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Religion in Roman Statecraft

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Abstract

The focus of this study is an examination of the use of religion in Roman statecraft during the time of the Republic. Traditionally, scholars have viewed religion as a tool used by the aristocratic class to control the wills and actions of the general populace. This study examines five case studies which serve as counter-examples to this traditional notion and suggest that there existed in the aristocratic class a large number of individuals who genuinely subscribed to traditional Roman religious ideals.

The methodology used to conduct this study focuses primarily on careful exegesis of primary source material. More modern scholarship is used as a helpful lens through which to critique the ancient sources; this helps particularly in presenting arguments for and against the assertions of this study. Support for the argument is found through analysis of the historicity of the case studies, the biases of the authors themselves, and deductive logic.

The conclusion of the study is that the traditional "pragmatic" view of aristocratic approach to religion is flawed. While irreligious segments of the aristocratic class did exist, there is evidence for a far greater number of aristocratic individuals who still subscribed to the efficacy of religious rites and traditions.

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Introduction

The question which occupies this study is a simple one: did Roman aristocrats believe in their gods? Naturally, the answer to this question involves much more time than is involved in the asking. To begin with, it is important to discern *when* we are discussing, since it is ill-advised to try to determine the religious convictions of an entire society whose existence spans more than a thousand years, especially a society whose political and geographical standing changed so dramatically over time. As such this study will be relegated to dealing with the convictions of those who lived in the time of what is commonly referred to as the time of the Republic in Rome, from 510-31 B.C.E. This particular focus area should help alleviate some of the confusion that will inevitably rise from attempting to anachronistically utilize sources from one era of Roman history to describe the state of being of a completely different era of Roman history.

However, given the nature of the source material associated with this period, the study will almost necessarily have to be constrained to the examination of a certain socio-economic group within the population of this time period. This population is that of the aristocracy, the Roman elite. The reason that we must study this portion of the population, if we are to glean any kind of insight into the convictions of the Roman people, is because these are the people for whom and from whom the source material was written. In general, education, specifically knowledge of reading and writing, was a privilege available only to those who had ample resources and time for this

pursuit. For the common farmer it would have been imprudent at best to spend ample amounts of time becoming well versed in Latin, but for a young aristocrat hoping to make his way into the senatorial elite, it would have almost been a pre-requisite for his training. As such, the individuals who could read these works would have been, in general, of the elite class. If, then, an author were to hope for some kind of remuneration for his literary exploits, he would have needed to frame his work in a way that an individual of the elite class could have received and appreciated the text. And again, it would likely have been an individual of this elite class who would have been writing to begin with; this kind of individual would have had a particular lens, characterized by their social and economic standing, through which they saw the world which would have affected the writing. The idiosyncrasies of the individual authors whose work is examined in this study will be expounded upon as their work is discussed, but it is important to establish this basic framework as we begin to delve into the quagmire that is an integral part of the landscape of exegesis in Roman history.

A fair question to ask of this study at this point would be what utility there is to gain out of an examination of the religious convictions of the aristocratic class of the Roman Republic, who do not even begin to come close to representing a numerical majority among the population of the Roman Empire. What can be learned by examining the religion of the few that will tell us about the conduct of the empire as a whole? A proper response to this question is based primarily on the role which the aristocratic class played

in the execution of religious observance in Rome. Religion and politics were, by nature, linked. This was truism in Rome that stretched back to the reign of Numa, the second King of Rome. Numa had taken it upon himself to establish a set of public religious observances, dictating the necessary rites required to propitiate the gods and maintain the *pax Deorum*[1]. Since that time period, Roman aristocrats had served as priests and politicians, sometimes fulfilling both roles at once. In the case of Publius Scipio Africanus, the famed Roman politician and military leader, who will be examined in much greater detail further on in this study, we have an excellent example of a Roman aristocrat who served as both politician and priest (one of the Salii). The importance of this connection as it regards the examination of the piety of Romans during the Republic is profound. If the Roman aristocracy, who include a vast majority of the priests and politicians among them, do ascribe to the beliefs espoused in religious observances then we can know that Roman society seems to have been a pious and religiously oriented empire. If, however, the aristocracy did not hold fast and true to those religious convictions, it would seem that the entire complex structure of the public religion that was so prominent in Roman society was really just a device implemented as a measure to control the general population.

This latter opinion is endorsed by some prominent ancient sources and has been supported often in more recent scholarship as well, all of whom we might call "rationalists" on account of their attempt to rationalize religious

[1] Valerius Maximus 1.2.1

conventions as practical tools. Polybius in the sixth book of his *Histories*[2] supported this view, saying:

> But the quality in which the Roman commonwealth is most distinctly superior is in my opinion the nature of their religious convictions. I believe that it is the very thing which among other peoples is an object of reproach, I mean superstition, which maintains the cohesion of the Roman state. These matters are clothed in such pomp and introduced to such an extent into their public and private life that nothing could exceed it, a fact which may surprise many. My own opinion at least is that they have adopted this course for the sake of the common people. It is a course which perhaps would not have been necessary had it been possible to form a state composed of wise men, but as every multitude is fickle, full of lawless desires, unreasoned passion, and violent anger, the multitude must be held in by invisible terrors and suchlike pageantry.

While Polybius gives at least a marginally hospitable gloss to the idea that the masses are being controlled through religion, we also have ancient testimony in the form of Lucretius which offers a much harsher perspective on this notion:

> You will yourself someday or other seek to fall away from me, overborne by the terrific utterances of the priests. Indeed, how many dreams can they soon invent for you, enough to upset the principles of life and to confound all your fortunes with fear. And for this reason: for if men saw that a limit has been set to tribulation, they would have some degree of strength to defy religious fears and the threatenings of the priests; but as it is there is no way of resistance and no power, because everlasting punishment is to be feared after death.[3]

Among modern scholars, Farrington serves as an excellent, and vehement, proponent of the deceptive nature of the religious system in Rome. According to Champion, Farrington held that "in ancient Greece and Rome the ruling elites used religious symbols in order to overawe and impose their will upon

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[2] Polybius 6.56.6-12
[3] Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* 1.102-111

gullible masses, who as a result fearfully did their bidding,"[4] quite the scathing indictment.

It is exactly this sort of vehement denial of aristocratic piety in the Republic that is to be brought into contention a number of historical events which, when viewed under this utilitarian lens, does not result in a consistent set of beliefs as manifested in action. The elenchus conducted herein will focus on the juxtaposition of this argument with a number of case studies of events dating from 249 B.C.E. through 114 B.C.E. and will hopefully contribute to understanding the beliefs of the aristocrats of the Republic. It is necessary to dwell on these particular cases since we cannot take our ancient sources at their word in their description of religious observance, since each author carries with them their own biases on the nature of religiosity among the Roman elite of this time. We have the examples of Polybius and Lucretius above, and in contrast we have statements like this from Cicero, "a deity omnipresent and omnipotent? If a man doubts this, I really cannot see why he should not also be capable of doubting the existence of the sun; how is the latter fact more evident than the former?"[5] which seem to indicate a genuine belief in the existence and power of deity.

What, then, are these particular cases which present such a problem for the eminent sources who contest the nature of piety displayed by the aristocrats of the Republic? The first focuses around the incident preceding the Battle at Drepana involving the drowning of the sacred chickens, which

[4] Champion 1
[5] Cicero, On Divination 2.4

were used in auguries, by Publius Claudius Pulcher. There will follow an examination of Scipio Africanus and his actions in pursuing Antiochus III in conjunction with Scipio's duties as a Salian priest; this will also encompass an examination of Scipio Africanus' character as a whole in order to better understand the nature of his confusing action in this circumstance. There will also be an examination of the Bacchanalian conspiracy, followed by an exploration of the burning of Greek religious and philosophical texts allegedly found at the burial site of Numa. Finally, there will be an examination of the three separate recorded incidents of human sacrifice in Rome, which is perhaps the most surprising of all these instances. It is the goal of this analysis to end with a better understanding of the nature of the religiosity of the aforementioned aristocrats, and through that to allow for a better understanding of the nature of religious belief in the time of the Republic.

Before embarking on an exploration of these matters, it will prove prudent to examine some additional information on Roman understanding of what religion was; it is impossible to understand whether there was legitimate subscription to religion without understanding at least the basics of what religion was to the Romans. To this end, I will appeal to the definition of religion which Fowler posits is most apt in examining piety in the Roman experience: "Religion is the effective desire to be in right relation to the Power manifesting itself in the universe."[6] The development of a religious system originated in worship within family units in order to attain the

[6] Fowler 8

aforementioned right relation to the Power in the universe[7]. This religious system was based largely around a desire to make sure that there were no interferences with the affairs of the day, namely health of crops and family, safety of dwelling places, and other like things which were practical necessities for a family unit[8].

As Rome evolved from a collection of family units based around land towards an urban center and as political life and various other state infrastructures were developed, religion could no longer be concerned just with the well-being of an individual family unit. The family unit had to depend for its survival on the prosperity of the city which they had become a part of, this eventually extended to a dependence on the empire which they had been incorporated into. As such, it became necessary to establish some kind of religious observances which served the purpose of protecting the well-being of the city. This serves as the fundamental backdrop for Numa's introduction of a codified religious system and establishment of formal rites designed to propitiate the gods, and the eventual evolution into the religious system which prevails during the time of the Republic. Fowler goes on to confirm the heritage of patrician families being primarily in charge of the maintenance and practices laid out by the religious system of the state[9], which explains the prevalence of priests among the aristocratic class during the Republic.

