken by the Roman authorities against the priests who performed the sacrifices

> In Africa infants used to be sacrificed to Saturn and quite openly, down to the proconsulate of Tiberius [?], who took the priests themselves and on the very trees

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[247] Marcel LeGlay, *Saturne Africain: Monuments* (Paris : Arts et métiers graphiques, 1961-1966).

[248] Marcel LeGlay, *Saturne Africain: Histoire* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1966), VII.

[249] J. B. Rives, *Religion and Authority in Roman Carthage from Augustus to Constantine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 146.

[250] LeGlay (1966), 63.

[251] David Cherry, *Frontier and Society in Roman North Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 87.

[252] LeGlay (1966), 93.

[253] LeGlay (1966), 95.

[254] See Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 1. 38, 2; Diodorus Siculus, 13. 86, 3; 20. 14, 4-6; Silius Italicus, *Punica*, 4. 5. 765; Plutarch, *Essay on Superstitions*, 13 (171 C-D); Augustine, *City of God*, 7. 19, 26.

> of their temple, under whose shadow their crimes had been committed, hung them alive like votive offerings on crosses; and the soldiers of my own country are witnesses to it, who served that proconsul in that very task. Yes, and to this very day that holy crime persists in secret...and their own parents offered them to him, were glad to respond, and fondled their children that they might not be sacrificed in tears.[255]

Which Tiberius this was is uncertain, but what can be assumed is that in and around Carthage, human sacrifice was taking place in Tertullian's own time "to this very day" (i.e. ca. AD 197). The severe reaction of Tiberius should not be seen as a reaction against the practice of child sacrifice, but against a Punic practice that had significant traditional meaning. Tiberius was reacting against a resurgence of Carthage which this tradition represented and this is clear because from the mid first century AD to the end of the second century AD, child sacrifices were able to be practiced freely so long as they were done privately, as is evidenced from steles and remains from Sousse and Utica. Also, apart from punishing the priests for performing public sacrifices which served as a warning to others, Rome did nothing, at least officially, against the practice.[256] This is an example, like the Bacchanalian suppression, where it was not necessarily the practice itself that was offensive, but what it meant socially and politically that so many people were taking part in something that was not sanctioned or controlled by Rome, and due to the number of participants it caught the authorities' attention. Such a gathering was interpreted by Rome as a demonstration of political power through religious displays since the Romans understood religious strength to be the same as political strength. As long as worship remained a private affair with few participants, there was nothing for Rome to be worried about.

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The Romans frequently cite horrific practices as reasons to suppress a group, but upon closer inspection it becomes clear that these practices were exaggerated and seem to have been used to justify persecution. While there appear to have been a number of reasons to persecute religious cults, the real reason was political. When the Roman authorities were made aware of an unsanctioned religious group, they presumed that the *pax deorum* had been disrupted and that the gods were not happy with the group since the gods allowed chaos to break out. If the *pax deorum* was in danger, this also meant that the leading political body in Rome was losing religious power and therefore political power, and the only way to regain the benevolence of the gods was to re-establish order. Reaffirming power in the religious sphere meant correcting or expelling anyone practicing un-Roman

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[255] infantes penes Africam Saturno immolabantur palam usue ad proconsulatum Tiberii, qui eosdem saerdotes ineisdem arboribus temple sui obumbratricibus scelerum votives crucibus exposuit, teste militia patriae nostrae, quae id ipsum munus illi proconsuli functa est. sed et nunc in occult preseveratur hoc sacrum facinus....cum propiis filiis Saturnus non pepercit, extraneis utique non parcedo perseverabat, quos quidem ipsi parentes sui offerebant et libentes respondebant et infantibus blandiebanur, ne lacrimantes immolarentur. Tertullian, *Apologetica*, trans, T.R. Glover (Loeb, 1931), 9. 2-5.

[256] LeGlay (1966), 322-323.

rites. Even when cults that had been persecuted were permitted to continue, it was done so under the supervision of the senate or emperor which shifted power back to the Roman state and re-established the government's control over the religious and political sphere. Each group examined in this chapter empowered its followers to a point beyond that which was compatible with the power structure of the republic and empire which held that only the political leader(s) could decide what the gods wanted and therefore since only those with political power had the support of the gods they were the only ones who legitimately knew how to retain the benevolence of the gods.

CHAPTER THREE: SUPPRESSION OF JEWS AND CHRISTIANS

The following sections concerning the Jews and Christians continue the examination of un-Roman religious groups in the Roman world, but move the discussion from the western parts of the empire to its eastern parts. Two differences between these groups and those examined in the last chapter will also be explored; in the case of the Jews, the first section will consider why this group experienced periods of relative freedom from persecution, and in the case of the Christians, the second section will look at why this group was treated with extreme hostility by Rome.

Jews

Jewish groups lived in many cities of the Roman world and generally were able to maintain their own religious traditions. Such traditions as keeping a different calendar and a different diet from the other members of the community and avoiding the rituals and festivals of the pagan city meant that the Jews living in a pagan community might be easily pointed out.[257] These differences between pagans and Jews did not necessarily lead to conflict or persecution, but they made it more likely that problems would, and did, arise. The Jews would not have seemed drastically different from the other ethnic groups living amongst Roman communities, yet since their religion was inherited from their ancestors and they did not seek vigorously (compared to the Christians) to convert their neighbours to their practices, the Jews were not regarded as a very menacing threat to those living in close proximity to them.[258] Although the Jews may not have actively sought out converts, they did seem to attract followers who attached themselves and gave support to the Jewish faith, and this certainly was taken as a reason to react against the Jews.[259] The extreme antiquity that the Jews could claim combined with their wisdom that even Pythagoras allegedly admired certainly appealed to Roman converts who attached much respect to such qualities.[260] Also, surviving stories that many pagan dignitaries, particularly Alexander the Great, offered gifts and sacrifices to the Jewish god at his temple in Jerusalem signified to many Romans that the Jews were a respectable nation and their god a respectable deity.[261] Even if the Jews did not win converts out of certain Romans, they did win many sympathizers which angered Rome.

A situation involving proselytizing may have caused the first apparent expulsion of the Jews from Rome which was recorded by Valerius Maximus in the early first century AD and has only survived in two inconsistent texts. Factors contributing to this expulsion of Jews from Rome in 139 BC, along with astrologers and supporters of Isis,

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[257] S. J. D. Cohen, "Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew," *The Harvard Theological Review* 82, no. 1 (1989): 20.

[258] J. A. North, *Roman Religion, Greece and Rome: New Surveys in the Classics No. 30* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 72.

[259] Tessa Rajak. "The Jewish Community and its Boundaries," *The Jews among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire*, eds. Judith Lieu, John North, Tessa Rajak (New York: Routledge, 1992), 20-21.

[260] Josephus, *Against Apion*, trans. John M. G. Barclay (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2007), 1. 22, 162-165.

