IV

PERFORMING RELIGION IN THE EMPIRE

FOUND IN TRANSLATION.
THE RELIGION OF THE ROMAN DIASPORA*

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1. *Republican Religion as Archetype*

A broad consensus exists that public cults lay at the heart of Roman religion, and that at the ritual heart of most of these cults lay sacrifice.¹ This short paper does not set out to challenge either view, but asks how we must nuance it when we write of the religion of Roman communities in the provinces, rather than that of Rome itself. The centrality of the public cults of the city is certain, at least as far as recent scholarly literature is concerned. The best studied cults are those of the Roman Republic and the Augustan age. Debates over conservatism and change have been played out in relation to the expulsion of the Bacchanales and the reception of Magna Mater Deorum. Our common understanding of priesthoods is very largely based on testimony referring to the Pontiffs, the Vestals and the Arval Brethren. Central concepts of modern scholarship, such as the idea of cult as designed to ensure *pax deorum*, the distinction between *religio* and *superstitio*, the social embeddedness of religion,

* Robust discussion at the workshop has greatly improved the argument and (I hope) its clarity. My special thanks here to Christoph Auffarth and Nicole Belayche. Clifford Ando very generously read an earlier version of this paper, and this one owes a great deal to his insightful comments. Responsibility for all remaining deficiencies remains my own.

¹ This viewpoint is so common it scarcely needs documentation, and a full bibliography would have to begin with the fundamental work of the 'Paris school' on the cults of the Greek polis. R. Gordon's chapters in M. Beard – J. North (eds.), *Pagan Priests* (London 1990), 177-255 offer a formulation that insists – rightly in my view – that the centrality of these cults is both ideological and a product of the power exercised by the Roman ruling classes to impose their version of Roman religion over and against alternative formulations. Slightly different views of the centrality of civic religion in a Roman context can be found in the various works of M. Beard, J. North and J. Scheid. On the general issue, G. Woolf, 'Polis-religion and its alternatives in the Roman provinces', in: H. Cancik – J. Rüpke (eds.), *Römische Reichsreligion und Provinzialreligion* (Tübingen 1997), 71-84, reprinted in: C. Ando (ed.), *Roman Religion* (Cambridge 2003), 39-54.

the contractual relationship between gods and their worshippers, the homologies between social, political and sacerdotal hierarchies all were worked out and are most commonly exemplified from Republican material. It would be easy to go on.

There seem to be two reasons for this. The first is empirical. A very large amount of contemporary or near contemporary testimony exists for Republican religion and the religious changes of the Augustan age. Less often noticed: even when imperial writers – such as Plutarch, Festus, Gellius, Augustine or Macrobius – offer precious evidence about Roman religion, it mostly derives from researches conducted in the late Republican and Augustan period, by Varro and Cicero above all, but also by others including Verrius Flaccus and Nigidius Figulus. Those researches were themselves in part a product of a collective effort to systematise and renew Roman public religion: they advertised their results as normative, and unsurprisingly have convinced many readers that they were.

This brings me to the second reason for privileging the study of Republican religion. As long as the dominant paradigm for the study of ancient religion remains the cults of the city state, the Republican period will have more to contribute. Evidence certainly exists for the imperial period – the epigraphy is much richer, the temple architecture often grander and better preserved and religion is far from absent in genres that flourished under the emperors, notably epic and panegyric.² Historical writing indeed had notable religious content from Fabius Pictor to Ammianus Marcellinus.³ The amount of religious material in Greek literature of the early empire is more and more apparent.⁴ But the city is no longer such an effective

² E.g. D.C. Feeney, *The Gods in Epic: Poets and Critics of the Classical Tradition* (Oxford – New York 1991) and id., *Literature and Religion at Rome. Cultures, Contexts and Beliefs* (Cambridge 1998); D. Levene, 'God and man in the classical Latin panegyric', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 43 (1997), 66–103.

³ See D. Levene, *Religion in Livy* (Leiden 1993); J. Davies, *Rome's Religious History: Livy, Tacitus and Ammianus on Their Gods* (Cambridge 2004) for two recent contributions.