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[7] Fowler 8
[8] Fowler 9
[9] Fowler 229

An important aspect in understanding Roman religion, and the basis for the accusations leveled against the patrician class by the "pragmatists", is a realization of the kind of power wielded by the religious structure in Rome. Valerius Maximus stated it most succinctly: "for our community has ever held that all things must yield to religion, even in the case of personages in whom it wished the splendour of most exalted dignity to be displayed"[10]. In the same section of text from which we find this comment we find an example given as an illustration of this state subservience to religion wherein the Consul Postumius was prevented from going to war by the chief pontiff on account of Postumius' failure to fulfill his religious obligation to the god Mars[11]. Examples of this kind of extraordinary religious control of political and military matters are found numerous times in the ancient sources, some of which will be examined in detail further on in this study. There are a number of other important features of Roman religion which can be briefly mentioned to emphasize the nearly absolute power of religion over statecraft in Rome. As we have seen, some Romans served as both politician and priest, but it should also be noted that the Senate, one of the chief political bodies, could only meet in a *templum* and was accompanied always by a taking of auspices[12]; this seems to solidify the bond between religion and state. Further, it was always possible for the religious authorities, specifically the college of augurs, to

[10] Valerius Maximus 1.1.9
[11] Valerius Maximus 1.1.2
[12] Champion 3; Gell *NA* 14.7.7; Varro, *LL* 7.10

interrupt and cancel popular assemblies on account of ill omens, which would be interpreted as the ill-will of the gods regarding the proposed meeting[13].

It is because of the power of religion in Roman statecraft that religion itself developed such a vitriolic opposition. It is easy for one to imagine that if an individual were to want to attain a high level of control and power in that society, and they perceived this kind of power in the religious institutions, the priesthood might quickly begin to draw individuals who despite a lack of piety desired entry into the ranks of the religious hierarchy to garner power and influence. It is even easily seen how this kind of institution could have come about as a means to control the populace through, as Lucretius put it, "everlasting punishment…feared after death"[14] which would have completely put the common people at the mercy of those who could determine their eternal fate: the priesthood. With the institutionalization of religious observance, an individual seems to have given over all control over their eternal fate to the whims of the government. This would have strongly affected the way that the populace responded to authorities both religious and political, since the two were clearly so deeply intertwined, and resulted in a more complete subservience. However, as stated above, there are a number of specific examples which draw into question the assumption that religion was used simply as a tool to control the populace. With this basic understanding of the nature of the state of religious worship in Republican Rome, we can now move on to the aforementioned case studies in order to begin to answer the

[13] Champion 3; Cic. *Leg.* 2.12.31
[14] Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* 1.102-111

question of whether or not religious observance was genuine or pragmatic among aristocrats.

Claudius Pulcher and the Drowning of the Sacred Chickens

Of all the case studies to be examined herein for the purpose of divining a better understanding of Roman attitudes towards religious conviction, the case of P. Claudius Pulcher is easily the most amusing. The events which transpired in this famous account are recorded in remarkably similar fashion throughout the ancient sources. The event is stated briefly by Livy[15]:

> When a certain consul [Publius Claudius Pulcher] who was anxious to conduct a campaign was prevented from departing by a tribune of the commons, the consul ordered the chickens to be brought. When these failed to eat the grain scattered before them, the consul, mocking the omen, said, "Let them drink, then", and flung them into the Tiber. After that as he was triumphantly retuning in his fleet to Africa he lost his life at sea with all his men.

This particular recounting of the memory of Pulcher basically provides the reader with an amusing anecdote, but there is something more to be seen in this episode. When the story is examined, especially in comparison with a few of our other sources, it becomes almost immediately clear how this incident relates to the present topic of inquiry. Cicero remarks that the "joke cost the jester himself many tears and the Roman people a great disaster, for the fleet was severely defeated"[16] in reference to Pulcher's remark about letting the chickens drink and their subsequent drowning. This comment reveals a great deal about how Cicero wanted his audience to perceive the event. He wanted his audience to see the disregarding of the auspices and the comment offending the gods as the direct cause of Pulcher's military disaster.

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[15] Livy, Epitome 19.12
[16] Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods 2.7

Perhaps Cicero is, in this case, over-exaggerating the importance of Pulcher's disregard for religious observances and its role in the defeat of the Roman fleet. After all, Livy does not go out of his way to give this incident a causal role in Pulcher's downfall. Cicero's account may be the result of wishful thinking or an attempt to prove a point using rhetoric rather than confirmed historical phenomena. Given this conundrum it is necessary to do something any good historian would do, look for confirmation or denial in other sources to further illuminate the matter.

The first source we will discuss, apart from Cicero and Livy, is the work of Valerius Maximus. V. Maximus refers to this incident in a section entitled "Of those who feign religion" which is especially fitting since the subject of this general inquiry is to discern whether the elites did or did not feign religious belief. Before investigating the contents of V. Maximus' account, a few words must be said on the placement of the account in a chapter of this heading. On this account, that Pulcher seems to have been feigning piety and that he did not have any real respect for the outcome of the auspices is universally agreed upon in the sources. No matter which source is consulted we find an account of Pulcher mocking the auspices, and by virtue of that mocking the gods; this was not a pious man in any recounting of the story. As such it should be made clear that what can be learned in this situation about Roman piety will not simply be from Pulcher's convictions himself; his stance towards religion seems very much defined by his disrespect towards religious observances. The existence of Pulcher, and those

like him, does give credence to the theory that there existed at least some aristocratic personages who did not subscribe to traditional religious beliefs. Illumination from this account in a larger since will come from reading how Pulcher is portrayed by the sources and discerning from that what is revealed about the beliefs of the individuals writing these accounts and about the perceived beliefs of the audience of the literature.

In V. Maximus' direct recounting of the story of Publius Claudius Pulcher[17], he adds very little new to the actual content of the story. There is mention of Pulcher seeking the auspices in the "traditional manner" which confirms that he was trying to keep the image of an individual who respected the power of religion. This was followed by the reticence of the chickens to give favorable auspices for launching an attack and the resultant joking comment by Pulcher ordering the chickens to be drowned. The chief factor which distinguishes this account of Pulcher's impious submersion of the holy fowl is a mention of Pulcher being "a man of impulse", directly preceding the requisite comment of V. Maximus concerning the destruction of the fleet, causing "great damage to the commonwealth". This remark seems to lay blame on the nature of Pulcher's character, rather than appealing to poor military theory or an overly clever or numerically superior adversary. Further, it seems prudent to remark that this statement about Pulcher's character seems to have come as a result of his standpoint on religious observances. It would be ill-advised to attribute to V. Maximus based on this point alone the viewpoint that it was a disrespect of religion and affront to the gods, who took

[17] Valerius Maximus, 1.4.3

compensatory action, which caused Pulcher to fail, since this view would necessarily imply that there was a belief on the part of V. Maximus in the efficacy of religious observance. It is, however, safe to infer that V. Maximus intended his readers to come away with the impression that individuals who lacked proper religious piety were to be associated with undesirable character traits.

Happily enough, V. Maximus does not mention this incident in isolation. In fact, this particular recounting is found in a section entitled "Of Auguries" and contains more than one case in which an augury was sought. In direct relation to Pulcher, there is given an example of what happened to one of his colleagues, L. Junius, who "neglected auspices and lost his fleet in a storm"[18] after which he killed himself, a story which is also found in Cicero's *On the Nature of the Gods*[19]. "Of Auguries" is rife with references to individuals who failed to take heed of auguries and died as a result, and contrasting examples of individuals who followed the instructions of the auguries and found success. It seems clear, then, that V. Maximus intended to portray Pulcher as failing on account of his contempt of religious observance, and specifically his contempt for auguries. This shows that V. Maximus, even if he did not personally believe in that adherence to religious observances was effective, at least wanted to give the impression that religious piety was something that was very effective and was even a necessity for the successful conduct of a military leader.

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[18] Valerius Maximus 1.4.4
[19] Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods 2.7

V. Maximus gives us one last glimpse into the importance of religion in his account of Pulcher in the statement: "Whether [Pulcher] was a greater affront to to religion or to his country I know not, seeing that he neglected the time honored usage of the one and lost a splendid fleet of the other"[20]. The ambiguity displayed between which occurrence is more deplorable, Pulcher's religious failure and his loss of his fleet, is quite revealing in itself. It shows that of these two disappointments that there is no way to tell which of these is worse and as such portrays proper observance of religion as just as important as fulfillment of civic duty and upholding civic pride. This places a very high value on religious observance in V. Maximus' account; clearly this was something that V. Maximus wanted his readers to see as an important, and perhaps necessary, facet of life.

For another account of Publius Claudius Pulcher, we turn to Suetonius for further enlightenment: "Claudius Pulcher, when he was taking auspices in Sicily and the chickens would not eat, defied the omen, throwing the chickens into the sea with orders that, if they would not eat, then they must drink, and began his sea-battle"[21]. The general storyline maintains its consistency with the other sources, as it later goes on to state that Pulcher lost his fleet, but there is one addition to the tale that is noteworthy. The entire story is contained in one sentence, which implies a very real relationship between Pulcher, his defiance of the auspices, and the Battle at Drepana which he begins directly following his impious actions. A real connection, then, is

[20] Valerius Maximus 8.1 abs 4
[21] Suetonius, Tiberius 2

created between religious observances and the proposed ability or wisdom to engage in a military expedition; this passage makes explicit this connection which, while present in our other accounts, has yet to be made lucid in so clear a fashion. This is important to note simply to stay aware of the real importance of religion in Roman society, no matter what an individual's beliefs. This reinforces the point made by V. Maximus in comparing the importance of religious duty with civic duty.

Suetonius follows the account of Pulcher with another story, a reference to an incident involving a woman named Claudia. A ship which Claudia was on, which was carrying sacred objects of a god, ran aground and was unable to continue its journey. Claudia, taking the initiative, prayed that the ship would follow her out of the shallows if she was chaste. The ship was thereby freed and the sacred objects continued on their way, so goes the tale[22]. In this account, the emphasis is clearly on the efficacy of religious piety in garnering tangible results. The tale of Claudia in comparison to the tale of Pulcher then strikes a very stark contrast. Claudia was pious and was greeted with success as a result of her piety as exhibited in by her chastity, whereas Pulcher was greeted with misfortune as a result of his impiety as exhibited in his impulsiveness and mockery of the gods. Suetonius' comparison seems to be designed to show how good things come to those whose faith is in the gods, and also to show that those who mock the gods are punished for their impudence.

