

The Religious Reforms of Augustus: Innovation & Opportunism

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Synopsis:

This dissertation will consider the alleged parlous circumstance of state cult and the religious fabric at Rome at the end of the Republic. It will analyse the religious policies and reforms of Augustus and seek to evaluate how, through a process of innovation and opportunism, the *Princeps* successfully appropriated the institutions and offices of the religious estate for the benefit of himself and his family.

Augustus states he restored 82 temples in his sixth consulship alone. Such claims imply a wholesale dereliction of the religious fabric in late Republican Rome, and give credence to the proposition, established from the 19th century, of a general decline in religious observance. Yet does the evidence support such a hypothesis? Ergo, it will be necessary to explore the condition of the *sacra publica* in the late Republic.

We shall seek to establish whether the purported revival of state cults under Augustus were in fact a restoration, or whether the Augustan interventions were essentially reformative, innovative and politically motivated. We shall evaluate how the power and status - so lauded in the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* - were made manifest in the religious sphere; how the *Princeps* modified the *sacra publica* to suit the new political realities, and how he appropriated state cults to promote his dynastic agenda. We shall examine Augustus' promotion of the abstract, and how such initiatives led to the veneration of the *genius* of the *Princeps* and the *genii* of the imperial family.

Some collegiate religious practices will be examined in order to assess the reach of the Augustan reforms e.g., the *Lares Compitales* and *Fratres Arvales*. Particular consideration will be given to the pivotal role of the *Ludi Saeculares* in consolidating the position of Augustus. For brevity, our enquiries will focus on the *sacra publica* at Rome only, and this dissertation will not consider magic or imported cults (except where the same were incorporated into state cult), nor the detailed impact of philosophy.

Chapter I

The Sacra Publica and the Pax Deorum

“The respect in which the Roman constitution is most markedly superior is in their behaviour towards the gods. For nothing could exceed the extent to which this aspect both of their private lives and of their public occasions is dramatised and elaborated. Many would find this astonishing..... it seems clear that all this has been done for the sake of the common people.”

(Polybius – *The Histories*)¹

Here Polybius, a member of the Scipionic Circle, observes the remarkable (for him) religious observance that was so characteristic of Roman state religion (*sacra publica*). Despite the apparent cynicism and inference of artifice, and the unwitting anticipation of Karl Marx², Polybius nevertheless bears witness to the demonstration of public ‘*pietas*’ that was such a singular aspect of the Romans relations with their gods. The axiom runs, that Roman power is due to Roman *pietas*, and that *pietas* must be openly exhibited to affirm the *Pax Deorum* that exists between the Romans and their gods. The mechanism for maintaining the *Pax Deorum* was the *ius divinum*, defined by Warde Fowler as:

*“.. laying down the rules for the maintenance of right relations between the citizens and their deities; as ordaining what things are to be done or avoided in order to keep up a continual pax, or quasi-legal covenant, between these two parties.”*³

Varro⁴ too, confirms the contractual nature of the *Pax Deorum*, whereby the whole system was predicated on the concept of a mutually beneficial agreement between men and gods; the gods had to be honoured, and in some instances placated, to ensure

¹ VI. 56.6ff.

² “*Die Religion .. ist das Opium des Volkes*”. Marx. 1843, Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie).

³ *The Religious Experience of the Roman People from the Earliest Times to the Age of Augustus*. p.187.

⁴ *Ant. Div*, via Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*. Ch. vi.

the continued well-being of the Roman state. This is not to presuppose any equality of bargaining power between the human and the divine, the Romans were the petitioners and were dickering with the gods with the aim of establishing a *quid pro quo*. Some vows offered were more generic than others, e.g., the *vota pro salute rei publicae*,⁵ was a broad appeal to the gods for the safety of the state by the new consuls on their first day in office. Other solicitations, and in particular the *vota publica*, were more specific and supplicatory in nature, e.g., the *votum* offered by a departing general holding *imperium* before deploying on state service. Beard, North & Price⁶, have reasoned that any ensuing triumph, which culminated with a dedication of spoils to the Capitoline triad, was in fulfilment of such *vota publica*. Further examples of *vota publica* were the petitions offered in time of war⁷ or pestilence⁸.

Whatever the subject matter of the particular entreaty, all Roman state religious practices, denominated as the *sacra publica*⁹, were communal and conducted for the benefit of the people as a whole. Certainly, there were no pretensions to individual salvation or redemption, only ever a collective *salus* whereby the needs of the individual were subsumed into the wider petitions of the populace. Even the *sacra privata* were essentially communal, whether that be the home and family, e.g., the *Lares*, or fraternal, e.g., the solidarity or guild. For the Romans, any individual yearnings would have to be satisfied through philosophy, through Hellenistic or oriental mystery cults, or even magic. The key tenet was that the gods existed to help the state and not the individual: certainly not to make such individuals morally better.

⁵ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, 21.63.

⁶ *Religions of Rome*, 2004, pages.15, 44-45.

⁷ Livy, 5.21, 42.28.

⁸ *ibid.*, 40.37, 41.21.

⁹ As defined by Festus, *De verborum significatione*, 284L.

This is not to say that the Romans conceived of their gods as granting moral licence, the number of temples dedicated to the moral virtues would imply a divine interest in moral behaviour¹⁰, but simply that the Roman gods did not define or impose a moral code¹¹.

It was this absence of any personal connection with the divine, that led an entire body of scholars in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to propose what soon became the prevailing orthodoxy; namely, that Roman religion was entirely ritualistic with no requirement for belief; that essentially, the *sacra publica* was non-religious and hollow. Such views, and specifically those of an Anglo-German Protestant corps, as influenced by Hegel, have largely been marginalised today on the basis that such interpretations, by viewing the *sacra publica* through the prism of Judeo-Christian thought, seek to deny the ‘otherness’ of Roman religious practices. This view that Roman religion must needs be viewed as ‘other’ formed the premiss of John Scheid’s revisionist text, *The Gods, the State, and the Individual*¹², i.e., “that when viewed in the light of secular history as opposed to Christian theology, Roman religion emerges as a legitimate phenomenon in which rituals, both public and private, enforced a sense of communal, civic, and state identity”¹³. Scheid in his preface, has said that those who seek to find the ‘truly sacred essence of Christianity’, are denying the right of otherness which so marks Roman state religious practices. He summarises:

¹⁰ Exempli gratia, Liv. XL. 34.4 (*Pietas*, 181 BC); Strab, *Geog*, VIII. 381 (*Felicitas*, 151 BC), (*Concordia*, 367 BC); Cic. *De Nat. Deor*, ii.61 (*Fides*, ca. 250 BC).

¹¹ Throughout *De Natura Deorum*, Cicero makes clear there is no connection between the *sacra publica* and morality. The nearest the Romans would get to Yahweh’s Ten Commandments would be the provisions of the XII Tables of 449 BC.

¹² *The Gods, the State, and the Individual: Reflections on Civic Religion in Rome*, 2016.

¹³ Jean-Jaques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, ch.8. bk. 4, 1762, claims civil religion is a “*form of cement, helping to unify the state by providing it with sacred authority*”.

“.. in the case of ancient Rome, the use of deconstructionist theories, which place emotions and beliefs at the very centre of religious practices, are groundless.¹⁴”

The communal nature of the *sacra publica* precluded any form of transcendence or, and ironically, ‘communion’ with the divine. Cicero¹⁵ refers to the individual as having a ‘*constitutio religionum*’ – a system of religious duties – but there is no indication that these duties need be predicated on belief. There was no notion or expectation of ‘salvation’. The divine contract was concerned with the practical and the material, never the moral: Roman state religion was a religion of the physical not the metaphysical.

Where the 19th century critics are unquestionably correct, is in their characterisation of the *sacra publica* as ritualistic and legalistic. It was imperative that the prayers, or more accurately the petitions to the gods, be precise in every detail, and ‘*religio*’ simply meant scrupulously adhering to the prescribed formulae lest the petitions be ‘struck out’; even the smallest error would require a repetition of the entire ritual. Any neglect would often only be noted retrospectively, usually following a manifestation of *ira deorum*; such phenomena itself confirming that meticulous observation was a requirement of right relations with the gods¹⁶. Thus, particularly on state occasions when it was not practical to re-perform the rite, and as a contingency, the pragmatic Romans would offer an expiatory sacrifice the previous day in the hope of atoning for any error or omission the next day. The importance of this strict adherence to both ritual and litany is attested by Pliny:

¹⁴ *The Gods, the State, and the Individual: Reflections on Civic Religion in Rome*, 139-142. 2016.

¹⁵ *De Leg*, 10.23.

¹⁶ Liv. V.17 - on *vitium*.

“It apparently does no good to offer a sacrifice or to consult the gods with due ceremony unless you also speak words of prayer. In addition, some words are appropriate for seeking favourable omens, others for warding off evil, and still others for securing help.”

(Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*¹⁷)

Further, the intricacies of the rites were compounded by the number of gods themselves. Varro¹⁸, by attempting to identify a divinity for every conceivable activity, occasioned Augustine to observe that the plethora of Roman gods, each having a specific and limited remit, was confusing¹⁹. The epigraphic evidence would tend to support the Church father’s view; for example, the Agnone Tablet²⁰ cites some seventeen cereal deities on one side alone. A further complication was that each god had a variety of names and might not respond if incorrectly addressed. Again, the pragmatic Romans were aware of the need for contingencies, so Catullus in a hymn to Diana, ends with the saving clause:

*“.. sis quocumque tibi placet sancta nomine,”*²¹

In practice, the *sacra publica* represented a logical extension of the domestic and fraternal devotions that the Romans expressed at a family or collegiate level. Their religion permeated every stratum of society and enabled all to establish their place in a collective affirmation of the *pax deorum*. Of course, the fact that state religious observances were collective, also meant that they were political.

¹⁷ 28.2(3).10,11.

¹⁸ Aug. *De Civ. Dei*, vi. 3-4.

¹⁹ *ibid.* vi. 9, and more generally, iv. 8.

²⁰ ca. 200 BC, from Samnium (in Oscan). B.M. 1873, 0820.149.

²¹ XXXIV, *Carmen Dianae*, 21-22.

Chapter II

Political Priests: The Civic Compromise

Given the rigorous requirements of the *sacra publica*, the need for skilled intermediaries was evident if the *pax deorum* was to be maintained. The state appointed agents were the *pontifices*, who from the days of Numa²² had been drawn from the societal elite and specifically from the *patres* of the senate. Their conferred religious functions would have been a logical extension of the remit of the *paterfamilias*, with the now additional state sanctioned authority as *pontifices*, to bridge the gap between the human and the divine²³. Any political aspect to this early role is unclear, but with the notable exception of the *rex sacrorum* who was excluded from political life for much of the Republic²⁴, it is likely that the various *pontifices* and *flamines* had a political dimension to their priesthoods from the outset²⁵. Certainly, by ‘The Struggle of the Orders’²⁶ and the subsequent *lex Ogulnia* of 300 BC, political priests were a reality, with state religion and state interests, meaning the interests of the elite, inextricably interwoven. This *de facto* merging of the secular with the divine is acknowledged by Cicero:

“Among the many things, gentlemen of the pontifical college, that our ancestors created and established under divine inspiration, nothing is more renowned than their decision to entrust the worship of the gods and the highest interests of the state to the same men – so that the most eminent and illustrious citizens might ensure the maintenance of religion by the proper administration of the state, and the maintenance of the state by the prudent interpretation of religion.”²⁷

²² Liv. I. 20.7; Plutarch, *Romulus*, II.1-4.