[261] Cohen (1989), 16.

appear to have partly been that the Jews were seen as foreigners involved in un-Roman activities and that they were trying to gain converts from Roman pagans.[262] It is difficult to assess the scale or rationale of this expulsion due to the lack of information about it; however, if indeed there was an expulsion, it was probably in line with the reaction to the cult of Bacchus a half century earlier, showing that the Roman state in 139 BC did not like the spread of unsanctioned foreign religions or rites among Roman natives.[263] In both cases, the authorities must have been worried by the indiscriminate nature of the religions since anyone was free to worship them, meaning that the traditional boundaries separating different members of society were being broken. Furthermore, as the Jews were not expelled in isolation, it can be surmised that the decision to punish multiple groups was done to ensure political stability where it had been lacking; that is, while the Jews may not have been very disturbing in Rome at this time, they were a casualty of the expulsion of other groups since the Jews too were an un-Roman group.

The Roman authorities at this time may not have been protesting against Jewish proselytizing so much as they were against Jews who were trying to introduce their native cult into Rome and to practice it publicly. If this was the case and Rome did expel the Jews in 139 BC, it could have been in opposition to the Jewish community there, which had become obvious to Romans to the extent that the state felt disturbed or even politically threatened.[264] Added to this feeling of disturbance, the Roman authorities were probably also aware that some Romans were attracted to Judaism and thus the state felt that the ancient Roman traditions were in danger.[265] While the tenets of Judaism itself were not very compatible with Roman customs, the ancient religion could be tolerated by Rome as long its adherents behaved themselves, meaning they could not overtly question Rome's authority nor disturb the peace by rebelling against Rome or seeking adherents from Roman subjects (Rome was also not happy about the fact that the Jews accepted converts at all).[266]

Judaism prevented many Jews from fully integrating into Roman life and created a strong group identity to which many Jews were devoted. Devotion to Judaism also had a political aspect and allusions to the political power possessed by Jewish communities can be found in both Horace and Cicero and suggest that Roman authorities had reason to fear the political ramifications of large groups of Jews. Horace says that "[poets], like the Jews, shall make you fall in with our happy band"[267], and Cicero refers to Jews in Rome

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[262] Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings*, trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey (Loeb 492, 2000), 1. 3. 3.

[263] John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE-117CE)* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 285-286.

[264] Peter Schäfer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes towards the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 106.

[265] Martin Goodman, "Jewish Proselytizing in the First Century," *The Jews among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire*, eds. Judith Lieu, John North, Tessa Rajak (New York: Routledge, 1992), 69-70.

[266] Lester L. Grabbe, *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian Volume Two: The Roman Period* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 398.

[267] Horace, *Horace: Satires and Epistles*, trans. Niall Rudd (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1973), *Satire* 1. 4, 142-143 (page 60).

as a "vast throng...close-knit...[influential] in public meetings."[268] While Horace's reference has been taken to mean that the Jews actively converted others to their religion[269], it seems best to understand the poet to mean that the Jews compelled others to do as they did politically, rather than that they converted people to their religion.[270] When Cicero's reference is also taken into consideration, this interpretation of Horace appears even more likely and supports the conclusion that during the republic an increase in the Jewish population and sympathy for it at Rome inevitably led to their (perceived) increased political power.[271] Judaism's popularity can perhaps be judged by the fact that in Rome in the later part of the first century BC and throughout the empire, pagans of the upper and lower Roman classes observed the Sabbath by lighting candles and fasting, like the Jews.[272]

Similar feelings of fear and anger towards the Jews were felt later and expressed by both Juvenal and Tacitus in their writings, with their recognition of converts to Judaism showing their fear at the religion's growth and because they felt it threatened Roman religion and life in general.[273] A theme of the Jews being exclusive yet also accepting converts, along with their ideological cohesion and thus political influence, was what caused ancient authors to see the Jews as particularly dangerous. Juvenal, for instance, found it especially worrisome that Jews felt it was impossible to combine their religion with a Roman way of life and therefore that they did not integrate into Roman society, while at the same time they accepted converts, which seems to have meant to him that the Jews allowed others to follow their religion only if they renounced the laws of Rome.[274] Similar thoughts about the Jews occupied and angered Tacitus as he often expresses his incomprehension that the Jews refused to be a part of Roman society and at the same time they succeeded in attracting proselytes, and thus in infiltrating the Roman world.[275]

While some saw no benefit in befriending the Jews, Julius Caesar did. Although Caesar banned *collegia*, fearing their role in social or political disorder, he allowed Jewish *thiasoi* in Rome to continue collecting money and meeting together.[276] Also, various cities were required by the Romans to permit the residents there to carry out their traditional customs.[277] Privileges granted by Caesar were done so because he was grateful to the Jews for their assistance during his war with Pompey and Caesar's actions

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[268] Cicero, *Pro Flacco*, trans. C. Macdonald (Loeb 324, 1976), 66.

[269] Louis Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 299.

[270] Goodman (1992), 64; Schäfer (1997), 107-108.

[271] Schäfer (1997), 192-193.

[272] Philo Judaeus, "Life of Moses", *The Essential Philo*, trans. Nahum Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1971) 2. 4; Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1.22, 166-167; 2.39, 280-284.

[273] Juvenal, *The Satires*, trans. Niall Rudd (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 3. 282-301 and 14.96-106; Tacitus, *Histories*, trans. Clifford Moore (Loeb 249, 1931), 5. 4-10.

[274] Juvenal, *Satires*, 14. 96-106.

[275] Tacitus, *Histories*, 5. 1-5.

[276] Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, trans. Ralph Marcus and Allen Wikgren (Loeb, 1970), 14. 213.

[277] Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 14. 241-264; Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, trans. J. C. Rolfe (Loeb, 1913), *The deified Caesar* 42.

served as important precedents to his successors who generally tried to imitate his treatment of the Jews. Caesar's respect for Jewish rights formalized and legalized that the Jews should have religious liberty and established Judaism as an incorporated body with an authorized cult throughout the empire, a status that it held for over three centuries with the exception of restriction under Hadrian.[278] Such preferential treatment, however, led to resentment against the Roman state and the Jews on the part of non-Jews living under Roman rule, as will be discussed was part of the case in AD 38.

The official sanction given to the Jews was not secure and required a renewal with every change of government. Those Romans who were friendly to the Jews were guided mainly by political considerations, not moral principles, and the initiative generally appears to have come from the Jewish side. For example, in 161 BC Judas Maccabee went to Rome for help against Antiochus IV, resulting in a declaration of friendship that drew the two sides together against Syria. Nearly a century later during the Roman civil war, the Jews again came into the favour of certain Romans, Caesar then Octavian, for giving military support. The Jews were keen to help Caesar against Pompey as the latter had violated the Temple after taking Jerusalem, and Octavian sent out official edicts instructing Greek cities in the east to allow Jews living in those cities to continue their traditions undisturbed, thanks to Herod's quick move to Octavian's side after Actium.[279] Also in the later first century BC, Roman law on the Jews developed in response to the requests of the Jewish communities of the Aegean, Asia Minor, and other parts of the Near East to help them protect their way of life against the constant attacks of their Greek neighbours.[280] The relationship between the Romans and Jews was always uncertain because the Romans based their acceptance of the Jews on the political situation at the time and many Jews were constantly seeking liberation from Rome.