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[22] ibid.,

As much as the accounts from Suetonius and Valerius Maximus confirm the importance of religious observance, at least insofar as these two sources wish to portray it, by returning to Cicero's account and the surrounding narratives an even stronger case can be made. While the account of Pulcher's impiety was related briefly above, the context in which it is found has not been expounded upon, the examination of which will help to provide a very clear picture of the stance on piety which Cicero wished to propound as the most admirable attitude in this particular text. Cicero keeps nothing hidden in trying to make clear his stance, he delivers a volley of statements praising piety and condemning impiety, of which the Pulcher incident serves only as one example. Cicero, along with Valerius Maximus, recounts the story of Junius' disaster and resultant suicide after his disregard of the auguries led to his loss of a fleet[23].

It is made very clear that Cicero does not see these as isolated incidents, but as a pattern of disrespect and disregard for religious observances among the aristocratic class; this is in fact the focus of his diatribe. In the section following his recounting of these case studies of impiety, Cicero begins to explain how Rome "was won by those commanders who obeyed the dictates of religion"[24] and how the only way in which Rome was in fact superior to her neighbors was as a result of her reverence for their gods[25]. He laments the nobility who have forgotten the importance of the auguries, sometimes not even maintaining the outward show of respect for religiosity

[23] Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods 2.7
[24] Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods 2.8
[25] Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods 2.9

and preventing the manifestation of any kind of piety in their actions[26]; here it seems that he is referring specifically back to Junius and Pulcher, but it can also be seen in the broader context of a criticism against the nobility at large.

Cicero's lambasting of irreverence among the aristocracy reveals a number of insights into the beliefs we are trying to uncover. However, it is necessary to recall that Cicero is not writing in 249 B.C.E. at the time of this incident, but is writing approximately two hundred years later. As such, it would be imprudent to take Cicero's analysis of the Roman aristocracy of his day and transfer his beliefs about religious convictions onto the Roman aristocracy in the time of Pulcher. However, it cannot be denied that the one facet of the aristocracy which Cicero is lamenting, its general impiety, is seen in the character and actions of both Pulcher and Junius, and can be construed fairly as a judgment against their character as they are portrayed by Cicero. Cicero's complaint, then, does at least partially bridge the gap between these two time periods and cannot be completely disregarded. Further, the existence of impious Roman aristocrats, or at least the perception of Roman aristocrats as impious must have been relatively commonplace in order for it to have gained such significant notice and garnered so much resentment from Cicero in this text. Conversely, it can be argued that there were enough patricians who supported Cicero's view that piety was something to be praised, or at least wanted to hear something similar to this view, for Cicero to safely make a comment like this about the need for all of the members of the Roman aristocracy to subscribe once again to a pious public lifestyle.

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[26] ibid.,

From Cicero we then see that there were quite certainly a number of Roman aristocrats who had rejected a pious lifestyle, but that there were still those who felt passionately enough about sustaining religious practices to condemn their comrades. However, it would have been pretty simple to guess that some individuals could have believed in pious religious observance while others rejected the practices, considering that the society of the Roman Republic was undoubtedly a large and diverse one which would have attracted individuals who would have subscribed to any number of religious convictions. The important point to note here is that a division existed, and if we are to take Cicero's writing as indicative of general feelings among his contemporaries, then there was a movement towards greater religiosity among aristocrats.

In the larger context of the discussion of Publius Claudius Pulcher, not just concerning Cicero's interpretation, a similar idea manifests. There is a general agreement among the sources that there was an act of religious impiety, and the perpetrator of said irreverence failed in his duty and disgraced both himself and the Empire. There is a trend of pairing this story with other stories of impiety or commentary on negative effects of impious attitudes. While it would be a stretch to imply that this general trend among the sources indicates a more advanced sense of religious propriety than existed for Pulcher and those with whom he is paired, we can infer that even if these authors did not themselves agree with the view propounded, that at least their audience was one who wanted to receive validation of religious

conviction. The sources at least wanted to be seen to be supporting piety among the aristocracy. This is the most profound insight that can be gleaned from this incident. After all, it can never be determined whether Pulcher and his colleagues were actually struck down by Neptune or Jupiter since neither of those characters makes themselves readily available for interview on the matter. We do, however, see from the portrayal of the incident that the irreligiosity of Pulcher is not something supported by our sources and is in fact lambasted. There was a clear desire to not be thought of as supporting irreverent behavior and rash impiety.

Admittedly, the main benefit of this examination of this particular case study was not found in the discerning of the belief of the individual in question, as Pulcher's convictions are clearly seen as impious. The purpose of this section was to instead show how the purveyors of historical events wanted themselves to be seen, and to show how they wanted their audiences to view the incident. These biases can now be kept in mind as we view the recounting of other cases in which we may be able to derive actual religious convictions from individuals in the period with which this inquiry is primarily concerned.

Scipio Africanus, Salian Priest

The question of whether religion was something actually subscribed to by Roman aristocrats is not an entirely new question. In fact, we have evidence from ancient sources that explicitly affirms or denies the religiosity of a number of patricians, one of the most notable examples of this is found in the case of Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus. The reason why this case is so significant is that Scipio occupied an incredibly unique role in that he was a tremendously prominent aristocrat and he was also well known as a priest. As a result of this dual role, Scipio can provide a powerful testament for or against religiosity among Roman aristocrats. There is ample citation concerning his character, on account of his military and political exploits, most notable among these is the defeat of Hannibal's armies establishing Scipio as one of the pre-eminent military commanders in history. The part of his character which will be under the most scrutiny in this section, in our attempt to discern the religiosity in this case of probably the most prominent Roman aristocrat of his day, is the role that Scipio held as a Salian priest.

There is one particular event in Scipio's career which draws special attention and will serve as the focal point for the examination of Scipio's personal convictions. This event is found in 190 B.C.E. when Scipio and his forces are in pursuit of Antiochus III across the Hellespont. This incident is recorded in a numerous ancient sources, but there is one particular aspect of the incident which captures attention as it varies considerably across the accounts. The basic story line runs thus: Antiochus is defeated and is on the

run, the Romans cross the Hellespont in order to chase him down. A messenger is sent by Antiochus in order to attempt to keep Scipio and his forces from pursuing them. The variation in this story occurs after the arrival of Heracleides, Antiochus' messenger, at the Roman encampment and before Heracleides is able to deliver his message to Scipio. In some sources there is no gap in between these events and Heracleides immediately delivers his message to Scipio[27], however, in Polybius we find that Scipio arrives at the Roman encampment a few days after Heracleides' arrival[28]. In Livy we also find that the Romans "for a considerable time… remained stationary in camp on the Hellespont" as a result of a religious observance for the 'ancilia', the twelve shields on which rested the safety of Rome and which were entrusted to the Salii who had to perform sacrifices and observe a set of rites on their account[29]. To further complicate things, Polybius, who we have seen stating that Scipio arrived a few days after Heracleides, also states earlier that the Salii were not permitted to change their residence for thirty days during the celebration of sacrifices which they were charged with in accordance with their duties as priests[30]; this serves as the explanation for why the legions remained stationary and why Scipio was delayed.

Why this discrepancy? Why is the gap between Heracleides' arrival so long in some cases and so short, or non-existent, in other sources? In order to properly understand this, it is best to first take a look at what the variation tells

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[27] Appian 8.49
[28] Polybius 21.14
[29] Livy 37.33
[30] Polybius 21.13

us in each case. In doing this, we make the assumption that the inclusion or exclusion of Scipio's delay is intentional and that the sources were not simply working from incomplete data, that there was a conscious decision to keep the delay in or to remove any mention of it. To begin, what does the account which foregoes all mention of the incident imply about Scipio? This case is relatively simple: Scipio is portrayed as a military commander in pursuit of his peoples' enemy. This is the only inference one can fairly make when reading this account which lacks mention of the delay. The military aspect of Scipio's pursuit is the only important thing in this view and mentioning a delay would add nothing to the account, assuming that there was a delay to begin with.

The second account, in which Scipio arrives to the camp late on account of his religious duties, presents a more complex problem. By allowing Antiochus as much as thirty extra days to flee from his troops, Scipio seems to be making an unusually poor tactical decision. If, as he goes on to do, he wishes to defeat Antiochus, it would seem most logical for him to continue pursuing his quarry until he caught up to them; this is clearly not what happened in the present case, where Antiochus has been given a few extra days to flee. Given the poor tactical decision, the most apparent reason for Scipio's action is his desire to perform the necessary religious rites associated with his priesthood. Since Polybius and Livy both cite this as the reason for his tardiness in crossing the Hellespont, it would seem wise to examine this as the most likely candidate for Scipio's actions, although the nature of Scipio's performance of the aforementioned rites may vary.

There are two possible explanations for Scipio staying behind his troops in order to perform these rites: the first is genuine religious conviction that the sacred rites took precedent over military affairs, the second is to appear to have said religious conviction. At first glance, the first of these two explanations seems to be the only plausible justification for Scipio's actions, since it would appear that the expected utility to be gained out of making sure that Antiochus is defeated seems much more convincing than the expected utility to be gotten from a single individual's religiosity. If, for example, Antiochus were to have escaped with his army and been able to launch a proper counter-attack, Scipio's religious observance could have resulted in numerous Roman lives lost. There are, however, pragmatic explanations for Scipio's actions. Perhaps Scipio was unsure whether he would be able to track down Antiochus, but knew that his religious office required certain sacrifices at the time when he delayed moving his personal encampment. If word were to have gotten out that Scipio had neglected his sacred duties in order to pursue an enemy, it would naturally follow in the eyes of his critics that his callousness towards his duty as a Salian priest was the cause of Antiochus' escape. Scipio would then have failed not only militarily but also religiously, leading to an overall loss of confidence in his ability and suitability as a leader. Another reason Scipio may have had a desire to appear pious and perform these sacrifices was to have inspired confidence in his men. By taking note that their leader was propitiating their gods and attending to his religious duties, it would be far more likely that a common Roman soldier would have

begun to believe that the gods would respond favorably on account of their appeasement. This would lead to an overall morale boost which would have been, as is generally the case in warfare, directly translated into a greater willingness to follow orders and more enthusiasm in fighting.