²³ *Pontifex* = Bridge Builder.

²⁴ Beard, North & Price, *Religions of Rome*, 2004, p 58-9.

²⁵ *ibid*, p.134 - consider this likely. This would seem a reasonable conjecture given that the *pontifices* were first *patres*.

²⁶ Liv. X. 6.1-9.2.

²⁷ Cic. *De Domo Sua*, 1.1.

By the time of Cicero's address, the religious colleges at Rome had long established and defined areas of expertise, with varying degrees of political influence²⁸ but, and despite the conflation of Cicero, the religious and the secular were still nominally separate, with the senate remaining the ultimate forum for political and religious matters. Largely any interaction between the secular and the divine remained unacknowledged constitutionally though one exception was the calendar, where the *pontifices* exercised a jurisdiction with overt political consequences, and where in addition to their role in intercalation, the *pontifices*:

“.. *determined the character of individual days – whether the courts could sit, whether the senate or the comitia could meet. The everyday organisation of public time was pontifical business.*”²⁹

Consequently, by declaring particular days *dies nefastus* or *dies comitiales*, the *pontifices* could manipulate political business and significantly affect public debate.

Prior to the Principate, the allocation of the religious offices, principally through co-option, was aimed at maintaining a balance and to ensure that no one faction, family or clan was dominant. The composition of the various religious fraternities³⁰, whether they be *pontifices*, *augurs* or *flamines*, reflected the diversity of the political landscape, with overall control by any one cohort being rendered unattainable. The colleges usually had no more than one representative of any family or clan, and it was unusual for any individual to hold more than one pontificate, flamine or augurate; the objective was always to widely disseminate control over religious matters throughout the elite families, and this considered tactic occasioned intense

²⁸ *rf*, Appendix 1: Priests/Ritual Officials.

²⁹ Beard, North & Price, 2004. p. 25.

³⁰ With the notable exception of the *Vestālēs*, women were excluded from public religious life.

competition for religious office³¹. Just why such positions were so avidly sought, given that the real decision-making power lay with the senate, who only took the views of the religious colleges under advisement³², must be an indication of the *de facto* benefit; namely, that religious office enabled the holder to build social capital which in turn brought increased political *auctoritas* and enhanced individual *dignitas*.

It is this intersection between the secular/political and the religious, with the apparent contradictions that entails, that has been characterised by recent scholars as the ‘civic compromise’. This term was first coined by Richard Gordon in 1990³³ and further refined by him in 2003³⁴; the essential premiss being that the Roman elite themselves acknowledged:

“.. *the lack of clear distinction between magistracy and priesthood.*”

that their belief in their entitlements stemmed from:

“.. *the absorption by the aristocracy of the king’s religious offices and functions.*”³⁵.

This characterisation of the ‘civic compromise’ as a coupling of the religious with the secular, and of the subjugation of the former to the latter, is not without its critics.

Both Scheid³⁶ and Bendlin³⁷ have challenged what they believe is the promotion of a new orthodoxy of dualism; Bendlin contends:

³¹ Although L. Cornelius Sulla increased the number of religious offices (82-80 BC), and repealed the *lex Domitia de Sacerdotiis* of 104 BC, this does not seem to have lessened the competition for office.

³² Cic. *Ad. Att.* 4.2.

³³ *Religion in the Roman Empire: The Civic Compromise and its Limits*, 1990. 233-55.

³⁴ *Roman Religion: From Republic to Principate: Priesthood, Religion and Ideology*, 2003.

³⁵ *ibid*, p.16.

³⁶ *supra*, fn. 12.

³⁷ *Looking Beyond the Civic Compromise: Religious Pluralism in Late Republican Rome. Religion in Archaic and Republican Rome and Italy*, 2000.

*“I argue that neither was there a subordination of religious life in the city of Rome to the civic domain (the ‘civic compromise’) nor were the sacra publica of Rome’s civic religion simply an elite creation which happened to be employed almost exclusively by and on behalf of the members of that very elite.”*³⁸

Rather, he contends that the late Roman republic was a time of religious pluralism, concluding:

*“.. that the doctrine inherent in the ‘civic compromise’ is far from being the established view based on evidence.”*³⁹

It is difficult to reconcile the opposing propositions of these modern commentators and establish any actuality, though what would seem inarguable is that the political value of a pontificate or augurate was tacitly acknowledged by the elite. For example, the sources are unambiguous that the office of *Pontifex Maximus*, so coveted by Caesar, Lepidus, and later Augustus, was clearly political, and similarly that of *augur* with their application of the *ius augurale*, provided for considerable subjective interpretation⁴⁰ by the individual office holder. The evidence may reasonably allow the conclusion that religious office was not autonomous and did not operate independently of civic life, the degree of inter-dependence was significant and the *sacra publica* did not exist unaffected by the political issues of the day.

³⁸ *ibid*, p. 131.

³⁹ *ibid*.

⁴⁰ Linderski, *The Augural Law*, 1986.

Chapter III

The 'Decline' of State Religion in the Late Republic

*“delicta maiorum immeritus lues,
Romane, donec templa refeceris,
aedesque labentes deorum et
foeda nigro simulacra fumo,
dis te minorem quod geris, imperas;
hinc omne principium; huc refer exitum,
di multa neglecti dederunt
Hesperiae mala luctuosae.”*

(Horace, *Odes*)⁴¹

Here Horace expresses the view that the sins of the fathers are being visited on the generation of the Principate, and these sentiments were faithfully echoed by a whole generation of writers. Livy, Virgil, Varro, Nigidius Figulus and Cicero, all subscribe to the consensus that the late Republic was a period of religious decline; that neglect or indifference on the part of the Romans (*neglegentia civium*⁴²) had led to a breakdown of the *pax deorum* which could only be restored by a return to the traditional religious observances of the past. The sources were clearly influenced by their experiences in the civil wars as well as, in the case of Horace, Virgil and Livy, by the need to validate the ‘restoration’ of Augustus. It is the credence given to this propaganda of revival and restoration, principally by the poets, that led many scholars of the 19th and 20th centuries to conclude that the *sacra publica* had declined to a level where cult and ritual were reduced to mechanisms for the convenience of political operators. Advocates of this ‘decline school’ such as Wissowa⁴³, Taylor⁴⁴,

⁴¹ *Odes*. III. 6.1-8.

⁴² Varro: Aug., *De Civ. Dei*, VI, 2.

⁴³ Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Romer*, 1902.

⁴⁴ *Class. Phil.* 37: 421-4, 1942.

Szemler⁴⁵, Bailey⁴⁶ and Latte⁴⁷, together with their chief advocate, Warde Fowler⁴⁸, sought to establish an orthodoxy (challenged of late, i.e., Scheid, Bendlin, *et alia*) whereby they have argued that the priesthoods had become nothing more than political clubs whose value lay in their ability to interfere in political matters. But such assertions are not new and nor are they specific to the late Republic, they may be attested at any time since the regal period. Certainly, both Livy⁴⁹ and Polybius⁵⁰, believed that the state religion had been established by Numa to keep the people in order; to occupy idle minds with, in times of peace, fear of the gods acting as a substitute for fear of the enemy. If the ancient sources are correct, the *sacra publica* was specifically created as an artefact of the state and had always been political.

The exponents of religious decline would have us believe that the fifty years or so to Actium (31BC), mark an era of particular religious chaos and decay. Warde Fowler states:

*“I have repeatedly spoken of that State religion as hypnotised or paralysed, meaning that the belief in the efficacy of the old cults had passed away..... and that outward practice of religion had been allowed to decay.”*⁵¹

According to the decline doctrine, the gods were abandoned, auspices and divination were shamelessly manipulated for political purposes; prodigies were neither announced nor recorded⁵²; the calendar was neglected by the *pontifices* and fell into

⁴⁵ *The Priests of the Roman Republic*, 1972.

⁴⁶ *Phases in the Religion of Ancient Rome*, 1932: ‘paralysed vitality’ of state religion (168), populace ‘ceased to take part or even to attend or regard the festivals, then religion died’ (173).

⁴⁷ *Der Verfall der römischen Religion*, 1960: ‘the fossilised shell of religion rather than the living organism’ (287).

⁴⁸ *The Religious Experience of the Roman People*, 1911.

⁴⁹ Liv. I, 19.15.

⁵⁰ *supra*, fn.1.

⁵¹ *supra*, fn. 48, 429.

⁵² Admittedly, attested by Livy, XLIII, 13.I.

arrears; temples deteriorated and were not repaired; religious offices remained vacant, and sanctuaries were robbed for avarice or to fund war. While there is some small element of truth to this dire portrayal of the *sacra publica* in the late Republic, may not that situation be plausibly attributed to the upheavals of the civil wars and their political consequences, rather than any general lack of *pietas* or any pronounced growth in rationalism or scepticism?

A brief consideration of a number of causes célèbres, and assertions of neglect of the religious offices and fabric as adduced by the advocates for religious decline, may prove instructive in establishing the actual state of the *sacra publica* in the late Republic.

Bibulus:⁵³ *de caelo spectare:*

Caesar's consulship of 59 BC introduced a controversial programme of legislation, including a land bill proposing a distribution of the *ager publicus* in favour of Pompey's veteran soldiers. Opposition amongst the *boni* to the proposed *lex* was implacable, and despairing of senatorial approval, Caesar was forced to place the matter before the *Comitia Centuriata*. M. Calpurnius Bibulus, a long-standing political opponent of Caesar and his junior partner in the consulship, was determined that the legislation would not pass. Unable to marshal sufficient support in the senate, Bibulus resorted to religious tactics. He first attempted to declare all days on which the Assembly met as *feriae* and as a consequence of this, according to Suetonius⁵⁴, his *fasces* were broken and he was violently driven from the Forum. Thereupon, Bibulus announced that for the remaining eight months of his term as Consul, he would

⁵³ M. Calpurnius Bibulus, *cos*, 59 BC.

⁵⁴ *Div. Iul.*, 20.

remain at home *de caelo spectare*, seeking divine signs to prevent the passage of the legislation. The process known as *obnuntiatio* had been introduced by the *leges Aelia et Fufia* sometime around 150 BC⁵⁵, and allowed the gods the opportunity to manifest their displeasure with respect to laws that were contrary to the interests of the state. Despite Bibulus regularly attesting to unfavourable omens, Caesar's law was passed⁵⁶. The question was, could the legislation be valid? It seems evident from the precedent case of Metellus and Milo⁵⁷ and from the reforms to *obnuntiatio* by Clodius in 58 BC, that the party claiming to have seen omens, or even to be observing the heavens for signs, had to announce this in person to the relevant assembly or presiding magistrate. This Bibulus did not do, and so his claim that he, being *de caelo spectare*, rendered all Caesar's laws invalid for the year of their joint consulship, is itself based upon a failure to observe the proper religious procedure. Caesar's legislative programme was never annulled, either because Bibulus' religious objections were not valid, or because - and more likely - they were simply ignored in favour of the political exigencies.

It is accepted that the Bibulus episode constitutes one clear example wherein the religious conventions were suborned to political expediency, but that is as far as the incident would permit us to go. The case is not necessarily symptomatic of a wider religious malaise, it is merely illustrative of political pragmatism and cynicism at a time of collapse of the political institutions; the *pax deorum* had not broken down, the political consensus had.