⁴ Some examples gathered (along with some Latin cases) in D. Elm von der Osten – J. Rüpke – K. Waldner (eds.), *Texte als Medium und Reflexion von Religion im römischen Reich* (Stuttgart 2006), especially the contribution of A. Bendlin, 'Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Mantik: Orakel im Medium von Handlung und Literatur in der Zeit der Zweiten Sophistik', 159–207. Pausanias' religiosity has

interpretative frame, so connecting all these strands is more difficult.⁵ The person of the emperor has seemed to some the ideal organizing principle for the later period. Yet even the loosest definitions of imperial cult explain much less of imperial religion than civic cult does of its Republican counterpart. Besides, there are good reasons in any case for regarding ‘imperial cult’ as a modern category, one that draws together for convenience a vast and uncoordinated body of local cults, most belonging to discrete civic, tribal or even military religious systems.⁶

2. From Republican City to Imperial Provinces

Roman Republican religion has not only been well studied. Its study has also provided some of the main heuristic strategies used to interpret material from Italy and the western provinces in the imperial period.⁷ Again it is easy to see why this is the case. First our

generated its own bibliography, see for instance S. Alcock – J. Cherry – J. Elsner (eds.), *Pausanias. Travel and Memory in Roman Greece* (Cambridge 2001).

⁵ M. Beard – J. North – S. Price, *Religions of Rome I-II* (Cambridge 1998) nicely illustrates the problem, as well as offering a rare synthetic view of the cult of the imperial city. It is striking how the focus necessarily shifts from the totality of Roman religion in the early chapters to the cults of the imperial metropolis in the later ones. Chapter 7 offers a fine description of the heterogeneity of provincial versions of Roman religion in the imperial period, one to which this paper owes a great deal, but it does not propose any particular schema for its interpretation. The best recent exploration of this heterogeneity is that of C. Ando, ‘Exporting Roman religion’, in: J. Rüpke (ed.), *Blackwell Companion to Roman Religion* (Oxford 2007), 429–445. I am grateful to him for advance sight of this piece.

⁶ S.R.F. Price, *Rituals and Power. The Imperial Cult in Roman Asia Minor* (Cambridge 1984); G. Woolf, ‘Divinity and power in ancient Rome’, in: N. Brisch (ed.), *Religion and Power. Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond* (Chicago 2008), 235–255.

⁷ For recent examples, T. Derks, *Gods, Temples and Ritual Practices. The Transformation of Religious Ideas and Values in Roman Gaul* (Amsterdam 1998) interpreting votive inscriptions with reference to the *acta* of the Arval Brethren; W. van Andringa, ‘Cultes publiques et statut juridique de la cité des Helvètes’, in: C.M. Ternes (ed.), *Roman Religion in Gallia Belgica and the Germaniae. Actes des Quatrièmes Rencontres Scientifiques de Luxembourg* (Luxembourg 1994), 170–194; J.B. Rives, *Religion and Authority in Roman Carthage from Augustus to Constantine* (Oxford 1995); G. Woolf, ‘Playing games with Greeks: one Roman on Greekness’, in: D. Konstan – S. Said (eds.), *Greeks on Greekness. Viewing the Greek Past under the Roman Empire* (Cambridge 2006), 162–178; B. Goffaux, ‘Formes d’organisation des cultes dans la *Colonia Augusta Emerita* (Lusitanie)’, in: M. Dondin-Payre – M.-T. Raepsart-Charlier (eds.), *Sanctuaires, pratiques culturelles*

evidence – although massive in quantity – is poor in quality. We lack provincial testimony to be set alongside that of Cicero and his contemporaries. Long inscriptions are rare. Nothing like the documentation from the shrine of Dea Dia exists outside Italy. We return again and again to a small body of key epigraphic texts (as I shall do myself in just a moment). Second, when the epigraphy of the western provinces is combed for material on religious institutions and cultic acts, the vocabulary is deceptively reassuring. Priests are given familiar Roman titles, votives are inscribed with formulae that recall Italian and Roman practice, the gods (and to a lesser extent the goddesses) have familiar names. There is a scant iconography of cult, but when sacrificial scenes are visible they seem to conform to Roman norms, as established from metropolitan evidence. Priests veil their heads, attendants hold the victims, flute players pipe in the background and incense is scattered on utterly conventional altars. Occasionally anthropomorphic deities look on. Monumental altars and the greatest urban temples also conform to Italian and Roman stylistic criteria.