There are, then, reasons to believe that Scipio was acting under compulsion from either of the proposed explanations. He had potential pragmatic reasons for wanting to appear to be observing his religious duties, but he could also have had strong religious conviction which compelled him to follow the dictums of his priesthood. Which, then, is the correct explanation? As the answer does not immediately present itself, it will be helpful to conduct a cursory survey of the portrayals of Scipio in other events in order to find a new lens through which to view his actions in the case at hand. Happily both of the sources in question supply additional information concerning Scipio's character in different sections of their texts, which will help to illuminate what each of these authors wished Scipio to be seen as in their works.

Polybius paints the picture of an incredibly astute politician whose guile led him to utilize religious superstition among his contemporaries to propel him into positions of power and coerce others to acquiesce to his will. In Polybius' recounting of Scipio's ascent to the office of aedile[31], Scipio is said to have waited in a temple for a white toga to signify his candidacy for the office and received his mother's blessing to run for office by recounting a dream he had where both he and his elder brother (whose candidacy had

[31] Polybius 10.5.5-10

already been announced) both achieved the office of aedile. After this dream, story spread that Scipio communed with the gods by day and in his sleep, since he had spent his time waiting to announce his candidacy in a temple. Polybius tells us that "it was not a matter of a dream at all" but that Scipio had adapted to this story in order that people might believe that he was under divine inspiration. Of his military career, Polybius recounts that "Scipio… made the men under his command more sanguine and more ready to face perilous enterprises by instilling the belief into them the belief that his projects were divinely inspired,"[32]. For example, Scipio once claimed that Neptune had intervened on his army's behalf and had allowed water to recede so that a siege could be brought to an end by a Roman incursion into the city in question by means of this lowered tide and a seaside assault; after the success of the plan, the army readily believed that they had been directly aided by some god[33].

Clearly Polybius has no qualms about showing Scipio as an impious, but very clever, politician using religion as a tool to further his purposes. Why then, in Polybius' account of our current case, does he neglect to mention any of the myriad pragmatic reasons that could have existed for Scipio remaining behind? A possible explanation is that given Polybius' established position on Scipio's religious convictions there was no compelling reason to further emphasize the point of Scipio's irreligiosity. Polybius perhaps instead intended to make his recounting of the event as streamlined and succinct as

[32] Polybius 10.2.8-13
[33] Polybius 10.14.12

possible. In any case, we have portrayed in Polybius a remarkably impious Scipio using religion as a tool, but we also have at least one example wherein it is not made explicitly clear (although one can draw conclusions if so inclined) why Scipio would be adhering to his religious duties.

In Livy's text, Scipio is shown in a similar light. While Livy is not as explicit in denying Scipio's religious convictions, he certainly seems to have in mind the possibility that Scipio merely used religion as a tool for his own ends:

> "For Scipio was remarkable not only for his real abilities, but thanks to a certain skill also had from his youth adapted himself to their display, doing most of his actions before the public either as if they were prompted by visions in the night or inspired by the gods, whether because he also was possessed by a certain superstition, or in order that men might carry out without hesitation his commands and advice as though emanating from an oracular response"[34]

Livy shows here that he clearly sees Scipio as someone who, regardless of his real convictions, utilizes religion in his public relations. While this statement could be seen as ambiguous regarding Livy's convictions about Scipio's religiosity, another reference emerges which casts further light on how Livy viewed Scipio's relationship with the deities. In a reference to the same battle seen in Polybius' account above, Livy tells the reader that Scipio had heard from a fisherman that the water was shallow and passable, which would have allowed for an assault on the town in question, and that Scipio had carefully calculated the assault[35]. Livy also tells the reader in the same section that Scipio had "represented [the water becoming shallow and passable] as a

[34] Livy 26.19
[35] Livy 26.45.9

miracle and act of the gods"[36]. In this section, if nowhere else, Livy is clearly portraying Scipio as an individual who feigned his religious piety.

Scipio seems to be largely portrayed as a politician rather than a priest, but is consistently portrayed as someone perceived by his contemporaries to be of the utmost piety. Valerius Maximus provides a succinct example of this, stating that Scipio never engaged in any business before spending time in the sanctuary of the Capitoline Jupiter and was therefore believed to be under divine protection, and in some cases even believed to be Jupiter's son[37]. This is mentioned in a section entitled "Of religion feigned" and follows after a recounting of Numa Pompilius' efforts to "bind the Roman people with rituals" through his feigned meetings with the goddess Aegeria[38]. Accordingly, the reader is bound to make the assumption that Scipio clearly had no true religious convictions, and that he faked his way through his public life portraying himself as a pious figure. There then remains the question of why his troops, his political constituency, and perhaps even his aristocratic peers seemed to be so ready to believe that Scipio communed with the gods on a daily basis and was inspired in battle by the will of the gods.

It seems that Scipio goes to absolutely incredible lengths to maintain his image as a pious citizen if his belief is indeed feigned. Scipio followed strict observance to religious dictums even when it might have resulted in misfortune in his military career. Before he began any political maneuvering he maintain his ritual of spending time appearing to commune with Jupiter in

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[36] ibid.,
[37] Valerius Maximus 1.2.2
[38] Valerius Maximus 1.2.1

the god's sanctuary. He rejected critical acclaim for his brilliance and attributed some of his more astounding military victories to the intervention of the gods, although it can be argued that he in turn received acclaim for being favored by the gods. Instead of acquiring support for himself, he redirected praise and acclaim as a byproduct of his relationship to the deities. In a way, it is easy to see the pragmatist's view that Scipio merely used religion as a tool. He clearly was adept at reading the attitudes of the people and knew that reliance on gods created more support than reliance on a single man. He knew how to adapt his lifestyle to reflect an image of piety, and he knew how to modify his accomplishments into acts that appeared to confirm a connection between him and the gods. The episode where Scipio neglected to fulfill to his highest abilities the military obligations he had in order to fulfill his religious obligation as priest can then be seen pragmatically as a conscious choice by Scipio to emphasize religious propriety over military propriety.

However, this may not be the full story. The sources are adamant about their disbelief of Scipio's religiosity, and are equally adamant about the peoples' belief in Scipio's religiosity. The peoples' belief is based off of the actions they saw Scipio taking and the explanations given for his actions. The sources apparently make their judgment based off of Scipio's motivations for his actions and explanations for his actions. The fact of the matter is, given the nature of Roman religion, it could easily be true that Scipio legitimately believed in his portrayed convictions, but was aware enough of the power inherent in them to be able to utilize those convictions to his advantage

whenever he could. Religion could be *both* a tool and a real belief; they are not mutually exclusive entities. Roman religion was founded based on the simple idea that acts of worship directed towards spirits would yield beneficial results[39]. This impacted the progress and evolution of Roman religion; this basic idea was never truly erased from Roman religious practice, and served as the focal point for how religion was perceived. For example, the Sibylline books were consulted, and its prescriptions followed, in order to avert catastrophes or to bring about a better cultural or political atmosphere. People would invoke certain gods in order to obtain tangible results, whether they manifested in a votive offering to Ceres for the growth of crops or incubation in an Asclepian temple for healing of varied maladies.

The Roman people practiced a causally based religion. It was not based on strict worship of gods, but the worship of gods came about as a result of the need to obtain certain results. This was not something that was an unconscious motive in peoples' devotion to their gods, but it was clearly a conscious factor in religious observances. Admittedly, this became ritualized over time and lost a measure of the awe that had originally inhabited the attempts to cause the gods to manifest aid in appreciation for worship[40], but it still remained the foundation of religious observance. Scipio, as a priest, would have had a very clear understanding of this. His duties were to perform the necessary rites in order to avert the anger of the gods and to gain their blessing, so that Rome would be able to prosper. Scipio saw that proper

[39] Fowler 70
[40] Fowler 104

observance of religious rites yielded favorable results in that he would have had to take no responsibility for any maladies that befell those influenced by him if he was meticulous in his adherence to the rites, since those maladies would have to be interpreted as the ill-will of the gods. He also would have seen that when events unfolded positively, he (or others whom he observed in the same capacity) would have been seen as specially blessed in his endeavors by the gods, and treated with due respect as a result of that.

Yes, Scipio may have been fully aware of the power of religion and used it to his advantage. This adherence to religious doctrine resulted in just the same things which those who might have blindly observed religious rites would have expected as a result. It seems to be a mistake to infer that Scipio was an irreligious and callously impious politician, simply because he was a part of a religious system which was based on cause and effect. He knew what would cause him to gain power and prestige, and he utilized it effectively, believing in its power. There merely seems to be no evidence that Scipio expected a direct divine intervention to effect the desired outcome of his observances, he expected it to come about through a more circuitous route: through the beliefs and expectations of the people when they saw him observing religion in a doctrinally sound fashion. That he used religious observance as a tool, then, can be seen to be the most profound testimony that he believed in the power of Roman civic religion and subscribed to it wholeheartedly. Believing in the efficacy of religious observance was the essence of belief in religion in Rome, it was the foundation of civic religion.

Scipio clearly believed that by following the necessary observances, he would see beneficial results; this *was* religious piety, hearkening back to the origin of Roman religious piety. Scipio, then, was far from the anti-religious politician he is portrayed as in the pragmatist tradition, and was instead a man with a firm grasp of the nature of Roman religion who understood how to utilize it most effectively in through his piety.

The Bacchanalian Conspiracy

To this point, the case studies examined have focused on single individuals and their personal relationships with religious conviction. As such, this study has to a certain extent not fulfilled its mandate. The purpose of this survey is to detail possible relations between the aristocratic *class* and religion, not aristocratic *individuals* with religion. To a certain extent examining the lives of these individuals does give insight into some of the more specific cases of religious conviction and as such cannot be wholly disqualified. One of the primary focuses of this study is to find whether religion was used as a tool by the aristocratic class to control the general populace. While one individual may be able to control the populace through the device of imposed religious worship, it would have been absolutely impossible to maintain this control indefinitely. There must have been other individuals who wielded substantial power who could continue this legacy after the originator of this doctrine of religious dominance was removed from power through death or loss of political influence. With this in mind, we will now begin an examination of a number of events which involved the entirety of the politically powerful individuals in Rome, focusing primarily on actions in which the senate as a whole was involved.