⁵⁵ Cic. *Piso*. 10; mentions the law as being '*centum prope annos*' (58 BC).

⁵⁶ Cic., *Ad Att.* II.16.2; 19.2.

⁵⁷ *ibid* IV.3.4.

The *Bona Dea* Scandal:

In 61 BC the senate established a special court to try a member of the Claudian *gens* on charges of sacrilege. The accused, Publius Clodius Pulcher, is portrayed in the sources as a dangerous rabble-rouser who cultivated the masses for his own political ends and who engaged in incest with his sisters⁵⁸; worse still from Cicero's perspective, he had been an associate of Catiline⁵⁹. Clodius was charged with having violated the rites of the *Bona Dea*, a fertility goddess whose orphic style worship was restricted to women. Disguised as a female musician, Clodius had sneaked into the house of the *Pontifex Maximus*, Caesar at the time, and attempted to observe the secret rites. The ensuing scandal engendered widespread horror, not least because the sacrilege involved the vestal cult, which was at the very heart of Roman religious tradition. The *Bona Dea* ritual had to be repeated and the appropriate expiatory sacrifices made. The Senate, acting on the advice of the *pontifices* and ostensibly protesting concern for the integrity of the *pax deorum*, ordered a trial.

The subsequent arraignment of Clodius represents a master class in political opportunism, and reveals the inextricable link between the religious and the political as well as the cynical subjugation of the former to the latter. Clodius was seen as a demagogue in the mode of the Gracchi and Saturninus, and as such, represented a threat to the senatorial elite⁶⁰. The senate recognised, that given his support among the superstitious masses, a successful conviction on a charge of sacrilege could prove extremely damaging to Clodius' incipient political career, and that his transvestite jape presented an opportunity to crush an opponent.

⁵⁸ Cic. *Milo*, 73; Plut: *Luc*, 38.1.

⁵⁹ Cic. *Har Resp*, 4, iii.

⁶⁰ The *Leges Clodiae* of 58 BC justified such fears.

Plutarch informs us, that the “*people arrayed themselves in defence of Clodius*”⁶¹ with respect to a trial that was as political as it was religious. The astute Caesar did not implicate Clodius, merely making a quip about his consequential divorce of Pompeia Sulla⁶². Conversely, Cicero by demolishing Clodius’ alibi, made a lifelong political enemy⁶³. The jurors, who were “*terror-stricken*”⁶⁴ by the mob, gave written judgments which were illegible, and the resultant acquittal of Clodius on such a serious charge is again illustrative of the triumph of political expediency (and/or bribery⁶⁵) over religious piety. What is noteworthy, is that although Cicero refers to the “*atrocious licentiousness*” and “*ill-omened wickedness*”⁶⁶ of Clodius, and states of the sacrilege:

“...that evil would certainly break out some day or other to the destruction of the state, if it were allowed to remain unpunished.”⁶⁷

...he views such consequences in purely secular terms, i.e., as danger to the state, and this is despite republican history being littered with examples of divine retribution following sacrilegious acts⁶⁸. It seems Cicero’s fears were not for the integrity of the *pax deorum* or the *pietas* of the people; similarly, Beard, North and Price have contended that we should not see the acquittal of Clodius as:

“...widespread acceptance of behaviour that appeared to flout traditional, religious rules.”⁶⁹

⁶¹ Plut. *Parallel Lives. Caesar*, 10.7.

⁶² *ibid*, 10.9: ‘*Quia suam uxorem etiam suspiciore vacare vellet*’.

⁶³ Clodius introduced retroactive legislation during his tribunate to banish Cicero (58 BC).

⁶⁴ Plut. *Caes*, 10.7.

⁶⁵ Cic. *Ad. Att.* 1.16, 3-6; 10; *Har Resp.* 37.

⁶⁶ Cic. *Har Resp* ,4, iii.

⁶⁷ *ibid*.

⁶⁸ e.g., Suet. *Tib*, II: Claudius Pulcher, Battle of Drepana, 249 BC (sacred chickens).

⁶⁹ *Religions of Rome*, 2004. p 130.

Those authorities who cite the *Bona Dea* incident as axiomatic of a wider religious decline are overlooking the unique position and personality of Clodius⁷⁰, are ignoring earlier attested incidences of irreverence and are being somewhat disingenuous in failing to acknowledge the overriding political agenda so evident at the time. The trial of Clodius provided the arena for a part generational, but mainly political conflict, it was not about stemming a perceived wider irreligiosity by example.

Temples & Shrines: The Religious Fabric of Rome:

The decline hypothesis, acknowledging that Roman religion was a religion of place as well as ritual, advanced as one of their principal tenets for a wider religious malaise, the apparent neglect of religious buildings in the late Republic; their submission was that this was symptomatic of a more general lack of *pietas*. Following the established decline orthodoxy, Karl Galinsky has stated that:

“.. the sight of sacred buildings...could function as an inducement to moral behaviour”.

and that

“.. buildings devoted to the gods can only enhance that behaviour. Their dilapidation has the opposite effect.”⁷¹

Galinsky draws parallels with Christianity, equating morality with *pietas*. As we have noted above, religious practices at Rome, and in particular the *sacra publica*, were not concerned with moral elevation.

⁷⁰ The *gens Claudii*, particularly the patrician branch, were notoriously unstable, e.g., Suet. *Tib.* 1-3.

⁷¹ *Augustan Culture*, 1998, 289.

Admittedly, Augustus' claim to have restored eighty-two temples during his sixth consulship⁷² would indicate the wholesale dereliction of the religious fabric and so seemingly corroborate the case for decline, and *prima facie* this inference is tenable, not least because Livy, who habitually records the foundation and repair of religious buildings, is regrettably nonextant for the period in question.⁷³ However, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, and it is clear that there are few examples in the extant sources, other than very general references, to damage or neglect of existing religious buildings. Where such damage and destruction are recorded, it is usually attributed to meteorological phenomena – arguably itself a manifestation of the *ira deorum* - or accident, rather than conscious neglect, e.g., the destruction of the Temple of the Nymphs in the Clodian riots of 57 BC⁷⁴ is specifically attributed to accident. Indolence also played a part: the long delay in the restoration of the temple of *Jupiter Optimus Maximus*, some twenty-one years, may readily be attributed to laziness and possibly embezzlement on the part of Q. Lutatius Catulus⁷⁵. In fact, far from being a time of spiralling decline, analysis of the evidence would indicate that the late Republic was actually a period of considerable building activity and restoration.

Beard, North and Price⁷⁶ have concluded after a careful search of both “*later writers*” and the “*surviving evidence of archaeology*”, that there is evidence of:

“.. *regular founding of new temples and the continued maintenance of the old through the last years of the Republic.*”

⁷² *Res. Gest.* 20.4.

⁷³ Livy ceases ca.,167 BC.

⁷⁴ *Cic. Pro. Milo.* 73.

⁷⁵ *Suet. Div. Iul.*, 15.

⁷⁶ *Religions of Rome*, 122.

The trio attribute several new foundations to Pompeius Magnus, most notably the vast temple-theatre complex of Venus Victrix on the Campus Martius. It was this vanity project which later Christian polemic would argue sought to lend respectability to the otherwise frivolous:

“So, when Pompey the Great, a man who was surpassed only by his theatre in greatness, had erected that citadel of all vile practices, he was afraid that some day the censors would condemn his memory. He therefore built on top of it a shrine of Venus, and when he summoned the people by edict to its dedication, he termed it not a theatre, but a temple of Venus, 'under which,' he said, 'we have put tiers of seats for viewing the shows.’”

(Tertullian. *De Spectaculis*, 10, 5-7.)

In fact, “*the stern Tertullian*”⁷⁷ misses the point entirely; the gods had long been associated with such undertakings, and Pompey was simply following the antecedents.

Caesar, once he had the financial means, also demonstrated notable consideration for the gods, most poignantly to those he claimed as his own ancestors. The whole of Caesar’s new forum was centred on the temple of Venus Genetrix, from which deity he conspicuously claimed descent⁷⁸. Further, Suetonius informs us that he commissioned:

*“...a temple of Mars, the biggest in the world, to build which he would have had to fill up and pave the lake where the naval sham-fight had been staged;”*⁷⁹

Cicero too, boasts of his own refurbishment of the temple of Tellus, and that this was a matter for family pride is evident from his letter to his brother Quintus:

*“.. these matters are actively being carried out. At the temple of Tellus I have even got your statue placed.”*⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Gibbon, *Dec & Fall*, XV, iv. 1776.

⁷⁸ Suet. *Div. Iul.* 6.

⁷⁹ *ibid*, 44.

⁸⁰ Cic. *Ad Q. Frat.* III.1.14.

These projects of Pompey, Caesar and Cicero, all exemplars of *primus inter pares*, are far from unique and are representative of similar instances of foundation or repair by their peers⁸¹. Other, non-literary, indications for the ongoing maintenance of the religious fabric at Rome are to be found in the archaeological record. To take just one example, the third century BC Temple A in the Largo Argentina complex, probably a temple to Juturna, shows evidence of extensive refurbishment in the mid 50's BC⁸².

Based on these few examples alone, it is evident that to contend that the late Republic witnessed a period of extensive dilapidation of the religious fabric, is something of an exaggeration. Any identified instances of neglect or destruction may reasonably be attributed to the general state of *tumultus* that ensued at Rome as a result of the wider political collapse; no instance can be legitimately adduced as evidence for a decline in *pietas* or any wholesale rejection of the *sacra publica*. On the contrary, it is evident that the Roman elite of the late Republic continued to engage in the tradition of associating themselves with divine or ancestral structures, and that a considerable amount of money, time and effort went into their endeavours. Insofar as deterioration of the religious fabric is fundamental to the case for religious decline – the case remains unproven.

The *flamen Dialis*:

The proponents of decline have cited the vacancy in the office of the *flamen Dialis*, the most senior of the fifteen *flamines*, as being something of a *fait accompli* to establish their claims for religious decay in the late Republic. This flamate of Jupiter had been vacant since the death of L. Cornelius Merula in 87 BC. Cinna and Marius,

⁸¹ *rf*: Appendix 2.

⁸² Coarelli, F. *L'Area sacra di Largo Argentina*, 1981.

possibly to preclude him having a political or military career, had designated the young Caesar as the new *flamen Dialis*, but it seems he was never formally consecrated to the priesthood⁸³. Sulla revoked all Marius' acts and appointments including, in late 82 or early 81 BC, Caesar's flamine⁸⁴, and the position then remained vacant until Augustus appointed Servius Maluginensis in 11 BC.

Beard, North and Price, have speculated that Caesar must have been '*privately relieved*'⁸⁵ given that the appointment was so very restrictive. A whole raft of taboos were associated with the *flamen Dialis*⁸⁶ who was *Jovi adsiduum sacerdotem*, including that he could not be absent from Rome for a single night; he may not touch a horse or anything made of iron; he was unable to swear an oath (Jupiter was the god of oaths); unable to strip naked in public or be seen without his proper headdress (*apex*); prohibited from touching flour or leavened bread, beans or raw flesh; barred from seeing, or touching, a dead body; most importantly, he was forbidden to seek any kind of civil magistracy⁸⁷. In the late Republic such shibboleths would have rendered the office singularly unappealing.