Augustus' benevolence towards Jewish communities under Roman rule was publicized in an inscription on the temple of Rome and Augustus in Ancyra.[281] The extent of Augustus' consideration for the Jews was further explained to Caligula by Philo, who related that Augustus further extended the rights of the Jews by allowing those who were Roman citizens and entitled to the monthly dole to collect their corn on the following day when the distribution fell on a Sabbath and that Augustus made special donations to the Jerusalem Temple.[282] Augustus' policy in matters pertaining to the Jews was probably influenced by his close relations with Herod whom Augustus (as Octavian) was instrumental in ensuring was recognized as king of the Jews.[283]

Following Augustus, the treatment of the Jews seems to have been less than compassionate. Tiberius banished approximately 4000 Jews to Sardinia to serve in the

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[278] E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule From Pompey to Diocletian: A study in political relations* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 135-136.

[279] Peter Garnsey, "Religious Toleration in Classical Antiquity," in *Persecution and Toleration: Studies in Church History 21*, ed. W.J. Sheilds (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984),10-11.

[280] L. V. Rutgers, "Roman Policy towards the Jews: Expulsions from the City of Rome during the First Century C.E.", *Classical Antiquity* 13. no. 1 (1994): 57.

[281] Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 16. 6.

[282] Philo, *Philonis Alexandrini Legatio ad Gaium*, trans. E. Mary Smallwood (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), 23. 157-158.

[283] Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 14. 14.

army along with the followers of Isis, magicians and astrologers in AD 19. The Jews apparently garnered imperial attention at this time because large numbers of Jews were flocking to Rome and attracting many to their beliefs.[284] Drawing people away from the worship of traditional Roman gods went against the rules under which Judaism was permitted and showed Tiberius that by accepting converts, the Jews were not respecting Roman custom and religion since they were taking people away from them.[285] A passage from Tacitus supports the idea that proselytes had something to do with the brutal treatment of Jews in AD 19, as it describes the 4000 proscribed men as "descendants of enfranchised slaves tainted with [Jewish] superstition."[286] The use of the word "taint" suggests a reference to converts of Judaism, not just native Jews, meaning that both converts and native Jews were targeted by this edict.[287]

Proselytes were not the only target or reason for the banishment though, since epigraphic evidence attests only seven cases of conversion over several centuries and it seems unlikely that there were 4000 converts living in Rome at the time.[288] Thus, those who were targeted were mainly Jewish males of military age, but also Jews in general, and converts to some lesser degree.[289] Another reason given for the banishment comes in the form of a story of an alleged embezzlement of gifts by four Jews from an upper class Roman lady intended for the Temple in Jerusalem.[290] While there could be some truth to Josephus' story, it should in no way be understood as a major reason for Tiberius, who had a strong tendency to follow tradition, to break with the precedent of permitting Judaism.[291] Even more surprising than Tiberius breaking with tradition is the fact that he set a precedent by sending Jews to war; service in the Roman army was something from which the Jews had thus far been exempted. As it was impossible, at least for the orthodox, to follow their religion and fight in the Roman army, many of the Jews sent away for military service were further punished for refusing to serve because they feared breaking the Jewish laws. As this move by Tiberius and the senate was unprecedented, deliberate, and planned, since they demanded of the Jews the one thing they knew the Jews could not deliver, it can be assumed that the Jews had committed offences that Tiberius and the senate felt deserved this heavy penalty.[292] In responding as he did to the Jews, Tiberius' actions, while uncharacteristic, were actually more conventional than not, since Augustus reacted the same way to groups felt to be threatening Roman peace.[293]

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[284] Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 36; Cassius Dio, *Dio's Roman History,* trans. Earnest Cary (Loeb, 1917) 57. 18.

[285] Grabbe (1992), 398.

[286] actum et de sacris Aegyptiis Iudaicisque pellendis factumque patrum consultum ut quattuor milia libertini generis ea superstitione infecta quis idonea aetas in insulam Sardiniam veherentur... Tacitus, *The Annals,* trans. John Jackson (Loeb 249, 1931), 2. 85.

[287] Schäfer (1997), 109; Barclay (1996), 299-300.

[288] Jean-Baptiste Frey, *Corpus of Jewish Inscriptions* (New York: KTAV Publishing House Inc., 1975), 21, 68, 202, 222, 256, 462, 523; Margaret Williams, "The Expulsion of the Jews from Rome in A.D. 19," *Latomus* 48 (1989): 771-772.

[289] Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 36.

[290] Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities,* 18. 3.

[291] Williams (1989), 775-778.

[292] Williams (1989), 779.

[293] For example the Isaic cult: Dio 54. 6, 6.

Based on the hard economic times Rome fell into during Tiberius' early reign, which were made worse by floods and fires,[294] it appears probable that poverty (seemingly the lot of many Jews in Rome in the late republic and early empire[295]) drove the Jews into unrest with the rest of Rome's poor. Furthermore, the expulsion of the Jews with the followers of Isis, magicians, and astrologers suggests that a clampdown on potentially subversive groups was underway due to perceived political insecurity caused by numerous factors.[296] Evidently, the Roman authorities became much less likely to turn a blind eye against un-Roman groups when tensions were already high.

Following Tiberius, Caligula in particular had quite a bit of trouble in his dealings with the Jews. He encountered problems with the Jews of Alexandria since relations between the Greek, Egyptian, and the Jewish residents there had never been good; the Greeks and Egyptians resented the right to self-government that the Jews had received under the Ptolemies and continued to hold under Roman rule.[297] Riots erupted in AD 38 and Caligula was directly confronted with the issue by Jewish and Greek delegations in Rome, although Philo reports that he never actually dealt with the riot and that he continued to allow the Alexandrians to persecute Jews.[298] Caligula, however, did punish the governor of Egypt, Flaccus, with death for his part helping the Alexandrians to target the Jews and this must have helped to calm the turmoil in Alexandria.[299] If the death of Flaccus earned Caligula any gratitude from the Jews he managed to lose it by demanding that the Temple in Jerusalem house a statue of himself in the guise of Jupiter.[300] The cause for such a reaction by Caligula can be found in an incident that took place in Jamnia where Jews demolished an imperial alter there, which Rome took to be an expression of political disloyalty. In fact, the action in Jamnia went against one of the preconditions for Jewish toleration by Rome, which was that the Jews must not interfere with other people's worship and, more obviously, that they must not openly protest the rule of Rome. Like the situation Tiberius faced, the Jews in Jamnia had committed a serious offence that was felt to deserve a serious punishment and Caligula's radical reaction was not out of step with the decisions of emperors before him against worrisome groups (although his mode of punishment, to erect his statue in the Jerusalem Temple, not the severity of it, was perhaps not the best choice).[301] The plan was never put into action though, either because he reversed his decision at the insistence of King Agrippa or simply because timing was on the Jews' side as Caligula's assassination prevented his plans from being carried out.[302] While Caligula did not stop the riots in Alexandria and

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[294] Tacitus, *Annals*, 1. 76; Dio, 57. 14; 57. 16.