The first such event is the Bacchanalian Conspiracy of 186 B.C.E., the account of which is found almost completely in the work of Livy[41]. The entire story of the Bacchanalian affair is a long one, and for the sake of brevity only the briefest of outlines will be sketched here. Aebutius, a young Roman

[41] Livy 39.8-18

lad, was to be initiated into the Bacchic rites by his guardians who intended this path for him in order to nullify his ability to claim the inheritance due to him so that they could claim it. Aebutius' lover, Hispala Faecenia, had attended the rites in her previous role as slave to another family. Hispala prevented Aebutius from joining the Bacchic choir on account of her testimony that Bacchanalians destroyed virtue, reputation, and life. As a result of Aebutius' resulting unwillingness to acquiesce to the machinations of his guardians, he was driven from his home. This event is reported to Postumius, the consul, who conducts an investigation into the nature of the Bacchanalian cult in order to ascertain its true nature. Through a poignant retelling of the evils of the cult by Hispala, Postumius comes to the conclusion that the cult must be expelled from Rome. When he recounts the myriad forms of evil practiced by the Bacchanalians, and the notion that this assemblage could result in a revolt against the established powers in Rome, before the senate there was an immediate and unanimous consensus reached to in essence dismantle the Bacchic cult and render it powerless. There was, in essence, a sudden and massive persecution of the Bacchanalians. This is the account that appears in Livy's text. In this incident, more than seven thousand individuals were implicated in this persecution; those persecuted spanned the socio-economic gamut, including both patrician and plebian members[42]. The punishment involved for those involved and found to have engaged in debauchery was generally execution or imprisonment; according to Livy,

[42] Livy 39.17

more people were executed than imprisoned[43]. This kind of reaction provokes a number of questions about the actions of the Roman state.

The first question that arises is why Rome, which had so successfully incorporated foreign religious rites into its own religious pantheon, from the Sibylline Books[44] to the Magna Mater, so vehemently rejected the worship of Bacchus. As Gruen points out, this is entirely out of keeping with Roman tradition, "[f]ar from being suspicious of foreign cults, the Romans welcomed and exploited them," and there had never existed any kind of precedent for the kind of action taken against the Bacchanalians[45]. There were members of the aristocratic class already existing as part of the cult, as we see from Livy[46]. It should then have been a rather simple task to manipulate the worship of Bacchus and cause it to fall in line with orthodox religious practices in Rome by causing those aristocrats to alter the form of worship so that it was directly under the control of the traditional religious authorities. This would seem to have been the most logical solution, since without much effort the populace could be brought back into line with Roman authority. This is assuming that there did exist a cadre of aristocrats who conspired to control the populace through religious observances, as is argued by the "pragmatists".

Upon a deeper examination a new solution presents itself. The notion that the crippling of Bacchanalian worship was a strategic maneuver concocted by the aristocratic class is an argument advocated by Gruen. The

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[43] Livy 39.18
[44] Gruen 39
[45] ibid.,
[46] Livy 39.18

idea is, essentially, that this incident served as a reassertion of control by the aristocracy[47]. Gruen suggests that this assertion was necessary given a number of events which prompted Rome to begin to try to consolidate power within the Italian peninsula and distinguish itself from foreign forces[48]. Gruen points out that there had been a number of military successes, including a defeat of the Aetolian Confederacy and the submission of Gallic tribes, in the years leading up to this event[49]. Gruen further emphasizes his point by enumerating the ways in which the focus of the empire had turned inwards, creating new roads and colonies within the peninsula in order to create a better and more unified imperial center[50]. Further, Gruen creates an impression that there was an anti-Hellenism brewing as a result of the introduction of numerous luxury items from the East accrued as a result of the aforementioned military conquests, which was seen as the beginning of a descent into excess[51]. This anti-Hellenism coupled with the desire to consolidate power in Italy would have then found an easy target to attack in Bacchic worship, which Livy portrays as a religion introduced by a nameless Greek[52] and which was not under incorporated into the traditional Roman pantheon and was hence outside of Roman control.

If Gruen's argument is to be accepted, it seems that there must necessarily follow the inference that at least in this case the aristocracy acted

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[47] Gruen 65
[48] Gruen 73
[49] Gruen 66
[50] Gruen 69
[51] Gruen 70-72
[52] Livy 39.8

in harmony to impose their will on the masses by means of religious manipulation. Gruen certainly provides compelling reasons for accepting his argument. There are, as he points out, a number of problems with the story as told by Livy which makes one doubt the historicity of this particular recounting. To begin, the shock portrayed among the senators at the revelation of the existence of the Bacchic cult seems to be entirely fabricated, since Livy shows Postumius reminding the senate that the cult had been known for an extended period of time in Italy[53]; as such, the revelation of the rites of Bacchus could not have been a true surprise. Further, the notion that the cult was in danger of consuming more Roman citizens and distracting from proper Roman worship seems bunk as well, since the cult was at that time refusing to admit any individual under the age of twenty, which would seriously curb the growth of any cult[54].

The most disturbing feature of Livy's account, however, arises with the story perpetrated by Hispala; Gruen gives an excellent account of this particular facet[55]. To begin with, Hispala seems to be the sole source of evidence upon which Postumius makes his proclamation, there is no mention of any other sources consulted before the pronouncement to the senate that the Bacchic cult was dangerous and ought to be largely disbanded. Hispala was, as mentioned, a former slave and as such would not be someone upon whose testimony 7000 Roman citizens would likely be persecuted without some kind of outside corroboration. Further, her testimony, the basis of which formed

[53] Livy 39.15.6
[54] Gruen 53
[55] Gruen 53-4

Postumius' argument designed to spur the senate into action, was elicited under stressful circumstances, specifically manifested in being directly questioned intensely by a *consul* of the Roman empire. And, to further establish the dubiousness of this account, there serves no real intermediary between the Aebutius/Hispala party and the consul. There complaint is dealt with directly by Postumius, and no political channels are traveled through. It seems *highly* suspect to assume that a former slave and a young lad of questionable importance and clearly suspect intelligence would have had easy access to one of the most powerful figures in the Roman Empire. And, if Postumius' speech is examined, it will immediately become clear that the numerous immoral acts enumerated by Hispala are not the focal point of the diatribe; instead, emphasis is laid on the possible political threat which this secret meeting might have elicited. This is fascinating; Hispala mentions murder, licentiousness and corruption of youth (among other things) as the immoral behaviors of the group, but never says a word about political dissension. This is an indicator that Postumius was using this incident as the impetus for a course of action which had already been planned either by him or by the senate, since he is not even using information provided by his source, but fabricating information himself. Given the unanimous consent elicited from the senate upon the presentation of the "evils" of the Bacchic cult, it would seem that Gruen's argument, which stated that this was a plan constructed by the aristocracy to reassert control, is accurate.

The question then arises about why the aristocracy chose the venue of religion in which to reassert political dominance. Why not military conquest? Perhaps slaughter a village which was harboring dissent towards the larger Empire in order to reassert control; after all, this would be a much more tangible display of dominance. Why maintain the apparent ruse? After all, we see from the story of Flaminus that when he rejected religious portents and resolved to continue under the strength of his own will, his soldiers "rejoiced in the temerity of their commander; their hopes ran high"[56]. The common people could just as easily have rejoiced in the strength of their leaders, as those soldiers did (although it must be admitted that those soldiers died in the ensuing battle, the point remains) and happily thrown off the obligations that came with civic religion in Rome. Perhaps the aforementioned aristocratic cadre foresaw greater utility to be had by maintaining their religious structure.

Before getting to far ahead of ourselves and coming to the conclusion that this was solely a political affair, it might be helpful to examine the event under a lens assuming that this was a religiously motivated persecution in order to understand the other side of the argument. We will then assume that the Bacchanalians were dispersed because the powers that be feared their worship of a god outside of traditional Roman religion. If the populace were to begin to devote themselves to Bacchic worship, which we see is clearly an initiatory religion, an assumption could fairly be made that their devotion to civic religion would necessarily decrease. Those loyal to the cult would be devoting the majority of their energy towards Bacchic rites, and the normal

[56] Livy 22.1.13

attention to the traditional deities would fade. This may well have caused indignation among those faithful to traditional worship, but the fact of the matter is that no matter how much one tries to show this as an instance of legitimate pious action on behalf of those loyal to traditional civic religion, the portrayal of Postumius' speech to the senate reveals that the inherent nature of this persecution was political.

If the Bacchic cult were something which legitimately threatened Roman religion, it would have been confronted much earlier in its history. As Postumius says, it had been long known throughout Italy[57], there was no reason to wait until this point in history to take action against a religiously subversive organization. Further, the centerpiece of Postumius' argument lay in identifying the possible political difficulty that could emerge from such a gathering. He supported this by referencing the damage already done by citing the numerous immoral activities perpetrated by the cult followers, but the primary motivation given for the dispersion of the cult was in the danger that lay in allowing a group of this magnitude to meet. The fear that was played upon was not fear of a disturbance of the *pax deorum*, but a fear of conspiracy against the state; hence the modern practice of referring to this episode as "The Bacchanalian Conspiracy".

This affair, then, was the result of an assertion of political power which utilized the venue of religion to justify itself. Given the unique circumstances of this incident, some conclusions may be drawn from this usage of religion as a vessel purely for the furthering of a political goal. As

[57] Livy 39.15.6

revealed in the previous section on Scipio's convictions, it was common practice to view religious piety as an expectation of beneficial results from proper observances of rites for deities. In this case, it seems more apt to characterize the aristocrats who prompted the event as expecting beneficial results (a strengthening of their own political stance) from their perceived protection of traditional religious rites and worship. While in Scipio's case it could be argued that he engaged in religious practices in order to elicit certain results, the patricians in this case led by Postumius expected to gain their results and simply attempted to justify their actions by religious means. They did not utilize classic religious piety, but saw religion as a way to explain their actions in consolidating political power on the peninsula.