Two analytical procedures underpin this discovery of Roman religion in the provinces. The first is an effort of selection. By a tacit consent the investigation of these cults proceeds by excluding contaminants, both those regarded as pre-Roman survivals (even when only attested in Latin epigraphy, in anthropomorphic images and monumental temples that in many parts of the west have no pre-conquest analogues) and ‘oriental cults’ of all kinds. The latter exclusion is certainly illegitimate, given that few would accept this category of cult in other contexts. Specialists working on metropolitan religion have long considered the policing of the frontiers of civic religion, through expulsions and incorporations, as central to its understanding. Yet the spread of the worship of Mater Magna Deorum in the west tends to be documented in the volumes of *Etudes Préliminaires aux Religions Orientales dans l'Empire*

et territoires civiques dans l'Occident romain (Brussels 2006), 51-97, all interpreting the cults of provincial colonies on the basis of the *lex Ursonensis*, after the model of J. Scheid, ‘Sanctuaires et territoire dans la *Colonia Augusta Treverorum*’, in: J.-L. Brunaux (ed.), *Les sanctuaires celtiques et le monde méditerranéen* (Paris 1991), 42-57. Goffaux’s discussion is particularly valuable for his comments on the strengths and limitations of this method.

Romain and marginalised in accounts of the civic religion of North Africa and southern Gaul.⁸

The second analytical procedure is less overtly stated but proceeds as follows. A pattern or scheme is derived from metropolitan material and an attempt is made to see how good an account it can give of a body of provincial material. Thus stated the methodological drawbacks are obvious. Just because one pattern explains a great deal it does not mean it is the only pattern that might do so, let alone the best one available. More importantly, the metropolitan pattern is not used to generate falsifiable hypotheses: the investigator sets out to find evidence that fits, rather than challenges, the hypothesis. Archaeological investigations are not immune to this trap. Once we classify a ritual deposit as a *favissa* we begin to interpret it in relation to an existing set of comparanda, adding it to a corpus of *favissae*, approaching it with questions derived from a pre-existing dossier. Material from Rome and Italy naturally provides the reference collections for most religious artefacts. It is certainly possible to look for local divergences, for departures from the norm. But even then the pre-existing taxonomy determines which norm provides the point of departure. The general problem is well known to contextual archaeologists. But the specific case is rarely raised in relation to Roman religion, perhaps because we take for granted the essential homogeneity of the material culture of the Empire. Lastly, when an interpretation depends on combining a pattern of this kind with lacunose evidence, there is a risk that the interpretative model is contributing most of the meaning. Does an inscription mentioning a *sacerdos* attest Roman styles of priesthood? That is possible, certainly, although there are other equally likely possibilities such as a local appropriation of a Roman term to describe something rather different.⁹ Tripolitanian bilingual inscriptions show that Punic *shophets* lie behind some Latin *suffecti*. The last attested *vercobretus* of the Santones of Saintes in western Gaul became their first *flamen Augustalis*, probably when the city

⁸ For an exception cf. W. van Andringa, *La religion en Gaule romaine. Piété et politique, Ier-IIIème s. apr. J.-C.* (Paris 2002), 191-194.

⁹ R. Gordon, 'Religion in the Roman Empire: the civic compromise and its limits', in: Beard – North 1990, op.cit. (n. 1), 235-255 suggests some other examples on pp. 242 f.

acquired the Latin right.¹⁰ When there are no bilinguals, and the inscriptions are short, few in number and often lacking in much context, how certain can we be what terms like *pontifex*, *flamen* and *sacerdos* meant in provincial communities?

