A Culture in Denial:
The Roman Cultural Relationship with Human sacrifice

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Acknowledgments:

I have a plethora of people to thank for assisting in the completion of my degree.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my dutiful and loving dog Coco, she couldn't read the last one, and certainly can't read this one. Rest in peace darling

Contents

Abstract

The Romans denied practicing human sacrifice, and claimed that almost every civilisation around them practised it, with it being an integral part in differentiating the Romans with everyone else; this self perception is deeply flawed. This work endeavours to grapple with the concept of human sacrifice, apply a pancultural defining framework for what counts as sacrifice, and engage with examples primarily from the Mid-Late Roman Republic and Early Principate period. Furthermore this work sets out to grasp the cultural importance of the term “human sacrifice” within the Roman mindset of the aforementioned period, to do so examples of allegations or genuine practice of human sacrifice within a select few other cultures with which Rome interacted with will be examined; not only will the claims themselves be interrogated, but the Roman attitude, racism and imperialistic actions against those cultures/groups be taken into consideration in regards to their fates. Examples of Roman human sacrifice to be examined include the ritual immurement not only of the Greeks and the Gauls of the 3rd & 2nd Centuries BCE but also the living entombment of the Vestal Virgins; the military self-sacrificial ritual of *devotio*; the drowning of hermaphroditic children; the allegations of human sacrifice that permeated the Late Republic; and the examination of assassinations as to whether human sacrifice under the guise of defending the Republic was occurring.

Chapter 1: Defining Human Sacrifice

In this opening section: I lay a groundwork for the parameters of the discussion at hand; what I view as the factors that constitute an act of sacrifice; justifications for said elements; formatting a cohesive structure by which we can evaluate individual cases to see if they constitute the parameters for sacrifice; and finally the issue of ancient sources in its identification of human sacrifice. It is important to remember that many instances in history do not neatly fit into these defined limits, and I will discuss cases that delve into the grey area within the Late Republic and Early Principate, most of these cases are political assassinations, however, they have significant religious implications or purported characteristics indicative of rites and rituals. Prior to any interrogation of sources and cultural activities, I must first endeavour to answer an important question: What exactly is and counts as human sacrifice?

At first glance, this seems relatively simple, religiously motivated deaths in appeasement of a deity involving voluntary or involuntary subjects.[1] But there are complications with that explanation, that definition leaves a lot of room for interpretation; do religiously motivated deaths such the destruction and devastation caused by holy wars count as human sacrifices? Does every man, woman and child slain by a zealous warrior count as a human sacrifice? Do acts of martyrdom to defend a temple or killing oneself count as sacrifice? Within those initial parameters, it would be hard to deny their arguments. Some scholars have posited similar definitions, such as Løvschal et al., whom explain that human sacrifice within their research parameters includes “...any kind of violence that people inflict on one another when sanctioned or sanctified, e.g. by social authority, and with explicit reference to a higher purpose or higher authority.".[2] All these questions asked previously would take Løvschal et al.’s definition to be, yes; in fact it's possible to broaden the definition to include states/societies in conflict with each other, by that definition most deaths in wartime would most likely fall under that categorisation.

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[1] Carrasco, D. (2013) ‘Sacrifice/Human Sacrifice in Religious Traditions.’ *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Violence* ed. by Juergensmeyer, M., Kitts, M., Jerryson, M. Oxford University Press. p.211
[2]Løvschal, M. et al. (2019) ‘Human sacrifice and value’, *Antiquity*, 93(370). p.3

Such a definition arguably cheapens the phrase, making a spectrum that is too vast and too encompassing to properly differentiate between violence that perhaps has more minor components of religiosity within a larger list of reasons with ritualistic religiously-motivated violence. The nebulousness of the term 'human sacrifice' and 'sacrifice' more generally is acknowledged by other scholars, with Aldhouse-Green highlighting aspects such as "...'giving' and 'separation'." and that the act would typically entail the killing "...perhaps in a distinctive way, by depositing it in a special place, and sometimes by doing something to it before death or deposition…".[3]

There is also the aspect of keeping the community clean, that the gods must be appeased to prevent the spreading of disease or 'social plagues' spreading through the community through an act of sacrifice, for example an act of *lustratio* would involve the act of sacrificing an animal to cleanse an area.[4] Do deaths of people based on religious panic count as acts of human sacrifice? One could argue that they do fit the parameters, as long as there is a ritualised action rather than sporadic and ill-planned violence, to what extent that mob killings derived from religious panic would have to be explored on a case by case basis.

In regards to the Roman religious experience; the interaction between the Roman political state and the religious state was deeply intimate. Indeed sometimes it is hard to discern where politics end and the religious element begins, if they were ever truly separate to begin with. Frequently they are overlapping and intertwining, especially due to the propensity of the Pontifex Maximus to hold some form of significant magistracy, whether that consul, or indeed, dictator. Thus, the religious practices of Roman priests could be considered to be both political and religious in nature.

Justifiable cynicism towards Roman religious officials is well founded in an analysis of human nature, but that shouldn't lessen the degree to which ancient figures truly believed in the rites, rituals and prophecies they were engaging and acting within a

[3] [Aldhouse-]Green, M.J. (2005) *Exploring the world of the Druids* London: Thames & Hudson p.72
[4] Beard 1998 *RoR: Vol.1* p.355; Lennon, J.J. (2011) *Carnal, bloody and unnatural acts : religious pollution in ancient Rome* [unpublished PhD in Philosophy thesis] University of Nottingham p.16, 45

context of.[5] For example; Cicero criticises the truthfulness of oracles yet concedes the importance of ritual and custom in Roman political life, as well as the importance for leaders to have at least a religious education and thorough understanding of the relationship between the mortal and the divine; whereas for some scholars there is a mixed opinion of the importance of ritual and the true religiosity of the Romans, “Ritual has increasingly been regarded…as the social cement for the Roman state, or as an ideological veil for the realities of power.”.[6]

Roman cultural customs and traditions often necessitated public interaction/observation, with few exceptions, indeed religion was very demonstrative in the Roman world; they tended to be public affairs, with the audience consisting of both gods and man. Wiseman, in their discussion of the foundation myth of Rome, interestingly characterising a mirroring between Remus’ and Decius Mus’ actions and subsequent deaths, puts the relationship between Rome and its patron deities as bluntly as possible with “For Rome to survive, the gods required a death.”.[7]

The nature of the Roman gods and gods of that time period in general was highly transactional, you would pay the gods, and they, depending on your piety and the quality of your offering, would grant some divine act, whether that be a bountiful harvest, an end to plague, or the protection of a loved one on a treacherous voyage. Now, the greater the demand from the individual, the higher the sacrificial cost would be, animals and votive offerings tended to be common; however, if the survival of the state itself was believed to be in danger, then the cost must match the demand. Humans are in effect, the ultimate price that one could pay for the god’s favour, and should therefore only be acceptable in the most dire of circumstances, such as in reaction to dire omens, ill portents for the survival of the state were deemed satisfactory to sanction an act they themselves perceived as abominable, so in attempt to save face, they would classify this as anything other than a sacrifice.

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[5] Coleman, S. et al. (2004) *Religion, identity, and change : perspectives on global transformations.* Aldershot: Ashgate. p.3

[6] Cicero *De Divinatione* trans. W.A. Falconer (1923) Loeb Classical Library 19; Cicero *De Domo Sua* trans. N.H. Watts (1928) 1.1; Feeney, D. (1998) *Literature and Religion at Rome: Cultures, Contexts and Beliefs* Cambridge p.116

[7] Wiseman, T. P., (2004) *The Myths of Rome* Exeter p.141-142

As has been thoroughly explored by scholars, the Roman state was heavily prone to anxiety, fear, and paranoia.[8] For Rome, this anxiety manifests itself in increasingly violent acts; both internally against its own citizens and subjects, and externally against foreign nations and peoples. As will be explored within this work, anxiety tends to be the primary driving force behind the instances of sacrifice that occur; with different anxieties, both mortal and divine, being the catalyst for these 'extreme' and 'barbarous' rites. As can be seen, the nature of the individual being sacrificed reflected either an external or internal threat, with the Greeks and Gauls being immured representing external fears, whereas the entombment of living Vestal Virgins is an internal threat, insomuch as the gods displeasure was a failure on the part of the Roman state and/or people rather than foreign deities and civilisations.[9]

Martyrdom is a concept that early on has a lot of what could be perceived as sacrifices is labelled, however the definitions differ even if they overlap somewhat. Martyrdom as a concept has a prevalence in early Christian apologetics and actions, those who die for their faith out of refusal to change or out of malice that they had participated in those beliefs in the first place are believed to have died, in a sense, for their god. That surely, by definition, is human self-sacrifice? Well, yes. In those instances, they could be counted as human sacrifice, with the main hangup being that if they, the victims or the perpetrators, considered their deaths as a payment towards a deity or would it rather be considered a demonstration of faith, certainly some scholars point towards this being an act of self-sacrifice.[10]

The difference between martyrdom and sacrifice is that martyrdom is not explicitly an offering to a deity as well as the fact it does not necessarily indicate the sacrifice of a life, its meaning is more implied by others, that this expression of faith will be rewarded by god with a place in heaven with the possible side effect of convincing others of the credibility of their own faith, Vasil'ev points out that it is more in line with the concept of a noble death than a normal human sacrifice.[11] Martyrdom also lacks

[8] Várhelyi, Z. (2011) 'Political Murder and Sacrifice', *Ancient Mediterranean Sacrifice*. Oxford University Press p.278
[9] Aldhouse-Green, M. J. (2001). *Dying for the gods: human sacrifice in Iron Age & Roman Europe.* Tempus. p.33
[10] Meszaros, J.T., Zachhuber, J. (2013) *Sacrifice and Modern Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.112
[11] Vasil'ev, A.V. (2015) 'Roman rite of devotio and Early Christian martyrdom: a comparative study', *Religiâ, cerkov', obŝestvo*, 4, pp. 116–135 p.124

the ritual element that is indicative of an act of sacrifice, however contention can be raised if offering prayers counts as a ritual act significant enough to justify a labelling of sacrifice. The importance of martyrdom as a concept is interesting, as Van Dam puts it "...the Christian church had glorified the concept of martyrdom…Martyrdom was seen as the absolute and perhaps only total imitation of Christ, ensuring perfect union with him." but martyrdom's characteristics shift over time to encompass more than just someone's death motivated by religious violence; it can mean someone not engaging in indulgent practices, a far cry from the concept of human sacrifice.[12] So while martyrdom cannot wholly be set within the confines nor outskirts of the realm of human sacrifice, it itself is a separate nebulous concept which sometimes skirts the boundaries of being considered a human sacrifice. Thus if we are to talk about martyrdom, it could only be those instances in which blood is shed and life is lost, rather than the entire concept of martyrdom.

One major problem we come to when trying to define which occasions ritualistic violence actually *is* sacrifice is the problem of implicit and explicit dedication to a deity. As explained, the Roman state was never fully separated from religion, in fact it not only indulged in and donned a lot of religious imagery and iconography as part of its character but its 'secular' aspects could never truly be separated from the religious because they never were *meant* to be truly separate.[13] Throughout Roman history, you see a sustained amalgam of 'secular' and religious figures: the kingship evolved into the mostly independent roles of *Rex Sacrorum*, *Pontifex Maximus* and consul, the latter two of which consolidate into the role of *Primus Princeps*, a role that has both significant secular and religious duties; with the importance of the concept of piety embedded within Roman politics.

Piety is a significant part of the Roman social consciousness and should be taken into its account when it is being examined. Within ancient scholarship we see: Polybius extolling the virtues of the integration of piety within the Roman constitution; acts of placing the comfort of priestesses over one's own family; as well as the piety

[12] Van Dam, R. (1992) *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* Berkeley; University of California press p.107
[13] *See* Cicero *De Domo Sua* trans. N.H. Watts (1928); Cicero *De Haruspicum Responso* trans. N.H. Watts (1928) 7.13

of priests protecting them from enemy combatants.[14] Piety can cause one to do extreme acts, like those aforementioned, and a lack of piety is often associated with catastrophe; so purposefully being impious can be perceived to have disastrous consequences, even if those consequences are by chance or from a form of self-fulfilling prophecy rather than actual scornful divine intervention specifically because of one's lack of piety.

Defining a sacrifice

My view is that a human sacrifice is constituted of three distinct but interwoven parts. Firstly, and most simple in its meaning and its identification, is that it must have the death of a human involved; surrogacy in the form of an animal or a doll, such as what took place in the procession of the Argei, do not count as sufficient substitutes.[15] Secondly is the ritual aspect, this aspect will be explained further on, but a simplified explanation is that there must be a ritualised or ceremonial aspect to the killing. Thirdly, and the one that will be possibly the most contentious aspect is the involvement of a deity, *whether that be explicit or implicit*. The intention of an act can be derived from the context surrounding the event, and the conditions that the act is set within can change an act from one of murder to sacrifice. An explicit devotion to the gods is, for lack of a better term, our smoking gun, one in which it seems in some cases is stated as having occurred.