[295] Juvenal, *Satires*, 3. 12-16, 293-296; 6. 542-547.

[296] Most notably, perhaps, a deficiency in the corn supply: Williams (1989), 781-783. In agreement with Williams is Rutgers (1994), 65.

[297] Barclay (1996), 48-50.

[298] Philo, *Philonis Alexandrini in Flaccum*, trans. Herbert Box (New York: Arno Press, 1979), 8. 54.

[299] Per Blide, "The Roman Emperor Gaius (Caligula)'s Attempt to Erect his Statue in the Temple of Jerusalem," *Studia Theologica* 32 (1978): 72 n. 16.

[300] Philo, *Legatio*, 29. 188.

[301] Blide (1978), 74-75.

[302] Tacitus, *Histories*, 5. 9.

solve the problems between the Jewish, Greek, and Egyptian residents there, which were centuries old, he also did not cause the riots since his order to have the Jews worship him as a god was stipulated after the troubles in Alexandria were well established. In Caligula another emperor is found whose policy towards the Jews reflected that of most other emperors: to maintain toleration unless provoked otherwise.

Claudius also had problems with the Jews, although he seemed better able to find solutions than Caligula without provoking issues further. Upon Caligula's death, it was up to Claudius to settle Alexandria, which he did by urging the people of Alexandria to allow the Jews to practice their faith in peace, but he also warned the Jews not to aggravate the situation. The Roman desire to maintain what went before is highlighted in Claudius' response to the Alexandrians, in which he tells the Jews "not to agitate for more privileges than they formerly possessed."[303] This response further helps to explain why the Jews were generally permitted to continue practicing their customs; that is, the Roman desire for sameness and tradition favoured the Jews.

Later in his reign, Claudius closed the synagogues in Rome and may have expelled some "because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus,"[304] but he also may have allowed some Jews to stay and observe their traditional way of life since "it would have been difficult to bar them from the city without causing immense disorder because of the numbers involved."[305] Whatever caused the Jews to upset the Roman authorities at this time, Rome intervened because there were disturbances and not because it wanted to interfere in the internal affairs of the Jewish community of Rome.[306] This situation perfectly displays the way in which Roman authorities dealt with problem groups: the circumstances were first analyzed and then the best outcome for the Romans, not the group in question, was determined and worked out. Claudius did not take military action in the case outlined above because he felt it would be too costly and create more problems than it would solve, but he probably drove out those Jews who persisted in rioting because he saw such action as necessary.

The Jews of Judaea were certainly perceived in terms of political opposition to Rome when they revolted in AD 66. It does not seem that Nero brutally suppressed the Jews at this time because he inherently hated them, since in the great fire of Rome (AD 64) it was the Christians, not the Jews, who were blamed.[307] Rather, his response matched the threat: Vespasian was sent to put down the revolt, which resulted in Vespasian's son, Titus, taking Jerusalem by siege, destroying the Temple, abolishing the council of the Sanhedrin and the office of High Priest, prohibiting proselytizing, and forcing the Temple tax to be paid to Jupiter Capitolinus.[308] After the suppression of this revolt by Vespasian and Titus, a policy of toleration was surprisingly reinstated. Even when the people of Antioch petitioned Titus to expel or at least remove the Jews' special

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[303] Claudius, "Letter of Claudius to the Alexandrians", *Select Papyri* Volume II, trans. A. S. Hunt and C. C. Edgar (Loeb, 1934), *Edicts and Orders* 212.

[304] Suetonius, *The deified Claudius*, 25.

[305] Dio, 60. 6.

[306] Rutgers (1994), 66.

[307] Barclay (1996), 308.

[308] Dio, 65. 7.

privileges, Titus refused.[309] Perhaps such treatment was partly due to the continued Jewish influenced on the leading Romans from Berenice, the sister of the Jewish king Agrippa II, who became the mistress of the Emperor Titus, and Agrippa II who had been educated in the court of Claudius.[310] It was likely also due to the distinction Romans drew between Diaspora Jews and those of Judaea who carried out the revolt; the Diaspora was not to blame for the actions of Jewish nationalists.[311] Take, for example, Tiberius Julius Alexander, an Alexandrian Jew who governed two Roman provinces under Claudius and Nero, played a major role in AD 63 in Rome's war against King Tiridates of Armenia, and was given much responsibility in the Flavian war in Judaea.[312] Since Tiberius Alexander was a Jew that "did not continue in the religion of his country,"[313] he was not hindered as most Jews were by an innate inability to fully assimilate with the Romans. His rise to highly respected and powerful positions shows that, in general, the Romans did not dislike the Jewish people as a whole, but rather they disliked any individual that questioned Rome.

Nonetheless, a prejudice against the Jews that had been generally lacking during the Julio-Claudian period did develop after the revolt and is revealed in the actions of the Roman authorities.[314] For example, the reign of Domitian was especially noted for cruelty against Jewish converts. Under Domitian, these Jews received hostile treatment perhaps prompted by Jewish (more likely Christian) proselytizing which had even earned converts, and victims, from the emperor's family, Flavius Clemens and Flavia Domitilla.[315] This removal of Domitian's own kin was probably motivated by political rather than religious reasons; however, Domitian was able to use his cousins' Jewish preferences as a sign of disloyalty to Rome revealing the delicate balance in which Judaism existed.[316]

As relations between the current emperor and the Jewish community had to be continually renegotiated, Domitian's anti-Jewish attitude was not maintained by Nerva. The special tax payable to the *fiscus Judaicus* introduced by Vespasian was violently forced by Domitian upon all Jews, including non-religious ethnic Jews. This action was seen as inappropriate since it seems that Romans accepted the rights of ethnic Jews to assimilate into the Roman citizen community, like any other people, and Domitian's behaviour was an affront to this attitude. In AD 96, Nerva corrected Domitian's blunder for a number of reasons, the main one probably being the support it earned him since his was a reform intended to help apostate Jews.[317] Such a calculated action by Nerva once

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[309] Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 7. 5.

[310] Feldman (1993), 100.

[311] Smallwood (1976), 364.

[312] Margaret Williams, *The Jews among the Greeks and Romans: A Diaspora Sourcebook* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 95.

[313] Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 20. 5.

[314] Valerie Warrior, *Roman Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 124.

[315] Suetonius, *Domitian*, 12, 15; Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History* Volume I, trans. Kirsopp Lake (Loeb, 1926), 3.19-20.

[316] Barclay (1996), 312. See also Rutgers (1994), 67.

