BARBARISM AND EXCESSIVE RELIGIOSITY?

Roman Perspectives on the Religions of Egypt and Gaul

First Century BCE – Second Century CE

by

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Introduction

Barbarism and excessive religiosity are two concepts which, at first glance, seem inherently connected to Roman views about foreign peoples. It stands to reason that views about religion, which were such an essential part of ancient culture, would have been no exception to this. But was this really the case?

The attitude of Rome towards its native religions in the provinces, has long been a subject of study. However, it is not without its problems, and the Roman interaction with such native religions in the late Republic and early Empire is often unclear and conflicting. Non-literary, written sources concerning religious perspectives are scarce, whilst literary sources are often ambiguous and sometimes contradict archaeological evidence. In addition, literary sources discussing these foreign religions often focus on a very select number of religions. The image of Roman attitudes towards foreign religion is therefore highly fragmented.

The great variety of religions during the late Republic and the Empire was probably partially responsible for this. There are great differences between these religions, and the Romans did not view all religions in the same way or even considered them equal to each other. What motivated a positive or negative view of these religions is often complex, since this is often dependent on the situation, the period or the author. Statements that Rome generally followed a policy of non-interference in local religion are not completely adequate, and do not sufficiently take into account the various political, social and religious differences. Therefore, it is not properly possible to discuss Roman attitude towards foreign religions as a whole. It is more constructive and practical to look at perspectives on specific religions and cults, since quite a few of them are well researched. Therefore, rather than examining perspectives on foreign religions in general, this paper will consist of two case studies of the Roman attitude towards two religions, namely those of Egypt and Gaul.

The main purpose will be to attempt to answer the following questions: What were the Roman perspectives on the religions of Egypt and Gaul from the first century BCE until the second century CE? What factors influenced their attitudes and perspectives? Did Roman authors view these religions

positively or negatively? And were their views based on historical reality or were they based on something else?

As perspectives should be understood the various attitudes and opinions of the Roman authors, as well as other aspects such as the acceptance, opposition and suppression of cults and other elements of religion. In addition, the transformation of religion may also offer insight into Roman and native perspectives on religion, although the interpretation of these may be uncertain.

The situations of these two religions differ greatly and may therefore yield very different results. Egyptian religion, particularly the cults of Isis and Sarapis, was widespread throughout the Mediterranean and Egyptian culture was admired for its architecture, antiquity and wisdom. The cults of Isis and Sarapis were also present in Rome and Italy, so there was a direct contact between Egyptian religion on one side and the Roman authors and Roman public on the other side. The Roman perspectives on Egyptian religion thus cover both the Egyptian cults in Rome and aspects of religion in Egypt. It should be noted that most authors were naturally less knowledgeable about Egyptian religion in Egypt than in Rome, because only few authors visited it.

In contrast, the religions and cultures of the Gallic provinces remained of a local nature and generally did not spread to other parts of the Roman Empire. Therefore there was little direct contact between the Gallic religions and Roman opinion. The presence of elements of Roman religion in Gaul and that of Romanised cults, suggests that there was a degree of contact, but that was likely mostly of a local nature. Native Gallic or Celtic religion was transformed or Romanised after the Roman conquest, but the opinions by Roman authors seem to focus solely on pre-Conquest elements of religion, even long after the conquest. Compared to Egyptian religion, Roman authors seem to have possessed even less information about Gallic religion, and considered it a new and barbaric culture. Interest in a culture which had, in the eyes of the Romans, little to recommend it drew far less attention and appreciation.

Roman ideas of what comprised proper and improper religion lie at the basis of Roman views on foreign religion. Essential to this are the concepts of *religio* and *superstitio*. *Religio* is usually understood as the traditional and proper performance of rites and sacrifices to the gods, which often seems to have been used for the Romans' own religiosity. *Superstitio* on the other hand, nearly always indicated some sort of excessive religious observance, which was often seen as a dangerous

phenomenon or was ridiculed.[1] In general, Roman authors often associated it with foreigners, women and the lower classes.[2]

Other Roman concepts which played a role were *humanitas* and *barbaritas*, and associated terms such as *romanitas*, *immanitas* and *feritas*. These were broad concepts which had meaning in various aspects of Roman society, such as politics and warfare. The concept of *humanitas* can be seen in various ways, but usually indicates a structure of ideas about civilization, which were fundamental to Roman culture. There are strong similarities with the Greek concept *paideia*, although the concepts are not identical.[3] This will be further explored in the case study about Gallic religion, to which it is the most relevant.