The problem is, is that an open declaration is an admission, an admission that it isn't just a ritual murder or an execution, it is an admission that an event *is* a sacrifice to the gods. A ritual murder being "...the killing of a human being for religious purposes, repeated in specific circumstances in a proscribed fashion…".[16] My perhaps controversial view is that the devotion of a human to a deity can either be explicit or implicit, it does not really matter, except in the ease of identifying which acts are and

[14] Appian *Roman History* trans. Horace White (1913) Loeb Classical Library 4.4.; Florus *Epitome of Roman History* 1.13.12; Polybius The Histories trans. W.R. Paton (1927) Harvard University Press 6.56.6; Wallace-Hadrill, A. (2008) *Rome's Cultural Revolution* Cambridge p.249
[15] Dillon, M., Garland, L. (2005) *Ancient Rome: From the Early Republic to the Assassination of Julius Caesar* Routledge p.116-117; Scullard, H.H. (1981) *Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic* London p.15, 120-121. 148, 179
[16] Schultz, C.E. 'The Romans and Ritual Murder' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 78, No.2 (2010) pp.516-541 p.518; Schultz, C.E. '

are not sacrifices. The problem with this, as I will admit, is the identification of what should be classified as a deity and trying to deduce the true motivations and reasonings behind a sacrifice.

The second component of sacrifice, the ritual aspect, is what differs sacrifice from other murderous acts. There has been a lot of development within scholarship over what 'ritual' is actually defined as, and even to this day the concept is inconclusive.[17] Broadly it can be defined as repeated systematic behaviours that may or may not be explicitly codified and typically serve a purpose – emotional or psychological – beyond that which the act physically entails. What separates a 'ritual' from 'regular' actions is the emotional aspect to them, the degree to which the actions themselves have value more than just what the act accomplishes physically on its own. In a lot of the cases I will evaluate the ritual components; the ritual aspect will certainly differ from case to case but shall be recognisably 'ritualistic' in examples that we can categorise as human sacrifice. Things can become assigned the label of 'ritual' rather than that be their original intended purpose, some thing or action can gain the quality of 'ritual' or 'ritualistic' if it becomes associated with a specific activity or is used in that way. For example in the Eucharist – also known as communion – wine and bread/wafers are used to symbolise the blood and flesh of Jesus Christ, with the concept of transubstantiation being ingrained within that act, this does not mean that all wine and bread are blood and flesh but the contextual act they are components in gives them that quality.

Location is one of the factors that should be considered when defining human sacrifice, as it is heavily involved in the context and indeed ritual aspect of the act. In my view a continuous or dedicated location is not necessary in defining something as a sacrifice, much like how Roman priests would travel with armies performing impromptu animal sacrifices or witnessing omens and auguries prior to or during the preparation of battle, so can human sacrifices be improvised on the spot, with the argument for my conviction being elaborated on below. As will be all too common within this dialogue, I must stress that although my opinion is that locations are not a requirement, the location *is* an important part of sacrificial acts, especially those of

[17] Bremmer 2007 p.32-43

the more institutionalised offerings of humans to the gods; chiefly the immurement of the Vestals or the Gauls and Greeks, as well as the execution of POWs in triumphs.[18] Both these ideas can coincide, for while location is not necessary for the enactment of these rites, they nevertheless are an important part of the discussion of the symbolism of different acts, for having a dedicated area for immurement must surely be recognised as conceding that there are structures reserved for the sacrifice of humans, and thus they necessarily must have been planned for.

The following argument embarks upon understanding the modern interpretation of the importance of location for human sacrifice. In the contemporary media landscape, the way in which the Western public characterises the idea of 'human sacrifice' is typically portrayed in one of two ways. First, and most commonly I'd argue, in the public imagination is a depiction of temple complexes; large dedicated building works serving as a pedestal for religious rites. This archetype is predominantly constructed by illustrations of Mesoamerican pyramids topped by *teocalli* with rivers of blood dripping down its steps, with movies like *Apocalypto* portraying this bloody and gruesome affair; this idea stresses the importance of location and ceremony in the carrying out of a sacrifice as well as the importance of public engagement with the ritual, not dissimilar with Roman practises of religion.

Secondly, a concept that has become more prevalent, especially due to and in the fantasy and horror genres is the more private concept of cults chiefly being the ones carrying out sacrifices, in the dark and secluded from wider society. Within this abstraction delineates two subgroups, either there is some form of permanent construction at the location of the sacrifice, with examples ranging from elaborate but sequestered shrines, to a dais with a stone altar/table. Within movies like Indiana Jones, which has quite an elaborate ritual process depicted, the temple itself is subterranean and secluded. The other abstraction is a more meagre and spartan occasion, with crude runes or a pentagram drawn onto the ground perhaps with candles encircling the pictograms upon which the victim or just their blood may be sacrificed. This second group is arguably placing more stress upon the ritual and

[18] Josephus *The Jewish War* trans. William Whiston (1737) 7.5.6; Maxfield, V.A. (1981) *The Military Decorations of the Roman Army*. London: Batsford. p.101, Beard, M. (2007) *The Roman Triumph* Cambridge, Mass. p.129-130

ceremony than the location, the lack of significant permanent structures within these second group forms an idea of an impromptu but organised event, whereas the first group underscores their actions with a physical display of power, something separate but integrated with the act itself.

Both of these concepts are heavily linked in the public imagination as being payment to deities, in return for bountiful crop harvests or successful military campaigns in respect to the Mesoamerican cultures, or as a way to increase the power/presence of an individual within that cult setting or empowering the deity being the end goal. There also may be a hesitancy within the public consciousness to identify certain acts as human sacrifice, especially if the act in contention is something that the individual aligns themselves to be the in-group of. Importantly, both large structures and secluded shrines are linked to the public imagination in a negative light It must be noted that both these examples are played for their brutality to keep the audience engaged, impressing the importance of the ritual over human life and its inherent rights, and are, especially considering *Indiana Jones*'s primary audience being Western, playing into stereotypical ideas of 'oriental mysticism'.

My contention is that the location is not of chief importance, that the act itself has the ability to be carried out at any location, *as long as* the appropriate rites and rituals are observed in the act's consecration. However, I will concede that location has an important part to play in the symbolism of the act, and that it heavily impacts an act's perception by both the general public and the academic community, and that some authors also stress the importance of a location in the making of a sacrifice.[19] So instead of being treated as a fourth stipulation for sacrifice, it is in fact a subsidiary element of the 'ritual' component.

Methodology

The prevalence of human sacrifice in Rome for scholarship is a contentious topic, with the discussion spanning many decades, having increased in its discourse fairly recently. Concepts such as *devotio* getting the attention they deserve from the 1970s

[19] Aldhouse-Green 2005 p.72

onwards, and challenges to the Carthaginian human sacrificial belief started within the last sixty years but has gained traction within the last twenty years. I think there is perhaps an element of timidity in assigning the label of human sacrifice to ritual murders perpetrated by Rome partially because of the very idea that human sacrifice is a negative thing, which we ourselves inherited from the Romans.

A significant amount of my selection of ancient scholarship comes from either contemporaries, near contemporaries, or those within a few centuries of the events they are retelling, accompanied by a few late antiquity sources. With the Greeks and Roman sources having a virtual monopoly on extant ancient written sources when it comes to the cultures of the Mediterranean and Europe during classical antiquity. Most of the problems with the ancient sources is that they are typically hindered by a level of ignorance or as Aldhouse-Green puts it, a "...curious but uninformed 'touristic' attitude...", with another flaw being the typical cultural bias there is towards other civilisations, sometimes resulting in reductionist or 'primitivising' the cultures they are observing and recording.[20] Thus their viewpoints are invariably going to be skewed towards a more 'fantastical' and 'gruesome' perspective.[21]

Furthermore there is a tendency within ancient scholarship to use human sacrifice as a tool to demonise political rivals or cast disrepute onto their character. An example of human sacrifice being used as a political weapon is Lucius Sergius Catilina; Whom, after attempting to overthrow the elected consuls, was killed in battle and his surviving co-conspirators executed.[22] Catilina within ancient scholarship is derided and criticised for supposedly drinking blood mixed with wine, much like the accusation that he sleeps with a Vestal Virgin, this allegation seems spurious at best.[23] Another example is the supposed sacrifice of prisoners by Augustus at the

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[20] Aldhouse-Green 2005 p.14
[21] Gill, C. and Wiseman, T.P. (1993) *Lies and Fiction in the Ancient World*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press. p.122-123, 126-127
[22] Plu. *Vit. Cic*. 10.3-11.3; Sallust *Bellum Catilinae* trans. J. C. Rolfe (1921) Loeb Classical Library 21.2, 26
[23] Cassius Dio *Roman History* trans. Earnest Cary (1929) Harvard University Press 37.30; Flor. *Ep*. 2.12.4; Minuc. Fel. *Oct*. 30.5; Plutarch *Parallel Lives* trans. Bernadotte Perrin (1923) Loeb Classical Library *Vit. Cic.* 10.4; Sall. *Cat*. 22, 5.1-8, 14-15.4; Gruen, E.S. (1974) The Last Generation of the Roman Republic. Berkeley ; University of California Press. p.42, 271; Isaac, Benjamin (2004) *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* Princeton University Press p.208

temple of Julius Caesar after crushing Lucius Antonius' forces in the Perusine war.[24] Although modern scholarship and even some ancient scholarship do not give credence to it being a sacrifice to the extent that many modern scholars do not even include it within the discussion of events.[25] This trend continues on throughout the later empire as seen with the scholarship surrounding Elagabalus.[26]

The use of language is again an important problem that has to be navigated, as explained thoroughly above, human sacrifice is viewed as inherently 'barbaric' and treated with disdain. As such, when these ancient sources discuss the cultures they are cataloguing, they may overexaggerate the prevalence of human sacrifice: firstly to demonise the respective culture, emphasising 'barbarity'; and secondly, to provide spectacle and a level of shock value to their audience. The Greeks and the Romans like to contrast their 'civilisation' to the foreign 'barbarian' peoples, and while there is some level of appreciation for other cultures, it is steeped within a deep sense of superiority and arrogant paternalism.[27] The best lies are those that integrate grains of truth to substantiate the more outlandish claims with a backdrop of factual context.

The modern scholarship I have engaged with is varied, with several disagreeing with each other's conclusions. Celia E. Schultz is one of the most prolific discussers of ritual murder and human sacrifice within contemporary scholarship, as such I engage with a variety of works she has contributed to the discussion, on some points I agree and in some our conclusions diverge. For some subject matter, such as the Vestal Virgins, the dialogue within scholarship is relatively new; spearheaded and heavily contributed by scholars such as Mary Beard, whom has been integral in much discussion of Roman religion within academic discourse. Miranda-Aldhouse Green also contributes a significant amount of scholarship to the subject of the Druids, the

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[24] Cass Dio. 48.14.3-4; Suet. *Aug*. 15.1; Velleius Paterculus *Roman History* trans. Frederick W. Shipley (1924) Loeb Classical Library 2.74.1-4

[25] App. *B Civ.* 5.48; Suet. Aug. 15.1; Lewis, A.-M. (2023) *Celestial inclinations : a life of Augustus.* New York, New York: Oxford University Press. p.226-227; Osgood, J. (2006) *Caesar's legacy : civil war and the emergence of the Roman Empire.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.172; Schultz 2010 p.525; Stern 2020 p.377

[26] Aelius Lampridius *Augustan History: Life of Elagabalus* trans. David Magie (1932) 8.1; Beard, M. North, J. Price, S. (1998) *Religions of Rome: Volume 2, a sourcebook* Press syndicate of the University of Cambridge p.160, 206, 8.5c

[27] Mattern, S.P. (1999) *Rome and the Enemy : Imperial Strategy in the Principate.* Berkeley, CA ; University of California Press. p.74; Preston, R. (2001) 'Roman questions, Greek answers: Plutarch and the construction of identity' *Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of Empire* ed. by Goldhill, S. , Cambridge University Press p.102

Celts, and human sacrifice in general, and they have provided a substantial amount towards my discussion of the Druids.

Chapter 2: Cases of cultures committing human sacrifice - Roman response and rhetoric

The purpose of this chapter is to give comparison studies to the Romans in regards to the practice of human sacrifice and focuses upon two cultures that are heavily entwined with human sacrifice.