The strength of scholarship on the public cults of the Roman Republic in combination with the relative poverty of data on provincial cults has made this sort of analysis beguiling. It may indeed be the case that Roman models of religion were rapidly replicated across the western provinces, as many recent studies have argued. Yet it is important to be clear that the analytical procedures we commonly employ will always tend to produce a version of provincial religion which closely resembles the cults of the Roman Republic. The more such studies are conducted, the more homogenous will come to seem the cultic life of the western provinces. There is a real sense in which it is we who are romanizing provincial religion.

It is important, naturally, not to exaggerate the difficulties. It would be perverse to ignore the abundant iconographic evidence for the existence of Roman ritual, especially sacrifice, in the provinces. Nor are we faced with a stark choice between the notion of religious change as the rolling out of one ritual system at the expense of its competitors, and the alternative that, beneath a veneer of Roman terminology and imagery, quite alien systems either persisted or emerged. It would be pragmatic to admit the plausibility of instances of local appropriation and of hybridity as well as of imposition and conformity. Going further than this, however, is difficult.

One profitable tactic is to set out on the deliberate hunt for material that does not conform to the expectations generated by explanations based on metropolitan patterns. At the level of ritual practice, an important contribution is made by archaeological traces of cultic acts that have no place in the Roman tradition. Roman sacrificial traditions expanded into a world in which sacrifices of different kinds were well established. The Romans themselves had some sort of folk-idea that ritual traditions were one of the means by

¹⁰ W. van Andringa, 'Prêtrises et cités dans les Trois Gaules et les Germanies au Haut Empire', in: M. Dondin-Payre – M.-T. Raepsart-Charlier (eds.), *Cités, municipes, colonies. Les processus de municipalisation en Gaule et en Germanie sous le Haut Empire romain* (Paris 1999), 425-446, at pp. 430 f. discusses *CIL* XIII 1074 (= *Inscriptions latines d'Aquitaine: Santons*, nr. 20).

which different peoples were to be differentiated and characterised, as illustrated by the concept of *ritus Graecus*.¹¹ Civic religion could on occasion accommodate a variety of *ritus* when subordinated to the appropriate discipline. A good deal of evidence is emerging, however, that other sacrificial traditions co-existed with the Roman one in parts of the west.¹² Eventually it may be possible to map more precisely what has been termed the limits of the civic compromise.¹³

3. *Diasporic Religion*

What I wish to suggest here, however is a different tactic. The phenomenon of religions changing when brought to new territories, especially in colonial contexts, is well attested both ethnographically and historically. Some elements seem less portable, others assume new importance, and occasionally substitution or syncretism occurs. For some contemporary actors these substitutions and syncretisms occur only in peripheral areas of the system, and may even be promoted as means of easing the reception by new peoples of the essentials. What is peripheral and what essential is, naturally, often disputed. Transferences of this kind might look, from the position of metropolitan observers or traditionalists, as an impoverishment or pollution of religion. Yet historians of religion must stand above those arguments, which are themselves part of the story.

When considering what might be lost and found in the translation of Roman religion to the western provinces, it might be helpful to bear in mind the analogy of the transformation of Judaism in the ancient diaspora, and especially after the destruction of the temple. That the temple of Jerusalem, the blood sacrifice performed there and the priesthoods that officiated over it were central to Jewish cult and identity can scarcely be doubted. Yet Diaspora Judaism was hardly impoverished. The creation of synagogues and new rituals for their use, the growth of the rabbinate and the development of exegetical traditions were all dynamic transformations. Against the awareness of loss was set the continuity provided by sacred texts and

¹¹ For a lucid exposition, J. Scheid, '*Graeco ritu*: a typically Roman way of honouring the gods', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 97 (1995), 15-31.

¹² E.g. I. Haynes, 'Religion in the Roman army. Unifying aspects and regional trends', in: Cancik-Rüpke 1997, op.cit. (n. 1) 71-84.