Barbaritas was the opposite or lack of *humanitas*. One of the Greek concepts of barbarian was originally linguistic and it referred to people who were not Greek or did not speak Greek. The Roman concept was significantly different, since it was used of all foreigners who did not fit into the Roman concept of civilization. It was especially used of those peoples who lived beyond the borders or in the periphery of the Roman Empire, and implied that they were cultural outsiders. Although Roman concepts of barbarism are too complex to be discussed in full here, it is logical that they must have had a large influence on Roman thought about foreign religion. Terms such as *barbarus* and *barbaria* were often used in relation to religion and foreign peoples by Roman authors.

> 'The frontier of the Empire could be seen as a moral barrier. Inside were the arts, discipline and humanity (*humanitas*). Outside were wildness, irrationality, savagery and barbarity (*barbaritas*). In large measure the identity of a civilized member of the Empire consisted in being the opposite of a barbarian. But there were tensions and ambiguities in Roman thinking. It was recognized that barbarians were not all the same. Those in the north were generally stupider but more ferocious than those in the east. Some barbarians, northern and eastern, could be thought of as good and wise.' [4]

The four concepts — *religio*, *superstitio*, *humanitas* and *barbaritas* — would have exercised influence on Roman opinion towards foreign religion. Particularly in cases where there was little or no direct contact between Roman authors and the culture in question, such concepts were probably what they relied on, in combination with general knowledge about the religions.

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[1] Beard, North and Price, *Religions of Rome*, vol. 1 (hereafter referred to as Beard (1998a)), pp. 215-219
[2] For example: Juvenal, Satire 6, lines 512-542; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 3.55; Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 8.4; Tacitus, *Annales* 13.32; Cassius Dio, 67.14
[3] Woolf, G., *Becoming Roman: The origins of provincial civilization in Gaul*, Cambridge (1998), pp. 54-60
[4] Sabin, P., Wees, H. van, Whitby, M, *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman warfare*, vol. 2, Cambridge (2007), pp. 5-6

In both case studies, an examination of the literary sources will form a significant part, and despite their occasional ambiguity, they are the most direct sources that convey opinions. Nevertheless, a more critical image can be formed with the inclusion of an examination of the treatment of the religions by the Romans. To a considerable degree this is also based of literary sources, therefore their historicity should not be taken for granted. Archaeological evidence can sometimes be used to affirm or negate the literary sources. A third component will be aspects such as iconography and names of deities, and Egyptian and Gallic image culture.

There is a variety of previously carried out research on the subject of Roman attitudes towards the native religions of conquered regions. However, most of this research discusses the Roman perspective in a very general way or it focuses on very specific subjects. General discussions can be found, in Guterman, who discusses the tolerance of certain foreign deities and cults, the restriction and prohibition of others, and the various causes which led the Romans to admit new deities within Rome and its pantheon.[5] Beard, North and Price discuss various aspects of native religions in the provinces and the subsequent reactions of the Romans to these religions.[6] More specific studies about perspectives on Egyptian religion have been conducted by Smelik and Hemelrijk, which focuses on animal worship, Maehler, focusing on the opinions of the Roman poets, and Versluys, focusing on Nilotic scenes and views on Egypt.[7] Specific research about perspectives on Gallic religions is scarcer, and is usually found in general studies about Gallic religion, such as by Van Andringa, Derks and Woolf.[8] In addition, there is some discussion of Roman perspectives in studies about Druidism and human sacrifice, such as by Webster, DeWitt and Rives.[9] Aside from these studies, there are very few studies that include Roman perspectives on these religions as a whole. This is particularly the case with perspectives on Gallic religion, although there has been done a considerable amount of

