

## VARIOUS

### Accounts of the Roman State Religion

Source: From: William Stearns Davis, ed., *Readings in Ancient History*, 2 Vols. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1912-13), Vol. II, pp. 9-15; 289; Livy, *The History of Rome*, by T. Livius, trans. D. Spillan and Cyrus Edmonds, (New York: G. Bell & Sons, 1892). Scanned by: J. S. Arkenberg, Dept. of History, Cal. State Fullerton. Prof. Arkenberg has modernized the text.

#### Cato the Elder: The Planting Ritual, c. 160 BCE

The offering is to be made in this way: Offer to Jupiter Dapalis a cup of wine of whatever size you wish. Observe the day as a holiday for the oxen, their drivers, and those who make the offering. When you make the offering, say as follows: "Jupiter Dapalis, since it is due and proper that a cup of wine be offered you, in my home among my family, for your sacred feast; for that reason, be honored by this feast that is offered you." Wash your hands, and then take the wine and say: "Jupiter Dapalis, be honored by this feast that is offered to you and be honored by the wine that is placed before you." If you wish, make an offering to Vesta. The feast of Jupiter consists of roasted meat and an urn of wine. Present it to Jupiter religiously, in the proper form. After the offering is made, plant millet, panic grass, garlic, and lentils.

#### Cato the Elder: The Harvest Ritual, c. 160 BCE

Before the harvest the sacrifice of the pig must be offered in this manner: Offer a sow as *porca praecidanea* to Ceres before you harvest spelt, wheat, barley, beans, and rape seed. Offer a prayer, with incense and wine, to Janus, Jupiter and Juno, before offering the sow. Offer a pile of cakes to Janus, saying, "Father Janus, in offering these cakes to you, I humbly pray that you will be propitious and merciful to me and my children, my house and my household." Then make an offering of cake to Jupiter with these words: "In offering you this cake, O Jupiter, I humbly pray that you, pleased with this offering, will be propitious and merciful to me and my children, my house and my household." Then present the wine to Janus, saying: "Father Janus, as I have prayed humbly in offering you the cakes, so may you in the same way be honored by this wine now placed before you." Then pray to Jupiter thus: "Jupiter, may you be honored in accepting this cake; may you be honored in accepting the wine placed before you." Then sacrifice the *porca praecidanea*. When the entrails have been removed, make an offering of cakes to Janus, and pray in the same way as you have prayed before. Offer a cake to Jupiter, praying just as before. In the same way offer wine to Janus and offer wine to Jupiter, in the same way as before in offering the pile of cakes, and in the consecration of the cake. Afterward offer the entrails and wine to Ceres.

#### Cicero: The Flamen Dialis, c. 50 BCE

A great many ceremonies are imposed upon the Flamen Dialis,<sup>1</sup> and also many restraints, about which we read in the

books *On The Public Priesthoods* and also in Book I of Fabius Pictor's work. Among them I recall the following: 1) It is forbidden the Flamen Dialis to ride a horse; 2) It is likewise forbidden him to view the classes arrayed outside the pomerium,<sup>2</sup> i.e., armed and in battle order—hence only rarely is the Flamen Dialis made a Consul, since the conduct of wars is entrusted to the Consuls; 3) It is likewise forbidden for him ever to take an oath by Jupiter; 4) It is likewise forbidden for him to wear a ring, unless it is cut through and empty; 5) It is also forbidden to carry out fire from the flaminia, i.e., the Flamen Dialis' house, except for a sacral purpose; 6) if a prisoner in chains enters the house he must be released and the chains must be carried up through the opening in the roof above the atrium or living room onto the roof tiles and dropped down from there into the street;

7) He must have no knot in his head gear or in his girdle or in any other part of his attire; 8) If anyone is being led away to be flogged and falls at his feet as a suppliant, it is forbidden to flog him that day; 9) The hair of the Flamen Dialis is not to be cut, except by a freeman; 10) It is customary for the Flamen neither to touch nor even to name a female goat, or raw meat, ivy, or beans; 11) He must not walk under a trellis for vines; 12) The feet of the bed on which he lies must have a thin coating of clay, and he must not be away from this bed for three successive nights, nor is it lawful for anyone else to sleep in this bed; 13) At the foot of his bed there must be a box containing a little pile of sacrificial cakes; 14) The nail trimmings and hair of the Dialis must be buried in the ground beneath a healthy tree; 15) Every day is a holy day for the Dialis; 16) He must not go outdoors without a head-covering—this is now allowed indoors, but only recently by decree of the pontiffs, as Masurius Sabinus has stated; it is also said that some of the other ceremonies have been remitted and cancelled; 17) It is not lawful for him to touch bread made with yeast; 18) His underwear cannot be taken off except in covered places, lest he appear nude under the open sky, which is the same as under the eye of Jove; 19) No one else outranks him in the seating at a banquet except the *Rex Sacrorum*; 20) If he loses his wife, he must resign his office; 21) His marriage cannot be dissolved except by death; 21) He never enters a burying ground, he never touches a corpse—he is, however, permitted to attend a funeral.