The question is why Caesar was not replaced in 81 BC or subsequently? The *flamen Dialis* was a lifelong flamine and given that Caesar had been designated for though not inaugurated into the office, he may *ab initio* contractually already have been the property of *Jupiter Optimus Maximus*. Given the scrupulous adherence to the forms of the *sacra publica*, to appoint a replacement while Caesar lived may incur *ira deorum*.

This hypothesis would not account for the office remaining vacant after Caesar's

⁸³ The sources are ambiguous, cf: Suet. *Caes*, 1.2.; Vellius, 2.43.1.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Religions of Rome*, 131.

⁸⁶ Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Attica*, X,15, 1-25.

⁸⁷ Plut. *Quaestiones Romanae*, 43. 50. 109.

assassination, but for the period 44 BC to 11 BC – with the appointment of Servius Maluginensis – the continued vacancy may be attributable to the fact that Augustus did not become *Pontifex Maximus* until the death of Lepidus in 12 BC. What is clear from the sources, is that the vacancy in the office caused “*no detriment to the rites*” and that “*the ceremonies continued without interruption*”⁸⁸. The *flamines* were of a collegiate structure, and so the rituals required of the *flamen Dialis* were undertaken by the *flamen Martialis*, *flamen Quirinalis* or the *flamines minores*, or even through the ‘assistants’ to the praetors and aediles⁸⁹.

We may reasonably conclude from the aforementioned examples, that those who have argued for neglect of the religious fabric and offices in the late Republic, may well be misrepresenting the situation. Whilst we do witness a degree of disorder in the *pax deorum* in this period, it is far less than in the society as a whole. Certainly, there is no evidence of widespread abandonment of the gods or neglect of their terrestrial dwellings or the offices of their intermediaries, and it would be specious to conclude that the increased political value of religious appointments in the late Republic was paralleled in a lack of religious observation. As we have demonstrated in chapter II, Roman state religion expressed the ideology of the elite, not least with respect to the conscious fragmentation of power both secular and religious. Once the Republican system had become sufficiently eroded to allow for unbounded personal ambition, what we witness is not the decline of the religious institutions and beliefs that had been central to the Roman psyche for centuries, but rather the collapse of the system upon which they were predicated.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Tac. *Ann.*, III, 58.

⁸⁹ *Dio Cassius*, LIV.36 (although, ‘*some mistakes and confusion*’).

⁹⁰ Shotter, D. *The Fall of the Roman Republic*, 2005. Provides an incisive analysis of the causes for the collapse.

Chapter IV

Augustus and Religious Reformation

Traditionally, the Romans sought both a secular and a religious explanation for disaster. For example, Livy⁹¹, when recording the defeat of G. Flaminius at Lake Trasimene in 217 BC, states that the senate authorised the consultation of the Sibylline books, with a subsequential programme of sacrifice to appease the gods, and at the same time, adopted ‘Fabian’ tactics which ultimately resulted in the defeat of Hannibal (it is noteworthy, that these two courses of remedial actions appear interdependent). And any perusal of the writings of Horace and Ovid will conclude that the successive crises of the late Republic were portrayed, for reasons of dramatic effect, in a similar way to these earlier disasters; ergo, they were manifestations of *ira deorum*, and specifically divine punishment for neglect of the religious conventions. The rhetorical conundrum for these poets of the golden age of Roman literature was in knowing how to restore the status quo. The Sibylline books, the default reference texts in time of crisis, had been accidentally burned along with the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in 83 BC, so who would now undertake the requisite expiatory actions on behalf of the fractured state:

*“What god shall Rome invoke to stay
Her fall? Can suppliance overbear
The ear of Vesta, turn'd away
From chant and prayer?
Who comes, commission'd to atone
For crime like ours?”⁹²*

The answer it seems, was Augustus.

⁹¹ Liv, xxii,.9.7-11.

⁹² Horace. *Odes*, 1.ii 25-30.

Actium in 31 BC proved to be a watershed, which although not known at that time⁹³, marked the end of the civil wars. This triumph of West over East was characterised by the contemporary poets in almost sectarian language, i.e., Octavian/Apollo v Antony/Dionysus, and as Ando Notes:

*“The victory of Augustus and the West might therefore be understood as a victory of one set of gods – one set of anthropomorphic gods – over the bestial gods of their enemies.”*⁹⁴

The engagement had left Octavian, (and from 27 BC, Augustus - a title loaded with religious significance) uncontested master of the Roman world and uniquely placed to restore and reform, if not the *res publica*, then at least some of its religious fabric, institutions and traditions. Augustus was foremost the consummate politician, and his motivations are often ambiguous, but it would appear that his religious reforms had a number of objectives. Firstly, he wished to reinvigorate the old state cults⁹⁵; secondly, to link religion with morality⁹⁶, and thirdly, to associate his position as *Princeps* with a new, divinely sanctioned, order. This last would have required caution as the fate of Caesar would have made Augustus wary of any overt claims to divinity; in fact, and despite denominating himself *Divi filius*, Augustus actively discouraged any parallels with Hellenistic ‘saviour gods’⁹⁷.

Augustus started with the religious fabric:

*“I rebuilt in my sixth consulship [28 BC], on the authority of the senate, eighty-two temples and overlooked none that needed repair”*⁹⁸

⁹³ *Res. Gest.*, 34.1: (*post mortem*) Augustus states that he ended the civil wars.

⁹⁴ Ando. *The Matter of the Gods*, 122.

⁹⁵ Suet, *Div Aug*, 93. While honoring established non-roman cult, Augustus ‘held the rest in contempt.’

⁹⁶ Augustus’ moral legislation is well attested, cf. Suet, *Div Aug*. 34: Dio. 54.16-17.

⁹⁷ Suet, *Div Aug*, 52.

⁹⁸ *Res. Gest.* xx, 4. And others: Jupiter Feretrius (31 BC), Quirinus and Minerva (16 BC).

That this personal restoration programme was extensive is attested by Livy⁹⁹, but that in accordance with the *mos maiorum* and believing *noblesse oblige* should be manifest, Augustus also required the descendants of the original temple founders to undertake repairs¹⁰⁰, is symptomatic of his desire to be associated with those traditional hereditary duties. However, any such manifestation of conservative values did not inhibit innovation, as Augustus' foundation of the temple of Mars Ultor¹⁰¹ attests:

*“He had made a vow to build the temple of Mars in the war of Philippi, which he undertook to avenge his father; accordingly, he decreed that in it the senate should consider wars and claims for triumphs, from it those who were on their way to the provinces with military commands should be escorted, and to it victors on their return should bear the tokens of their triumphs”.*¹⁰²

This section of Suetonius warrants further analysis. Mars, the progenitor of Rome and father of Romulus, had long had shrines and temples outside the *pomerium* in the Campus Martius¹⁰³; that Augustus chose to bring the concept of ‘righteous vengeance’ within the religious boundary and erect the temple as the centrepiece of his new forum, represents a departure from the tradition that dedications to Mars had hitherto only been outside the *pomerium*. Henceforth, the new temple of Mars Ultor would host senatorial debates on war, witness the enrolment of Roman youth for military service and the departure of military expeditions. Significantly, and in part usurping the remit of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, returning generals, having dedicated

⁹⁹ Liv. iv, 20,7; Augustus ‘*the founder and restorer of every temple*’.

¹⁰⁰ Dio Cass, 53, 2.4; Suet, *Div Aug*, 29.5.

¹⁰¹ cf. Appendix 3, *Fig. 1*.

¹⁰² Suet, *Div Aug*, 29.

¹⁰³ e.g., Aedes Martis (T. Quinctius, 388 BC); Temple of Mars. (Junius Callaicus, 132 BC).

their spoils on the Capitol, were to devote their triumphal regalia to Mars¹⁰⁴. The temple was dedicated in 2 BC¹⁰⁵ and located in a forum complex with wholly innovative architecture; specifically, there were Greek-style long colonnades and *exedrae*. The iconography was predeterminate: in addition to statues of Republican heroes, there were images of Mars, Venus, Romulus, Divus Julius, the kings of Alba Longa and most central and prominent of all, a quadriga statue of Augustus. The whole panorama served to underscore the founder's intention to be '*proclaimed as the heir*'¹⁰⁶ of these heroes and divinities and be lauded as the epitome of filial piety by an ancestor obsessed elite. Augustus may also have been highlighting his personal status in locating the new temple within the *pomerium*. The imperium of a magistrate was greatly curtailed within the *pomerium*, the exception being the dictator, an office always rejected by Augustus¹⁰⁷ presumably for reasons precedent. Augustus preferred the less controversial, but equally authoritative title of *Princeps*, which carried the powers of the dictatorship within the *pomerium*, and which reminded the senators gathered within Mars Ultor that the holder of that title was now more than simply *primus inter pares*.

For those state cults already established within the *pomerium*, a more subtle but no less self-serving approach was required. The goddess Vesta had from the foundation of the city, been pivotal to the *sacra publica*¹⁰⁸. Ovid informs us of the numinous spirit:

*"Vesta is the same as the earth. Perpetual fire constitutes them both"*¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Suet, *Div Aug*, 29.

¹⁰⁵ *Res. Gest.* XX.1.

¹⁰⁶ B, N & P. *Religions of Rome*, p 200

¹⁰⁷ *Res. Gest.* V.1.

¹⁰⁸ Liv, I, 20; V, 30, 39-40.

¹⁰⁹ *Fasti*, VI, 267.

The six vestal priestesses were chosen from the highest ranks of the nobility and:

“... represented a peculiarly extreme version of the connection between the religious life of the home and of the community; if anything went wrong in their house, the threat was to the whole salus of the Roman people.”¹¹⁰

Any irregularity within the vestal college was deemed a danger to the state¹¹¹.

When he eventually became *Pontifex Maximus* in 12 BC¹¹², the Vestal Virgins came within the *potestas* of Augustus as their *paterfamilias*, and that the College originated with the kings cannot have gone unnoticed by the new Romulus: Augustus began a process of familial association with the cult to serve his own dynastic ends. Whereas previous holders of the priesthood, including Caesar, had lived in the *Domus Publica* adjacent to the temple of Vesta in the Forum, the new *Pontifex Maximus*, Augustus, gave the *Domus Publica* to the Vestals for their sole use¹¹³ and made a section of his own house on the Palatine hill public land. This enabled Augustus to dedicate a shrine to Vesta in an area which already housed the *Lares* and *Penates* of his own family and to effectively promote, by association, the notion that the Palatine was now sacred space. Furthermore, this apparently modest and reverential deeding of the *Domus Publica* to the Vestals, apart from being a conspicuous departure from a tradition that originated with the foundation of the Republic, may provide some insight into Augustus' long-term strategy. Presumably, he was aware that whether he was successful or not, he would not be the last *Pontifex Maximus*; thus, the relocation of the official residence of the *P.M.* may indicate that future holders of the priesthood

¹¹⁰ B, N & P. *Religions of Rome*, 52.

¹¹¹ Cic. *Pro Font*, 46-8.

¹¹² Death of M. Lepidus who, despite *Res Gestae*, 10.4, had been allocated the pontificate as part of the Triumvirs settlement at Bononia in 43 BC.