[317] Martin Goodman, "Nerva, the *fiscus Judaicus* and Jewish Identity," *Journal of Roman Studies* 79 (1989): 41.

again shows that the Romans based their 'tolerance', or lack of, on how it would benefit themselves not the group in question and it was not based on some Roman religious tendency to accept all gods.

While the Diaspora Jews had not, for the most part, joined their nationalist brethren in revolting against Rome in AD 66, those living in Egypt, Cyprus, Cyrene, and Mesopotamia turned against their Roman overlord in AD 116. The literary sources present the Jews in Alexandria and Cyrene as falling upon their Greek neighbours without reason around AD 115, which brought Roman troops to the scene.[318] Attacks on Greeks at this time are not wholly without warrant since long nursed contempt had always existed between the Greeks and Jews, and Trajan's Parthian war at that time led the Jews to think that the emperor's attention was fully occupied elsewhere.[319] Miscalculating the strength of Rome, the revolt was put down in AD 117. Responding to this armed Jewish threat with military strength does not seem to have been unwarranted nor was it unusual for Rome and was not done out of anti-Jewish feelings, but rather in order to maintain the empire. The Jewish refusal to worship other gods caused astonishment and resentment among pagans, but this could be accepted. Judaism was no longer protected, however, when it was combined with an active attempt to suppress other forms of worship, which was hypocritical to the Romans as the Jews demanded religious tolerance, then denied it to others.[320] This Roman victory was bittersweet though, since it only increased Jewish resentment against Rome which turned into an even larger problem in AD 132.

The Jews of Palestine made their second and final attempt to escape Roman rule in AD 132 under the leadership of a man known as Bar Kokhba, believed by many to have been a messiah. The exact causes of the revolt are not clear and it seems, once again, that the general cause was hatred towards Roman rule felt by many Jews. Dio claims that the revolt was caused by Jewish anger against Hadrian's founding of a Roman city, Aelia Capitolina, in Jerusalem, while Eusebius says that Aelia Capitolina was a result of the war.[321] As the city certainly came into being after the war, the claims of both sources can be reconciled since Aelia Capitolina was planned before the revolt, which was where Dio's information came from, but it was not constructed until after, as Eusebius claims.[322] A further cause for the revolt can perhaps be attributed to Hadrian's ban on circumcision, as reported by the *Historia Augusta*.[323] Smallwood, Schürer, Applebaum, and Bowersock all see a ban on circumcision as a main cause of the revolt, while Schafer believes it was a punishment implemented after.[324] Furthermore, the

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[318] Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4. 2.

[319] Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.-A.D. 135)* Volume I, eds. Geza Vermes and Fergus Millar (Edinburgh: T.& T. Clark LTD, First edition 1885, revised edition 1973), 529-530.

[320] Grabbe (1992), 411.

[321] Dio, 69, 12; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4. 6.

[322] Smallwood (1976), 433; Peter Schäfer, "The Causes of the Bar Kokhba Revolt," *Studies in Aggadah, Targum and Jewish Liturgy in Memory of Joseph Heinemann*, eds. Jakob J. Petuchowski and Ezra Fleischer (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1981), 84.

[323] *The Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, trans. David Magie (Loeb 139, 1921), *Hadrian* 14.2.

[324] E. Mary Smallwood, "The Legislation of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius against Circumcision," *Latomus* 18 (1959): 334-347; Schürer (1973), 539-540; Shimon Applebaum, *Prolegomena to the Study of*

rebels' primary objectives appeared to have been ridding Judaea of its Roman garrison and re-establishing the Temple and its cult there, meaning that they wanted to free Jerusalem from Roman rule.[325] While the exact causes of the revolt have yet to be identified with certainty, the reaction of Rome to it is well known: the consequence of posing a serious threat to Roman domination was a serious punishment and this took the form of the new city built over Jerusalem, Aelia Capitolina, the renaming of the province of Judaea to Syria Palaestina, and the expulsion of Jews from the area. The gravity of this punishment was reinforced by the fact that no other province that had revolted against Rome in the past had been punished by losing its original name derived from the name of its people.[326]

Following the last attempt to liberate Judaea, the Jews were resigned to accept the 'protection' from Rome to which they had grown accustomed. Even during the Christian persecutions of Decius and Diocletian, the Jews were exempted from pouring libations to the Roman gods. Such exemption does not indicate special favouritism though, since attacks on Christianity were made in defence of the Roman state religion, which Christians undermined and actively sought to destroy.[327] Not counting for the personal hatred of some emperors toward the Jews, the attitude of the Roman government was positive towards the Jews so long as it posed no threat, through attempts at conversion, to the state cult or to the social and political order.[328] During the late republic and early empire, the Romans supported the Jews in their desire to live according to their ancestral customs and frequently upheld their petitions over the infringements of their rights. Not all Jews behaved in ways the Romans felt they could support, however, so that the deliberate spreading of Jewish ways to non-Jews and riotous behaviour was usually met with expulsion.[329] The rebellion of the Jews living in Judaea in AD 66 was met with brutal suppression by the Romans since the Romans perceived a risk and acted to protect their interests. Rome's measures concerning the Jews had straightforward political causes, not religious ones. Although the Romans were not thrilled with certain Jewish rites like circumcision and Sabbath, these were practices that could be permitted, whereas gathering together and violently fighting against Rome could not. The previous two rites were allowable because they were ancient and not viewed as intrinsically threatening to the Roman order, while trying to overthrow Rome clearly was--hence the brutal reaction of Rome and destruction of the Temple. With the repeated attempts at separating from Rome, a complete annihilation of Judaism was never attempted showing that Rome clearly distinguished between the undesirable political ambitions of the Jewish nationalists in Judaea and the harmless religious practices of most of the Diaspora. Since not much support was sent to the revolting Jews in Judaea by Diaspora Jews, this shows

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the Second Jewish Revolt (A.D. 132-135), Oxford: B.A.R. Supplementary Series 7, 1976), 8; G. W. Bowersock, "A Roman Perspective on the Bar Kochba War," *Approaches to Ancient Judaism Volume II*, ed. William S. Green (California: Scholars Press, 1980), 135-136; Schäfer (1981), 86-87.

[325] Smallwood (1976) 441-443.

[326] Werner Eck, "The Bar Kockba Revolt: The Roman Point of View," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 89 (1999): 89.

[327] Smallwood (1976), 540.

[328] Feldman (1993), 101.

[329] Williams (1998), 98.

that the Diaspora within the Roman Empire had little quarrel with Rome and their non-participation was proof of the generally harmonious relations which transpired between them and Rome since Julius Caesar.[330]

Since the Romans knew about and disapproved of Jewish customs, yet supported the Jews if doing so also benefitted Rome, this relationship falls under the modern definition of toleration. However, Roman treatment of the Jews gives the impression that tolerance or intolerance was nothing but a by-product in the formulation of a given policy.[331] Rome was interested in keeping the urban masses under control and in checking initiatives of too political a nature. During the First Jewish Revolt, Rome showed little mercy to the Jewish insurgents, yet no repressive measures were taken against Diaspora Jews, not because Rome was generally tolerant, but simply because such measures were not necessary.[332] Roman treatment of the Jews never amounted to something that could be called a "Jewish policy" since each measure came about depending on the situation. In general, when law and order was underway, when the *pax Romana* was secure, the Jews had nothing to fear from Rome.