[5] Guterman, S.L., *Religious toleration and persecution in ancient Rome*. London (1951), pp. 11-14, 27-29, 33
[6] Beard (1998a), pp. 245-266, 297-309, 340-353
[7] Smelik, K.A.D., and E.A. Hemelrijk. 1984. "'Who Knows Not What Monsters Demented Egypt worships?': Opinions on Egyptian Animal Worship in Antiquity as Part of the Ancient Conception of Egypt." In: *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt II*, Vol. 17.4, Berlin (1984), pp. 1852-2000; Maehler, H., "Roman poets on Egypt", in: R.J. Matthews and C. Römer (eds.), *Ancient perspectives on Egypt*, London (2003), pp. 203-216; Versluys, M.J., *Aegyptiaca romana : Nilotic scenes and the Roman views of Egypt*, Leyden (2002)
[8] Andringa, W. van, *La religion en Gaule Romaine. Piété en politique (Ier-IIIe siecle apr J-C.)*, Paris (2002); Derks, T., *Gods, temples and ritual practices: The transformation of religious ideas and values in Roman Gaul*, Amsterdam (1998); Woolf, G., *Becoming Roman: The origins of provincial civilization in Gaul*, Cambridge (1998)
[9] Webster, J., "At the end of the world: Druidic and other revitalization movements in post-conquest Gaul and Britain", in: *Britannia*, vol. 30 (1999), pp. 1-20; DeWitt, N.J., "The Druids and Romanization", in: *Transactions and proceedings of the American philological association*, Vol. 69 (1938), pp. 319-332; Rives, J.B., 'Human sacrifice among Pagans and Christians', in: *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 85 (1995), pp. 65-85

research on various aspects of it. Therefore, an inquiry into the Roman perspectives of both religions has merit.

Case study 1

Roman perspectives on the religion of ancient Egypt

This case study will analyse the Roman perspectives on Egyptian religion. There is substantial knowledge about Egyptian religion, as well as extensive Roman sources that concern themselves with Egyptian religion, therefore we can assess Roman knowledge and opinions fairly well. However, an analysis of solely the Roman opinions about these aspects will be insufficient to form a more comprehensive view, because the Roman sphere of interest was limited to a small number of aspects: animal worship, zoomorphic and hybrid deities, the Egyptian cults in Rome and the mythology of Isis and Osiris. In order to come to a comprehensive understanding of the various Roman views and the position of the Roman state about Egyptian religion, other approaches must be considered as well.

As one of the most visible aspects of Egyptian religion from the Roman perspective, the presence of Egyptian religion in Rome, in particular the cult of Isis, has received a substantial amount of attention, both from the Roman authorities and from Roman authors. Therefore the first chapter of this case study shall be committed to an analysis of the stance of the Roman authorities towards the cults and other aspects of Egyptian religion in Rome. The focus will be to explore the reasoning behind the supposed repressions during the late Republic and the early Principate and the gradual acceptance of the cults in the public sphere. In this manner, we may obtain insight whether the repressions were motivated by ideological objections or whether we should take other considerations into account.

The second section of this case study shall be devoted to the opinions and views of Roman authors regarding various aspects of Egyptian religion. Of these, animal worship, zoomorphic and hybrid deities and the Egyptian cults in Rome have received the most attention, however there are several significant texts devoted to the myths surrounding Isis and Osiris and their interpretation, as well as those that concern Egyptian priests. Because the authors under discussion come from a variety of backgrounds and writing traditions, this section will also explore the reasoning behind their opinions and will attempt to assess their knowledge of Egyptian religion whenever possible.

In general, it may be said that the cultural interest in Egyptian culture increased after the Roman victory at Actium. All the more so, because after Egypt's conquest the number of Egyptians in Rome grew significantly. Before Actium, Octavian's propaganda was directed towards emphasizing the differences between Rome and Egypt. As may be expected, after the defeat of Marc Anthony and Cleopatra, and the official cease of hostilities, such differences are no longer emphasised quite as much, although Roman authors and poets continue with unfavourable representations of Egyptians and Egyptian religion. It can be argued, that a significant number of the negative opinions of the authors and poets of the Augustan age, were influenced by the conflict with Cleopatra and Marc Anthony, instead of it being a general preconception.[10] This is not true of all Roman opinion of this period, and opinions about animal worship and zoomorphic and hybrid deities seem to be deep-rooted in Roman discourse. The sudden aversion to the goddess Isis, who was strongly Hellenised and in many ways quite acceptable to the Romans, but with whom Cleopatra strongly identified herself, must be seen in this light; as an attempt to reinforce Roman identity and tradition.[11]