¹¹³ Dio Cass. 54.27.3.

would also reside on the Palatine, i.e., they would be the heirs and successors of Augustus. Additionally, and although not certain, it is considered probable that the Palladium itself was appropriated to the new shrine at this time¹¹⁴, though Ovid would have us believe it was simply returning home:

“Gods of ancient Troy, the worthiest prize to him who bore you, you whose weight saved Aeneas from the foe, a priest descended from Aeneas handles divinities related to him; Vesta, you must guard his person related to you.”¹¹⁵

Livia too, who as wife of the *Pontifex Maximus* already had the status and obligations which accompanied that role, was now further granted the legal rights and special privileges of a vestal¹¹⁶. Thus Augustus, by annexing the tutelary deity of Rome, sought sacrosanctity by association for himself and his family, and the conflation in the Roman mind of the vestal cult with his own ritual devotions; henceforth:

“...the public hearth of the state, with its associations of the success of the Roman empire, had been fused with the private hearth of Augustus. The emperor (and the emperor’s house) could now be claimed to stand for the state.”¹¹⁷

In a further innovation – again within the *pomerium* – to the religious topography of Rome, Augustus constructed a grand temple to Apollo on his Palatine estate, allegedly on a site chosen by the god himself.

“He reared the temple of Apollo in that part of his house on the Palatine for which the soothsayers declared that the god had shown his desire by striking it with lightning.”¹¹⁸

Suetonius states that Augustus, following pre-natal portents and dreams, was

“regarded as the son of Apollo”¹¹⁹ and that from an early age he demonstrated

prodigious talents and divine favour. While such birth myths follow an established

¹¹⁴ Platner, S. Ashby, T. *A Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, 1929; the Sorrento Base Relief.

¹¹⁵ Ovid, *Fasti*, III. 423-6.

¹¹⁶ Dio Cass, 49.38 and 60.22.2; Tacitus, *Ann*, 1.14.

¹¹⁷ B, N & P, *Religions of Rome*, 191.

¹¹⁸ Suet, *Div. Aug*. 29.3.

¹¹⁹ *ibid*, 94.4.

narrative, e.g., Mars and Rhea Silvia, Olympias and Zeus/Amun, the relationship between Augustus and Apollo is long-standing and one in which the *Princeps* seems to have demonstrated genuine piety for his special patron deity. That the temple was explicitly constructed *ex voto* the victories at Naulochus in 36 BC and Actium in 31 BC, is emblematic of the *pietas* of the founder; Augustus manifestly discharged his divine contractual obligations¹²⁰. The grandeur of the new temple is attested by Pliny¹²¹ and the iconography, by depicting the fate of Niobe's children at the hands of Apollo and the expulsion of the Gauls from the shrine at Delphi, was laden with prophetic warnings against angering the god – or his favoured son. It was to this temple that Augustus transferred the remaining Sibylline oracles¹²², which had previously been in the custody of Jupiter Optimus Maximus. These purported ancient texts, which were always known to be ambiguous and incomplete and so subject to considerable interpretation, were to prove invaluable to Augustus, not least in the staging of the *Ludi Saeculares*. The result of all this reshaping of the religious landscape was that:

*“Phoebus owns part of the house; another part has been given up to Vesta; what remains is occupied by Caesar himself. Long live the laurels of the Palatine! Long live the house wreathed with oaken boughs! A single house holds three eternal gods.”*¹²³

Aside from his personal initiatives, and in keeping with his expectation that they refurbish the foundations of their forebears, Augustus also encouraged the scions of the famous families to build new temples to the gods:

“And many such works were built at that time by many men; for example, the temple of Hercules and the Muses by Marcius Philippus, the temple of Diana by Lucius Cornificius, the Hall of Liberty by Asinius Pollio, the temple of Saturn by Munatius

¹²⁰ Propertius. IV, 6,29, Augustus witnessed an epiphany of Apollo at Actium.

¹²¹ *Nat Hist*, xxxvi. 24, 25; Propertius II,.31.

¹²² Suet. *Div. Aug*, 31.1.: Augustus edited the Sibylline books, presumably for his own ends.

¹²³ *Ov. Fast*. 4.943.

*Plancus, a theatre by Cornelius Balbus, an amphitheatre by Statilius Taurus, and by Marcus Agrippa in particular many magnificent structures.”*¹²⁴

The Roman elite, and in particular the patriciate, had long been concerned with the administration and maintenance of the state religion, and Augustus' programme for the reinvigoration of the national cults and refurbishment of the religious estate was, and this can hardly be co-incidental, also an attempt to revive the dignities and standing of a depleted - both the proscriptions and the civil wars had taken a toll - and cowed patriciate.

Thus, and taken as a totality, the claims in the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* to a comprehensive refurbishment and foundation programme would seem to be justified. However, the *Res Gestae* amounts to a valedictory, and we should be conscious of the political agenda: John Scheid has observed:

*“the princeps framed his repair and reconstruction of religious temples as a re-establishment of the institutions his rivals had neglected during the previous years of political turmoil. Thus, Augustus' restorative construction projects lent strength to his claim that he was reviving republican institutions and further legitimized his power”*¹²⁵.

Even restoration allowed for innovation, and Augustus frequently altered the dedication dates of buildings he restored so that any future annual celebrations coincided with anniversaries within his family. However, and despite the claims of the *Res Gestae*, given that so many of Augustus' projects were new and merely added to

¹²⁴ Suet, *Div. Aug.* 29.5.

¹²⁵ Scheid, *To Honour the Princeps and Venerate the Gods: Public Cult, Neighbourhood Cults, and Imperial Cult in Augustan Rome*, 2009, 278.

the religious topography of Rome, it is not legitimate to conclude that all, or even most, of the pre-existing structures were in an advanced state of decay. On the contrary, and as previously stated, the maintenance of the religious estate seems to have been a constant throughout the late Republic.

Augustus was not content with restricting his religious and dynastic agenda to the sacred fabric of Rome and actively directed his attention to the very bedrock of cult. In 7 BC, Augustus reorganised the administrative system of Rome, subdividing the city into 265 *vici*, or city districts¹²⁶. Each *vicus* had a cult of its own, the *Lares Compitales* (spirits of hearth and home), who were honoured by the residents of each *vicus* at the festival of the *Compitalia*. The organisation of these local festivities lay in the hands of the *collegia compitalicia* as headed by the *magistri vici* or *vicorum*. These neighbourhood cults were tribal and unruly and had often been linked with the political violence of the late Republic, most notably the Clodian riots, and they had been repressed many times, most recently by Caesar¹²⁷. As part of his claim to be restoring age-old cults and traditions, Augustus revived the *collegia*, and along with these the role and status of the *magistri*. It is not known whether the *magistri*, who were always freedmen, received any financial recompense under Augustus, though they did under later emperors¹²⁸. Augustus' motives were seldom wholly altruistic, and his restoration inevitably had a price; henceforth, the *Lares Compitales* were redesignated *Lares Augusti*, and their veneration now incorporated a new component, the *Genius Augusti*¹²⁹.

¹²⁶ Suet, *Div. Aug.* 30.

¹²⁷ Suet, *Caes.* 42, though Fine. J, *A Note on the Compitalia*, *Classical Phil.*, vol 27, No.3, 1932, contends the *collegia compitalicia* were categorised as *antiquitus constituta*, and so not repressed.

¹²⁸ Suet, *Tib.* 76.

¹²⁹ Ovid, *Fasti.* 5.145ff.

The veneration of such an abstract as an individual's *genius* had previously been confined to the *sacra privata* and was a simple extension of the homage paid to the household *Lares* which all families, including Augustus' own, were obliged to honour¹³⁰. The introduction of the *Genii Augusti* to the *vici*, although purportedly part of the wider agenda of stemming the Hellenization and anthropomorphism of the Roman gods and returning to the origins of the Roman religious journey, was nonetheless extraordinary. This blatant insertion of the *Genii Augusti* into the rituals of the *Compitalia* – for those rituals would soon extend to include Augustus' family - marks a significant departure, and this wholly innovative measure, amounting to a formalised respect for Augustus' ancestors and his own spirit or *genius* as well as his family, appears to an achievement of which the *Princeps* was inordinately proud:

*“In addition, the entire body of citizens with one accord, both individually and by municipalities, performed continued sacrifices for my health at all the couches of the gods.”*¹³¹

To this singular innovation, appealing to even the lowest strata of Roman society, we may be able to trace the origins of the imperial cult; the effect was:

*“...to see the emperor inserted within a religious framework that incorporated the whole city, by creating an opportunity for local participation in the creation of imperial Rome's new mythology”*¹³²

Over time, the veneration of the *Genii Augusti* would spread throughout Italy and the Empire and eventually result in a number of new religious solidarities¹³³; the *ordo Augustalium* being a particularly prestigious example and one predominantly

¹³⁰ cf: Appendix 3, Fig. 4.

¹³¹ *Res Gest.* 9.3.

¹³² B, N & P, *Religions of Rome*, 186.

¹³³ *ibid.*, 58.

comprised of *liberti*, who for reasons of status and influence, eagerly sought membership: Petronius, has famously satirised the vulgarity of these parvenus:

*“TO GAIUS POMPEIUS TRIMALCHIO
AUGUSTAL, SEVIR
FROM CINNAMUS HIS
STEWARD.”*¹³⁴

With other religious solidarities the Augustan agenda was much more overt, and no more so than with the ancient brotherhood of the *Collegium Fratrum Arvalium*. We know next to nothing of their role during the Republic, other than the etymology of the name¹³⁵ i.e., that they performed rites to make the fields (*arva*) productive, but the myth ran that Romulus himself had been a member¹³⁶ and thus the fraternity was well suited to Augustus, the new founder of Rome.

The *Fratres Arvales* celebrated a festival in May in honour of the *Dea Dia*, an obscure agricultural deity known only from the extensive epigraphic records (*Acta*) left by the college. When Augustus became a member, the brotherhood was provided with new premises in Rome, and for their sacred *lucus* outside the city, a stadium – the purpose of which remains unclear, and a new focus; specifically, to offer prayers and sacrifice for the emperor and his household. The *Fasti* of the Arval Brethren mark all the important events in the life of Augustus and his family, their births, marriages, successions, journeys and safe returns, consulships, priesthoods and other offices.

¹³⁴ *Satyr*, 30.

¹³⁵ Varro, *On the Latin Language*, v.85.

¹³⁶ Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* XVIII.6.

The college had a full complement of twelve, and seven of the members appointed – technically co-opted – by Augustus to the college in 21 BC, had in the past been political enemies or had remained neutral in the civil wars e.g., P. Aemilius Lepidus, L. Cornelius Cinna, A. Claudius Pulcher, Cn. Pompeius Rufus, etcetera. Augustus was sufficiently secure by 21 BC for us to conclude that this was not a case of ‘keeping your enemies close’, but rather the appointments would indicate that Augustus had determined upon a policy of conciliation and rehabilitation. He was demonstrating that the calamities that Rome had suffered were in the past and emphasising the benefits of association with his new regime, and as with his allocation of civic magistracies which also provided both opportunity and obligation, to bind the new *fratres* to the Principate. Later Augustan appointments to the College would consist primarily of young *nobiles*, often co-opted to replace deceased fathers, where membership, under the discerning eye of the *Princeps*, was a proving ground for later civic office.