Christians

In each situation described in this paper, Rome took some form of action against a religious group with whom it had objections. Whatever punishment was meted out, whether it was violent or not, the Romans felt it was deserved; their reaction was based on the level of perceived threat and most of the reactions that have been discussed were in line with the actions of previous Romans in power. Two exceptions standout: the Bacchanalia suppression and the persecution of the Christians. Both groups managed to cause the Romans to take radical action in defiance of the normal pattern of pagan life that bade the Roman authorities to match the reaction to the crime and the Christians caused even more radical action by the Romans because the persecutions and their nature were very erratic and uncertain.[333] Such uncertainty can partly be attributed to the savagery, or lack of, of governors and local garrisons who carried out orders against Christians at their own discretion with the result that some Christians were quietly tried without torture and beheaded as befit their station in life, Cyprian for example, while others died from torture or in the arena especially if they were non-citizens, as occurred at Lyons and Vienne.[334] While there is no denying that at times Christians were the objects of terrible fates caused by the hatred of some, it was not generally the case that Christians were sought out as vigorously as might be assumed from the evidently large number of victims nor that the Romans were constantly seeking to wipe Christianity out. The nature of Christianity certainly had something to do with the persecutions of Christians, that is, its tendency towards voluntary martyrdom and that a main duty of every Christian was to spread the word of God. However, these Christian characteristics were not solely the

[330] Smallwood (1976), 357.
[331] North (1979), 86.
[332] Rutgers (1994), 71.
[333] North (2000), 72.
[334] Michael Gough, *The Early Christians* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1961), 42.

cause since it was not until the middle of the third century AD that persecutions stopped being sporadic and localized and instead became systematic. These changes coincided with the rapid decline of Rome's military situation and the decay of the empire's political frame work.[335] While the crucifixion of Jesus marked an important moment for Christianity, it would be many years before the religion became consequential in the Roman Empire.

The first reference to Christians in Roman law can be found in Trajan's rescript to Pliny in the early second century AD.[336] Nero's much earlier persecution of Christianity was not carried out because his victims were Christians, but instead he needed a scapegoat for the fire in Rome and his actions did not set a precedent for future action.[337] It was not until Trajan became emperor that the legal situation of Christians was established and it remained the same until the time of Decius. Trajan was prompted to define a Christian's legal position by Pliny in AD 110 when that governor encountered a number of Christians in Pontus that were either denounced as such anonymously or were openly professing their religious belief. What mattered for Pliny was not what Christians did so much as whether they admitted publicly to being Christians, and apostasy brought immediate acquittal. At this time, what Christians did or did not believe was not particularly worrying, but instead it was their refusal to offer a gesture of honour to the gods and to conform to tradition.[338] The reason for Pliny's letter and his concern stemmed from his confusion as to how Christians ought to be dealt with. Trajan insisted that proper legal forms should be observed, as a charge of Christianity was a crime, and that the accused ought to be treated the same way as any criminal who was a Roman citizen.[339] (Those who were not citizens did not receive a trial, but were supposed to have been given the opportunity to renounce their Christianity). Therefore, Pliny was to conduct a trial when a proper charge was laid, hence he should not listen to anonymous accusations, nor was he to seek out Christians without proof that a crime had been committed, and if a charge was deemed credible, Pliny was to allow those who committed the crime to repent in court and prove their loyalty to Roman society by sacrificing.[340] The treatment of the Christians paralleled that of the followers of the cult of African Saturn, since in the latter case also, it appears that while sacrificing children was frowned upon, the practice only incurred suppression when it was performed in public. Trajan's ruling in response to Pliny's letter implied toleration for the Christians if they remained discreet and self-contained; however, since the main duty of every Christian was to spread the word of God, persecutions were inevitable.

The first deliberate, empire-wide persecution of the Christian Church was orchestrated by Valerian is the mid third century AD. Persecutions before this time were

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[335] Gough (1961), 40-41.

[336] For an excellent commentary on this letter, Book 10.96-97, please see A. N. Sherwin-White, *The Letters of Pliny: A Historical and Social Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 691-712.

[337] J. E. A. Crake, "Early Christians and Roman Law," *Phoenix* vol. 19, no. 1 (1965): 69-70.

[338] Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1986), 425.

[339] Wardman (1982), 129.

[340] Pliny, *Correspondence with Trajan from Bithynia (Epistles X)*, trans. Wynne Williams (Warminster : Aris & Phillips, 1990), 10. 96.

essentially a locally planned campaign or were instigated by Christians themselves, who as 'voluntary martyrs' had attacked the statues of gods, presented themselves for execution to a governor, or preached their faith in a synagogue.[341] The one exception to this general treatment of Christianity up to Valerian was the Decian edict on sacrifices in AD 249 which required that all inhabitants of the empire sacrifice to the state deities and hence obtain a notice verifying that they had performed this action. It is uncertain whether this edict was created specifically to seek out Christians (although this was probably one of its main purposes) since it required all to prove their participation in the sacrificial system and thus acceptance of Roman rule. The edict led to many executions for those who refused to sacrifice, especially Christians, and it led to great disputes among Christians because many had obeyed the order. Valerian's edicts on the other hand were aimed directly at the church, but still did not have the purpose of destroying it. In AD 257, his first edict ordered the arrest of distinguished Christians, demanded that they sacrifice or face imprisonment and/or exile, and Christian meetings and the use of cemeteries were banned in many places.[342] The second edict, a rescript, seems to have been issued in response to inquiries about what to do with Christians already in custody and ordered that bishops, priests, and deacons be executed, senators have their property confiscated unless they persist in being Christian, in which case the senators should be executed, and matrons were to have their property confiscated and be exiled.[343] While these edicts were clearly aimed at Christians, their main goal was to have Christians recognize the standing of the state deities, not destroy Christianity since those who sacrificed were let go. It should be noted, however, that each governor did not necessarily carry out Valerian's orders in the same manner, with the result that some Christians certainly suffered more than others. Valerian's management of the Christians was similar to that of Trajan, but the important difference was that Valerian sought out Christians, while Trajan did not and these edicts represent a movement towards the more terrible persecutions that occurred later in the third century which signified increasing problems within the empire. As was the situation with Jewish groups, the state was more likely to take action against troublesome peoples when there were other problems threatening Rome and successful action demonstrated the state's power and control.[344]

By the time of Diocletian's 'Great Persecution' in the early fourth century AD, the degree of imperial initiative for persecution was quite intense. Diocletian was particularly interested in establishing ancestral Roman virtues in the entire empire and this must partly have been connected with the emperor's aim of consolidating central authority after the chaos that had characterized much of the third century AD.[345] This desire, however, clearly played a role in attacks on Christians since paying close attention

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[341] G. E. M de Ste. Croix, "Why were the Early Christians Persecuted?", *Past and Present* 26 (1963): 21-22; MacMullen (1966), 156.