This indicates at least a partial shift away from viewing religion as a means by which to achieve desired ends towards a view of religion as an explanation for why certain ends were achieved. This may seem a minor or perhaps even insignificant distinction, but it serves to show that at least in this case religion was not something that could be both believed in and utilized for its expected results. It shows that religion was something that was perceived as a force that did not need to be believed in to understand that it had power to be utilized in whatever fashion deemed necessary. It indicates that there was little to nothing to do with legitimate religious conviction apparent among the individuals enacting this repression of Bacchanalians. This does not mean that there were none among the aristocrats who were actually legitimately pious, but it means that in this case that was not the justification for their actions.

In fact, given the nature of Roman political and religious authority, it seems absolutely foolish to believe that no aristocrats were pious in reality. There were clear factional struggles within the relationship between the secular and the religious[58]. Keeping in mind that a number of senators were also priests, it stretches the bounds of reasonable believability that these factions who were so often so diametrically opposed in policy would put aside their differences in order to perpetrate a persecution of this magnitude. It seems far more likely that Postumius and perhaps a cadre of like-minded politicians constructed this situation. The religiously-minded among the senate would be apt to accept the disbanding of the Bacchanalian cult since it was not part of the traditional Roman pantheon and it distracted from the observance of traditional religious rites. The irreligious among the senate, led by Postumius and his cohorts, would have supported this action since it would have furthered their purpose in establishing control in the Italian peninsula via the rejection of foreign influence. The most likely explanation for this action, then, is that it was a combination of religious and irreligious senators looking to advocate their respective views through the debilitation of a foreign religious tradition which was impinging on the grounds of traditional civic religion in Rome.

[58] Champion 5

The Burning of Greek Religious and Philosophical Texts

In the previous section concerning the Bacchanalian Conspiracy, it was evident that the major driving force behind the incident was one that was politically motivated, but was supported by the religious element of the Roman aristocracy on grounds of piety. In this section we will examine another event which involved the actions of a group of aristocrats, the burning of a number of Greek religious and philosophical texts. This event will shed more light on the question of whether belief in religion was a necessary facet of statecraft or whether it was simply utilized in furthering political purposes. In this case, there are a fair number of discrepancies within the source texts, some are important and some are superficial, but happily the main features of the account stay the same throughout.

In different accounts, the individual who makes the discovery in question changes[59], but there always remains a relatively average Roman citizen who is involved in the revealing of a number of entombed texts. In some accounts there is one tomb which was destined for the body of Numa Pompilius but which is empty, and a separate tomb containing a number of texts[60]; in other cases there is only one tomb which contains the texts[61]. In almost every account the number of texts discovered varies[62], but there is generally a division between Roman religious texts and Greek philosophical

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[59] L. Petilius is the name given in Valerius Maximus and Livy, while Terentius is the name given in Augustine and Pliny the Elder's accounts, while no name is given in Plutarch's account.
[60] Plutarch, Life of Numa 22
[61] Pliny the Elder 13.27.84-88
[62] See Pliny the Elder 13.27.88 for a list containing a large number of variations on the number of texts discovered.

texts. This discovery occurred in 181 B.C.E. in a field near the Janiculum, which was traditionally the burial place of Numa Pompilius[63]. These texts were eventually turned over to the local praetor, named Petilius, who is said to have read the texts and turned them over to the senate with his recommendation the they be burned on account of their religiously subversive contents. The senate took his proposal to heart and ordered that the texts be burned publicly.

The question then arises of why these books were burned, was it a reaction to religious propaganda that was targeted against traditional religion or was it an attempt to utilize religion to control the masses, or was it something else all-together? After all, the discovery was presented to the entirety of the senate and the books were burned in full view of the public in the *comitium*; surely there was a motive for this. Erich Gruen, as he is wont to do, interprets this display in a manner similar to his interpretation of the Bacchanalian Conspiracy in the previous section; he sees it as a planned display designed to distance Roman culture and policy from dependence on Greek culture. A justified initial reaction to this analysis would be to question how the burning of books said to be possessed by Rome's second king, who "taught Rome the arts of peace, gave her laws, and established religious institutions"[64] and in effect laid the foundation for Roman civilization, could be thought to be a display of anti-Hellenism. At first glance this seems to be a rejection of Rome's own tradition, rather than the traditions of the Greeks.

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[63] Plutarch, Life of Numa 22.2
[64] Gruen 159

Gruen's argument, and an altogether separate argument which attempts to show this as a religiously motivated action, rests on the notion that there existed a connection between Numa and Pythagoras, a Greek mathematician and philosopher; the nature of this connection is generally recalled with Numa being a disciple of Pythagoras[65].

According to Gruen, both Livy and Cicero declare with great conviction that it would have been utterly impossible for Numa and Pythagoras to have been acquainted, much less have developed a close working relationship. This argument is established on the grounds that the language barriers would have been all but impossible to bridge in the amount of time they might have co-existed and on the grounds that according to chronographers Numa had died 140 years before Pythagoras had ever come to Italy[66]. Nevertheless, there was still a popular belief that there had existed some kind of connection between these two figures[67], and this is what is important for this study. This connection is important because in most of the sources the actual contents of the books that were burned are not elaborated upon, it is merely stated that they were subversive[68], although in some cases there remains an implication that the philosophical texts were related to Pythagoras[69]. Pliny the Elder, however, recounts Cassius Hemina's recollecting of this account, wherein it is stated explicitly that the philosophical doctrines found in these writings were the teachings of

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[65] Gruen 158
[66] Gruen 159
[67] ibid.,
[68] Chiefly in the accounts of Plutarch and Valerius Maximus
[69] Chiefly in the accounts of Augustine and Livy

Pythagoras[70]. Pliny shows support for this by citing numerous other accounts of what was found within the excavated coffers: Piso recorded that the doctrines of Pythagoras were unearthed, while Varro is told to have said that there were texts entitled *Antiquities of Man*, and Antias reports the existence of a number of volumes concerning *Doctrines of Philosophy* written in Greek[71].

Before attempting to discern the significance behind the perceived connection between Pythagoras and Numa, and what it would have meant to those who unearthed these texts, we must first deal with the nature of the find itself. It is important to determine whether the discovery was genuine or falsified, since in either case there results a number of illuminating implications concerning the religious beliefs of the Roman aristocrats involved in the decision to destroy the texts. To begin with, the coffers containing the texts were found in the vicinity of the Janiculum, the traditional burial place of Numa Pompilius[72]. This lends a degree of believability to the find, since the geographical location of the find is consistent with the traditional location of Numa's burial. Further, there is testimony in numerous sources[73] that there were also found with the Greek philosophical texts a number of texts on pontifical law written in Latin. This further lends credence to the view that this discovery was actually connected to Numa, given that he

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[70] Pliny 13.27.84-88
[71] ibid.,
[72] Plutarch, Life of Numa 22
[73] Chiefly Valerius Maximus and Pliny the Elder's recollection of the accounts of Piso, and Antias.

"instituted the rituals that would be most acceptable to the immortal gods"[74] in Rome and thus serves as the founder of traditional civic religion in Roman history.

There is, however, ample evidence which indicates that this discovery was not genuine. To begin with, there is the basic fact that these texts were discovered 535 years after the ascension of Numa[75]. This enormous gap in time would have likely done much to change the nature of the language used by Greeks. To begin with, it is highly unlikely that the scribe who discovered these texts would have been able to read Greek (since in general it was only those of the highest class who would have had the time and leisure to verse themselves properly in Greek) as a number of sources claim he could[76]. It is even more unlikely that this scribe would have been able to decipher what would have by then been an archaic form of Greek language. It is slightly more likely that the praetor Petilius would have been able to read Greek given his higher social standing, but there would have been little to no practical purpose for this skill given what we know of this character. It is again incredibly dubious to assume that the praetor would have been able to read such an archaic form of the language. It is even questionable that the senators who were given the books would have been able to decipher the language. This does not, however, preclude the examiners of this text from having been able to make inferences about the texts. They knew from the Latin writing on the coffers that they had found what appeared to be Numa's tomb. They

[74] Valerius Maximus 1.2.1
[75] Pliny the Elder 13.27.84-88
[76] Chiefly Livy 40.29

would have been familiar with the popular association of Numa with Pythagoras. Further, they may well have been able to deduce from the characters in the texts that there was a group of Greek writings among the books found, even if they were unable to decipher the characters' meanings. From these three pieces of information they could have come to the conclusion that these texts were possibly a set of Pythagorean teachings. While this may not be the most convincing rhetorical presentation designed to sway the senate to destroy what could have been highly important historical documents from one of the great figures in Roman history. It should be noted that the maintenance of the religious *status quo* was something that was taken seriously enough to postpone military excursions, halt meetings of the senate, and as such it is very likely that the senate would not have hesitated to destroy what appeared to be old texts which attacked its foundational principles, especially without incontrovertible evidence that the texts were genuinely the property of Numa Pomipilius. Valerius Maximus stated this principle succinctly, showing that it would take only the threat of irreligiosity resulting from the texts to have them done away with: "For the men of old misliked that aught be preserved in this community by which men's minds might be turned away from the worship of the gods,"[77].

Understanding, then, that this discovery was most likely falsified, there can now be a more in depth examination of the reasons behind this burning and we can understand what it reveals about piety in the Roman aristocracy. We will begin with Gruen's interpretation of the event, that it was a public

[77] Valerius Maximus 1.1.12

display constructed to promote anti-Hellenism. Gruen's argument is based around the streamlined and simplistic nature of the proceedings of the event. Every procedure is followed with precision, the scribe is given every opportunity to defend his claim to the texts and is offered compensation for their confiscation, the decision is made quickly, with no dissent being raised even by the scribe, the religious authorities are not consulted on the grounds of this being a purely civil case, and there is no in depth review of the contents of the texts. The ease and speed with which this review is conducted raises questions about the nature of the event, how something so potentially controversial and divisive could have been so easily and quickly handled by the senate.