Section 1 (The Druids):

The first group I will be discussing in regards to the prevalence of human sacrifice in proximity to the Romans is the Druids, both those inhabiting Gaul and those inhabiting Britannia. Aldhouse-Green states that there are three historical narratives the ancient sources tend to follow: those positively inclined towards the Druids, those negatively inclined, and those who present a mixed view, and all three are separated and grouped together by time.[28] Those whom are negatively inclined, coalesce around the point in which Gaul is becoming fully integrated into the Roman empire, this could be because of a cultural backlash towards Gallic influence in Roman culture; those more positively inclined tend to come from Alexandria in the late 2nd century up to the 5th century CE, this could be denoting a more positive cultural shift that occurred in respect to the Gauls, either through perception of it being a Romanized/dominated province, or cultural hostility decreasing as cultural intermingling permeated, there is also a possibility that there was a sense of baselessly attributed nostalgia towards the Druids; a point of interest can be raised around the idea that magic and human sacrifice become inextricably linked within the Roman mindset, as “Human sacrifice had…become…a clear diagnostic of magic...”.[29] As Alhouse-Green argues, the Druids could have been falsely credited with ideas of stoicism or pythagoreanism.[30] In particular, this later period of conversation on Druidic culture tends to be characterised as an example of cultural

[28] Aldhouse-Green 2005 p.39-42
[29] Beard, M. North, J. Price, S. (1998) *Religions of Rome: Volume 1, a history* Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge p.233-234; Beard et al 1998 *RoR:Vol.2* p.263-264 11.3; Liebeschuetz, J.H.W.G. (1979) *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion.* Oxford: Clarendon Press. p.138 fn.4; Rawson, E. (1985) *Intellectual life in the late Roman Republic*. London: Duckworth. p.310
[30] Aldhouse-Green 2005 p.41

chauvinism towards the ‘Noble Savage’, that the ‘barbarians’ did pertain some aspects of ‘civility’ prior to being subdued by Roman dominion.[31]

Conversely, in the time of the Republic, views of the Gauls were pretty negatively inclined, with a lot of this most likely stemming from Brennus’ sack of the city in 387 BCE, as well as several other Gallic incursions near or into Roman territory. Anxiety had its part to play in this, the Gauls had sacked Rome before, they could do it again.[32] Gaul, which had not been subjugated by this time, is a target of the typical Roman cultural racism and stereotypical tropes; allegations of human sacrifice is a way in which the Romans could better ‘justify’ their expansionist attitude in the region, along with Caesar’s aggressive posturing in his pursuit for glory and riches.[33] We know that the allegation of human sacrifice was a deeply emotional assertion to levy against a people purely for its role in the civilised vs barbarian dichotomy that is prevalent within Greco-Roman rhetoric.[34] Conversely to this, we have Caesar’s account of the Gauls during his decade of conquest in the region. Caesar has a legacy of systematically subjugating the Gauls; nevertheless, he is one of if not our best account for Gallic and Druidic culture, Aldhouse-Green puts it well with “Although his [Caesar] *Gallic War* had a politico-propaganda purpose, his description of the Druids is dispassionate, detailed and contemporary”.[35] It is incredibly bleak that our primary source for Gallic and Druidic culture is the man who would lead a campaign of brutality against them.

The Romans would wholeheartedly disagree with the labelling of their diplomatic tactics being referred to as a ‘war of aggression’. Wars in the Roman mindset had to be justified, their wars had to be just otherwise the gods would side against them, this ‘defensive expansionism’ is clued into by a number of scholars when talking about Roman imperialism; that the Romans would always argue that they were never the aggressors, only defending their state from outward aggression, that their *casus belli* was always justified. Caesar’s conquest of Gaul was highly destructive to

[31] Ibid.
[32] Caesar *De Bello Gallico* trans. H.J. Edwards (1917) Loeb Classical Library 6.16; Plu. Marc. 3.2-3; Tacitus *Histories* trans. C.H. Moore (1925) Loeb Classical Library 4.54; Beard 2015 p.284
[33] Beard 2015 p.284; Mattern 1999 p.75; Taylor, T.S. (2023) ‘Caesar’s Gallic Genocide: A Case Study in Ancient Mass Violence’ The Cambridge World History of Genocide: Volume 1: Genocide in the Ancient, Medieval and the Premodern Worlds. Cambridge University Press pp.309-329 p.327
[34] Beard et al 1998 *RoR:Vol.2* p.159 6.6c
[35] Aldhouse-Green 1997 p.41-42

the native inhabitants, the series of revolts orchestrated by the Gauls to remove the Romans caused substantial casualties due to famine and Roman violence. Pliny the Elder states that Caesar killed 1.129 million Gauls, Plutarch claims a million killed and a million enslaved, which is an incredibly high number, although considering Caesar's campaigns through Gaul lasted a decade, it is not as far-fetched as it might initially seem.[36]

Figure 1

The particular distaste the Romans had for the Druids is exercised in their explicit persecution by Emperors such as Augustus, Tiberius, and Claudius.[37] Typical Roman integration of foreign belief systems and cultural groups into the empire tended to be to a certain extent, hands off, "With the exception of the prohibition against human sacrifice and druidic practices—about which we know very little—and the establishment of provincial cults, the Romans rarely intervened in this process of integration…" with the Druids being the notable exception, fear of uprising or undermining probably played into this significantly, and its endemic link with human

[36] Pliny HN. 7.25; Plut. Vit. Caes. 15.5
[37] Aldhouse-Green 2005 p.14-15; Beard et al 1998 *RoR:Vol.1* p.341

sacrifice would have further tightened the sights the Romans had on them.[38] In contrast, we have the Egyptian annexation, which for the most part allows for religious practices to continue despite prior incidents of human sacrifice occurring there; the bureaucratisation that accompanied Roman rule extended into the religious realm, Gordon is of the view that the Egyptian priesthood found itself clashing with and being eroded by Roman bureaucracy/authority which, while permitting its typical religious activities, extended influence over some practices, in one particular instance is the appointment of an official whose only concern "...was to consider requests to circumcise candidates for the priesthood.".[39] In contrast to the Druids, the treatment is almost night and day.

A, quite frankly, interesting incident between the Druids and Romans occurs upon the shores of Mona (modern day Anglesey) according to Tacitus. Mona was a stronghold of the druids in Britain, being an island of significant cultural and religious significance.[40] Tacitus relays to us a scene of devout religiosity and utter destruction. He says that the Druids engaged in symbolic rituals upon the beach, "...showering imprecations…" upon the Roman soldiers, whom were paralysed by this religious fervour or at the very least by the lack of fear exhibited by the Druids upon facing the Roman task force.[41] It is also said that aside from the Druids were a band of what we can assume to be local militia whom had "...women flitting between the ranks. In the style of Furies, in robes of deathly black and with dishevelled hair.".[42] Furthermore, upon their destruction, the Romans encircled, slaughtered, then "...enveloped the enemy in his own flames.", it is also stated that the 'furies' who dashed about "...exposed their bodies to wounds without an attempt at movement." which hints at a purposeful allowing of themselves to be cut down, which in itself could hint that the Romans were unwittingly involved in an act of human self-sacrifice, given the religious nature and purpose of the 'furies'.[43] Further evidence of the Roman persecution of the Druidic culture is found within the same text alongside the explicit reasoning for doing so; Tacitus says that they destroyed the shrines and temples of the Druids on Mona because "...their savage cults…considered it a duty to consult

[38] Johnston 2007 p.124
[39] Gordon 1990 p.241
[40] Aldhouse-Green 1997 p.52-53
[41] Tacitus *Annals* trans. J. Jackson (1925) Loeb Classical Library 14.30
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.

their deities by means of human entrails.", this being a clear cut case of religious persecution based on the Roman disgust for human sacrifice, alongside a more pragmatic removal of symbolic rallying locations for local resistance.[44]

Section 2 (The Carthaginians):

Carthage was, for the Roman Republic, the age-old enemy, even after its conquest and utter destruction.[45] While there had been struggles with other regional powers such as Epirus, the Samnites and the other Italian peoples, Carthage stands alone as being the predominant opposition to Rome during the Mid-Republic, the three wars between the two saw Rome grow ever stronger. Arguably the war that not only sat in the minds of many a Roman as well as modern historians was the Second Punic War, a war that would span two decades and lead to the deaths of vast swathes of young men, and a war that would be the context in which the Romans committed an act they viewed as truly 'un-roman' and sacrificed people to the gods.[46] The conception of the Carthaginians committing human sacrifice was not limited to the Roman mindset, with the Greeks in the 5th Century BCE talking of such practices.[47] It is possible that there was an overlap in the Romans continuing the Greek tradition of the 'civilised-barbarian divide' being married with the geopolitical struggle against the Carthaginians as the Roman sphere of influence grew beyond central Italy and expanded into the Western Mediterranean, similar to how Roman expansion into Transalpine Gaul caused the proliferation of stories of Gallic human sacrifice.[48]

The accusation of sacrificing children is, in my opinion, a deeply irreverent allegation to make against a people, a culture, and a civilisation; as others have noted it is a difficult subject to broach with any sense of clarity.[49] The concept of the sacrificing of humans was already an abhorrent concept within Roman society, with it being linked

[44] Ibid.
[45] Mattern 1999 p.211-222
[46] Bremmer 2007 p.6
[47] Rives, J.B. (1994) 'Tertullian on Child Sacrifice', *Museum helveticum*, 51(1), pp. 54–63. p.68
[48] Ibid.
[49] Smith, P. et al. (2011) 'Aging cremated infants: the problem of sacrifice at the Tophet of Carthage', *Antiquity*, 85(329), pp. 859–874. p.871

to cannibalism and generally linked with ‘barbarism’ as explained previously.[50] However, an allegation that not only did a culture sacrifice humans, but those most innocent and in dire need of protection is an even more egregious allegation that would, in the eyes of the Roman people, dehumanise the Carthaginians to a greater extent. Firstly by ensuring they were kept out of the category of ‘civilised’ and secondly being placed below other ‘barbarian’ civilisations like the Gauls and the myriad other cultures bordering the Mediterranean, for that while the other cultures around them practiced human sacrifice, the Carthaginians sacrificed *children* to their gods.

The historical consensus used to be in line with what the ancient sources were in general agreement about, that the Carthaginians sacrificed their children, in some sources the most preeminent families in particular, at an altar of Cronos.[51] However, some ancient scholars, notably Mela did not include this in their discussion of Carthaginian culture, despite frequently describing it being an activity in other groups.[52] This idea came into dispute within the last half century, a portion of scholarship generally accepted and concurred with the ancient scholars that the Carthaginians engaged in this grizzly ritual.[53] In contrast, the acceptance of sacrifice has been heavily disputed by archaeologically-backed research and scholarship.[54] With some scholars coming to a conclusion of indecision.[55] More recent examples of archaeological analysis include Schwartz et al’s multiple papers regarding an archaeological analysis of the human remains found there.[56] The reports construct the argument that there has been a massive either misunderstanding or purposeful misattribution of the site and its ritual usage in ancient Carthage.[57]

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[50] App. *HR*. 6.5.96; Firmicus Maternus *On the Error of Profane Religions* trans. C.A. Forbes (1970) Newman Press 26.2; Justin *First Apology* trans. Marcus Dods, George Reith (1885) 26: Isaac, Benjamin (2004) *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* Princeton University Press pp.334
[51] Eusebius of Caesarea Praeparatio Evangelica trans. E.H. Gifford (1903) 4.16; Rives 1994 p.68
[52] Pomponius Mela *Chorographica* trans. F.E. Romer (1998) University of Michigan Press 2.11, 2.15 for the Taurians, 3.18 for Gauls; Isaac 2004 p.335; Lancel 1995 p.249
[53] Aldhouse-Green 2001 p.75; Isaac 2004 p.475; Liebeschutz 1979 p.179 fn.3; Rives 1994 p.54
[54] *See* Lancel, S. (1995) Carthage: A History trans. Antonia Nevill, Blackwell Publishing
[55] Cerezo-Román, J.I. et al. (2024) ‘The life and death of cremated infants and children from the Neo-Punic tophet at Zita, Tunisia’, *Antiquity*, 98(400), pp. 936–953 p.948-949
[56]Schwartz, J.H. et al. (2010) ‘Skeletal remains from Punic Carthage do not support systematic sacrifice of infants’, *PloS one*, 5(2), pp. e9177–e9177.;Schwartz, J.H., F.D. Houghton, L. Bondioli, and R. Macchiarelli, (2012) ‘Bones, teeth, and estimating age of perinates: Carthaginian infant sacrifice revisited’, *Antiquity*, 86(333), pp. 738–745.; Schwartz, J.H., F.D. Houghton, L. Bondioli, and R. Macchiarelli, ‘Two Tales of One City: Data, Inference and Carthaginian Infant Sacrifice’, *Antiquity*, 91 (2017), pp.442–54
[57] Lancel 1995 p.251

Schwartz' and other archaeologists arguments hinge upon an analysis of the bone fragments and teeth of the remains, they found that these corpses were indeed children, it would be good news for the traditional narrative, however; a significant portion of the remains were calculated to have been those of stillborn or very early post-birth deaths, referred to as prenatal/neonatal/recently postnatal, something that is far more in line with the fact that pregnancy and childbirth in general had a high mortality rate in the classical era.[58] Schwartz' argument concludes that this was in fact a special place for newborn fatalities or stillborn to rest; with a cultural analysis of this concept focusing on the idea that these individuals were perhaps not viewed as full members of the community, that they hadn't reached the age of induction into the community and as such, could not be buried with the same rites and rituals as fully fledged citizens.[59] The site was also located nearby to the proper funeral place of citizens, giving further credence to the idea that it was a place of respect but distancing them from being 'true' members of the community.[60] Another theory suggests that the dead children are surrogate sacrifices for actual living human sacrifices, and that it is to an extent a convenience to use the children in this manner rather than sacrificing living humans.[61]

Carthage was destroyed, its memory was denigrated and much of its culture is wholly lost to us, both accidental and purposeful.[62] The reasoning for the war itself seemed to stem from a fear of Carthaginian resurgence, with some saying that war was orchestrated because of "…jealousy of its power…", despite the fact that Carthage had significantly diminished in power and influence, losing vast tracts of its land to the Numidians as it was not allowed to wage war in any capacity without Roman permission.[63] Applying the term 'genocide' to what the Romans did to Carthage is a debated topic, there is the issue of retroactively applying modern