[10] Orlin, E.M., "Octavian and Egyptian cults: Redrawing the boundaries of Romanness", in: *American Journal of Philology*, Vol. 129, Number 2, (2008), pp. 238-239, 243-244

[11] Takács, S.A., *Isis and Serapis in the Roman world*, Leyden and New York and Cologne (1995), pp. 21-28; Smelik, K.A.D., and E.A. Hemelrijk. 1984. "'Who Knows Not What Monsters Demented Egypt worships?': Opinions on Egyptian Animal Worship in Antiquity as Part of the Ancient Conception of Egypt." In: *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt II*.17.4, Berlin (1984), p. 1892

Chapter 1

Egyptian religion in Rome

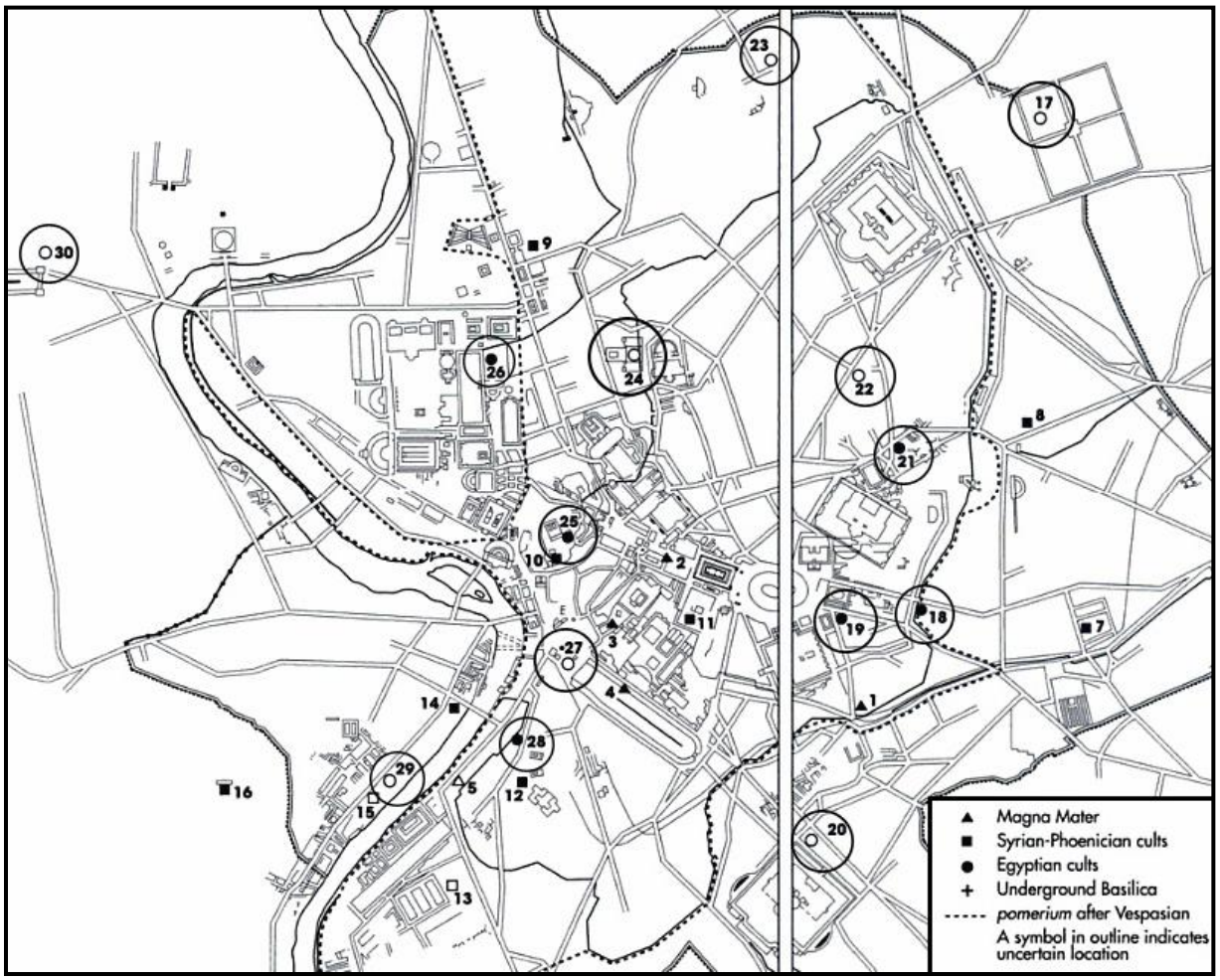

Figure 1: Map of the Egyptian cults in Rome.
Modified from Beard (1998a), pp. XVIII-XIX.
17. Isis in Praetorian Camp; 18. Isis and Sarapis; 19. Isium Metellinum; 20. Isis Athenodoria; 21. Shrine near S. Martino ai monti; 22. Isis Patricia; 23. Sanctuary in Sallustian Gardens; 24. Sarapis on Quirinal; 25. Isis on Capitolium; 26. Isis and Sarapis in Campus Martius; 27. Isis in Circus Maximus; 28. Isis below Santa Sabina; 29. Isis in Trastevere; 30. Isis in Vatican.

The Egyptian cults that settled outside Egypt were a thoroughly selective, simplified and universalised version of the original Egyptian cult, however its Egyptian origins were stressed and were likely used as an advertisement of ancient wisdom.[12] Less desirable aspects were removed from the cult, and as they were identified and equated with Greek and Roman deities, they took over aspects and roles of these deities as well.[13] During the Ptolemaic period, when the Egyptian cults spread through various

[12] Liebeschuetz, J.H.W.G., *Continuity and change in Roman religion*, Oxford (1979), p. 220
[13] Heyob, S.K., *The cult of Isis among women in the Graeco-Roman world*, Leyden (1975), p. 2

parts of the Mediterranean, the principal Egyptian deities for the Greeks, which were later adopted by the Romans, were equated with Greek counterparts. During this process, Isis was equated with Demeter, Osiris with Dionysus, and Horus/Harpocrates with Apollo, which increased their popularity and eased the spread of the cults. Zoomorphic and hybrid (human-animal combination) deities generally did not have any independent cults in the Graeco-Roman world outside Egypt, however, they were sometimes included in the cults of Isis and Sarapis.[14] The main deities worshiped outside Egypt (Isis, Sarapis, Osiris and Horus/Harpocrates) were almost always worshiped in anthropomorphic style.