[342] David Potter, "Martyrdom as Spectacle", in *Theatre and Society in the Classical World*, ed. Ruth Scodel (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 58-59.

[343] Cyprian, *The Letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage* Volume IV; Letters 67-82, trans. G. W. Clarke (New York: Newman Press, 1989), 80. 1, 2.

[344] Wardman (1982), 129-130.

[345] For a discussion of the chaotic late third and early fourth century and its implications for Christians see Gough (1961), 51-52.

to who was and was not strictly attending Roman rites would have revealed many Christians. Diocletian's need to increase loyalty to himself and the Roman state led to severe actions against any new-fangled religions, which meant Christianity and particularly the Persian Manichaeism, the latter of which the state acted against by an empire wide edict in AD 297. The first loyalties tested were those of soldiers via sacrifice in AD 302, then in 303 Christian worship was declared illegal and all clergy were imprisoned and released only if they sacrificed; finally in 304 everyone living in the empire was ordered to sacrifice.[346] The long years of uncertainty ended for Christians in AD 313 when the two Augusti, Constantine and Licinius, issued the Edict of Milan which gave Christians full legal rights.

There is not a single conclusive answer as to why the Christians aroused so much hostility from Rome. The apparent rarity of serious conflicts between Christians and pagans suggests that many took the view that while the Christians maintained some ridiculous beliefs, they were harmless, and so serious action against them was not usually necessary. Christianity started to gain attention in the mid first century AD, but was generally regarded as a particularly annoying sect of Judaism. The connection to Judaism came from the fact that the Christians started as a tiny group of loyal members, many staying within the community of Jews and retaining their commitment to the temple and respecting Jewish Law. The expansion of Christianity took many decades and a progressive annual expansion of their numbers.[347] It was not until closer to the second century that Christianity became recognized as a group distinct from Judaism. Slow reactions to the new religion probably had something to do with the slow increase of Christians from AD 70-250 , most of whom must have been converted rather than born into the new faith, being pagan or Jewish by origin.[348] Since Christianity spread slowly, by the third century its larger number of followers along with their message and duty must have been more determined and hence more likely to gain the attention of officials. The increased visibility of Christianity was probably one determinate that led to more organized and resolute action on the part of Rome.[349] One reason Christianity became more noticeable was probably due to, as De Ste. Croix strongly maintains, "the prevalence of voluntary martyrdom...which contributed to the outbreak of persecution and tended to intensify it when already in being."[350] For example, the governor of Asia in AD 180, C. Arrius Antoninus, was faced with a throng of Christians who declared themselves as such without provocation and demanded that the governor do his duty and condemn them all to death. A few were executed, but this only incited the crowd more as each Christian tried to be the next one killed so that Antoninus told them that "...if you want to die, you have cliffs [to leap from] and ropes [to hang by]."[351] This concept of the 'rush to

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[346] Beard, North, Price (1998), 242.

[347] North (2000), 74.

[348] K. Hopkins, "Christian number and its implications", *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6.2 (1998): 185-226.

[349] North (2000), 74.

[350] De Ste. Croix (1963), 21.

[351] Tertullian, *The Select Works of Tertullian*, ed. F. A. March (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1876), *Ad Scapulam*, 5.

martyrdom' was presented by Tertullian as a constant danger to the Roman government.[352] The conversion of pagans was also perceived to mean that less people were placating the deities of the pantheon and thus maintaining the *pax deorum*. Christianity's total refusal to worship any god but their own caused Romans to believe that the goodwill of their deities was being alienated and therefore the Christians might be held responsible for disasters which overtook a community.
While the Jewish religious identity was incompatible with Roman religious practices, many Jews that tried to maintain their religious identity as well as attending pagan rituals were successful. All men were expected to observe the religious customs of their ancestors, which even Tacitus could admit the Jews did.[353] Christians, however, were seen as abandoning their ancestral religion, Judaism, and adhering to beliefs which caused them to be utterly incapable of respecting both their religious rites and those of Rome. This is proven by the charges laid against Christians, which were that they did not worship the gods and that they did not offer sacrifice to the emperors.[354] Christianity was so incompatible with Roman life that simply being Christian was considered a crime. As more Romans joined the church, a growing number of people from all stations of life were meeting in an organized group and this went against Roman social rules and directed loyalty away from Rome and to Christianity as whole.[355] When Christians faced trials before Roman officials the concern was, if they would not support the traditional pantheon (which upheld the emperor), how could they support the empire? At stake for Romans in authority was the whole web of social, political, and hierarchical assumptions that bound imperial society together. Sacrifices and other religious rituals were concerned with defining and establishing relationships of power, so that not sacrificing meant excluding oneself from the set of relationships between emperor, gods, elite, and people, effectively denying Rome.[356] Maintenance of the social order was seen by the Romans to be dependent on maintenance of this agreed set of symbolic social structures, which assigned a role to people at all levels.[357] The church, however, had developed their own hierarchy which included bishops and other officials and was very well organized by the fourth century AD, and which Decius reportedly feared more than a political rival.[358] Valerian and Diocletian certainly feared the power of those leading the church as their edicts specifically targeted such Christians. The tenets of Christianity were completely opposite to and were felt by many to threaten Roman beliefs and the Roman order which were taken by many as reason enough to persecute.

Had Roman religion and politics not been intertwined, Christianity would not have posed problems to the Roman authorities. It did, however, because Christians actively sought to convert people which meant rejecting Roman religion and thus denying

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[352] G. W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 2.
[353] Tacitus, *Histories*, 5. 5.
[354] Tertullian, *Apology*, trans. T. R. Glover (Loeb, 1931), 10. 1.
[355] De Ste. Croix (1963): 9-10, 19.
[356] S. R. F. Price, *Rituals of Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 15-16, 221-222, 247-248.
[357] Beard, North, Price (1998), 361.
[358] Cyprian, *Letters* Volume III; Letters 55-66, 55. 9, 1.

Roman authority. The Christians were not against praying for the emperor and the good of the empire to their god, but they could not recognize Rome's gods. Studying the relationship between Roman authorities and Christianity reveals that it is very difficult to make any generalized statement about the nature of that relationship. This problem is mainly due to the widely varying political, social, and economical situations that the empire encountered with time, the different attitudes of emperors concerning how to secure the empire, and the differing beliefs of Christians themselves.