[58] Lancel 1995 p. 249-250; Miles, R. (2011) *Carthage Must Be Destroyed: The Rise and Fall of an Ancient Civilization* Penguin p. 71; Schwartz et al.
[59] Cerezo-Román 2024 p.950
[60] Schwartz et al 2017 p.452
[61] Miles 2011 p.71
[62] Van Dommelen, P. 'Punic persistence: colonialism and cultural identities in Roman Sardinia' *Cultural Identity in the Roman Empire* 1998 ed. by Berry, J., Laurence, R. London. Routledge p.25-33
[63] Plu. *Cat. Mai.* 27.1-3, Vel. Pat. 1.12.5)

concepts onto the actions of ancient civilisations.[64] Lemkin initially defined genocide as also including the destruction of a societies/cultures physical presence i.e. their towns/cities etc.; in contrast, the 1948 Genocide convention focuses on acts against people rather than inanimate locations, although certainly some of the wording – Article II sections C & D's wording is rather vague so could include the destruction of a groups 'home' – can certainly be up for interpretation.[65] In conclusion to this point; I, and others, believe that what the Romans did to the Carthaginians absolutely constituted a genocide.[66] The destruction of Carthage for some Romans was supposedly bittersweet, as Scipio Aemilianus allegedly quotes the Iliad upon viewing the ruins of Carthage that was still ablaze.[67] The fear surrounding Carthage outlasted itself, such was the cultural legacy surrounding the city-state that for Roman scholarship, there was a belief – read fear – that "...the city kept threatening to rise again." even when these successors would be a wholly Roman colony.[68]

[64] Taylor, T.S. (2023) 'A Tale of Three cities: The Roman destruction of Carthage, Corinth and Numantia' The Cambridge World History of Genocide: Volume 1: Genocide in the Ancient, Medieval and the Premodern Worlds. Cambridge University Press pp.278-308 p.278-280
[65] Lemkin, R. (1944) *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Division of International Law Washington p.80 fn.3, 85, 86-87; UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* United Nations 2.C-D
[66] Kiernan, B. (2004) 'The First Genocide: Carthage, 146 BC', *Diogenes (English ed.).* English edition, 51(3), pp. 27–39. p.27
[67] Polyb. 38.22
[68] Goldschmidt, N. (2017) 'Textual Monuments: RECONSTRUCTING CARTHAGE IN AUGUSTAN LITERARY CULTURE', *Classical philology*, 112(3), pp. 368–383. P.376; Taylor 2023 p.307-308

Chapter 3: The Immurement of the Gauls and the Greeks

The immurement of the pairs of Gauls and Greeks underneath the Forum Boarium is perhaps the easiest topic to broach within the subject matter at hand. This example is one that both contemporary and ancient scholars agree upon. In a rare move from ancient scholarship, this event is attested to, albeit with hesitancy to align it with typical *or even* Roman rituals, to be an act of sacrifice.[69] This is also likely the specific procedure the law in 97BCE and later the *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et venefecis* illegalised.[70] Here we find Livy's arguably infamous commentary, that it – human sacrifice – was "...a practice most alien to the Roman spirit.".[71] Livy's language makes it incredibly clear that this is *absolutely* a case of sacrifice, no two ways about it; there seems to be a level of introspective disgust at even the very concept of it,that Livy's rhetoric is "... shrinking back from the sacrifice of Gauls and Greeks.".[72] The act is so blatantly an act of sacrifice that hundreds of years into the common era, we have Orosius speaking of the event in highly evocative manner within his *Histories* "Two years later, the pontiffs, who were mighty in their power to do evil, polluted the wretched city by sacrilegious rites.".[73] Here we see that the revulsion towards human sacrifice is still prominent within the ethics and morality of the Roman citizenry, although arguably a part of the emotive rhetoric is derived from a possible distaste for the Pagan nature of the Romans he was writing about and thus causes the use of more colourful language in his depiction of events, conversely it may be the act itself denigrating the priests with the act itself taking precedence and dominance of the subject matter, certainly the Christians had no issue in alleging human sacrifices to Pagans.[74]

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[69] Livy *Ab Urbe Condita* trans. Rev. Canon Roberts (1912) E.P. Dutton & Co. 22.57.6; Oros. 4.13.3; Plutarch *Moralia* trans. F.C. Babbitt (1936) Loeb Classical Library *Quaest. Rom*. 83; Beard et al 1998 *RoR:Vol.2* p.168 6.6b; Dumezil, G., (1996) *Archaic Roman Religion: With an Appendix on the Religion of The Etruscans* trans. Philip Krapp John Hopkins University Press p.449-450

[70] Julius Paulus 'The Opinions of Julius Paulus' from The Civil Law trans. S.P. Scott (1932) The Lawbook Exchange Ltd. Cincinnati, Ohio. 5.23.16-18; Pliny the Elder *Natural History* trans. John Bostock (1855) 30.3; Gruen 1974 p.224-225, 246; Liebeschuetz 1979 p.138 fn.4

[71] Livy *AUC* 22.57

[72] Schultz, C.E. (2016) 'Roman Sacrifice, Inside and Out', The Journal of Roman studies, 106, pp. 58–76. p.71

[73] Orosius Histories 4.13.3

[74] Firm. Mat. 26.2; Tertullian *Apology* trans. W. Reeve (1889) 9; Hoyos 2011 p.457; Rives 1995 p.85

The reason for the selection of these two pairs is multifaceted, some scholars argue that it is because they are not seen as part of the community, with others stating that the Gauls and the Greeks as a peoples represented the most significant threat to the territorial and cultural influence of the Romans, there is a possibility it is both of these and more.[75] Macbain argues that the sacrifice occurring during the Second Punic war is partially motivated, or at least justified, due to the presence of Gallic troops within Hannibal's army.[76] Both the Gallic and Greek peoples had long and complex relationships with the Romans, for the Gauls there tended to be an anxiety towards them from the Romans; the Gallic sack of Rome was both humiliating and to some extent caused some form of cultural PTSD, evidenced especially by their political class whom would not have abided the cultural memory of the sack of their home, the ‘heart of civilisation’ by ‘barbarians’ particularly well.[77]

The Greeks on the other hand are a more complex case, it is no bold claim to argue that the Romans took a significant amount of cultural influence from the Greeks, conversely they didn't exactly respect every aspect of Greek culture. There was a mixed view that while they were a ‘civilised’ culture, they were not equal to the Romans, with Rawson stating “Brief comparison of Greek and Roman heroes goes back to Cato the Censor at least, usually with the implication that the Romans are at least as good as the Greeks, who owe their greater fame to eloquent historians.”.[78]

There is a possibility that one of the reasons as to why the Romans would have considered this practice of ritual killing as sacrifice, in comparison to other sacrificed individuals such as the Vestals who are killed in a similar and perhaps even more ritualistically entrenched way is the perception that the victims in this case are ‘outsiders’ rather than Roman citizens, it is hinted at that in the rhetoric in the ancient sources, that the labelling of the victims as *specifically* Gauls and Greeks rather than actual Roman citizens clues at a concept that perhaps human sacrifice only ‘counts’ if both the perpetrator and the victim are not of the same group, that being

[75] For former: Gallia, A.B. (2015) ‘Vestal Virgins and Their Families’, *Classical antiquity*, 34(1), pp. 74–120. p.107; for latter: Plu. Marc. 3.3-4; Beard et al 1998 ROR:vol.1 p.82; Aldhouse-Green 2001 p.33
[76] Macbain 1982 p.61
[77] Plu. Marc. 3.3
[78] Rawson 1985 p.231

specifically non-Romans being killed ritualistically by Romans, though this is purely speculation on my part. In contrast to my point, Rives says that the Gallic and Carthaginian acts of human sacrifice differ from other cultures like the Taurians because "...the victims of human sacrifice were not necessarily foreigners, but members of the group; accordingly, the stories did not carry the same implications of hostility towards outsiders." so perhaps there is a different reasoning as to why the Romans consider this act specifically to be human sacrifice within their own culture.[79]

Along with the Vestals, immurement is the fate of the Gauls and the Greeks in these instances of sacrifice, but instead of being buried by the Colline Gate, they are instead buried in the *middle of Rome*, under the *forum boarium.* This is a fact that isn't really focused upon in scholarship and should probably be given more attention, not only is this an act of human sacrifice the Romans admit to, but it also occurs in the middle of the city, not in a secluded or dedicated temple, in the middle of a market.[80] To an extent this seems like an attempt to differentiate it from the other immurement rituals the Roman government would partake in, in differentiating the death of the Greeks and Gauls from the Vestal execution by having them buried in physically separate and metaphorically distinct place, Aldhouse-Green stipulates that these "...aversion rituals…" were intended for the physical safety of the city rather than its theological or metaphysical health, although the lines between these two are frequently blurry.[81]

Considering this tradition originated in a time of crisis with advice being derived from the Sibylline books, this felt like an extraordinary procedure, with it occurring thrice before a prohibition on human sacrifice is enshrined into Roman law, we can also interpret Livy's words in this context as well, with it truly being a "...practice most alien.." which can not only be interpreted as a refutation and repudiation of it being a truly Roman practice, but also as an almost last ditch behaviour the Romans would never usually be brought to, highlighting the escalation in fear that had gripped the Roman people, or at the very least its priesthood and senatorial elite. Macbain posits the idea that the practice was Etruscan in origin, but other scholarship disputes

[79] Mela 2.11, 2.15; Rives, J. (1995). 'Human sacrifice among pagans and Christians.' *The journal of roman studies*, 85, 65-85. p.70
[80] Macbain 1982 p.61-62
[81] Aldhouse-Green 2001 p.33

this.[82] In contrast to this we have Hoyos, who articulates that – in reference to the immurement in 216 BCE – the act was a "...a religious rite that was unmistakably their own.".[83] Three times Rome was under serious threat, in 225 BCE from a Gallic invasion, 216 BCE at the height of the Second Punic War, and later in 113 BCE during the Cimbrian War.[84] Yet again we see the Sibylline books dealing with ill portents and omens by offering up humans as payments, both implicitly and explicitly, to the gods for the safety of Rome.

Several contemporary scholars have brought up the point that these burials occur within the same time frame as accusations of unchastity among the Vestals, with an older theory by Cichorius stating that these burials occurred because of or in concert with the Vestals trials and/or executions.[85] Eckstein disputes this, citing a distinction between internal fears of civic 'pollution' and external threats to the Roman state, one could argue against Eckstein's point with the idea that in a time of emergency it is unlikely that the general populace would see them as unrelated and separate issues, the possibility that the public would have viewed both matters as the state dealing with omens in an official capacity cannot be wholly dismissed as Eckstein has.[86] In conclusion, for this practice, it is not only evident that it is a human sacrifice, but it also allows us to set precedent for the type of execution that the Romans partook in when they wished to sacrifice people to their gods i.e. one that kept the 'executioners' hands clean by not directly shedding blood.

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[82] Macbain 1982 p.62-64; North, J.A. (1986) 'Religion and Politics, from Republic to Principate', *The Journal of Roman Studies*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, pp. 251–258 p.255; Potts, Charlotte R., 'Investing in Religion: Religion and the Economy in Pre-Roman Central Italy', ed. by Andrew Wilson, Nick Ray, and Angela Trentacoste, *The Economy of Roman Religion* (Oxford, 2023; online edn, Oxford Academic, 22 June 2023) p.53

[83] Hoyos, B.D. (2011) *A companion to the Punic Wars*. 1st ed. Oxford ; Wiley-Blackwell p.277

[84] Goldsworthy, A.K. (2016) *In the name of Rome : the men who won the Roman Empire* Yale University Press, First Yale University Press edition, New Haven ; London p.143, Miles 2011 p.292

[85] Beard et al ROM v.1 p.81

[86] Eckstein, A.M. (1982) 'Human Sacrifice and Fear of Military Disaster in Republican Rome.', *American Journal of Ancient History*, Vol. 7, Nº 1, 1982, pp. 69-95 p.70-87

Chapter 4: The Immurement of the Vestal Virgins

The Vestal Virgins were, in short summary, a symbolification and subsequent anthropomorphisation of the theological health of the Roman state.[87] They were also used as an indicator for the moral robustness of the Roman regime. Their priesthood is possibly the most well known of the many Roman religious orders within the modern world, largely in part due to the excellent work of Mary Beard, with other positions like the *rex sacrorum* or *flamen dialis* being less well known despite their importance.[88] However, most of the population while aware of the title will have less of a familiarity with the rules, regulations and religious importance that the Vestals represented, and would certainly have no idea that the most famous of religious orders are used as tools of human sacrifice by the Roman state in times of tribulation, and indeed scholarship is divided over whether they were tools of sacrifice or not.