According to Gruen, there was a growing trend of Hellenism within Rome, especially in forms of learning, which led to greater awareness of the supposed connection between the foundation of Roman religion and law with a Greek rather than growing out of native soil[78]. This trend, he asserts, served as the impetus for the construction of this event; the burning of these texts served as a public rejection of Greek tradition in Roman policy and life. The pronouncements against the texts themselves were left vague and, as stated, a number of the accounts recall that the senate did not even examine the documents[79]. This gives the impression that, while procedure was followed impeccably, no real action was taken in those steps to attempt to alter the determined fate of the texts. It seems to have never been the intent of any

[78] Gruen 169
[79] Gruen 168

party involved to try to save the texts. This apathy is seen as evidence that the authorities wanted to use the texts as an assertion of cultural autonomy in Gruen's interpretation, since it appears absolutely impossible for a factionalized senate to have all spontaneously come together in agreement that the texts should be destroyed. The only explanation is that this event was planned from the beginning and the entirety of the senate was in on the deception.

However, there is something which Gruen seems to have overlooked. Numa Pompilius was said to have been buried with these documents[80]. When this fact is taken into account with the proposal in the previous section on the Bacchanalian Conspiracy, which suggested the dubiousness of the entire body of senators agreeing unanimously upon a course of action with so little debate given the inherently fractured nature of aristocratic existence, it is possible to construct a viable alternative to Gruen's account. Imagine an aristocrat, a senator, with real religious conviction who is present when the discovery of these books is announced. This senator hears that the grave of an individual regarded as a major force in the foundation of Roman religion has been discovered with a number of texts buried with him. Some of these texts, this senator is told, possibly contain religiously subversive material which appears to be of Greek origin. As a member of the ruling class in Rome, this senator would be aware that some of the precepts taught in Greek philosophy are irreligious and could very well cause confusion among the masses if popularized. This senator further notes that these documents were *buried* with

[80] Plutarch, Life of Numa 22.2

Numa, and not handed down to either his pontifical or political successors. A simple deduction is then made, and a very justified deduction at that, that Numa did not want these texts to become dispersed and made known among the populace, but instead wanted them consigned to the grave with him. Except in very rare instances, when an individual goes out of their way to be buried with something it is not likely that they want those items to be passed on to others. Therefore, being the pious and upstanding citizen that this senator no doubt is, a decision is made to attempt to follow through on the apparent wishes of the progenitor of Roman religious practice, and the books are consigned to the flames. In order to emphasize the religious nature of this action since it appears to be following through on the wishes of the individual who instituted traditional religious practices, the *victimarii*, who would later in history become known primarily for assisting priests and magistrates in performing sacrifices[81], are enlisted to supply the fire upon which the books were to be burned. This becomes an action to honor the will of Numa, who was said to have been favored by the gods and ensured Rome's continued right relationship with the powers of the universe by establishing religious rites[82].

Now, given that the discovery was fabricated and the compelling arguments for this act as a device used to show disapproval of Hellenization, it would be absolutely foolhardy to assume that there was no individual or group of individuals who were attempting to utilize this instance for their own ends.

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[81] Livy 40.29 footnote
[82] Valerius Maximus 1.2.1

However, it would be equally foolhardy to make the assumption that there existed no individuals who resembled the hypothetical aristocrat described above whose convictions prompted them to destroy the texts for religious ends. The individuals who orchestrated the event could easily have come up with a reason, such as the one stated above, to present to the more religiously inclined of their colleagues which was designed to gain their approval and support for the desired end of this public display. This certainly seems to make more sense than the idea that the myriad competing factions within the senate suddenly came to the conclusion that Hellenism ought to be officially frowned upon by means of the discovery of an obscure set of texts. The basic contents of the texts were never fully revealed to the public and as such would have been far less effective at discouraging Hellenism, since the populace would not have been fully aware of what this public display was protesting. This seems an overly complex method which presented its point in a very obtuse fashion.

The incident of the burning of Greek philosophical texts, then, serves to further confirm the conclusion drawn from the examination of the Bacchanalian Conspiracy. While it is clear that in both instances there were certainly individuals, or perhaps groups of individuals, who were utilizing religious fears or religious tradition in order to further their own ends, there still must have remained a significant number of the aristocratic class who legitimately subscribed to the power of religion. There must have always remained those individuals who believed that the following of traditional

religious rites would result in a beneficial outcomes for both themselves and the state, and who sought to maintain the rites which guaranteed their ability to procure those results. There could never have been the proposed utilization of religion as a tool to control the populace without a group of aristocrats who actually believed in the religious practices which they preached as necessity; they were necessary in order for any display of this nature to be successfully carried out by the pragmatists.

Human Sacrifice in Rome

The final case to be examined is actually a compilation of three incidents which occurred in 228, 216, and 114/3 B.C.E. in Rome. These incidents were all instances of human sacrifice, a practice "wholly alien to the Roman spirit"[83]. Naturally, with a description such as this it makes the reader wonder what would have impelled the Romans to engage in a practice so clearly considered vile. To further add intrigue to this case, this distasteful exercise was carried out three distinct times in this period. What does this practice reveal about religiosity among Roman aristocrats?

In short, human sacrifice shows gives enormous testament to the nature of religious belief in the Republic. Naturally, then, we begin with an exposition of what characterized these sacrifices. Firstly, each sacrifice was typified by burying male and female Greeks and Celts alive in the Forum Boarium[84]. In the first instance of this in 228 B.C.E., the ancient sources are generally in agreement that this sacrifice was designed to avoid a major military disaster[85], and was deemed necessary as a result of the consultation of the Sibylline Books after lightning had struck the Capitoline Hill near Apollo's temple[86]. Eckstein claims that this was a manifestation of an obsessive worry about an increasingly likely Celtic attack on Rome[87]: "the

[83] Livy 22.57.4
[84] Eckstein 69
[85] Eckstein 78
[86] cf. Dio fr. 50
[87] Eckstein 80

essential purpose of human sacrifice at Rome was to ward off possible military disasters that foreign enemies might inflict upon the State,"[88].

The second instance of human sacrifice in this period, which occurred in 216 B.C.E., directly followed the Roman defeat at Cannae[89]. There had also been a discovery of impropriety among the Vestal Virgins before this time, which was interpreted as an ill-omen and was paired with numerous other prodigies which had occurred during the year; these subsequently appeared to be ill-omens by their association with the numerous other inopportune occurrences[90]. There then existed an atmosphere of general anxiety, which prompted the senate to order a consultation of the Sibylline Books, which led to the sacrifice in question[91]. The conclusion drawn by Livy concerning this and surrounding events is that there was a desire to discover the proper religious rites to be utilized in order to placate the gods [92]. Again, Eckstein draws the conclusion from this event that "the purpose of the human sacrifice of 216 [B.C.E.] must therefore be that the burials were performed in order to please the gods and to avert any future military disaster to the Roman State,"[93].

The final instance of human sacrifice within the scope of this study is the one which occurred in 114/3 B.C.E. which began with a daughter of a Roman *eques* being struck dead by lightning[94]. This prompted an examination

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[88] Eckstein 81
[89] Eckstein 73
[90] ibid.,
[91] Livy 22.57.2-6
[92] Eckstein 74
[93] Eckstein 75
[94] Eckstein 71

into possible portents of the incident, which resulted in the discovery of a scandal within the ranks of the Vestal Virgins, which in turn prompted a consultation of the Sibylline Books[95]. This led to the requisite human sacrifice of two Greeks and two Celts. Eckstein contends that it was a fear of what the dual portents of the lightning strike and the scandal among the Vestals could mean for Rome's immediate future which prompted the consultation of the Sibylline Books, and that it was on account of a desire to avert any imminent danger that the nameless Greeks and Celts were sacrificed[96]. It should also be noted that directly preceding this event, Rome had suffered its first military defeat in a generation, which may well have contributed to a sense of hysteria and a desire to see something done which might reverse this sudden ill turn in Rome's fortunes[97].

The view propounded by Eckstein and the facts made apparent which surrounded these sacrifices indicate that they were all implemented in order to avoid some approaching danger to the Roman state[98]. The implication that this statement has for Roman religiosity is readily apparent: there was clearly still a belief in the efficacy of religious practice throughout this time period. If that belief did not exist, then there would have been no reason to perform these sacrifices which were so abhorrent to the Roman psyche[99]. Because all of these sacrifices were meant to stave off impending danger, the argument of the pragmatist in this most extreme of cases is found remarkably impotent.

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[95] ibid.,
[96] Eckstein 72
[97] Eckstein 73
[98] Eckstein 72
[99] Livy 22.57.4

The argument that would have made the most sense for the pragmatist to make would be that these sacrifices were clearly made in order to quell the populace disturbed by unsettling prodigies or scandals or to distract from military defeat. However, each of this explanation relies on the fact that the sacrifices were made with the settling of then current issues as their objective. It seems clear, as shown above, that each human sacrifice was instead designed to avert some unperceived or real threat in the near future; there was no thought towards settling the populace. The prodigies and military defeats, along with the scandals with the Vestal Virgins, all merely served as indicators of more trouble to come and were not dealt with as something of concern for the senate to deal with.

It may seem perverse to the well-informed that this study uses as part of its paradigm for religious understanding, which was mentioned in the beginning sections of this study and has been referred to throughout, the account of W. W. Fowler who fervently denied the existence of a genuine religious belief among Romans during this time period. Indeed Fowler states:

> "I have repeatedly spoken of that State religion as hypnotized or paralysed, meaning that the belief in the efficacy of the old cults had passed away among the educated classes, that the mongrel city populace had long been accustomed to scoff at the old deities, and that the outward practice of religion had been allowed to decay."[100]

Fowler's basic argument for this lies in the institutionalization of religion, taking religious destiny out of the hands of the individual and putting it in the hands of the state[101]. He argues, as seen in the above quote, that this

[100] Fowler 429
[101] Fowler 226

necessarily removed the intimacy which an individual must feel with the spiritual in order to have a proper awe and fear of the supernatural, which serves as the basis for religious belief. This awe and fear was removed when religious practice was put in the hands of an external authority, and this took away from genuine religious belief.