Almost the same ceremonial rules belong to the Flaminica Dialis.<sup>3</sup> They say that she observes certain other and different ones, for example, that she wears a dyed gown, and that she has a twig from a fruitful tree tucked in her veil, and that it is forbidden for her to ascend more than three rungs of a ladder

<sup>1</sup> The priest of Jupiter (see page 4 above).

<sup>2</sup> The sacred boundary of Rome.

<sup>3</sup> I.e., his wife.

and even that when she goes to the Argei Festival<sup>4</sup> she must neither comb her head nor arrange her hair.

### **Livy: History of Rome, c. 10 CE**

There is an ancient instruction written in archaic letters which runs: "Let him who is the Praetor Maximus fasten a nail on the Ides of September." This notice was fastened up on the right side of the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, next to the chapel of Minerva. This nail is said to have marked the number of the year—written records being scarce in those days—and was for that reason placed under the protection of Minerva because she was the inventor of numbers. Cincius, a careful student of monuments of this kind, asserts that at Volsinii also nails were fastened in the Temple of Nortia, an Etruscan goddess, to indicate the number of the year. It was in accordance with this direction that the consul Horatius dedicated the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus in the year following the expulsion of the kings; from the Consuls the ceremony of fastening the nails passed to the Dictators, because they possessed greater authority. As the custom had been subsequently dropped, it was felt to be of sufficient importance to require the appointment of a Dictator. L. Manlius was accordingly nominated, but, regarding his appointment as due to political rather than to religious reasons and eager to command in the war with the Hernici, he caused a very angry feeling among the men liable to serve by the inconsiderate way in which he conducted the enrolment. At last, in consequence of the unanimous resistance offered by the tribunes of the plebs, he gave way, either voluntarily or through compulsion, and laid down his Dictatorship. Since then, this rite has been performed by the Rex Sacrorum.

### **Plutarch: Life of Numa, c. 110 CE**

The original constitution of the priests, called Pontifices, is ascribed unto Numa, and he himself was, it is said, the first of them; and that they have the name of Pontifices from pons ["bridge"], or, thus, "bridge-makers." The sacrifices performed on the bridge were among the most sacred and ancient, and the keeping and repairing of the bridge attached, like any other public sacred office, to the priesthood. It was accounted not simply unlawful, but a positive sacrilege, to pull down the wooden bridge; which moreover is said, in obedience to an oracle, to have been built entirely of timber and fastened with wooden pins, without nails or cramps of iron. The office of Pontifex Maximus, or chief priest, was to declare and interpret the divine law...he not only prescribed rules for public ceremony, but regulated the sacrifices of private persons, not suffering them to vary from established custom, and giving information to everyone of what was requisite for purposes of worship or supplication. He was also guardian of the vestal virgins, the institution of whom, and of their perpetual fire, was attributed to Numa, who, perhaps, fancied the charge of pure and uncorrupted flames would be fitly entrusted to chaste and unpolluted persons, or that fire, which consumes but produces nothing, bears an analogy to the virgin estate.

Some are of opinion that these vestals had no other business than the preservation of this fire; but others conceive that they were keepers of other divine secrets, concealed from all but themselves. Gegania and Verenia, it is recorded, were the names of the first two virgins consecrated and ordained by Numa; Canuleia and Tarpeia succeeded; Servius Tullius afterwards added two, and the number of four has been continued to the present time. The statutes prescribed by Numa for the vestals were these: that they should take a vow of virginity for the space of thirty years, the first ten of which they were to spend in learning their duties, the second ten in performing them, and the remaining ten in teaching and instructing others. Thus the whole term being completed, it was lawful for them to marry, and leaving the sacred order, to choose any condition of life that pleased them. But, of this permission, few, as they say, made use; and in cases where they did so, it was observed that their change was not a happy one, but accompanied ever after with regret and melancholy; so that the greater number, from religious fears and scruples forbore, and continued to old age and death in the strict observance of a single life.

For this condition they were compensated by great privileges and prerogatives: as that they had power to make a will in the lifetime of their father; that they had free administration of their own affairs without guardian or tutor; when they go outside, they have the fasces carried before them; and if in their walks they chance to meet a criminal on his way to execution, it saves his life, upon oath being made that the meeting was accidental, and not concerted or of set purpose. Any one who presses upon the chair on which they are carried is put to death.