They were given liberties and freedoms that no other woman within Rome had access to, their touch or mere glances would free a citizen condemned to execution, and above all, their bodies were sacrosanct, untouchable, unimpeachable; to harm one meant – almost – certain death. However, with this power came great limitations to themselves, as their willingness in a loss of their virginity would also culminate in their death, it seems as though the symbolic virginity and "...sexual purity…" of the women was more important than the women themselves, and that they are treated as beyond reproach if they have kept their virginity intact, that "Livy places the…Vestals and collegiate priests beyond criticism. Only when they descend from propriety do they become individuals again.".[89]

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[87] Kroppenberg, I. (2010) 'Law, Religion, and Constitution of the Vestal Virgins', Law and literature, 22(3), pp. 418–439. p.420; Staples, A. (1998) *From Good Goddess to Vestal Virgins : sex and category in Roman religion.* London ; Routledge. p.135; Wyrwińska, K. (2021) 'The Vestal Virgins' Socio-political Role and the Narrative of Roma Aeterna', *Krakowskie Studia z Historii Państwa i Prawa*, 14(2), pp. 127–151. p.130

[88] Beard 1980 p.12-27, Beard et al 1998 RoR Vol.1 p.51

[89] Davies, J. P. (2005) *Rome's Religious History: Livy, Tacitus and Ammianus on their God* Cambridge p.67; Parker, H.N. (2004) 'Why Were the Vestals Virgins? Or the Chastity of Women and the Safety of the Roman State', American journal of philology, 125(4), pp. 563–601. p.566

Plutarch says of the reasoning for the necessity of the priestesses virginity in the creation of their order, that "...either because he [Numa] thought the nature of fire pure and uncorrupted, and therefore entrusted it to chaste and undefiled persons, or because he thought of it as unfruitful and barren, and therefore associated it with virginity." the latter explanation being, as Plutarch later explains, a conception borrowed from the Greeks, whose eternal flames were tended to by widows past their marital age.[90] But as Parker points out, Plutarch doesn't adequately answer the question of why it had to be virgins "...in charge of virtuous matrons, *Univirae*, or widows", although the answer could be gained through other latin mythology and literature, their virginity was perhaps parallelled to the Goddesses virginity.[91] Further focusing on the idea of purity, Aulus Gellius informs us of a multitude of requirements for their selection, not only is their physical 'purity' and innocence stressed by the age requirements that they be between the age of six and ten, but those with physical disabilities are rejected "...she must be free too from any impediment in her speech, must not have impaired hearing, or be marked by any other bodily defect*…"*.[92] It is interesting that there is such a rigorous selection process for the Vestals, this is most likely solely due to the significance of their role in the relationship between the state and the gods, and as such they must be in perfect physical health.

Immuration was the punishment administered to Vestals if they were found to have broken their vows, or at the very least, if the college of Pontiffs, and in one case a secular magistrate court championed by a mandate of public fear, *thought* they had. Importantly, a Vestal's blood could not be shed in her execution. While this death is horrendously painful, dying most probably by lack of water, the lack of shedding of blood is highly symbolic; their flesh was not impugned by blades or nails, not bruised by the strain of a rope, nor thrown from the Tarpeian rock. Coincidentally they are not the only religious order that has its members killed for a dereliction of duty with the Romans not spilling the blood of the guilty party themselves. We have an example from Livy of a *pullarius* whom falsified the augury so as to give favourable omens,

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[90] Cicero *De Legibus* trans. H.H. Rackham (1931) Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University 2.29; Ovid Fasti trans. J.G. Frazer (1931) Loeb Classical Library Available at: <https://www.theoi.com/Text/OvidFasti6.html> Book 6 9th June ff.249-468; Plu. *Num.* 9.5

[91] Parker 2004 p.566

[92] Aulus Gellius *Attic Nights* trans. J.C. Rolfe (1927) Loeb Classical Library 1.12.3)

upon discovering this, the commanding Consul, one Lucius Papirius Cursor, has the *pullarius* placed in front of the army until he is struck down by the enemy; the *pullarius* is struck down by a javelin and Cursor indicates it was the gods who guided the missile to its target, upon citing a cawing crow as a positive omen, the Romans joined battle and won.[93]

The immurement, as many scholars have stipulated, is enacted to ensure the 'keeping clean' the hands of the executioners, that they aren't physically killing the priestess, so in the eyes of the gods, it's all kosher.[94] What is interesting is that even though they had been found guilty by a court, which itself could be made up of either secular or religious officials made clear by the case in 113 BCE, their bodies still would be viewed – whether formally or informally – as sacrosanct, whether this was superstition regarding if the judges decision was correct and in line with the will of the gods or if they remained as priestesses until their deaths and therefore the same rules applied to them is unclear. Although one would assume a Vestal found guilty would have had their ability to free condemned citizens suspended in these circumstances, some disagree with this view, and that the Vestals were just as low as any other prisoner, but the way in which they are treated suggests otherwise.[95] This 'keeping clean' could also serve a secondary role of curtailing the personal fears of the executioners. Most citizens knew of the sanctity and prestige granted to the priestesses, and under normal circumstances laying hands upon the Vestals would result in execution, so one could imagine that there were several superstitious magistrates and other individuals would have refused to touch a condemned Vestal in any capacity regardless if the *Pontifex* had given them the go-ahead. Even in execution, the Roman anxieties and superstition surrounding the religious is self-evident. Interestingly, the location, a field by the Colline Gate that is ominously yet adequately named the *Campus Sceleratus*, literally the 'profaned/polluted field', which itself gives a hint to the despicable act that desecrated the area.[96] Schultz argues, counter to the prevailing thought among scholarship, that the immurement the Vestals go through is not in fact a sacrifice, pointing out that there is no specific

[93] Livy *AUC* 10.40.2-14
[94] Kroppenberg 2010 p.431-432; Stern, G. (2020). 'Devotio and human sacrifice in archaic Italy and Rome.' *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 60, 3-4, pp.363-398 p.383
[95] Kroppenberg 2010 p.431-432; Stern 2020 p.382
[96] Gallia 2015 p.110

dedication to a deity, nor do any ancient sources describe the act as a sacrifice while they had not hesitated to declare the immurement of the Gauls and Greeks as such.[97] These points are robust and run counter to my prevailing thesis, nevertheless I shall tackle them to the best of my abilities. Implication should be an important part of the discussion, if an act has all the hallmarks of a sacrifice but no contemporary nor ancient source labels it as such, that, as stated before, does not disqualify it from being categorised as such.

In regards to the offering to deities aspect, Stern writes that "She was then offered to the gods of the Underworld, like the victims of *devotio* and *xenothusia*…", a point that is not expounded upon with citation, though I believe this is a conclusion drawn from those two other cases of sacrifice that if a ritual dedication was clearly recorded in *devotio* an argument could be made that similar prayers were offered but whose record is no longer extant.[98] Whether the paramours of the Vestals are also considered sacrifices is yet another aspect that should be investigated. Arguably they could be considered as sacrifices, but there are several problems when considering it in the context of other instances of sacrifice. The manner of their deaths differs from that of the Vestals, indeed it differs in quite a drastic way in the levels of violence, not that the Vestals deaths were not violent by any means, but the deaths of their lovers are visceral; the lovers are beaten to death in a very public place, with this more fitting into lines of secular punishment for sexual immorality and law breaking rather than as a ritualistic payment to the gods, by beating into the minds of everyone present the consequences of improper relations with a Vestal; according to Beard, this is symbolically emblematic of the rights of the husband for dealing with his wife and her lover if they were unfaithful.[99] Both forms of killing are ritualistically sadistic in their ways of punishment, but one fits more into the frame of what the Romans would consider sacrifice. However, despite this, we see in the examples of *devotio* that sacrifice is not always a bloodless act, and that these deaths present a quandary that is difficult to reconcile one way or the other.

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[97] Schultz 2010 p.530-534; Schultz, C.E. (2012) 'On the burial of unchaste Vestal Virgins', *Rome, pollution, and propriety : dirt, disease, and hygiene in the eternal city from antiquity to modernity.* Bradley, M., Stow, K.R. (ed.) pp. 122-135. Cambridge University Press. p.126-127
[98] Stern 2020 p.379
[99] Beard, M. (1980) 'The Sexual Status of Vestal Virgins', *The Journal of Roman studies*, 70, pp. 12–27. 1980 p.14

We have to evaluate each separate incident of immurement of the Vestals, for the context can heavily influence the interpretation of the act. Some occasions it is closer to a ritual murder, and in other cases it is far closer to human sacrifice, these are heavily dependent on the context for each event. The problem does not arise from the ritual aspect or the human being killed, the problem lies within the dedication to metaphysical/spiritual beings, as that is what would truly differentiate it from just being ritual murder. The circumstances surrounding the scandals and the immurement of the Vestals will help us differentiate between examples where there is no obvious *prodigia* or omens outside the allegations of unchastity and those that better fit the definition of sacrifice.

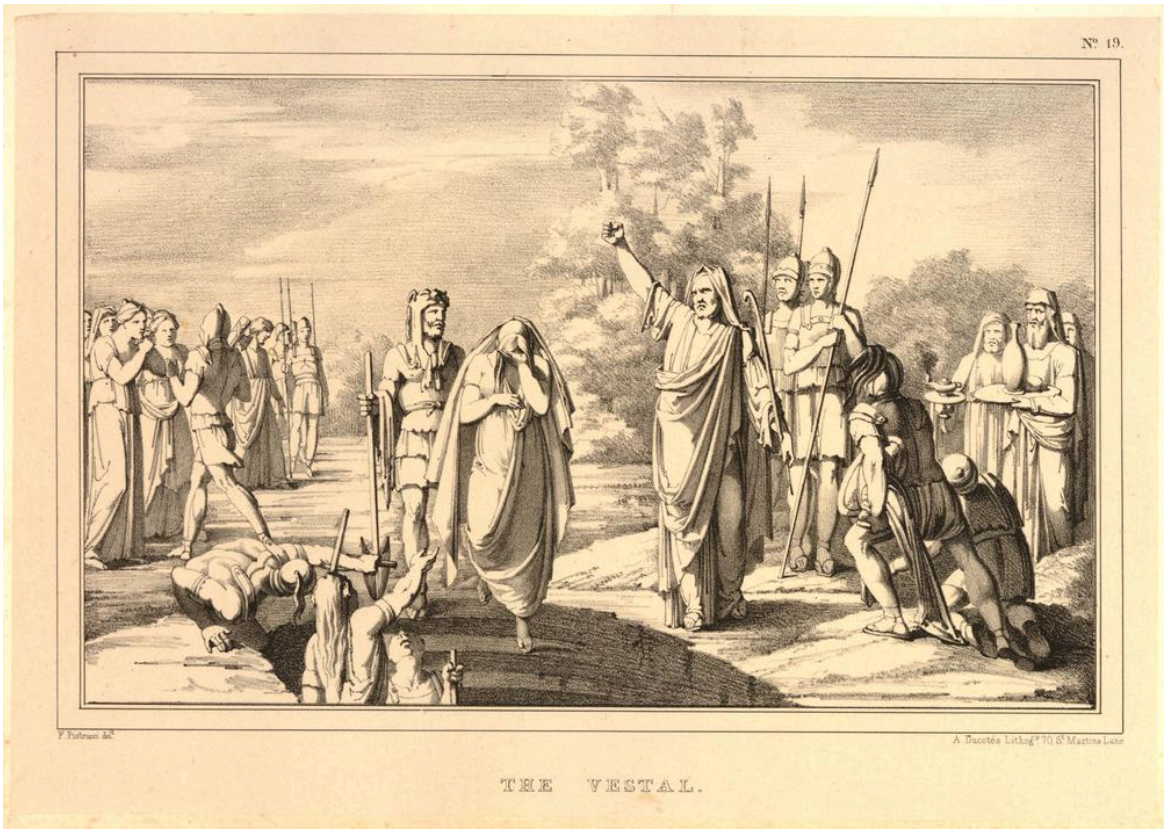

Figure 2

484-483 BCE Immurement

The immurement of 483 BCE is a great example of Vestals being sacrificed for public panic and fear in relation to ill religious omens and portents, with indications of the

gods displeasure being observed daily both in the city and the Roman countryside.[100] Livy tells us that war had broken out with the Veii and that there had been numerous ill omens:

> "The universal anxiety was aggravated by supernatural portents, menacing almost daily City and country alike. The soothsayers, who were consulted by the State and by private persons, declared that the divine wrath was due to nothing else but the profanation of sacred functions." - Livy *AUC* 2.42.10-11

This background gives me no issue in coming to the conclusion that the immurement of 483 BCE was indeed a human sacrifice, as it is obvious that the Vestal is indicted to return the favour of the gods to Rome by expiating their relationship via a scapegoat, the Vestal in question being called Oppia.

337 BCE Immurement

Yet again, in Livy 8.15, we see another Vestal being executed, this time for impropriety in regards to her choice of dresses. The tribulation occurring surrounding this event is the legitimacy of the election of a dictator, with supposedly the religious rites associated with the office not being properly observed, as well as the usual mistreating of local Italian allies causing rebellion, in this case the Samnites.[101] The idea that the Vestal was killed not even for breaking her vows of chastity, but for simply dressing immodestly which then gave rise to an allegation of unchastity gives credence to the idea that there are other motives at play when Vestals are put on trial, and this occasion brings into doubt regarding the pious foundings of other instances, rather it is the use of a Vestal as a bribery sacrifice to persuade the gods to align themselves with Rome as well as being a pretty blatant example of Roman patriarchal values, that the very idea of a Vestal 'acting alluring' to men was an indicative sign she was going to or already had broken her vows, being punished for a crime she did not commit.

216 BCE Immurement

[100] Livy *AUC* 2.42
[101] Livy AUC 8.15.1-7

The consultation of the Sibylline books by the decemviri in 216 BCE and the subsequent sacrifices seem, after consideration of the surrounding factors, chiefly Cannae, to be a desperate times means desperate measures situation. 80,000 fighting men had been slain or captured at cannae, simply enveloped and consumed by the fighting, if the striking down by lightning of a daughter of an *equite* had been a warning from the gods, Cannae was a death threat.[102] It is very interesting that Livy labels the burying of the two couples of Greeks and Gauls as sacrifice, but does not consider the execution of the Vestals to be so, Eckstein's hypothesis is that they, while separate rituals, are two parts of a votive human sacrifice to the gods for victory against Hannibal.[103] This can be construed as a frightful, uncommon and 'barbaric' act carried out by a 'civilised' society out of fear and desperation by more archaic terminology, but the precedent of sacrifice occurring less than two decades prior undermines this view to a certain extent, this wasn't a once in a generation or century, a citizen of Rome could witness this act carried out multiple times.