The composition of the Egyptian cults' adherents was not as black and white as is often implied by the sources and early modern scholars. The notion that the adherents were mainly female, of non-Roman origins or from the lower classes is a misconception. It is possible that these notions stem from the conception that these groups were not sophisticated enough to recognise the un-Romanness in Isis, and the opinion of various poets was that civilised Romans should not get involved in such un-Roman cults.[15] However, this might be a generalisation, rather than because of actions of the cult. The Isis cult lacked the emotional excessiveness of the cults of Bacchus and Magna Mater, and did not promote asocial behaviour. Epigraphic and archaeological material has shown that most adherents must have been of average means and that not all were exclusively foreign. Moreover it seems that a number of the adherents were administrative and military officials, and that women did not constitute a majority.[16] In the second and third century, inscriptions and dedications by men of senatorial rank start appearing and it is probable that after the reigns of Octavian, Tiberius and Claudius, the cult had made great progress into being regarded as an acceptable cult, even amongst the elite.[17]

1.1 Isis, Osiris and Sarapis

Functionally, the Hellenised Isis was a different deity than the traditional Egyptian Isis. The Hellenised Isis was a universal goddess, although there are elements of the traditional cult present in the Hellenised cult, such as her role as protector. In the Hellenistic cult, life, order and salvation are

[14] Roullet, A., *The Egyptian and Egyptianizing monuments of imperial Rome*, Leyden (1972), pp. 124-132; Alvar, J., *Romanising oriental gods: Myths, salvation and ethics in the cults of Cybele, Isis and Mithras*, Leyden and Boston (2008), pp. 10, 296
[15] Takács, pp. 1-2, 30
[16] Takács, pp. 5-7; Wardman, A., *Religion and statecraft among the Romans*, London (1982), pp. 119-120
[17] CIL 14.352 = ILS 6149; Beard, M., J. North and S. Price, *Religions of Rome*, Vol. 2, Cambridge (1998), (hereafter referred to as Beard (1998b)), pp. 300-301

important aspects of Isis, and she is usually reckoned as queen of the gods in hymns and aretalogies.[18]