The *fratres aruales* are unique in that we are particularly fortunate that their *Acta* have survived to such a considerable degree¹³⁷, and it would seem reasonable to extrapolate and infer that these records reflect the membership profiles in other religious colleges, e.g., *Sodales Tittii*, *Fetiales*. Augustus states:

“I was pontifex maximus, augur, quindecimvir sacris faciundis, septemvir epulonum¹³⁸, frater arualis, sodalis titius and fetialis”¹³⁹

Such an accumulation of priestly offices was unique, although it established a precedent followed by subsequent emperors: in all probability, the common factor

¹³⁷ ca, 21 BC – 325 AD.

¹³⁸ Member of the Board of Seven for Feasts in honour of Jupiter. Augustus was a member by 16 BC.

¹³⁹ *Res. Gest.*, 7.3.

with all these religious colleges, was the opportunity for Augustus to promote the status and sanctity of himself and the imperial family. Certainly, the coinage of the time reflects a creeping shift towards the divine¹⁴⁰.

In parallel with his amassment of religious offices, Augustus sought to promote his more esoteric attributes as part of a wider programme of veneration of the abstract. The origins of Roman religion lay in the worship of indigenous and multifarious *numina*¹⁴¹, which were in most instances not personified – the Hellenistic/Greek anthropomorphic gods being a relatively late development – and which were mainly venerated at a domestic or rustic level, e.g., the *Lares* and *Penates* or *Rusina*, *Jugatinus*, *Voluntina* or *Patelana*¹⁴². *Numen* were assigned to even the most mundane facets of daily life, e.g., the hearth, the larder, the doorway and the garden, but they could also populate the abstract, e.g., *Pietas*, *Salus* and *Sancus*. Playing to this notion that everything, every place and everyone had a divine spirit or aspect, Augustus supplemented the Roman pantheon with additions such as *Annona* and *Abundantia*¹⁴³, and sought to elevate his personal guardian spirit (*genius*) to state level. The *Princeps* accorded his own accomplishments attributes that were tangible for the populace, and which could provide a focus for their respect; the altar of Fortuna Redux (*Ara Fortunae Reducis*) is particularly germane. This cult was established in 19 BC by a grateful senate to commemorate Augustus' quelling of civil unrest at Rome and his accomplishments in, and safe return from, the East¹⁴⁴. The annual oblations involved

¹⁴⁰ rf: Appendix 3, Fig. 2

¹⁴¹ Wissowa, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen*, Munich, 1904, 175 ff; this categorization of numen as *di indigetes* and *di novensides* is now questionable; q.v.: Altheim, *Römische Religionsgeschichte*, 2015, Gruyter, Berlin; Goldman, *Di Novensides* and *Di Indigetes*, 2009, Cambridge U.P.

¹⁴² Augustine, *De Civi. Dei*. iv. 6: supplies a list of fifteen deities related to agriculture alone.

¹⁴³ Although the *Ara Pacis* dates to 13 BC, it is not clear if *Pax* as a deity existed at that time.

¹⁴⁴ Augustus recovered the standards lost by M. Crassus (53 BC) and M. Antonius (40 & 36 BC).

sacrifices by the Pontifices and Vestals¹⁴⁵ and the associated new holiday (*feriae*), which ultimately morphed into the *Augustalia*, was destined to become a major festival in the Roman calendar. As Scheid has observed, the *Princeps* now had:

“.. *his own great festival day similar to Ceres Cerealia, Vesta’s Vestalia, or Saturn’s Saturnalia, an honour which was fitting for the gods*”.¹⁴⁶

However, and as with the *Ara Pacis Augusta*¹⁴⁷, commissioned for similar reasons in 13 BC, the *Ara Fortunae Reducis* was poignantly located outside the *pomerium* near the Porta Capena, an area long associated with the celebration of triumphs and victory. It seems that the ever-cautious Augustus, although consistently refusing divine honours within Rome, was not wholly averse to the attendant plaudits and celebrations.

¹⁴⁵ *Res. Gest.* 11.

¹⁴⁶ Scheid, *To Honour the Princeps and Venerate the Gods*, 2009, 289.

¹⁴⁷ *Res. Gest.*, 12; Dio, 54.25.3.

CHAPTER V

Ludi Saeculares

The priesthoods were exclusive in membership, and although they could enhance status, they could not ensure the level of public exposure and participation necessary to promote the religious credentials of the new regime. Without question, the key event that was to consolidate the religious reforms of Augustus and provide the new emperor-priest with the opportunity to involve the wider population of Rome, were *the Ludi Saeculares* of 17 BC. Fortunately, as well as extensive literary references¹⁴⁸, we have the full text of Horace's hymn, which together with the *Acta* discovered in 1890 on the Campus Martius¹⁴⁹ and the more recently deciphered senatorial decrees of 18 and 17 BC, allow for an almost complete record of the Augustan *Ludi Saeculares*. All these primary sources are emphatic that these *ludi* were to be a once in a lifetime event:

*“tali spectaculo [nemo iterum intereit]”*¹⁵⁰

A *saeculum* appears to have been the period stretching from a given date to the death of the oldest person born at that time; the traditional period being 100 (in some cases 110¹⁵¹) years, and the celebration signified a new beginning with all misfortunes being put behind the state (*saeculum condere*), and the new *saeculum* heralding an era of peace and prosperity. The origins of the festivities go back to the foundation of the Republic and were associated with the *gens Valerii*, and purportedly with the suffect

¹⁴⁸ e.g., Suet, *Div Aug.* 31.6; Cassius Dio 54.18; Tacitus, *Ann.* 11.11.

¹⁴⁹ ILS 5050: *CIL*, VI, xxxii, 32323; *Ephemeris Epigraphica*.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*, Line 54

¹⁵¹ Horace, *Carmen Saeculare*, Stanza 6, mentions ‘*ten times eleven*’.

consul of 509 BC, P. Valerius Poplicola¹⁵²; the original rites were primarily expiatory in nature, e.g., the celebration at the Tarentum, a shrine to the gods of the underworld, on the Campus Martius during the First Punic War.¹⁵³

In the conventional chronology, the games should have been celebrated in 46 or 36 BC¹⁵⁴ and quite why Augustus chose 17 BC as the date for his new epoch is unclear. It is possible the date was chosen to commemorate the ten years since he received the title Augustus, or to promote the recently enacted and much resented *Lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus*¹⁵⁵, or the date may be a response to the appearance of a comet the previous year (18 BC), which served to remind Augustus of the significance of the *Sidus Iulium*. Such comets had long been associated with endings and beginnings, and Augustus harking back to the Julian Star which heralded the apotheosis of his ‘father’ is unsurprising if he sought to link that apotheosis to his new saeculum; certainly, this stellar event was commemorated¹⁵⁶. More prosaically, it may be that Augustus simply felt sufficiently secure and authoritative by that time, and taking advantage of the popular feeling simply manufactured the date, though sensibly with the advice of the jurist and religious scholar Ateius Capito, who provided:

“*. a detailed exposition of the rites and the times when the sacrifices should be held and the procession organised*”¹⁵⁷.

¹⁵² Liv. *Ab Urbe Condita*, 2.2.

¹⁵³ Liv, *Periochae*, 49.6; refers to games of *Dis Pater*.

¹⁵⁴ 348 – 249 – 146 = [46/36] BC.

¹⁵⁵ D. Feeney, *Literature and Religion at Rome: Cultures, Contexts, and Beliefs*, 1988, 32-38.

¹⁵⁶ *rf*: Appendix 3, Fig.3

¹⁵⁷ Zosimus, *Historia Nova*, 2.4.2.

The games were prescribed by the Senate and supervised by the *quindecimviri sacris faciundis*,¹⁵⁸ and closely followed the prescription of the Sybilline books:

*“Indeed, whenever the longest span of human life has come, travelling around its cycle of one hundred and ten years, remember, Roman, even if it escapes your notice, remember to do all these things, to sacrifice to the immortal gods in the field beside the boundless water of the Tiber where it is narrowest, when night comes upon the earth after the sun has hid its light. Then perform offerings to the all-generating Moirai, both lambs and dark female goats, and gratify the Eileithyiai, favourable to childbirth, with burnt offerings in the proper way. In that place let a black sow pregnant with young be sacrificed to Gaia. Let all-white bulls be led to the altar of Zeus by day, not by night: for to the heavenly gods sacrifices are performed in the daylight. Let the temple of Hera receive from you a young heifer and a cow beautiful in form. And let Phoibos Apollo, who is also called Helios, son of Leto, receive equal victims. And let Latin paeans sung by youths and maidens fill the temple of the immortals.”*¹⁵⁹

Though adherence to this directive does not necessarily testify to either the antiquity or authenticity of the Augustan games: the Sybilline books had been reconstituted many times, most recently on the instructions of Augustus himself in 18 BC¹⁶⁰. Fortuitously, these oracular texts were notoriously obtuse and incomplete, and perhaps more significantly, were known to be incomplete; they provided a guide, not a prescription. Notwithstanding any prescript, Augustus introduced innovations which sought to demonstrate the *Princeps* regard for, and affinity to, the gods. Most significantly, the principal sacrifices were conducted by Augustus alone¹⁶¹, establishing a precedent that was to be followed by succeeding holders of the purple and which, again wholly innovatively, contained an appeal for personal divine favour. For example, when sacrificing to the Fates (*Moirai*), Augustus entreats that they be:

¹⁵⁸ Interestingly, not by the *Pontifex Maximus*, a title still held by M. Lepidus in 17 BC. It may be that such a centennial celebration fell outside the remit of the *P.M.*

¹⁵⁹ Zosimus, *Hist Nova*. 2.6: Phlegon, Book of Marvels, 37.5.

¹⁶⁰ Cassius Dio, 54.17.2.

¹⁶¹ Augustan Acta (*Acta*), 90–91; Schnegg-Köhler, 2002, 34.

“.. well-disposed to the Roman people, the Quirites, to the college of the Fifteen, to me, my family and household.”¹⁶²

Augustus was omnipresent throughout the *ludi*, but he did involve his family members, and most notably his (at that time) designated heir, M. Agrippa as a co-officiant:

“Marcus Agrippa sacrificed to Juno Regina a cow, for her own, according to the Greek rite”¹⁶³

Such a close association and public prominence would only have served to confirm the legitimacy and raise the profile of Agrippa, and his at that point three children¹⁶⁴ by Julia and must surely amount to a further indication of Augustan dynastic ambition.¹⁶⁵

The new *saeculum* commenced with a ritual purification; torches, sulphur and bitumen (*suffimenta*) were distributed to all free persons and not just citizens, and despite the provisions of the recent *lex Iulia*, even unmarried men took part. This involvement of all but the servile in a process of purification and renewal is significant; all participants were *de facto* complicit in acknowledging the status of Augustus and the sanctioning of his new regime. While the original rites had involved offerings to the chthonic gods, specifically Dis and Proserpina, these were clearly unsuitable deities for the new Augustan age and were ignored in favour of the Moirai, the Ilithyiae (Goddesses of Childbirth) and Tellus Mater. A further deviation from precedent is evident in the prominence of Apollo and Diana, deities closely linked

¹⁶² *CIL*, VI 32323, lines 98-99.

¹⁶³ *ibid.*, 119–120. 38.

¹⁶⁴ Gaius (20 BC), Julia (19 BC), Lucius – in utero? (17 BC).