Eckstein summarises and refutes, in part, Cichorius' idea that human sacrifices only seemed to occur when the Vestals were engaging in acts of moral turpitude in regards to Roman societal expectations, especially of those in such a religiously important and public-facing role.[104] Eckstein labels the Vestal scandal, as well as the catastrophic defeat at Cannae both as *prodigia* of the Gods displeasure with Rome, and upon a report from the Oracle of Delphi after ordering Q. Fabius Pictor to venture to that infamous temple, indicating which gods had to be placated, the Senate concluded that the Sibylline texts would have to be consulted for the final word on how to relieve the gods of their enmity towards the Romans.[105] It would seem that, for the survival of the Romans, the state would go to any length, offering priestesses of one of the most sacred priesthoods, regardless of cultural ethics and moral transgressions undertaken. Once again, anxieties, both within and without, cause the Romans to break staunch moral boundaries in an attempt to dissuade the state's destruction. Ironically, Cichorius' concept of societal expectations doesn't seem to draw the line at sacrificing Roman citizens.

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[102] Valerius Maximus *Memorable deeds and sayings* trans. S. Speed (1678) 1.1.15
[103] Eckstein 1982 p.69-82
[104] Eckstein 1982 p.72-82
[105] Livy *AUC* 22.57

113 BCE Immurement

This case is preceded by a series of omens, the notable one being the striking of a daughter of a knight by a lightning bolt.[106] This case is incredibly interesting because it sees an unprecedented involvement of the Roman secular state taking matters of religion into its own hands "The traditional competence of the pontifices to preserve correct relations with the gods had been called into question, while the power of the people to control the behaviour of public religious officials had been asserted.".[107] Here we see the Roman 'secular' state intercede where there is disagreement with the religious priesthoods, although this is more likely due to either public pressure because of the prior omens.[108] The girls are re-tried and found guilty, this seems like a blatant case of a kangaroo court to ease public concern by using the Vestals as scapegoats.

As talked about in previous chapters, this also occurs at around the same time as an immurement of a pair of Gauls and Greeks, and thus a conjunction with that immurement can be assumed, Plutarch says that the Vestal's actions were so atrocious that their crimes necessitated the Greeks and the Gauls.[109] And thus despite being initially found innocent, the Vestals: Aemilia, Licinia, and Marcia are immured for the crime of *incestum*.[110]

Domitian's Vestal Executions

Domitian supposedly presides over an era in which three Vestals are executed; however, their deaths and the context surrounding their deaths breaks long running sacrificial tradition, something that is commented on by Suetonius.[111] Two of the Vestals, Occulata and Varronilla, are allowed to choose the method of their own execution; while the execution of the chief Vestal, Cornelia, again differs significantly

[106] Obseq. 37; Oros. 5.15.20-21; Plu. *Mor. Quaest Rom.* 83; Scullard, H.H. (1964) *From the Gracchi to Nero* Methuen & Co Ltd. p.47-48
[107] Beard et al 1998 *RoR:Vol.1* p.137
[108] Ibid.
[109] Plu. *Mor. Quaest Rom.* 83
[110] Ibid.
[111] Suet *Dom.* 8.4

compared to the other practices of sacrifice. Firstly; the allegation of *incestum* is incredibly dubious in this case, an initial court finds her innocent, she is later arraigned again, although Pliny claims Domitian declares her guilty without trial and without even meeting her, and found guilty.[112] Interestingly, Cornelia is supposed to have had several lovers, as Suetonius claims all but one are beaten to death in the regular manner, with an unnamed ex-Praetor being allowed to go into exile, which is irregular.[113] Secondly; the context that regularly occurs when Vestals get executed, i.e. that Rome is in danger and there are omens of the gods displeasure all around - are completely missing; with the exception of an embarrassing failed rebellion in upper Germany by Lucius Antonius, Rome is relatively stable and has been in no active wars in over a decade. Pliny tells a friend that he believes Domitian ordered her death so as to make his reign famous, or rather, infamous.[114]

Occulata's and Varronilla's lovers are allowed to go free, though exiled, which is a not insignificant change from tradition, in which the paramours are typically beaten to death in the *comitium*, which is a fate consigned to all but one of Cornelia's supposed multiple lovers. This is a divergence from the typical rituals, raising suspicions that Domitian knew the innocence of the men and had to diverge from established tradition to avert becoming more of a target for Patrician ire.

It is clear from Domitian's record that he did at least give the illusion of being a rigidly just man, as seen from Suetonius' description, he "...administered justice scrupulously…" and it doesn't align with Domitian's supposed character to spare these sexual transgressors whom in regular circumstances, for the security of the state, should not have been spared from ritual murders.[115] Another glaring problem with this is that there is a possibility they weren't even killed the same way, Cassius Dio alleges that they were "...put to death in some other way.", and while it is likely that these deaths also did not involve the spilling of their blood, the traditional ritual being abandoned lends further credence to these being murders or ritual murders rather than actual sacrifice.[116] The number of Vestals isn't irregular per se, as the

[112] Pliny the Younger *Letters* trans. J.B. Firth (1900) 4.11
[113] Suet. *Dom.* 8.4
[114] Pliny *Ep.* 4.11
[115] Suet. *Dom.* 8.1
[116] Cass. Dio 67.3.4

accounts of 113 BCE can attest as another instance when 3 Vestals were arraigned, but the number of lovers and the indictment of the chief Vestal does rightly raise suspicions, as this would be a truly historic instance of the breaking of their oaths.

In conclusion for this particular case, I feel that it does not fully meet the requirements of human sacrifice as laid out, at least, not to the extent to which the other incidents of execution of the Vestals. Typically these executions occur in a time of genuine or at least perceived to be genuine societal strife through war and the gods displeasure, this event occurred in a vacuum of this archetypal strife, and as such the implicit dedication to a deity cannot be implied. While one may argue that the deaths perhaps are a bribe to the gods to make Domitian more famous, I feel he would instead be relying on the trial and executions themselves to make his point for him, rather than this being an act of a devout believer.

Chapter 5: *Devotio* and self-sacrifice

Self-sacrifice is a fairly common theme within not only Roman History but Greco-Roman myth as well, it is found within literatures and histories as an example of heroism, and this section deals with a form of self-sacrifice exhibited within Roman history for no greater can a *vir* be than one who gives his life for the state, doubly so if he exalts the gods while doing so.[117] *Devotio* – sometimes spelled *deuotio* in other scholarship – is a set of Roman rituals that promise the gods human lives in exchange for benefits, which almost always entails military success.[118] The main examples we have of this are the repeated acts of *devotio* of the patronymic Publius Decius Mus, with scholars disagreeing over the number of times this occurred.[119] *Devotio* is a contentious topic among historians, certainly the Romans viewed it with a great deal of pride, it being a symbol of both patriotic fervour and resolute piety.[120] Some historians believe it to be a human sacrifice, while others view it as just ritual murder.[121]

Versnel in their extensive discussion of the topic identifies two separate interpretations of the act of *devotio* within Roman history, they categorise and differentiate them, one is the act of *devotio hostium*, a categorisation characterised by the sacrifice of an enemy combatant force/city alone, hence the term *hostium*; the second term is the *devotio ducis*, which is derived from the name of the family who carry out the practice of self sacrifice *as well as* the sacrifice of the enemy force/city.[122] Both *ducis* and *hostium* can be applied with the label human sacrifice, with both volunteering humans as payment for military success. Ducis differs from *hostium* in yet another way, where *hostium* is the dedication of unwilling and most likely uninformed participants, *ducis* involves a combination of both voluntary and involuntary subjects as both the commanding officer of the Roman army and to an

[117] Cicero *De Finibus* trans. H.H. Rackham (1931) Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press 2.19.61; Stern 2020 p.363
[118] De Cazanove, O. (2007) 'Pre-Roman Italy, Before and Under the Romans' *A Companion to Roman Religion* ed. by Rüpke, J. Oxford: Blackwell pp.43-57 p.44; Meszaros 2013 p.231
[119] Vasil'ev 2015 p.110
[120] Cic. *Sest.* 48; *Fin.* 2.19.61; Val. Max. 5.4.6.5; Stern 2020 p.368
[121] Schultz 2010 p.517 fn.1
[122] Versnel 1976 p.366

arguably lesser extent the lives of his opponents are sacrificed in order to win the battle.[123] *Devotio ducis* in some scholars' perspectives may be more eligible to come under the umbrella of human sacrifice than *Devotio Hostium*. As Versnel notes, the 'sacrificee' is not under the control of the priests undertaking the ritual to give, whereas in *ducis* there is an element of control exhibited by the participants.[124] What seems to be of more importance in the ritual is the individual's death, as a proscribed punishment for failure to fulfill their sacrificial duties leads to a set of reparatory duties that involve an expiatory sacrifice.[125]

The prayer offered to the gods is as follows:

"'*Janus, Jupiter, Father Mars, Quirinus, Bellona, Lares, ye Novensiles and Indigetes, deities to whom belongs the power over us and over our foes, and ye, too, Divine Manes, I pray to you, I do you reverence, I crave your grace and favour that you will bless the Roman People, the Quirites, with power and victory, and visit the enemies of the Roman People, the Quirites, with fear and dread and death. In like manner as I have uttered this prayer so do I now on behalf of the commonwealth of the Quirites, on behalf of the army, the legions, the auxiliaries of the Roman People, the Quirites, devote the legions and auxiliaries of the enemy, together with myself to the Divine Manes and to Earth.*'" Livy *AUC* 8.9.6-8

In contrast to Versnel's categorisation, one could argue the term *ducis* is reductionist and exclusionary to others who perform a similar act; for example, during the sack of Rome by Brennus, a deeply impactful societally conscious event for the Romans, there was a *devotio* of many elderly men within the city of Rome.[126] The *Pontifex Maximus* went through the consecration ritual of *devotio* for 80 elder men who were physically incapable of acting in the capitoline defence but also too stubborn to flee, then they sat in their homes, in their ceremonial magistracy robes and awaited the Gauls with their doors open, which caused nervousness for the Gauls, they are

[123] Piegdon, M. (2014) 'Some Remarks on War Rituals in Archaic Italy and Rome and the Beginnings of Roman Imperialism', *Electrum (Uniwersytet Jagielloński. Instytut Historii)*, 21(21), pp. 87–97. p.92
[124] *See* Janssen, L.F. (1981) 'Some Unexplored Aspects of Devotio Deciana', Mnemosyne, 34(3–4), pp. 357–381.; Versnel, H.S. (1976) 'Two Types of Roman Devotio', *Mnemosyne*, 29(4), pp. 365–410. p.374
[125] Livy *AUC.* 8.10.12
[126] Florus 1.7.9; Wiseman 2004 p.128-129

eventually all killed, supposedly fulfilling their dedication to the gods.[127] Here we see that *devotio*, despite Decius Mus' claims, is not a ritual of self sacrifice solely granted to the Decii family, and predates those illustrious Consuls actions. Furthermore, despite not directly being referred to as a *devotio* or indeed having the ritual prior to the sacrifice, the death of Marcus Curtius by hurling himself and his poor horse into a ravine, followed by more individuals, to save Rome and to be a payment for the gods for their favour, yet again the Sibylline books are demanding human blood and life be shed for the gods favour.[128] Another undermining point to Decius' claim that only the Decii family have access to this ritualistic self-sacrifice is the idea that there is a standardised ritual that the accompanying priests also engage in, it would certainly be odd for the priests to have memorised or have codified a specific ritual that *only* the Decii family could engage in.

Devotio ducis differs from other cases of Roman practices in regards to human sacrifice that in one major way: where the Vestal Virgins must feign willingness, which as previously discussed, the societal pressure to conform to their role doing a significant amount of leg work, and the prisoners are given no choice in the matter of their death; there is a greater deal of legitimacy of self sacrifice within the act of *devotio ducis.* The story surrounding the event does to an extent make it clear, although it is prophecy and destiny, the consul Decius Mus – and other individuals not of the Decii previously mentioned – 'willingly' gives his life. Although a broader philosophical question of determinism can be raised; the primary interrogation of that philosophy must be set within the Roman mindset.

When it comes to Roman rituals in regards to warfare, *devotio* is not alone, while it is one of the more obscure and less employed practices, with far more common practices involving auguries with chickens as well as the ritual slaying of some beasts; in particular the ritual *evocatio* is far more similar in nature to *devotio* than the other augury practices for it involves the direct intervention, or lack thereof, of deities.[129] *Evocatio* is the "summoning forth" of a deity of an opposing force to

[127] Florus 1.7.9-10; Feldherr, A. (1998) Spectacle and society in Livy's history. Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press. p.85; Wiseman 2004 p.128-129
[128] Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Roman Antiquities* trans. Earnest Cary (1937) Loeb Classical Library 14.11.3-4; Davies 2005 p.58
[129] Dillon 2005 p.152-154 3.55-3.56, p.693 14.22

abandon them and join the Romans; this ritual, similar to *devotio*, directly call on deities to influence the battle either by abandonment of the enemy or by reinforcing the spirit of the legions, however, *devotio* is the only one that promises a human life in exchange for the gods help, whereas *evocatio* involves the promise of superior worship by the Romans.[130] In fact, we have examples of *devotio* and *evocatio* being used in conjunction with each other, during the siege of Carthage during the Third Punic War, *devotio* in this instance would be categorised as *devotio hostium* of the city itself to the gods of the underworld rather than a willing participant such as with Decius Mus, the acts being used in cooperation serves to both deprive the city of Carthage of its gods thus removing any divine protection *and* its sacrificial offering to the underworld giving the gods further bribery to ensure its utter destruction.[131] As explored previously in this work, the subsequent physical eradication of the city of Carthage and its peoples seems to have been premeditated, the dedication of the city itself fulfilling both an internal desire to remove any trace of the infamous adversaries to symbolise Rome's greatness and military supremacy, as well as the completion of a covenant with the gods of the underworld; in some sense, Carthage's destruction was an affirmation of Roman religious piety. Whether the destruction of Carthage can be truly categorised as a fulfilment of a sacrificial ritual can be debated, and would warrant further discussion between scholarship.