Sarapis, the consort of the Hellenised Isis was the patron deity of the Ptolemaic dynasty and fulfilled the position of Isis' consort and took over certain attributes of Isis' Egyptian husband Osiris.[19] However, the latter's position in Isiac myths and rituals remained intact. It is argued by many scholars that Sarapis is composed of elements of existing deities. Particularly Osiris and Apis are named in this respect, both of which have strong connections to kingship and monarchical ideology. Physically the figure of Sarapis resembles the Greek Hades or Pluto with curled hair and a beard. In many respects, we may consider Sarapis a Hellenised combination of Osiris and Apis, who was assimilated with Pluto.[20] The connection with Pluto was also suggested by two ancient writers cited by Plutarch, Archemachus of Euboea and Heracleides Ponticus.[21] Sarapis may therefore be considered a god of the underworld, but with strong connections to kingship ideologies due to his connection to Osiris and Apis.

1.2 The Egyptian cults during the late Republic

Analysing the stance of the Roman authorities towards the Egyptian cults can only be done indirectly, since there are no sources available to us that clearly state the views or actions of the Senate and the emperors. Therefore we are limited to a small number of sources that mention the actions of the Senate and the emperors between the first century BCE and the first century CE: Dio Cassius, Tertullian, Tacitus, Suetonius and Josephus. The references in these sources are sparse, but from their context we may understand the motives for the recurring repressions of the Egyptian cults, and thereby gain an understanding of the authorities' stance towards them.

Repression of the Egyptian cults during the late Republic has been recorded by Roman authors on three separate dates.[22] The accounts which noted these occurrences are all from a much later date than the repressions of the cults. It is important to realise, that in the period in which these accounts

[18] Ferguson, *Greek and Roman religion: A sourcebook*, Park Ridge (1982), pp. 168-170; Salzman, M.R., *On Roman Time: The Codex Calendar of 354 and the Rhythms of Urban Life in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley (1990), pp. 170–171
[19] Bricault, L. and M.J. Versluys (eds.), *Isis on the Nile: Egyptian Gods in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, Leyden and Boston (2010), (hereafter referred to as Bricault and Versluys (2010)), pp. 23-24; Heyob, p. 2
[20] Alvar, pp. 52-59
[21] Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* 27
[22] Tertullian, *Ad Nationes* 1.10; Dio Cassius, 40.47, 42.26

were written, the second and third century CE, the Egyptian cults were recognised as official cults. The small number of these mentions supports the theory that the actions against the Egyptian cults were probably infrequent and should be considered as efforts to restore religious uniformity.[23] Interesting in this context is a passage from Varro, who complained about the presence of the Egyptian cults within Rome, thus suggesting the continued presence of the Egyptian cults within Rome despite the actions taken against them.[24] According to Tertullian, consular action was taken against the Egyptian cults in 58 BCE.

> 'Father Bacchus, with all his ritual, was certainly by the consuls, on the senate's authority, cast not only out of the city, but out of all Italy; whilst Varro informs us that Sarapis also, and Isis, and Harpocrates, and Anubis, were excluded from the Capitol, and that their altars which the senate had thrown down were only restored by the popular violence. The Consul Gabinius, however, on the first day of the ensuing January, although he gave a tardy consent to some sacrifices, in deference to the crowd which assembled, because he had failed to decide about Sarapis and Isis, yet held the judgment of the senate to be more potent than the clamour of the multitude, and forbade the altars to be built.' [25]

The reasoning behind this consular action is difficult to reconstruct with certainty, because the context of Varro's original passage remains unknown. However, the fact that the cults were banned from the Capitol and their altars demolished indicates that the Egyptian cults had a presence on the Capitol in the years before the repressions started. The passage suggests that the cults enjoyed popular support, and the following senatorial actions suggest that this continued to be the case.[26] In addition, there are no significant negative mentions about the Egyptian cults prior to the consular actions of 58 BCE, thus supporting the theory that the repressions were not related to moral or ideological objections, but instead to socio-political circumstances.

Dio Cassius informs us of two senatorial actions taken against the cult. First in 53 BCE, he informs us that an Isiac altar was demolished by order of the Senate.