¹³ Gordon 1990, op.cit. (n. 9).

the observance of the law. Roman religion in the provinces did not differ from that of the metropole to quite such a marked degree. The distance between them was geographical, not historical. There seems to have been little sense of loss, and after all the cults of the City were still there and to a great degree unchanged, as the correspondence of Symmachus makes clear.¹⁴ The vast recent literature on so-called pagan pilgrimage has not produced any evidence of provincial-born Romans 'returning' to Rome to observe or participate in rituals that only took place in the capital.¹⁵ Equally there was perhaps less to provide a new kernel for diasporic Roman religion in the absence of authoritative scripture or law. Members of the Roman diaspora could not find a new coherence in the sort of debates over the interpretation of sacred text and the observance of ritual that were available to the Jews. The variety of institutional contexts within which members of the Roman diaspora conducted cult must also have fragmented its nature. On the other hand, not all Jewish communities were alike either. The analogy is at least worth exploring.

A useful starting point is offered by a recent reassessment of religious organization in the colonial settlement of Urso in southern Spain, in so far as it can be reconstructed from its partially extant charter.¹⁶ That charter or statute defined the civic organization of a colony of Caesarian date. Its provisions have often been believed to have been generated from a template used for a number of colonial foundations of the period, one that had evolved from similar statutes

¹⁴ R.J.A. Talbert, *The Senate of Imperial Rome* (Princeton 1984) accords the senate itself relatively few religious functions (on pp. 345 f. he considers election to priesthoods, on pp. 386-391 *consecrationes*, *supplicationes* and other business). Z. Varhelyi's *Power and the Beyond: The Religion of Senators in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge, forthcoming) is eagerly awaited.

¹⁵ Most recently D. Frankfurter (ed.), *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt* (Leiden – Boston 1998) and J. Elsner – I. Rutherford (eds.), *Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Antiquity: Seeing the Gods* (Oxford 2005).

¹⁶ J. Rüpke, 'Urban religion and imperial expansion: priesthoods in the *Lex Ursonensis*', in: L. de Blois – P. Funke – J. Hahn (eds.), *The Impact of Imperial Rome on Religions, Ritual and Religious Life in the Roman Empire. Proceedings of the Fifth Workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire* (Leiden – Boston 2006), 11-23 (= Rüpke 2006a) with id., 'Religion in the *Lex Ursonensis*', in: C. Ando – J. Rüpke (eds.), *Religion and Law in Classical and Christian Rome* (Stuttgart 2006), 34-46 (= Rüpke 2006b).

issued to Italian communities. Many of the civic institutions described can be read as a sort of simplification and miniaturisation of those of Rome. What has now been noticed, however, is that at least in respect of religion, other changes were introduced. Urso had two priestly colleges, one of *pontifices* and the other of *augures*. But their authority seems to have been subordinated to that of civil magistrates. There is, in fact, little sign of what these priests are to do and the balance of responsibilities with the magistrates has been altered.¹⁷ The authority of provincial pontiffs and augurs also seems too have been limited in some cases by the authority of the governor.¹⁸ A parallel is offered by the flamine established at a slightly later time for the province of Narbonensis. While the regulations clearly draw on metropolitan models in many respects there are differences, notably that the position is an annual one rather than (as in the case of the metropolitan *flamen Dialis*) a lifetime appointment.¹⁹ There are some indications that at the creation of a colony considerable care was taken to accommodate existing cults and devise appropriate and authorised syncretisms between local and Roman deities. The appearance of the cult of even relatively obscure deities such as Vertumnus in some provincial centres strongly suggests that some kind of religious experts were involved.²⁰ Yet what they created was a transformation, not an epitome, of the *sacra publica* of Rome.²¹

Drawing up a complete list of Roman religious institutions that were not propagated in the provinces is beyond the scope of this paper (although such an exercise would have the merit of falsifiability). But it is possible to sketch an outline. Consider priesthoods: pontiffs and augurs are attested from provincial communities and seem, to judge from the municipal laws, to have been ordered in mini-colleges even if their functions were largely

¹⁷ Rüpke 2006b, op.cit. (n. 16), 42-46.