Scholarship does not agree over whether *devotio ducis* should be considered an act of human sacrifice, Beard et al. in *Religions of Rome* hints that it should be, stating "In effect, he [Decius Mus] made himself sacred, the property of the gods (*sacer*), rather like a sacrificial victim…*"*, not directly stating that it is, but that the act is evocative enough of an act of human sacrifice; alternatively, Schultz would argue that it should not be considered as such, opining that *devotio* "..differ from rites more commonly designated as sacrifice…".[132] Her stated reasons are firstly that the act ".....differ from rites more commonly designated as sacrifice in that they both include a significant element of chance and are not subject to hard-and-fast rules of

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[130] Ando, C. (2008) *The Matter of the Gods: Religion and the Roman Empire* Berkeley p.44, 128-138; Beard et al *RoR Vol.1* p.34-35; Beard *RoR Vol.2* p.41; Glinister 'Sacred Rubbish' *Religion in Archaic and Republican Rome and Italy* ed. by Bispham, E., Smith, C.J. (2000) Edinburgh; Edinburgh University Press pp.54-70 p.62; Halm, F.H. 'Performing the Sacred' *A Companion to Roman Religion* ed. by Rüpke, J. (2007) Oxford: Blackwell pp.235-248 p.239

[131] Beard et al 1998 *RoR Vol.1* p.82, 111, Janssen 1981 p.359

[132] Beard et al. 1998 *RoR:Vol.1* p.35; Davies 2005 p.109-110; Schultz 2010 p.517 fn.1

procedure.” ; and secondly “Modern scholars, following the imperial writer Florus…identify devotio as a form of *consecratio* and not as a *sacrificium*.".[133] Here Schultz refers to *devotio* wholly, neither the *ducis* or *hostium* sub-categories in particular, however, contextually, both are being criticized with the same observations.

My contention with Schultz’ and Versnel’s argument is thus, arguments that rely heavily upon the presupposition that because the Romans viewed the *devotio* as an act of *consecratio* therefore means that *devotio* cannot be considered a sacrifice, are flawed in their analysis and conclusion. While it is important to take into account what the Romans thought of themselves as well as Roman religious custom, just because the Romans didn’t consider it a human sacrifice does not mean we should remove it from that categorisation; because a culture that abhors acts will do its best to sequester criticism by hiding those acts. Our framework should absolutely consider cultural contexts, however not be dissuaded from reaching conclusions based on cultural relativism. Another problem arising from the usage of the term ‘ritual murder’ for the acts rather than ‘human sacrifice’ is that, as far as the Roman legal system was concerned, what they did was not murder; as has been discussed, the act of immurement was at least largely to avoid an allegation of murder *or* sacrifice, the thought being that if they didn’t spill the victim's blood, it did not count.[134] Thus an argument founded on the basis that just because the society under inspection did not call it sacrifice means it was not sacrifice is flawed in its reasoning as its replacement phraseology and categorisation is similarly faulty, for labelling it murder can be criticised and undermined with the very same logic. The argument that the ritual aspect is missing due to the element of chance can be countered with the idea that the consul’s fighting and death *are* a part of the ritual, that the combat *becomes* ritual combat that he *must* lose, and that the failure of a Consul to get himself killed not only involves an expiatory ritual to partially alleviate his failings, but he is also barred from engaging in any religious activity in concert with the Roman state.

[133] Schultz 2010 p.517 f.1
[134] Beard et al. 1998 *RoR:Vol.1* p.80-81; Stern 2020 p.385

Another argument is that *consecratio* puts the human body in a weird religious legal limbo, one which means 'secular' laws do not have jurisdiction, to be a way of obfuscating the guilt that should be attached to the killing of an individual.[135] Consecrating an individual puts them into the category as property of the gods, and therefore not wholly within the mortal realm on a metaphysical level, thus their ritual killing, even by other Roman religious officials, is more acceptable. I would argue that the human body is inviolable and immune to conceptions of apotheosis in terms of its sacrificial characteristics, regardless of cultural relativism. Several scholars contend that acts that transition the body as property of the human in question to that of the gods – *consecratio* – removes it from the definition of sacrifice, as the human is no longer property of the mortal realm it technically no longer counts as wholly human in a metaphysical respect. While this detail is important to its perception within that cultural context, it does not automatically disallow said act from being categorised as a form of human sacrifice, only that their particular religious framework forbids it from being ascribed that term.

Schultz and others conclusion can only be reached if you are to take a subjective view of human sacrifice and only consider the Roman standpoint for what legally counts as a sacrifice, it has little cross-cultural value apart from comparing the ways in which a society may deny it engages in sacrifice while blatantly committing it. I think Schultz and others are wrong in their conclusion that the act of *devotio* and the immurement of the Vestals do not count as sacrifice due to an overreliance on the wording of classical scholarship and the misattributation of the term *consecratio* in denying the charge of sacrifice towards Roman acts that otherwise would absolutely be considered sacrifice. Both forms of *devotio* fall into the category of being motivated by anxieties, however I would argue that *devotio ducis* has a more significant element of internal anxieties out of the two in relation to the performance of the Roman troops, that the sacrifice is not only to ensure the defeat of the enemy, the external threat, but what is arguably just as important, the victory of the Roman forces, an internal threat, the threat of failure and shame.

[135] Beard et al. 1998 *RoR:Vol.1* p.80-81; Schultz 2010 p.517 fn.1

A third form of *devotio* could be identified and argued for within the works of Cicero, whom directs the act upon himself. Rather than a physical sacrifice or death, Cicero argues his exile from Rome at the behest of Clodius was a form of *devotio*, while humbly verbally prostrating himself to the memory of the Decii who gave their *actual* lives.[136] This *devotio* is ironically far similar in appearance to the late antique developed concept of martyrdom rather than a 'sacrifice' in relation to our discussion, Cicero 'gave up' his political life in Rome so that the state may be spared.

Wiseman posits an interesting comparison with *devotio*, he places both Publius Decius Mus (instance of *devotio* 295 BCE) and Remus on parallels in regards to their deaths.[137] The 'parallel' aspects are interesting to discuss, while Decius Mus' death is directly preceded by and offered willingly to the gods in return for a specific deliverance of victory, Remus supposedly offers his life to the gods in exchange for the prospering of the city; however, it is unlikely he expected to be killed so quickly nor expecting the murderer to be his own brother, although legends regarding this instance do sometimes assign the murder to a follower of Romulus, a man who would assume the nickname Celer.[138] Indeed the consecration of the Roman Pomerium with Remen blood spilled for the defence of the city and in reverence to the gods would serve as deeply ironic poetry. As Wiseman puts it "...the death of Remus was necessary, a foundation sacrifice for Rome's protective walls.".[139]

For the concluding remarks on *devotio*, it is abundantly clear that it meets the criteria for human sacrifice, and unlike so many instances of ritual murder/human sacrifice that will or has been discussed in this work, it features an explicit calling of deities to intervene in recompense for their deaths. *Devotio* also embodies a cultural aspect of noble self-sacrifice that the other instances of human sacrifice do not, as such it is to quite a degree romanticised by the Romans.

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[136] Cic. Domo Sua 64, Dyck, A.R. (2004). 'Cicero's devotio: the rôles of dux and scape-goat in his post reditum rhetoric.' *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 102, 299-314. p.313
[137] Broughton 1951 *MRR vol.1* p.177; Wiseman 2004 p.141
[138] Wiseman 2004 p.141
[139] Wiseman 2004 p.142

Chapter 6: The Murder of Hermaphroditic Children

A horrendous and most bitter irony to the Roman stipulation that Carthage engaged in child sacrifice is the way in which the Romans reacted to and handled the birth of 'hermaphroditic' (intersex) children. Children born with both sets of genitalia were seen as an omen,a *prodigium*, and much like how the Romans dealt with a lot of their other omens, the blood of innocents was shed in retaliation.[140] Beginning in 207 BCE, panicking as something slightly uncommon had occurred in the natural order, the Romans immediately went to go consult the Sibylline books, and what a surprise, the answer, as was fairly typical, is to ritualistically kill people.[141] Whether or not these deaths specifically count as human sacrifices is perhaps more complex than other instances of ritual killings. In arguing that it is a case of sacrifice, one would point out the fact that these births are considered *prodigium,* a warning from the gods that something was wrong with the *pax deorum*, similar to the Vestals found to have engaged in intercourse during the span of their service, and much like the Vestal *prodigia* the method for dealing with such portents was the ritual execution of the supposed omen.[142] So if we are to come to the conclusion that in some circumstances the Vestals executions should be considered a sacrifice, then why should we not consider the ritual drowning of intersex infants to similarly be a human sacrifice?

The basis for the conception of hermaphroditic children being an omen is found in the idea that they are an uncommon expression of the human form, and thus a breach of the *pax deorum*.[143] Graumann points to a response that is steeped in emotion "In my view, the only constant topos in congenital undetermined sex conditions is the human reaction: disruption of the dual mode of sex and gender by 'intersex' causes discomfort and fear, and the awareness of contingency induces

[140] Cicero *De Divinatione* trans. W.A. Falconer (1923) Loeb Classical Library 1.43.98; Eutropius *Abridgement of Roman History* trans. Rev. J.S. Watson (1886) George Bell and Sons, London 4.15; Obseq. 22, 27a, 32, 34, 36, 47, 48, 50, 53; Rosenberger, V. 'Republican Nobiles: Controlling the Res Publica' A Companion to Roman Religion ed. by Rüpke, J. Oxford: Blackwell pp.292-303 p.295
[141] Graumann 2013 p.190; Orlin, E. (1997) *Temples, Religion and Politics in the Roman Republic* Leiden p.88
[142] Kroppenberg 2010 p.430; Macbain 1982 p.127, Rosenberger 2007 p.295, Schultz 2010 p.530
[143] Schultz 2010 p.529

deep-seated fears and insecurities. It is this that generates the urge to erase the 'problem': in antiquity by drowning (on religious grounds)...".[144]

Modern scholarship has not really engaged in extended discussion of the topic of the ritual execution of intersex children, with it mostly being brought up as an afterthought or footnote into larger discussions of sacrifice, in which the Vestal Virgins and the Gauls and the Greeks take prominence, nevertheless, I believe it is an important topic to discuss to a more substantial degree as it can allow us to speculate into the perception of both itself and other instances of ritual murder and how they are perceived within the Roman cultural self-perception.[145] Schultz argues that because of the semantics regarding the rhetorical choice of ancient scholars surrounding the deaths, that this should not be interpreted as such, with phrasing never explicitly labelling the children as *victima, hostium* or *sacrificium* and instead relying on less religiously steeped language such as 'kill'.[146] My problems with Schultz conclusion based on this supposition have already been expanded upon previously: it does not take into account context surrounding the events, especially the turmoil that seems to be precede and occur simultaneously with the 'discovery' of *prodigium*, and it does not fully address the problems with wholly relying upon the testimony and rhetorical choice ancient scholarship which already has a culture of disdain for sacrifice and will logically differentiate and split hairs to avoid self-incrimination of the Roman religious system especially after the Senate has outlawed human sacrifice as a practice.

Their deaths also seem to be normal for the typical Roman totally-not-a-sacrifice; while the others that involved unwilling victims, with exception to *devotio hostium*, have a lot of specifically ostentatious displays of the Romans not *physically* causing the deaths of the victims, with Stern contemplating that archaic Roman religious laws prevented the shedding of the blood of humans.[147] The deaths of the children clearly meet the criteria for the death of a human, the ritual aspect is also fairly obvious considering that not only is this a repeated procedure, it is codified and carried out in a pattern way rather than haphazardly murdered in whatever way is the most

[144] Graumann 2013 p.203
[145] Rosenberger 2007 p.295
[146] Schultz 2010 p.530
[147] Stern 2020 p.385

convenient. There is, however, considerable disagreement of how the children were killed, or that at the very least a number of different methods are used to dispose of the children: from drowning, to exposure, to burning.[148] The difficulty comes about when talking of the dedication to a deity, whether this is a case of social cleansing/removal of an omen or if this is in fact a payment towards a deity.

As a side note to this section, I would like to discuss the frequency in which the Sibylline books are cited as a foundation document for several of the cases of human sacrifice/ritual murders.[149] The Sibylline books seem to be a the initial reference point for a lot of the Roman human sacrificial practices, with exceptions for *devotio* and the Vestals, the latter of whom's ascribed punishment procedure predated the Sibylline texts introduction, nevertheless the books call for the ultimate sanction on many an occasion.[150] To some extent, I believe it is an attempt at a separation of responsibility for the actions, claiming that the acts are derived from a text not 'native' to the Romans but sold to them by an outsider would give a level of credence to the idea that, at least to the Romans, it is not *their* practice, but one they've adopted out of desperation.