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The point thus far has been to show that Roman authorities moved to neutralize religious forms that seemed to be a focus of opposition to Roman rule. In this way, the Roman Empire proved not to have been the tolerant place it is often described as being. Priesthood was an area of particular concern since, as was discussed in the first chapter, Roman priests were civic officials with strict limitations on their authority, but many of the native religions the Romans encountered had priesthoods that were based on rich and powerful temple institutions.[359] The religious organizations of Judaism and Christianity were no exceptions. For Judaism, arrangements such as transferring the management of the temple finances and restricting the capacity of the Jewish council, the Sanhedrin, were meant to bring Jews under the rule of Rome. Although such changes were made, the day to day temple organization was largely unaffected by Rome and Jews in other provinces were permitted to send money to the temple (until AD 66).[360] Such arrangements are what have perhaps caused the Romans to be characterized as tolerant; however it is precisely these types of arrangements that show that the Romans used religious toleration for their own gain in political control and therefore applying the term 'toleration' to the Romans' treatment of the Jews hardly resembles the definition of toleration today. Until the Jewish revolt of AD 66-70, the Roman authorities probably saw no need to alter the daily functioning of the temple because there was no specific threat that might be produced by such activities. The Romans had taken care of whatever threat they saw the religious organization of Judaism as posing and therefore most likely did not think operating a full scale persecution or major re-organization of the religion would be more beneficial. At certain times, the Romans do appear to be exhibiting what is today termed 'toleration', but to the Romans this would likely have been described as a smart political policy, especially since the concept of toleration is the idea of later periods of history and even if the concept did enter the minds of Romans, it probably did not receive serious thought by any Roman authorities.

Rome could be more tolerant to Judaism than to Christianity because Judaism was less dangerous. Since Christianity lacked a national basis, it could pursue a much more aggressive missionary campaign than Judaism. For example, Christianity's freedom from the legalistic matters of Judaism and circumcision gave it a much wider appeal and attracted converts on a larger scale.[361] Furthermore, the fact that Jews, as opposed to Christians, sacrificed to the emperor proved their loyalty or at least their willingness to be a part of Roman society. Attempts at controlling Christianity were utterly a failure due to

[359] Beard, North, Price (1998), 340.
[360] Beard, North, Price (1998), 341.
[361] Smallwood (1976), 542; Potter (1993), 54.

the nature of the religion and that of the persecutions. In Christianity Rome met a religious group that turned persecution into martyrdom and actually helped the religion to spread, yet no alternative way of dealing with the group was discovered until Constantine. A religion that turned away from the traditions of its ancestors, refused to compromise any of its tenets, and actively tried to turn Roman citizens away from their ancestral religion represented the most dangerous religious group Rome had ever encountered.

CONCLUSION

Describing the religious situation at Rome as open, inclusive, and tolerant is an oxymoron. If Roman polytheism was open and inclusive, then toleration could not have existed since to be tolerant of something requires a distain for the religion in question combined with a decision not to persecute. Therefore, in a closed system, toleration becomes an option, and this was what was found in Rome. The situation was not, however, so simple as to describe Rome as tolerant or not, which is why political and economical considerations need to be taken into account when assessing the treatment of foreign deities and rituals by Roman authorities. The nature of religion and politics in the Roman world made it such that what are now considered two very different realms were at that time inseparable. Casually looking back at a situation obtaining in the Roman world does not allow the full reasoning behind the actions of Roman authorities to be understood without considering both the political and religious sides of the problem (and admittedly others outside the scope of this paper). Previous examinations of Roman religion have likely been hindered by their inability to consider the relationship between politics and religion, due in part to the nature of their relationship in modern society, and have therefore led to incorrect conclusions that the Romans were a religiously tolerant people. Such scholarship was particularly produced in the 19th and early 20th centuries and of course later scholarship built upon it, so that it has only been somewhat recently that the flawed perception of the Roman world as being tolerant has started being corrected. Certainly the Romans permitted many deities to be worshipped within their areas of control, but this was a consequence of their expansion and deities and practices that did not go unnoticed had to undergo some kind of review before simply being admitted into the Roman world. As Garnsey has noted, "Roman-style polytheism was disposed to expand and absorb or at least neutralize other gods, not tolerate them."[362] The Jews are a special case rendering the description of the action of Romans against foreign religions as "toleration by default" closer to the truth than simply 'toleration'.[363]

The method with which the Roman world was governed involved compromise with necessity. Laws laid out in detail what a person must not do, however, if a law was broken without causing a disturbance, no reprimand was given. As has been shown, a similar *quieta non movere* attitude was taken when dealing with situations involving un-Roman religious groups.[364] When the Roman authorities felt that the peace of a city or their position of power was threatened enough, all forms of punishment and suppression might be used to regain control of the situation. Depending on how dire the situation was or how many times a particular group had disturbed the *pax Romana* in the past, the state determined the most effective way to solve the problem and dissuade it from happening again. Such determination can be seen each consecutive time the Romans had to deal with the Jews. In AD 66, the Jewish rebellion was determined to require severe suppression since the Jews threatened the Romans with arms and came together in an

[362] Garnsey (1984), 8.
[363] Garnsey (1984), 9, 25.
[364] Ramsay MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order: Treason, Unrest, and Alienation in the Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 156.

attempt to overthrow their ruler who had protected (to a degree) Jewish interests. The Roman responses to the events surrounding the Jewish communities in the first century AD did not differ essentially from the way in which Rome treated every group discussed in this paper: when law and order were seriously disturbed, expulsion and persecution were used as a means to suppress disorder.[365] Significantly, in nearly all of the situations discussed in this paper, it remained possible for the suppressed groups to continue practicing their customs under certain conditions. Even Christians managed to maintain their beliefs until the fourth century when theirs became the religion of the empire.

The truth seems to be that the Romans tolerated what seemed to them harmless and drew the line whenever there seemed to be a threat of possible harm. Often, they saw no great harm in many cults of their contemporary world where many individuals and cities worshipped gods and goddesses much like their own. However, when it happened that groups of people under Rome's control joined together on the basis of shared religious beliefs and hierarchies were formed, groups acquired their own power which even Roman priests did not enjoy and they became potentially threatening in politics. Each group examined in this paper received different treatment from Rome depending on other stresses endangering Roman political stability and the structure and practices of the group in question. One result of separate religious groups was the increased importance that was being placed on a person's beliefs, which had been scarcely considered important in the traditional context. The attention to individuals' beliefs also meant that conversion from one religion to another became a possibility for the first time and as a consequence the individual began to be identified as a member of a particular group rather than simply a citizen of Rome and their religious identity became the more important of the two.[366] Since the republic and empire essentially maintained the loyalty of their subjects by preserving the traditional religious rites of their inhabitants and by evaluating any foreign and/or new rites that caught the attention of the state, any religion which created strong group identities meant a transfer of loyalty and threatened the Roman order. When Roman authorities became aware of such groups, they either took action or did not, but whatever decision was made was a conscious, active one. To imply that the Romans were tolerant and welcomed nearly every religious rite and deity that they encountered is to deny the importance that religion played in Roman political power.

[365] Rutgers (1994), 69.

[366] J. A. North, *Roman Religion, Greece and Rome: New Surveys in the Classics No. 30* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 63, 66.

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