> 'But it seems to me that that decree passed the previous year, near its close, with regard to Sarapis and Isis, was a portent equal to any; for the senate had decided to tear down their temples, which some individuals had built on their own account. Indeed, for a long time they did not believe in these

[23] Takács, pp. 56-57
[24] Servius, *In Aeneidem* 8.698
[25] Tertullian, *Ad Nationes* 1.10, translation: R.E. Wallis, P. Holmes, S, Thelwall and J. Kaye, *The writings of Quintus Sept. Flor. Tertullianus*, Vol. 1, Edinburgh (1869-1870), p. 440
[26] Orlin, E.M., "Octavian and Egyptian cults: Redrawing the boundaries of Romanness", in: *American Journal of Philology*, Vol. 129, Number 2, (2008), pp. 236-237

> gods, and even when the rendering of public worship to them gained the day, they settled them outside the *pomerium*.' [27]

Then in 48 BCE, Cassius Dio alludes towards the possibility that the temples of Isis and Sarapis could or should have been demolished.

> 'On the contrary, many dreadful events took place, as, indeed, omens had indicated beforehand. Among other things that happened toward the end of that year bees settled on the Capitol beside the statue of Hercules. Sacrifices to Isis chanced to be going on there at the time, and the soothsayers gave their opinion to the effect that all [temple] precincts of that goddess and of Sarapis should be razed to the ground once more.' [28]

Both passages appear to have had a distinct political background and it should be argued that the first in particular should be seen as an effort to restore religious uniformity, and is directly connected to the period's political unrest and Senatorial weakness.[29] The main reason for such opposition against the cult was not therefore related to the moral objections as voiced by the Roman poets and elegists.

Another passage which fits the political context of the occasional repressions is from Valerius Maximus, who relates how consul L. Aemilius Paullus demolished the doors of an Isis temple with an axe. The passage seems to suggest the reasoning had a political or social context, instead of moral or religious objection.[30]

The apparent infrequent and intermittent nature of the repressions in the sources suggests that we are not dealing with a continuous oppression of the cults in Rome, but rather with individual expulsions of the cults from the *pomerium*.[31] The repetition of measures between 58 and 48 BCE suggests that the cults' followers continued to build and restore shrines and altars, and it is possible that this was tolerated by the Roman authorities to a certain degree. This rules out the possibility that there were significant objections to the Egyptian cults that were irreconcilable with Roman ideology, and that the reasons for the repressions were of a different nature.

Further evidence for this comes from a passage in Dio Cassius, which notes that the Second Triumvirate voted to dedicate a temple to Isis and Sarapis.[32] The dedication of the temple was never realised due to the aftermath of Caesar's death and the propaganda of Octavian against Cleopatra,

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[27] Dio Cassius, 40.47, translation: E. Cary and H.B. Foster, *Dio's Roman history : in nine volumes.* Vol. 3, Cambridge & London (1914), pp. 477-479
[28] Dio Cassius, 42.26, translation: Cary and Foster, Vol. 3, pp. 155-157
[29] Takács, pp. 67; Moehring, H.R., "The persecution of the Jews and the adherents of the Isis cult at Rome A.D. 19", in: *Novum Testamentum*, Vol. 3, Fasc. 4 (December 1959), pp. 293-294; Roullet, pp. 2
[30] Takács, pp. 56-59, 67-68; Maehler, H., "Roman poets on Egypt", in: R.J. Matthews and C. Römer (eds.), *Ancient perspectives on Egypt*, London (2003), p. 205
[31] Takács, pp. 62-63
[32] Dio Cassius, 47.15-16

however the fact that they voted for such a temple, indicates that there were no ideological objections to a temple dedicated to Egyptian gods.[33]

1.3 The Egyptian cults during the early Empire

In retrospect, the repressions during the late Republic seemed to have had little effect on the long term. The aforementioned intention to dedicate of a temple to Isis and Sarapis and the victory at Actium meant a shift in the official position towards the Egyptian cults. However, soon after Actium, two more measures went into effect that banned the Egyptian cults from the *pomerium* once again. However, these bans had a different context and motivation than those during the late Republic.[34] The following passage from Dio, describing Octavian's ban of 28 BCE, confirms that the Egyptian cults were again banned from the *pomerium*, however, this time it is explicitly confirmed that Octavian allowed temples, built by private means, to be restored.