¹⁶⁵ cf. Stevenson, ‘*The Succession Planning of Augustus*’, Cambridge U.P., 2015

with the imperial family, e.g., Augustus/Apollo and Julia/Diana¹⁶⁶; in fact, the Capitoline Triad seems almost marginalised in the celebrations¹⁶⁷. Conspicuous roles were allocated to one hundred and ten Roman matrons and fifty-four youths of both sexes and good social standing, but most apparent of all was the centrality of Augustus himself and the focus of the celebrations on his religious landscape. Throughout the days and nights of the celebration all the major state cults were honoured throughout the city, but the pivotal religious ceremonies were predominantly at locations either constructed or renovated by Augustus¹⁶⁸ and they culminated at the *Princeps* divinely ordained temple of Apollo¹⁶⁹ on the Palatine.

It was on the Palatine that Horace's *Carmen Saeculare*, a paean to Augustus' mythical and divine forebears and a proclamation of a longed-for return, was performed:

*“If Rome is your doing, and if from far Ilium
Came that band of people who reached the Tuscan shore,
Those commanded to change their home and their city,
On a lucky course,*

*Those for whom pious Aeneas, the survivor,
Who passed without injury through the flames of Troy,
Prepared a path to freedom, destined to grant him
Much more than he'd lost.*

*Then, you divinities, show our receptive youth
Virtue, grant peace and quiet to the old, and give
Children and wealth to the people of Romulus,
And every glory.*

*“Whatever a noble descendant of Venus
And Anchises, asks, with a white steer's sacrifice,
Let him obtain: a winner in war, merciful
To our fallen foe.*

¹⁶⁶ rf: Appendix 3, Fig. 2.

¹⁶⁷ *CIL* VI 32323, line 3. and *CIL* VI 32323, line 119, indicate that they each received a single offering of a bull and a cow.

¹⁶⁸ e.g., Jupiter Tonans, dedicated 22 BC; Aventine Diana, Lucius Cornificius rebuilt it, but at the direction of Augustus (Suet, *Div Aug*, 29).

¹⁶⁹ Dio Cass, XLIX.15.5; The site, owned by Augustus, had been struck by lightning in 36 BC.

*“Now Faith and Peace, Honour, and ancient Modesty,
Dare to return once more, with neglected Virtue,
And blessed Plenty dares to appear again, now,
With her flowing horn.”¹⁷⁰*

Following the precise staging, the *Carmen* was sung by a youthful choir, a generation unsullied by the sins of their forebears, and symbolised an era of new hope and peace. The hymn was intended to be performed, as opposed to simply recited, and as a performance piece with its generation-wide appeal to mythic origins, ancestors, civic pride and hope, may be:

“perhaps the most successful publicly commissioned poem in the history of poetry.”¹⁷¹

Augustus commissioned the *Carmen* and would have been active in the composition of what he hoped (rightly) would prove to be an enduring propaganda centre piece. Some have even argued that Horace was a mere cipher, and that Augustus actually authored the entire work:

“.it is far too flat to be the genuine offspring of such a poet as Horace. To me it reads as though Augustus had written it in prose and then ordered his poet to put it into metre; and assuredly it expresses exactly what we should have expected Augustus to wish to be sung by his youthful choirs.”¹⁷²

Although subjective, this may be a quite penetrating observation. The *Res Gestae* is primarily a record of the secular achievements of a self-publicist and provides little insight into Augustus’ thinking on religious matters; the *Carmen Saeculare* may prove to be a more legitimate and sincere reflection of the *Princeps* religious aspirations. As noted, the order of performance of the *Carmen* makes it noteworthy for the marginalising of the (republican) Capitoline Triad, and the prominence and

¹⁷⁰ Horace, *Carmen Saeculare*. Stanzas, 10-13, 15.

¹⁷¹ Levi. *Horace: A Life*, 1998, 207.

¹⁷² Warde Fowler, ‘*The Religious Experience of the Roman People*’, 442.

pre-eminence of Apollo, allows us to legitimately infer that the new sacred family lived on the Palatine, not the Capitol hill.

The inspirational hymn, the pious atmosphere, the inclusivity, the notion of a demarcation of the past, the celebratory sense of renewal and the *Princeps* as the intermediary of the gods, would all have served to make the *Ludi Saeculares* of 17 BC memorable, and been crucial in cementing the position of Augustus in the new – now arrived – golden age. The celebrations were orchestrated to spotlight the achievements of one man and his pivotal role in bringing peace after over seventy years of civil wars, a new emperor-priest who ritually purified the current generation and who ostentatiously buried the old-failed generation of Rome - and with it the Republic. This format for renewal, which had clearly proved effective, established a precedent which was to be followed by subsequent Augusti, e.g., the *saeculum* celebrations of Claudius in 47 AD, those of Domitian in 88 AD, and Septimius Severus in 204 AD all followed the same pattern.

Augustus' whole programme of religious revival and reform was aimed, by a none too subtle process of association with the divine, at promoting loyalty and respect for his role as *paterfamilias* of the *populus Romanus* and engendering the belief that the imperial family were somehow sacrosanct. However, the line was fine, and Augustus seemed conscious of not crossing the boundary by advancing any outright claims to divine status at Rome. The *Princeps* may have been deified in literature¹⁷³, but he was never, despite attempts, formally accorded divine status at Rome during his

¹⁷³ Ovid, *Tristia*, 1.2.103–105. Explicitly links the *saeculum* with Augustus's authority and divinity.

lifetime¹⁷⁴; Augustus, perhaps conscious of the fate of Caesar, made a point of rejecting any such proposals; he states that he was only ever *primus inter pares*:

*“I excelled all in influence but of power I had no more than my colleagues in whatever office I was holding”*¹⁷⁵

This claim is, of course, wholly disingenuous and clearly at odds with the political and religious realities. For while Augustus, in keeping with his pose as only ever ‘first citizen’, may have demurely decline divine honours, he nonetheless encouraged such initiatives from others. And ultimately, despite the self-deprecating rhetoric of the *Res Gestae*, in 14 AD Augustus’ factual and long-standing dominion and pre-eminence was acknowledged in his uncontested apotheosis as *Divus Augustus*.

¹⁷⁴ Suet, *Div Aug*, 52: He certainly was in the East, e.g., Pergamum and Bithynia, often associated with *Roma*. Dio. Cass. 51.20.7: Also, Dio Cass. 53.27.3; Agrippa’s attempt to dedicate the Pantheon as a temple to Augustus; and possibly, *ILS* 112; *CIL* XII. 4333, but it is unclear when this dedication from Narbonne was inscribed.

¹⁷⁵ *Res Gest*, 34.3.

Chapter VI

Summary and Conclusion

The orthodoxy established from the nineteenth century that by the late Republic the state religion of Rome was in paralysis, if not actually moribund, can no longer stand in the face of the evidence; perhaps, the commentators are confusing decline with development. It is true, that by the late Republic, philosophy increasingly dominated the thinking of the elite, and that much of the general populous had taken up Hellenistic/eastern mystery cults, magic and superstition. But these developments had been ongoing since at least the second century BC and had evolved alongside and in addition to the *sacra publica*, they did not replace it. The popularity of philosophy and mystery cults may be indicative of greater personal religious choice but the *sacra publica*, with its demonstrations of collective *pietas*, remained integral to the worship of the gods. Thus, to infer that diversity of belief and practice is necessarily indicative of stasis or deterioration in the *sacra publica*, amounts to a *non sequitur*.

It is also true, that the state cults and rituals were sometimes suborned to maintain the ascendancy of the governing elite, and we have considered evidence of such manipulation for individual and factional advancement. But again, to regard these few instances of abuse as symptomatic of wider religious decay, would be to imply that they were unique to the late Republic when they were not. Cynical manipulation of the religious forms had long been a characteristic of Roman political manoeuvring, and this was only set to continue under the arch manipulator Augustus; the only change was in the manipulators. Therefore, to conclude as the decline school of thought has that the late Republic witnessed a unique charade, whereby the whole college of *pontifices* and the entire Roman elite, were engaged in some form of

religious mummery conducted solely for the benefit of the masses, is an extrapolation too far and is unsustainable.

“expedit esse deos, et ut expedit, esse putemus”

(Ovid¹⁷⁶)

Ovid’s cynical observation, coined when he was in an (in his view) unjustified and much resented exile, simply underscores the growing rationalism of the elite in the late Republic. At this time, the sophisticated were attempting to reconcile the notion of the ‘double truth’, i.e., that real philosophical truth, was based on their own special insight, and that organised religion consisted of allegories, often archaic and impenetrable. But the convenient paradox of the double-truth is that the contradictory truths need not be reconciled, and so such intellectual debates seldom resulted in any outright rejection of traditional religious practices by the elite. It seems any duality of thought or opposites of truth, were always trumped by the innate conservatism of the Romans, and the reverence for the practices of the ancestors as inherent in the concept of the *mos maiorum*.¹⁷⁷ Cicero, in both *De Natura Deorum* and *De Divinatione*, after considering all the inconsistencies and irrationalities of the *sacra publica* cults, concludes that the religious tradition must be maintained, that the Romans:

*“Must believe the religion of our ancestors.”*¹⁷⁸

In summary, there is no compelling evidence of any marked deviation from the primacy of the *sacra publica* in the late Republic, and any adaption of the religious

¹⁷⁶ *Ars Amatoria*, I. 637.

¹⁷⁷ Syme, *The Roman Revolution*, 1938, 315, maintained that the *mos maiorum* was rigid. Arena, *Informal Norms, Values, and Social Control in the Roman Participatory Context*, 2014, 218, has argued that it was “fluid, flexible and diverse”.

¹⁷⁸ Cic. *De Nat Deo*, III, 2.14.

institutions or rituals to external influences may simply be viewed as symptomatic of an ongoing evolutionary process; such adaptations are not evidence of widespread atheism or abandonment of the gods.

With respect to the religious fabric at Rome, the ancient sources have recorded numerous instances of foundation as well as repair and refurbishment.¹⁷⁹ The deconstructive interpretations of the decline school, with their assertions of wholesale neglect and abandonment of the Roman temples and shrines, does not withstand any objective analysis of the evidence. Fundamentally, when assessing the health of the *sacra publica*, its institutions and fabric in the period of the late Republic, we must credit the sources with an understanding of the language they use and the accuracy of the descriptions they give. To do otherwise, would be to deny the validity of these contemporary accounts.

It is against this backdrop of religious and secular mutability that the Augustan reforms must be considered. Augustus recognised that the *sacra publica* could provide structure, meaning and reassurance following the chaos of the civil wars, and he sought to reassert the central role of state religious practices and to provide an anchor following the fratricidal storm. There was in fact considerable continuity between the actions taken by the *Princeps* and the earlier religious reforms following crises under the Republic. Of course, there were distinctions; under Augustus, the state religion ceased to be a battleground for factional political conflict, and the reforms made were not random or accidental, but rather part of a deliberate plan to acclimatise the populace to a new system of government based on the person and family of the *Princeps*. The view that the reforms of Augustus mark a dramatic

¹⁷⁹ *supra*, Ch. III. Of course, this does not include the propaganda of Augustus' tame court poets.

change, or new beginning in Roman religion, is largely the product of an unquestioning approach in the reading of the contemporary poets; agents who uniformly advocated the view that the *Princeps* restored the *pax deorum* and effected a new religious beginning after decades of impious neglect¹⁸⁰. Doubtless, all societies believe that previous generations were more pious than themselves, and Augustus and his tame court poets were astute enough to recognise and seize on this assumption. That the blatant untruths peddled by Virgil, Ovid and Horace were believed, is a measure of the effectiveness of the propaganda machine and a tribute to the political skills of Augustus, but such hype is not an accurate portrayal of the health of the *sacra publica* in the late Republic.