¹⁸ Beard – North – Price 1998, op.cit. (n. 5) II, 328 f.

¹⁹ For the law see *CIL* XII 6038 = *ILS* 6964. The contrast with the Roman *flamen Dialis* is drawn by Beard – North – Price 1998, op.cit. (n. 5) I, 357.

²⁰ Scheid 1991, op.cit. (n. 7); Beard – North – Price 1998, op.cit. (n. 5) II, 330 f. suggest that religious experts were attached to the staff of governors or army units, and even Varro's *Antiquities* may have been consulted.

²¹ Ando 2007, op.cit. (n. 5), 434 notes that the very fact that the institutions of *coloniae* – unlike those of Rome – were fixed by an initial *lex* marks a significant difference in terms of their capacity to respond to and initiate religious change.

allocated to magistrates. There is no sign however of the *quindecimviri sacris faciundis* nor of the *septemviri Epulonum*, nor of *Vestales* and *Arvales*, nor of a *flamen Dialis*, nor a *flamen Martialis* let alone all the many minor priesthoods of the metropolis. The list is not complete, but a number of reasons at once appear that explain why these priesthoods were not replicated in colonies. Some related to cults tied to one particular locality – the cult performed by the *Vestales* was concentrated almost entirely in a set of linked locations in the Forum Romanum and the Capitol. Linked, that is, by their repeated act which was believed to be both ancient and essential to the persistence of the state. The *Arvales* too conducted their cult at one particular sacred grove. The functions of the *quindecimviri* were tied to the management in Rome of public cults that were in some senses regarded as foreign, and in some sense too to the use of the Sybilline books to help manage change. They would, as a result, have had little to do in provincial communities. More generally only some of the functions of Republican Roman priests were performed by their provincial analogues. Officiating at rituals, sacrifice above all, remained central to the role of Roman priests everywhere.²² In these senses at least provincial priests continued to mediate between their communities and the divine.²³ But none of those priesthoods

²² A few individuals of senatorial or equestrian status held priesthoods both in Rome and in provincial communities. J. Scheid – M.G. Granino Cecere, 'Les sacerdoce publics équestres', in: S. Demougin – H. Devijver – M.-T. Raepsart-Charlier (eds.), *L'ordre équestre. Histoire d'une aristocratie, IIe s. av. J.-C. - IIIe s. ap. J.-C.* (Rome – Paris 1999), 79-189 found that of the attested holders of minor priesthoods in the City nearly half of those whose *origines* were known were provincial. L. Egnatuleius Sabinus was both *pontifex Palatualis* in Rome and *flamen Augustalis* in his native colony of Thysdrus in Africa (*CIL* VIII 10500); the prosopographic tables provided by Scheid and Granino Cecere indicate maybe nine or ten analogous cases. We might presume rather fewer senators held priesthoods in their own communities. It is difficult to know whether this phenomenon led to any communication of religious knowledge *sensu lato*, especially since in many cases priesthoods held in provincial communities would have preceded equestrian posts. Yet strong links continued to connect some members of metropolitan elites to their provincial communities of origin, on which cf. W. Eck, 'Rome and the outside world: senatorial families and the world they lived in', in: B. Rawson – P. Weaver (eds.), *The Roman Family in Italy. Status, Sentiment, Space* (Canberra – Oxford 1997), 73-99.

²³ Cf. Van Andringa 1999, op.cit. (n. 10) for discussion. From Gaul there are indications that election as the annual *sacerdos* or *flamen* might be the apogee of a civic career (rather than an adjunct as in Rome). Membership of priestly *collegia* seems (again unlike in Rome) to have conferred relatively less prestige.

whose holder 'acted out' the role of gods are attested in provincial communities, and it seems very unlikely that provincial pontiffs sat together to rule on arcane matters of ritual, or sat as a court in the way that their metropolitan analogues did. Roman priesthood in provincial communities seems to have been only concerned with the performance of ritual.