If these vestals commit any minor fault, they are punishable by the Pontifex Maximus only, who whips the offender, sometimes with her clothes off, in a dark place, with a curtain drawn between; but she that has broken her vow of chastity is buried alive near the gate called Collina, where a little mound of earth stands inside the city reaching some little distance, called in Latin agger; under it a narrow room is constructed, to which a descent is made by stairs; here they prepare a bed, and light a lamp, and leave a small quantity of victuals, such as bread, water, a pail of milk, and some oil; that so that body which had been consecrated and devoted to the most sacred service of religion might not be said to perish by such a death as famine. The culprit herself is put in a litter, which they cover over, and tie her down with cords on it, so that nothing she utters may be heard. They then take her to the Forum; all people silently go out of the way as she passes, and such as follow accompany the bier with solemn and speechless sorrow; and, indeed, there is not any spectacle more appalling, nor any day observed by the city with greater appearance of gloom and sadness. When they come to the place of execution, the officers loose the cords, and then the Pontifex Maximus, lifting his hands to heaven, pronounces certain prayers to himself before the act; then he brings out the prisoner, being still covered, and placing her upon the steps that lead down to the cell, turns away his face with the rest of the priests; the

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<sup>4</sup> A festival; at which 24 puppets were thrown into the Tiber.

stairs are drawn up after she has gone down, and a quantity of earth is heaped up over the entrance to the cell, so as to prevent it from being distinguished from the rest of the mound. This is the punishment of those who break their vow of virginity.

From Numa's day also were dated twelve sacred targets of bronze, said to have the virtue of guarding the city from pestilence. The keeping of these targets was committed to the charge of certain priests, called Salii, who received their name from that jumping dance which the Salii themselves use, when in the month of March they carry the sacred targets through the city; at which procession they are habited in short frocks of purple, girt with a broad belt studded with brass; on their heads they wear a brass helmet, and carry in their hands short daggers, which they clash every now and then against the targets. But the chief thing is the dance itself. They move with much grace, performing, in quick time and close order, various intricate figures, with a great display of strength and agility. The targets are not made round, nor like proper targets, of a complete circumference, but are cut out into a wavy line, the ends of which are rounded off and turned in at the thickest part towards each other.

Numa ordered that fish which have no scales, except the scar, should not be offered to the gods. He ordered each person to draw a line around his own real property and to set stones on the boundaries, such stones being consecrated to Jupiter Terminus. But if anyone destroyed or displaced the boundary stones, the person who had done this would be sacrificed to the god. He ordained that the funeral pyre should not be sprinkled with wine, not that libations be made to the gods with wine from unpruned vines. Among other laws he made: A concubine shall not touch the Altar of Juno, and if she does, she shall sacrifice, with her hair unbound, a ewe lamb to Juno; If a man is killed by lightning, the proper burial rite shall not be performed—those who disobey this will be sacrificed to Jupiter; Priests should have their hair cut with only bronze shears.

"January" was so called from the god Janus, and precedence given to it by Numa before March, which was dedicated to the god Mars; because, as I conceive, he wished to take every opportunity of intimating that the arts and studies of peace are to be preferred before those of war. For this Janus, whether in remote antiquity he were a demi-god or a king, was certainly a great lover of civil and social unity, and one who reclaimed men from brutal and savage living; for which reason they figure him with two faces, to represent the two states and conditions out of the one of which he brought mankind to lead them into the other. His temple at Rome has two gates, which they call the Gates of War, because they stand open in the time of war, and shut in the times of peace; of which latter there was very seldom an example, for, as the Roman state was enlarged and extended, it was so encompassed with barbarous nations and enemies to be resisted that it was seldom or never at peace. Only in the time of Augustus Caesar, after he had overcome Antony, this temple was shut; as likewise once before, when M. Atilius and T. Manlius were Consuls;<sup>5</sup> but then it was not long before, wars breaking out, the gates were again opened.

#### **Certificate of Having Sacrificed, 250 CE**

To the Commissioners of Sacrifice of the Village of Alexander's Island:<sup>6</sup> From Aurelius Diogenes, the son of Satabus, of the Village of Alexander's Island, aged 72 years:—scar on his right eyebrow. I have always sacrificed regularly to the gods, and now, in your presence, in accordance with the edict, I have done sacrifice, and poured the drink offering, and tasted of the sacrifices, and I request you to certify the same. Farewell.——Handed in by me, Aurelius Diogenes.——I certify that I saw him sacrificing [signature obliterated]. Done in the first year of the Emperor, Caesar C. Messius Q. Trajanus Decius Pius Felix Augustus, second of the month Epith. [June 26, 250 CE]

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<sup>5</sup> 235 BCE.

<sup>6</sup> The Province of Egypt.