What differs the *prodigium* of the Vestals and their subsequent deaths and the intersex children would be the prevalence for the Vestals to just so happen to be discovered breaking their vows when Rome is under significant enough threat, whether that be physical, geopolitically, theologically or otherwise; compared to children born as intersex, which is impossible to predict. As said prior, the circumstances surrounding a ritual execution can discern typical ritual murders from human sacrifices. The lack of explicit identification within the ancient sources that babies were killed around the other instances of sacrifice within the Roman state seems to disallow their deaths from qualifying as human sacrifice, with their deaths being more akin to a recognising of a breach and a subsequent removal of the warning rather than as a way to fix the breach. And while the Vestals similarly do not have explicit dedication to deities, the context surrounding the incident differs. And the lack of recording by any ancient sources in a level similar to the killing of the

[148] Graumann 2013 p.190, Macbain 1982 p.127
[149] North 1986 253
[150] Plut. *Mor.* 83; Plut. *Vit. Marc.* 3; Orlin 1997 p.88

Vestals, the Devotio, or the burying of the Greeks and Gauls mean that we are unable to qualify the children's death with the same contextual verification that the previously mentioned examples had. In contrast some scholars argue otherwise, that "…in times of crisis and war, *androgyni* were interpreted as the most fearful sign (*prodigium)* from the Gods of Rome of something serious happening.", Schultz in countering this train of thought argues that the *prodigium* of the births was more an indicator of a rupture in the *pax deorum* rather than as an expiatory sacrifice.[151]

We know the instances of infanticide ended in the 90s BCE, with Schultz saying 92 BCE for Rome, Graumann citing 90 BCE for the last case in Athens, which coincides quite well with the Senate banning of any form of human sacrifice.[152] This coincided with a trend within Roman culture of viewing the physical deformations as being more of a fascination or figure of intrigue rather than solely as an omen for bad things to come, though the fear that was associated with the births never truly exited the culture as a whole; Graumann states that there was a shift from the perception of *androgenii* as *prodigii* solely to a perception that categorised them also as *delicii*, and in a sense lurid fetishisation supplanted the Sibylline dictat to practice ritualistic infanticide.[153] Ultimately, due to the evidence evaluated, I believe that while these executions do absolutely constitute ritual murder, I am less inclined to designate these as human sacrifices purely on the basis that there seems to be no correlation between the deaths and military or social crises of the Romans.

[151] Graumann et al 2013 p.190; Schultz 2010 p.530
[152] Paulus, *Sent.* 5.23.16, Graumann 2013 p.191 & 193, Schultz 2010 p.529 fn.46
[153] Graumann 2013 p.191

Chapter 7: Assassination Machinations

As an introduction to this section, there are several assassinations and political conspiracies that occur within the period of the Late Republic that are reminiscent of ritual murders or to some extent have human sacrifices linked to them. These occur in a time where political violence between officials of the state was becoming increasingly common, which coincided with, or rather was a symptom of the declining political stability and functionality of the Roman state. Not all assassinations or significant within the Late Republic will be covered, as they do not coincide with a human sacrifice or even a ritual murder, examples of these include: the death of Publius Clodius Pulcher, while his funeral pyre was certainly symbolic, his death certainly wasn't and seems to have been opportunistic; the death of Pompey Magnus, unceremonial and motives were solely political gain; Lucius Saturninus's death is certainly among the more unconventional ends, yet it doesn't meet the burden of proof. Not all of these assassinations meet the burden for human sacrifice yet some do toe the line, and some in my view absolutely come under the purview of ritual murder. This section will also delve into the context surrounding their deaths and the machinations that occur regarding the memory of their deaths.

Tiberius Gracchus

Tiberius' death is what interests us in the beginning of this discussion, for the manner of his death is unlike aforementioned politically-motivated deaths, its appearance is one masquerading as the preservation of the state and as a moral duty. There is division within ancient scholarship over the nature of Tiberius, some say he is virtuous in his goals, and some view his actions as motivated by personal ambition as well as the danger of his influence over his friends.[154] The reasoning for Tiberius' murder are present across a spectrum; on one hand we have the selfish interests: examples like Nasica who lost land over its redistribution had revenge on their

[154] Val. Max. 4.7.1; Plu. *Vit. Ti. Gracch*. 4.1

minds; there was also the possibility of more virtuous reasons for killing him, Tiberius presented a threat to the stability of the Roman state – read conservative and oligarchic patrician rule – and thus he must be killed to prevent its 'destruction'.

When the senators finally are enraged enough that they resolve to kill Tiberius, Nasica supposedly places a section of his toga over his head, symbolically imitating priests who were about to perform sacrifice, or "...in order to conceal himself from the gods on account of what he was about to do.", before leading a throng of vengeful senators to go confront the so-called tyrant in defence of the state.[155] Florus forgoes the specifics but tells us that Nasica acted in a way to give the pretence that Tiberius "...was put to death with some show of legality.".[156] These sources have a common ground, that Tiberius' death was the beginning of a dangerous trend, that "...and there was no civil butchery until Tiberius Gracchus..", it seems fitting that the first blood spilled that marked the beginning of a century of brutal civil wars was steeped in symbolism.[157] Nasica's draping of his toga is the focal point of this argument, the application of a ritual symbol to the leader of the mob, as well as noting that they were the Pontifex Maximus so would have been acutely aware of the symbology he was using, however it must be noted that there is a possibility that this detail is embellished for effect in the story's retelling.[158] Tiberius' death itself is a result of mob violence, with little ceremony but a hefty amount of symbolism by both sides: with magistrates breaking apart benches to use the legs as clubs; Tiberius' signal being misinterpreted as an attempt to crown himself; Nasica's aforementioned drapery of his toga; the death of supposedly three hundred of Tiberius' supporters who are all beaten to death with not a sword drawn.[159]

Gaius Gracchus

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[155] Appian *Civil Wars* trans. Horace White (1912) Loeb Classical library 1.16; Plu. *Vit. Ti. Gracch.* 19.3-4; Vel. Pat. 2.3.1
[156] Flor. *Ep.* 2.2.7; Bollan, J. (2013). *Pontificalis honor : a re-evaluation of priestly Auctoritas and sacro-political violence in the transition from republic to principate.* [unpublished PhD in Philosophy thesis] University of Glasgow p.28
[157] App. *B. Civ.* 1.2
[158] Beness, J.L., Hillard, T.W. 'The Theatricality of the Deaths of C. Gracchus and Friends.' *The Classical Quarterly*, vol. 51, no. 1, 2001, pp. 135–40. JSTOR p.135
[159] Beness 2001 p.135; Plu. *Vit. Ti. Gracch.* 19.6

I am also covering the assassination of Gaius Gracchus so as to give a comparison to his brother in terms of their deaths; they, while extreme in their own ways, both differ from each other greatly despite the threat both of them posed to patrician dominance. While Gaius is noted by every source as being far more full of invective and being a much more agitated instigator in comparison to his brother, the sources have several different reasonings for his strength of conviction, but what is undeniable is that the murder of his brother would have unquestionably filled him with a lust for revenge and likely realising the same fate would befall him, he chose a more radical route as his brother's more tame attempt still got Tiberius butchered.[160]

Much like his elder brother, Gaius – also spelled Caius – would be killed in reaction to his policies, his invective, and perceived, both real and imagined, threat to the established order of senatorial rule. Unlike his brother, Gaius' death is far more secular in nature, spurred on by the passing of a *senatus consultum ultimum.* However, as is fairly typical for Roman assassinations, their deaths are extravagant, which itself can be perceived as symbolic. Beness and Hillard talk of the theatricality of Gaius' death: with self-sacrifice being committed to allow Gaius time to escape his hunters; the devotion – or lack thereof – of Gaius' slave; the beheading of Gaius' corpse, with his body supposedly sent to his mother and his head drained of his brain and replaced with lead for a greater reward.[161] In stark contrast to Tiberius' death, there are little to no ritual aspects in regards to Gaius' death, just a significant amount of violence perpetrated by anxiety-ridden senators who worry that they would lose power, influence, and most importantly money to Gaius' reforms.

Gaius Julius Caesar

Now we come to what will arguably be my most contentious topic, Gaius Julius Caesar (100-44 BCE). This argument postulates that the assassination of Julius Caesar should be viewed partially in the idea that his death manifests many of the aspects of a human sacrifice, not to any gods in particular, but to the Roman state, which stated prior was itself inherently religiously significant; if not a deified,

[160] Plu. *Vit. C. Gracch*. ; Plu. *Vit. Ti. Gracch*. 2.3
[161] Beness 2001 p.137-138; Plu. *Vit. C. Gracch.* 17.3-4

dehumanised, and non-anthropomorphised nebulous concept of godhood. The conspirators believed that Caesar was destroying the sanctity of the Republic, that only his death would reverse the political and social upheaval that came in Caesar's wake. Little did they know that the fires that stoked Caesar's funeral pyre would bring forth a transformation of the Roman states relationship with religion, with the sanctified establishment of an Imperial cult, with Caesar's memory as its symbol, its godhead; they killed the man, and unwittingly made a god.

It is not unusual for figures and politics within Roman histories to be riddled with rhyme and echoes of the past, in fact, it is a staple for a lot of Roman storytelling. The stories and legends that surround Caesar's death are a mythology unto themselves, with claims of prophecies coalescing, culminating in Caesar's assassination.[162] Instances of these remarkable events include; Spurinna the soothsayer saying beware the ides, the bones of Capys predicting the death of the son of Ilium, a bird carrying a sprig of laurel into the theatre of Pompey before being itself torn apart by other birds; Caesar's dream of flying with Jupiter; Calpurnia's dream of holding her husband's bloodied corpse; Artemidorus, a teacher and friend of a friend of Brutus, giving Caesar a scroll which may have contained the conspiracy.[163] All these 'prophetic omens' were supposedly observed prior to Caesar's assassination.

Caesar's death is perhaps one of the most well-known assassinations in human history, this is due not only to Shakespeare's plays but also due to modern historian's infatuation with not only Caesar himself but the Late Republic in general resulting in an abundance of works both academic and entertainment orientated; the event is catalogued by many ancient scholars primarily due to its importance in the formation of the Principate, with Caesar being the first to be deified after his death. The ending of Caesar is in some sense quite heroic, portrayed as the last stand of a man betrayed by friends. The first person to strike, Casca, grazes Caesar's throat before being grasped and, according to one source, stabbed by Caesar with a stylus. Caesar is then set upon by the rest of the conspirators and his shock is laid bare.

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[162] Suet. *Caes.* 81
[163] App. *B Civ.* 2.115-116, 153; Obseq. 67; Plu. *Vit. Caes.* 63 & 65; Suet. *Caes.* 81

His assassination was, unknown to the assassins, the final act in solidifying Caesar's deification, his 'legal murder' as the victim of a tyrannicide could, and would, be construed as an apotheosis. I personally believe there is a great symbolic link between Heracles' funeral pyre leaving only the god and Caesar's funeral pyre, the latter of which was laden with: soldiers arms and armour; musicians clothes and instruments; women's jewelry; benches and tables were also thrown onto the fire, all willingly.[164] His death fulfills the criteria of being done to save the Republic, but an interesting question could be raised as to whether, due to not only the symbolism, but the idea that he was killed as a legal act of killing a tyrant whether this was a ritual murder/execution.[165]

[164] Plu. *Vit. Caes.* 68.1-2; Plu. *Vit. Brut.* 20.6-7; Suet. *Caes.* 84.3-4
[165] Cicero *De Officiis* trans. Walter Miller (1913) Loeb Classical Library 3.19; Plu. *Vit. Brut.* 10.4-6

Chapter 8: Concluding remarks

In culmination to this work, I want to restate some of the conclusions I have reached during this research. Human sacrifice across almost all cultures of the Ancient Mediterranean and Europe seems to have been relatively common, the extent to which a society carried out these sacrifices however greatly differed. Dissecting the concept of sacrifice was more difficult than initially anticipated, as there are many caveats and even the definition I have reached is rather nebulous, but firm enough to provide a proper diagnostic framework for investigation, but I suppose that is the nature of concepts such as these.This conceptual framework has allowed me to differentiate some of the more obvious examples of sacrifice from those of ritual murder as well as place some cases, which previously have remained almost solely within the political realm, into the grey area between ritual murder and human sacrifice.

The animosity towards human sacrifice spurred from the notion that human sacrifice was equivocated to ‘barbarity’, ‘primitivity’, and was a component in the typical cultural chauvinism exhibited by Roman statesmen and historians alike. Being that the Greeks and the Romans comprised in whole or in majority part the written scholarship of the ancient world, the Romans chose the narrative for what we remember of the cultures they incorporated or destroyed, and directed it to view human sacrifice negatively. My disagreements with scholarship are well-documented throughout this work; an overreliance on the ancient sources despite their lack of neutrality in the subject is not broached by scholars, and I believe this leads to ill-considered conclusions regarding religious rituals.
From the Vestal immurement to the battlefield sacrifices of *devotio*, human sacrifice was arguably both rare and common in its occurrence, in that it may have occurred once a generation or so, it was more often than not treated as normal practice for both Roman religious officials and magistrates to engage in in times of strife and sufficient anxiety.

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