If, for the sake of argument, Fowler were correct in this analysis, the pragmatist argument becomes much less apt. The pragmatist believes that the sometimes strange dictums of religion were followed by the aristocrats in order to keep the populace in line. It is incredible to think that the aristocratic class would go through so much trouble to maintain this ruse if, as Fowler asserts, the 'mongrel city populace' did have the disrespect for religion which he portrays them as having. This would then seem to be a very ineffective way of attempting to control the masses, since there appears to be nothing in religion under this analysis which the citizens would respect enough to go out of their way to follow. This, if nothing else, shows a flaw in Fowler's conclusion that there was no religious conviction in the time of the Republic. There must have been either religious conviction among the patricians or at least among the plebian class, else there seems to be no reasonable explanation for the cases examined in this study.

Further, according to the account of the human sacrifices which has just been examined, we can see another attack on Fowler's argument concerning Roman religiosity. Despite the ritualization of Roman religion, it seems clear that both the plebian class and a majority of those in the

aristocratic class (although there will always be exceptions in the vein of P. Claudius Pulcher) still clearly subscribed to the efficacy of proper observance of religious rites. The expected beneficial results, namely averting imminent dangers, were reported to be the reason for conducting the sacrifices; it would be a direct contradiction to claim that the Romans expected their religious rites in this case to yield results while maintaining Fowler's view that the Romans no longer expected religious rites to yield results.

In short, these examples of human sacrifice seem to accurately characterize the general piety of both the general public and the aristocratic class during the period of the Republic. They show that there was still the belief that following religious rites would yield favorable results, in just the same way as Romans had when religious worship was based around worship exclusively among family groups[102]. In fact, these incidents of human sacrifice simply do not make sense from a pragmatist view, and as such require accepting that there was a large contingent of aristocratic Romans in the Republic who legitimately subscribed to the power of traditional civic religion.

[102] Fowler 7

Conclusion

This study began with a simple enough question: were Roman aristocrats legitimately pious, or did they use religion as a tool to control the masses? While traditionally the Romans of the Republican period were portrayed as an irreligious coalition working to control the populace by means of religious rites, the examination of the five case studies discussed herein has shown that there existed a measure of religiosity among this class. While it seems clear that religion was utilized to further certain goals of aristocrats, see especially the cases of Scipio Africanus and the aristocrats involved in beginning the persecution of the Bacchanalians, this was not necessarily an irreligious action. It was instead the manifestation of the belief that religious rites were to be implemented for the purpose of tangible improvement of one's condition. In those particular cases the improvement was in political career or well-being and unity of the State, although other benefits were often sought.

The example of Publius Claudius Pulcher shows that there were certainly irreligious individuals among the Roman aristocratic class, but the examples of human sacrifice throughout this era that there was a majority of individuals willing to sacrifice traditional Roman values for the sake of religious observances because of their belief in the power of piety. It is as imprudent to jump to a generalization stating that all Roman aristocrats were deeply pious as it is to assume that religion was only used as a tool to control the general populace as so many scholars have done (cf. Fowler, Farrington).

However, it is prudent to assume that, given the examples we have seen, religion was something that was subscribed to by a large segment of the aristocratic population. This allowed small sections of aristocrats to exploit this relatively widespread belief to further their schemes. It is on the perceived impiety of those few aristocrats, in addition to the testament of a number of cynical authors writing many years removed from this time period, that the current belief in the pragmatist view has come. In fact, the authors in question seem to be commenting largely on the beliefs of aristocrats of their own time, attempting to showcase the irreligiosity of their own day. We may note as well that there remain no accounts from authors contemporary to the cases studied herein which report the perceived impiety that is advertised in the work of Cicero and Polybius, among others[103].

As has hopefully been shown here, without the existence of a large cohort of genuinely religious aristocrats that cadre of manipulative aristocrats would not have been effective enough to have been remembered. The combined forces of these two groups utilized religion effectively in statecraft, the former as a result of their genuine conviction that religious observances yielded favorable results and the latter because they knew that they could exploit the beliefs of the former in advancing their own standing and in supporting their own policies.

[103] Champion 12

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Summary

The purpose of this study is to define the role which religion played in statecraft during the time of the Roman Republic, a period stretching from 510 B.C.E. down to 31 B.C.E. More specifically, it focuses on the middle period of the Republic and events occurring from 249 through 114/3 B.C.E. Sources, both ancient and modern, have traditionally characterized the aristocratic view towards religion as "pragmatic" and by extension have seen the elites as largely impious. This view asserts that Roman aristocrats utilized religion merely as a means by which to control the populace, and generally did not subscribe to the actual existence of any kind of deity. Through the examination of five case studies, this study challenges this traditional view.

Each of the case studies in question is characterized by its seemingly impractical nature in relation to the "pragmatic" view. The first, and easily the most amusingly titled of these cases, is the case of Claudius Pulcher and the incident of the drowning of the sacred chickens. In this case, Pulcher, in traditional fashion, seeks an augury before he means to begin a naval battle. The augury is taken by means of the sacred chickens, whose behavior (not eating the food placed out for them) is interpreted as an ill-omen indicating that Pulcher and his fleet should not engage in the battle. Pulcher states that if the chickens will not eat, then they ought to drink, and has them thrown overboard. In this case, it is clear that Pulcher is not a bastion of religiosity among the Roman people. However, the case does prove useful in revealing the biases present in the ancient sources when an irreligious character is

portrayed. It is clear that there existed, in the numerous accounts of this event, a genuinely negative view of individuals who flaunted the traditional religious rites. Further, in cases surrounding this one, it is made clear that those who did adhere scrupulously to traditional religious observances were held in high regard. This reveals that, at least at the time of the writing of these texts, religiously inclined behavior was encouraged… and the enduring negative portrayal of Pulcher seems to indicate the general disapproval of irreligious behavior.

The second study deals with the character of Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus, especially in relationship to his role as a Salian priest. The particular incident around which this account focuses is found in the midst of a chase. Scipio and his legions are pursuing Antiochus III, an enemy of Rome, and then they suddenly come to a halt. Scipio was forced by his role as a priest to not change the place of his residence for thirty days in order to properly conduct a number of religious rites. This seems to have been an entirely impractical decision, since he was allowing his enemy more time to flee and recover from the onslaught of the Roman army. This case study is used to explicate the traditional nature of Roman religion. It did not hinge on awe and reverence of deity as its foundation, but instead relied on a causal relationship. Roman religion was founded through appeal to deities or spirits in order to ascertain some beneficial outcome (i.e. crops growing, safe house, etc). Through this lens, then, Scipio is seen as religious in the purest sense. While his opponents classify him as irreligious, it seems clear from his actions

that he engaged in religious ritual in order to ascertain beneficial results. He just happened to be wise enough to know how the results would generally manifest. His subscription to the power of religious observances shows him to be religious in the most traditional and pure sense in this manifestation of religion.

The third study begins to widen the scope, no longer focusing on the beliefs of single individuals, but viewing the entire apparatus of Roman aristocracy in its relationship with religion. This case focuses on the Bacchanalian Conspiracy, an event in which, without warning, as many as 7000 Roman citizens faced harsh persecution for their allegiance to the god Bacchus and for their participation in his rites. The persecution was conducted under suspicion of moral depravity and conspiracy against the government. This is out of place, considering Rome's long tradition of incorporating foreign gods into their pantheon. An analysis of this event shows that there was a contingent among the aristocracy who utilized this event in order to assert their authority in the Italian peninsula, but that they relied on the traditional piety of the majority of their peers in order to carry through their plan. This event was apparently originally designed to serve as a rejection of foreign influence in Roman governance, but it hinged on the traditional beliefs of the majority of the aristocracy to carry the motion through and to gain justification for the debilitation of the cult through the persecution.

The fourth study is the burning of Greek philosophical texts, which serves primarily to reinforce the point made in the previous section and to

serve as another example of the necessary existence of a large contingent of genuinely religious aristocrats. The event focuses on the discovery, and destruction, of a set of texts purportedly belonging to Numa Pompilius, who was the second king of Rome and established the traditional rites of Roman religion. There existed in this case, as well as the previous one, a group of aristocrats who used this event to distance both themselves and the Roman government from claims that Rome was shaped by foreign powers, and did not establish herself by her own power. A connection between the man who, in essence, founded Roman religion and Greek philosophy would have proved to be quite problematic for a Roman tradition which maintained that Rome was self-made. Given the fractured nature of the senate a unanimous agreement that this public burning of Greek philosophical texts should occur was unlikely to occur naturally. As such, that small group of aristocrats played on the religiosity of their peers, namely through the inherent threat to religion that Greek philosophy held, in order to accomplish this end.

The final case study is an examination of human sacrifice in Rome. Succinctly put, this was the most abhorrent thing to the Roman spirit… and it occurred three times in this era. In each case the sacrifice was meant to make sure that some future threat did not manifest. This cause and effect kind of religious rite indicates a continued belief in the essence of Roman religion, as outlined in the section concerning the piety of Scipio Africanus. Without this belief in the power of religion, there simply remains no cogent "pragmatic" explanation for this action to have occurred.

This study was primarily conducted through an exegetical study of primary source materials. In some cases, modern scholarship was utilized to provide a more cogent and sound explanation of the theories which have emerged concerning Roman religiosity in the intervening years between the case studies and the present. These modern sources were particularly helpful in building the foundation of the pragmatic view, so that the argument could be given a fair hearing. The bulk of this argument, however, still rests on the interpretation of the ancient sources and the proper contextualization of the writing.

The impact of this, if my argument is sound, results in a fundamental change in the way Roman piety is perceived during the period of the mid-Republic. It will result in a reinterpretation of a number of historical events which have until now been perceived through the pragmatic lens, since it ought now be possible to assume that it is likely that the majority of Roman aristocrats did subscribe to traditional religious ideals. The study of religion and its role in the conduct of statecraft can also be used in drawing parallels with modern society. In recent years it seems that the focus on religion in United States politics has expanded enormously, and it is possible that the government of the mid-Republic in Rome can be used in a comparative study with the modern government of the United States. While this may seem an overly self-important stance it should be noted that the modern political structure of the United States takes many cues from the Roman Republic, so this comparison may still be apt, though likely not comprehensive in dealing

with all of the nuances of our current political system. In any case, the study remains valuable for its utility in examining the motivations and actions of a number of Rome's most influential politicians and military leaders, and serves as an illuminating backdrop for the growth of the Roman Empire.