Festivals provoke similar reflections. A number were certainly capable of celebration anywhere that Romans found themselves. The *Saturnalia* and the *Parentalia* are cases in point: interestingly both were celebrated at the level of the household.²⁴ Others depended on certain locations, locations in the City of Rome that is. There could be no provincial *Lupercalia* for there was only one *Lupercal*, and no triumphs anywhere but in Rome. That even Constantine felt the need to in some senses reproduce the sacred topography of Rome in his new capital shows an acute awareness that for some rituals place was all important. Part of the significance of annual festivals orientated towards members of the imperial family may have been that these too were portable. Augustus' birthday or the anniversary of this or that prince putting on the toga of manhood could be celebrated anywhere. It is very striking how many of the festivals marked in the *Feriale Duranum* are of this type, that is anniversaries of imperial accessions, consulships, and birthdays along with festivals such as the *Rosalia* and *Neptunalia* which were not so closely tied to particular locations.

What of ritual itself? Antiquarian writers and Christian apologists alike revelled in the more bizarre ceremonies of the Roman calendar. The October Horse, the *Parilia* held on the 21st of April to celebrate Rome's foundation, the dances of the *Salii*. None of these seem to have been translated into the provinces. What we do see are repeated, and nor usually very surprising, uses of the key ritual technology: processions, purifications, sacrifices, common meals all organised by the ruling elite according to calendars that resembled those of Rome without duplicating them. New festivals were occasionally added to the mix. A series of Greek agonistic festivals appeared in western cities following the lead given by Domitian's *Kapitolia*.²⁵ Cults of

²⁴ See Gellius 18.2.1 for expatriate Romans in Athens meeting to celebrate the *Saturnalia*.

²⁵ M.L. Caldelli, *Gli agoni alla Greca nelle regioni occidentali dell'Impero. La Gallia Narbonensis* (Rome 1997), 387-481.

the *divi* accumulated over time in the greatest centres. Yet the diversity of ritual practices was much reduced compared to the rich and exotic ritual life of the metropolis.

If we stand back and consider the religion of the Roman diaspora²⁶ it is now possible to get some sense of how it differed most from that of Rome. The ritual acts were more austere, and much more restricted in range. There were no sacred books, no complex prayers or ceremonies the meaning of which might be debated endlessly by scholars. Sacrifice was therefore, if anything, even more central to provincial Roman communities than it was in the metropolis. The management of cult, and of innovation, also seems to have become simpler. Authority was centralised in fewer hands and institutions. That reflected not just pragmatic adaptations, but perhaps also theories of how religion ought to be ordered.²⁷ The cults of provincial Roman communities were apparently quite similar to one another. The sense of religious uniqueness, rooted in a history of cultic innovation, that pervades Republican religion is not present. Nor is the sense of antiquity. While the gods themselves were not young – except for the *divi* – most Roman communities had a year zero in recent history. Ritual has famously been described as a machine for the suppression of time. Recent writing on Roman sacrifice has emphasised that monumental altars and reliefs depicting sacrifices allude to both past and future acts of cult, stabilizing the relationship between worshippers and deities.²⁸ Yet in the provinces there is none of that dizzying sense of antiquity that surrounds Republican references to the *Lupercalia*, or the *ara maxima* or the cult of the *Penates*. There are instances of provincial cults that refer pointedly to the cult of Diana on the Aventine as a model, as if to establish a cultic genealogy, and the *Penates* are invoked in the municipal charters from Spain.²⁹ How widespread, or meaningful,

²⁶ For the notion of a Roman diaspora see N. Purcell, 'Romans in the Roman world', in: K. Galinsky (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus* (Cambridge – New York 2005), 85–105. For diasporic religion in the Roman world, C. Ando, 'A religion for the Empire', in: A.J. Boyle – W.J. Dominik (eds.), *Flavian Rome* (Leiden 2003), 323–344, reprinted in: C. Ando (ed.), *Roman Religion* (Cambridge 2003), 220–243 (references are to the latter edition).

²⁷ Rüpke 2006a, op.cit. (n. 16).