“Something like the Augustan (religious) restoration would probably have been undertaken by any responsible Roman if he had had absolute power; it would have seemed to him an integral part of any bringing back of public order”.

(A. D. Noce¹⁸¹)

Noce, quite rightly, associates the religious ‘*restoration*’ with the re-establishment of ‘*public order*’ in a state which had been perilously close to self-destruction. However, that the ‘*responsible Roman*’ cited happened to be Augustus, an individual conscious of the social and political value of religious ritual and fully aware that association with the state cults could cement his dynastic ambitions, made the Augustan ‘*restoration*’ quite singular. The lexical semantics are important here, and the term ‘*restoration*’ is problematic in the context of the Augustan religious programme. There was certainly no extensive revival or restoration of the *sacra publica* by Augustus: such terminology would be wholly inappropriate for it implies that the state cults were at, or near, death; the evidence considered above may allow us to

¹⁸⁰ *supra*, fn. 176. Ovid’s *volte-face* was only expressed when in exile.

¹⁸¹ CAH, vol X, chap XV, p. 469 (1952 ed.).

reasonably conclude that this was not the case, that the *sacra publica* was not in such disrepair at the end of the Republic as to require resuscitation. Ergo, while the term ‘*restoration*’ - ‘returning something to a former condition’¹⁸² - may be reasonably applied to many of the secular measures Augustus took in re-establishing public order, it is generally inappropriate in describing a religious programme where the only evidential act of restoration, and even here there was innovation, is with respect to the *Lares Compitales*.

A more accurate designation would be to characterise the Augustan religious agenda as essentially ‘reformatory’, and this adjective is entirely suited to the attested changes and in accord with the evidence as considered. Somewhat in the mode of Henry VIII, Augustus engaged in religious reformation for political, personal and dynastic – though not financial - reasons, not necessarily because the religious system was broken. The Augustan agenda was never about a simplistic return to tradition, rather it consisted of a dual curriculum - a considered process of both selective reform and innovation, with the unstated aim of ensuring that reverence for Augustus and the religion of the state were synonymous. It is evident that Augustus the priest was always subjugated to Augustus the politician, but we may be doing the *Princeps* an injustice if we assume that political guile necessarily excludes religious sincerity.

John Firth has observed:

“When he stood forward as the champion of the old religious spirit which was part and parcel of the Roman temperament, he came nearer to absolute sincerity than he did in most of his political institutions”.¹⁸³

¹⁸² concise O.E.D. 1998.

¹⁸³ J. B. Firth. *Augustus Caesar*, 1923, 165.

Whereas the degree of Augustus' personal piety is unknown and unknowable, he was certainly inordinately superstitious¹⁸⁴, said to be addicted to astrology¹⁸⁵ and paid close attention to omens and prodigies¹⁸⁶, any analysis of his religious reforms reveals little of his personal belief set:

*“One can rarely feel quite sure at any given point in Augustus's life that one knows exactly what he had in his mind.”*¹⁸⁷

and:

*“There are indeed those who believe that his whole career was a lie, that his austerity of life was assumed for effect, that his call to the age to revert to ancient ideals was a sham, and that his zeal for religion was sheer hypocrisy. The theory is simple, but it solves the difficulty much too easily to carry conviction, and this assuredly is not the explanation of so Sphinx-like a personality.”*¹⁸⁸

The contemporary poets sought to portray Augustus as the renewer of Republican religious values, but it is not a truth that may be assumed *a priori* that he was himself a religious man. The reality may have been that he only ever perceived the state religion as a vehicle for self-promotion and a pillar for his dynastic ambitions. Conversely, he may have been sincere in his beliefs and actions, though one suspects from his reputed penultimate words that this was not the case¹⁸⁹.

We may reasonably infer from his religious programme, that the *Princeps* was both an advocate of continuity and an agent for change, and therein lies the central paradox that was Augustus. Further, the evidence does allow for the conclusion that Augustus' religious reforms and innovations amounted to a calculated attempt to reinvigorate and redefine the connection between religion and state, and that given that the state

¹⁸⁴ Suet. *Div Aug.* 92.

¹⁸⁵ Augustine, *Confessiones* IV.3. 5-6.

¹⁸⁶ Suet. *Div Aug.* 92.

¹⁸⁷ Firth, *Augustus Caesar*, 1923. 414.

¹⁸⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 280-1.

¹⁸⁹ Suet. *Div Aug.*, 99. “Acta est fabula, plaudite”

was embodied in his person, that these reforms and innovations were self-serving. The Augustan agenda reveals a considered and gradual process of moving the populace away from their preoccupation with the political and the civic, to a renewed focus on, and engagement with, the sacral, and of discarding all that which no longer served the *Princeps* dynastic ambition.

Was Augustus successful in reinvigorating the *sacra publica*? Certainly, his extensive reforms were acknowledged at the time and even his successor, that study in resentment, Tiberius, observed that:

“Augustus had accommodated certain relics of a rude antiquity to the modern spirit”.¹⁹⁰

While it is doubtful that Augustus saw himself as a moderniser, many of the institutions and rituals he reformed or created survived until the Theodosian legislation of 438 AD¹⁹¹. What is uncontested, is that the enigma that was Augustus sought to portray himself as both priest and magistrate, albeit the highest priest and supreme magistrate, though ostensibly still as only one half of a dyarchy with a coeval senate working in unison towards the common good. This useful fiction, though widely recognised was seldom challenged; it was in no-one’s interest to remove the mask and reveal the reality. That reality was that Augustus held supreme power, and that by his death in 14 AD, he had effectively combined permanent multiple magistracies with permanent multiple priesthoods - that he had established *Imperium Sine Fine*.

¹⁹⁰ Tac. *Ann.* 4.16.

¹⁹¹ *Cod. Theod.* e.g., finally banned the worship of the imperial *genii*.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Priests and Ritual Groups in Rome

1. Major Colleges Consulted by the Senate
<p>Pontifices: Nine members from 300 BC (<i>lex Ogulnia</i>); increased to 15 members by Sulla with members co-opted by College until <i>lex Domitia</i> of 63 BC when elected by 17 of the 35 tribes from nominations by existing members. Headed by the <i>Pontifex Maximus</i>, who represents the College in the Senate and exercises disciplinary rights over College members.</p> <p>Additional members: <i>Flamines maiores</i> (<i>Dialis, Martialis, Quirinalis</i>). <i>Flamines minores</i> (<i>Carmenta, Ceres, Falacer, Flora, Furrina, Palatua, Pomona, Portunus, Volcanus and Volturus</i> + 2 unknown). <i>Rex Sacrorum</i> and <i>Vestālēs</i>.</p> <p>Functions: To advise the Senate on all matters concerned with the <i>sacra</i> (both <i>publica</i> and <i>privata</i>); advise the people on matters of sacred law, including burial and family law; also, keepers of records and wills (<i>Vestālēs</i>).</p>
<p>Augures: Numbers increased to 9 by <i>lex Ogulnia</i>, Caesar increased numbers to optimum 16. Election/co-optation, etc, as <i>pontifices</i>.</p> <p>Functions: Supervisors of, and advisers about, all the rituals and procedures concerned with the auspices.</p>
<p>Duo/Decem/Quindecimviri Sacris Faciundis: Originally 2 in number; 10 from 367 BC (Licino-Sextian Rogations); 15 after Sulla. Election/co-optation as for <i>pontifices</i>.</p> <p>Functions: Care of, and at the direction of the Senate, consultation of the Sibylline Books.</p>
<p>Tres/Septemviri Epulones: Created as three members in 196 BC; increased to seven by Sulla. Election/co-optation as for <i>pontifices</i>.</p> <p>Functions: Supervision of the regular Games in Rome.</p>
2. Priestly Groups Sometimes Consulted by the Senate
<p>Fetiales: 20 in number.</p> <p>Functions: Deal with relationships with other states – war, peace, treaties etc. (historically religious function - unclear)</p>
<p>Haruspices: 60 in number by late Republic.</p> <p>Functions: Not a college. Specialists in Etruscan lore of prodigies, lightning and other divination; experts on the reading of entrails at sacrifice.</p>
3. Groups Never Consulted by the Senate
<p>Salii: Two groups of 12 each.</p> <p>Functions: ritual dancing and chanting through the city on March and October Festivals (Mars).</p>
<p>Luperci: - Two groups – numbers unknown.</p> <p>Functions: ritual run/dance through city at Lupercalia (15th February) – association with fertility.</p>
<p>Fratres Arvales: - Twelve in number.</p> <p>Functions: Maintaining cult of the <i>Dea Dia</i> (agricultural/fertility). Responsible for the cult of the emperors after Augustus.</p>

Appendix 2

A Chronology of Building Activity during the 50's BC

- 58 B.C.** *Aedes Fidei* [Temple of Faith] on the Capitoline restored by M. Aemilius Scaurus.
- The domus of the Tullii Ciceronis was razed by Clodius following Cicero's banishment. On the site Clodius built a monument to *Libertas*.
- 57 B.C.** The *Fornix Fabianus*, on the Sacra Via, was restored by Q. Fabius Maximus, the grandson of the arch's original builder.
- Cicero's land is restored after his return from exile. The shrine of *Libertas* is deconsecrated, and Cicero arranges to rebuild.
- 55 B.C.** The *Aedes Veneris Victricis* [Temple of Venus Victrix] was dedicated by Cn. Pompeius Magnus in the Campus Martius.
- The Basilica Iulia was begun by C. Iulius Caesar.
- Caesar begins acquiring land for his *Forum Iulium* and makes plans for building the *Saepta Iulia* in the Campus Martius.
- 54 B.C.** The *Tumulus Iulia* is erected in the Campus Martius after Julia, the husband of Pompeius and daughter of Caesar, died in childbirth.
- The *Basilica Aemilia et Fulvia*, located at the junction of the Sacra Via and the Argiletum, is restored by L. Aemilius Paullus.
- 52 B.C.** The Curia Hostilia is burned.
- The Basilica Porcia is burned.
- 51 B.C.** *Forum Iulium* begun. Incorporates temple to *Venus Genetrix*

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Appendix 3

Fig. 1,



Augustus AR Denarius MAR VLT – Obv: Laureate head right, CAESARI AVGVSTO
Rev: Temple of Mars Ultor (the Avenger) containing legionary eagle between two standards.
RIC I 105a (pg.48); BMCRE 373.

Fig. 2,



Augustus AR Denarius Julia/Diana – Rev: depicts Julia as the goddess Diana, as indicated by the quiver on her shoulder. The inscription refers to the moneyer, C MARIUS.
RIC 403, RSC 1.

Fig. 3,



Denarius of Augustus for the celebration of the Secular Games bore the bust of Caesar on the obverse, with the comet above his brow. Moneyer, M. Sanquinius. RIC 12, 338.

Fig. 4,



Altar of the Lares: Augustus sacrificing with Julia (or Livia) and Gaius Caesar.
ca, 2 BC. Uffizi Museum – Florence.

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