²⁸ E.g. J. Elsner, 'Cult and sculpture: sacrifice in the Ara Pacis Augustae', *Journal of Roman Studies* 81 (1991), 50–61.

²⁹ Ando 2003, op.cit. (n. 26), 234 f. with references, and an explanation.

such gestures were is unclear. Most ritual was recent in origin and apparently stripped of myth.³⁰ Describing this religion negatively, in terms of what it lacked, should not lead us to regard it as defective or incomplete. The example of Diaspora Judaism is again relevant. As in the case of the Jews, those who adhered to the diasporic versions of Roman religion soon greatly outnumbered those who continued to orientate themselves on the cults of the City.

What the consequences of all this are is difficult to say. But the idea that the Roman religion of the diaspora had evolved distinctive forms and a new order of priorities is attractive. Did a notion of 'Roman religion' separate from the cults of each individual Roman city emerge, as individuals moved between cities with near identical *sacra publica* none of which were tied to local topographies of myth? The municipal epigraphy of Spain is full of references to *incolae*, resident aliens who in many cases seem simply to be members of neighbouring communities.³¹ The Flavian municipal law established certain standardised rites across the peninsula, including the swearing by magistrates of oaths by Jupiter, the *divi* and the *dei Penates*. Resident citizens of nearby Latin communities might have been forgiven for thinking of all these as aspects of a single Roman religion, rather than rites integral to the discrete and autonomous *sacra publica* of Irni, of Malpensa, of Salpensa, and so on.³²

Soldiers and their officers too moved within a ritual world emancipated from the constraints of the city, often taking their cultic preferences with them.³³ The choice of festivals commemorated in the *Feriale Duranum* – mostly portable feasts, and many orientated on the family of the emperors rather than the city of Rome – offers one glimpse of what a generalised Roman religion could have looked

³⁰ There is, of course, a delicious irony in claiming provincial Roman communities as mythless societies just as Rome itself shrugs off that label, cf. F. Graf (ed.), *Mythos in mythenloser Gesellschaft. Das Paradigma Roms* (Stuttgart – Leipzig 1993). There is growing evidence, in fact, for the creation of myths of origin in the western Mediterranean in the Roman period, but this is exclusively confined to 'ethnographic' and historical writing and not associated with cult.

³¹ N. Mackie, *Local Administration in Roman Spain. AD 14-212* (Oxford 1982).

³² Cf. Ando 2003, op.cit. (n. 26). My debt to this paper should be clear throughout this section. Our main difference in emphasis is that while Ando focuses on the spread of cults through diasporic communities, my interest is their modification in diasporic conditions.

³³ J. Scheid, 'La piété des procurateurs des Gaules et des Germanies', *Cahiers du Centre Gustave Glotz* 9 (1998), 265-275 offers some nice illustrations.

like. Many western cities of peregrine status hosted associations (*conventus*) of Roman citizens, most visible when they gathered to perform collective cult to the emperors separately from that paid by the non-citizens among whom they lived. These associations were in Gaul co-ordinated into a transprovincial organization. At least one body with significant religious functions – the *Augustales* – is attested in many western cities but was not present in Rome.³⁴

What I am suggesting is that relatively wide sections of society came to understand Roman religion in ways that had little to do with the City of Rome and its distinctive mythic topography. If so, then investigating diasporic Roman religion may require analytical strategies that do more than simply seek to demonstrate the compatibility of ancient and supposedly fundamental Roman religious principles with the extant epigraphic and archaeological data.

St Andrews, February 2008

³⁴ A. Abramenko, *Die munizipale Mittelschicht im kaiserzeitlichen Italien. Zu einem neuen Verständnis von Sevirat und Augustalität* (Frankfurt 1993). Despite recent doubts about their status as a priesthood (e.g. Beard – North – Price 1998, op.cit [n. 5] I, 357 f.) some religious function still seems probable given their organization by *collegia* and the early title of *seviri*. See the observations by J. D'Arms, 'Memory, money and status at Misenum: three new inscriptions from the collegium of the *Augustales*', *Journal of Roman Studies* 90 (2000), 126-144.