> 'As for religious matters, he did not allow the Egyptian rites to be celebrated inside the pomerium, but made provision for the temples; those which had been built by private individuals he ordered their sons and descendants, if any survived, to repair, and the rest he restored himself.' [35]

The fact that Octavian allowed existing temples to be restored refutes the often argued theory that the ban was a reflection of dislike. Rather it must be viewed as part of his program to restore religious uniformity.[36] According to Orlin it served to re-establish boundaries between Roman and non-Roman religion and identity.[37] In my opinion, this position agrees with the preceding political situation. After the civil wars and the political instability of the late Republic, Octavian certainly would have wished to re-assert Roman identity. The ban resulted in the removal of the cults from the official religious space and effectively relocated any cultic processions to outside the city proper, confirming Octavian as protector of Roman values and removing Egyptian rites from the public sphere without removing the Egyptian cults from Rome.

The following passage from Dio describes a further restriction of the ban carried out by Agrippa in 21 BCE. The intention of this restriction must also be seen as a removal of the cults from the public sphere.

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[33] Takács, p. 69
[34] Roullet, p. 2; Takács, pp. 75-78
[35] Dio Cassius, 53.2.4-5, translation: Cary, E. and H.B. Foster, Dio's Roman history: in nine volumes. vol. 6, Cambridge & London (1917), pp. 197-199
[36] Takács, p. 76
[37] Orlin, pp. 231, 234-236, 242-244

> ‘Agrippa, then, checked whatever other ailments he found still festering, and curtailed the Egyptian rites which were again invading the city, forbidding anyone to perform them even in the suburbs within one mile of the city.’ [38]

The Egyptian cults were now also banned from within an eight of a half-stadion of the city. This included the *pomerium* and a part of the suburbs (the *proastion*).[39] This removed them once again from the public sphere and the attention of crowds.

The earliest version of the Iseum Campense was most likely built in the years 20-10 BCE, which puts it shortly after the ban by Agrippa.[40] Its location on the Campus Martius, and therefore outside the *pomerium*, compliments the limitations of the bans, but also concords with the idea that the bans were not motivated by dislike of the Egyptian cults, but were more a reflection of their intention to restore uniformity.[41]

In effect, only the rites of the Egyptian cults were banned from the city proper. Other aspects of Egyptian religion and culture were left untouched, particularly the incorporation of Egyptian and Isiac motifs and the use of Nilotic scenes flourished. This is also evident from Octavian's use of Egyptian objects and aspects within public space. He relocated two Egyptian obelisks to Rome.[42]

During Tiberius’ reign, several sources make mention of the expulsion from Rome in 19 CE of adherents of the Isis cult, along with a number of Jews. The expulsion is described by both Tacitus and Suetonius, the former naming it an act of the Senate, the latter as an act of the emperor.[43]

> ‘He abolished foreign cults at Rome, particularly the Egyptian and Jewish, forcing all citizens who had embraced these superstitious faiths to burn their religious vestments and other accessories. Jews of military age were removed to unhealthy regions, on the pretext of drafting them into the army; those too old or too young to serve — including non-Jews who had adopted similar beliefs — were expelled from the city and threatened with slavery if they defied the order. Tiberius also banished all astrologers except such as asked for his forgiveness and undertook to make no more predictions.’ [44]

A third source about Tiberius' reign, Josephus, who wrote approximately a decade before Tacitus, describes a rather different version of events. Josephus gives a description of a scandal involving the

[38] Dio Cassius, 54.6, translation: Cary and Foster, vol. 6, p. 297
[39] Takács, pp. 76-77
[40] Versluys, M.J., *Aegyptiaca romana : Nilotic scenes and the Roman views of Egypt*, Leyden (2002), p. 12
[41] Orlin, pp 234-237
[42] Marlowe, E., “Framing the sun. The Arch of Constantine and the Roman cityscape”, in: *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 88, No. 2, p. 229
[43] Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.85
[44] Suetonius, *Tiberius* 36; translation: Graves, R., *The twelve Caesars*, Harmondsworth (1957), p. 128

Isis cult which prompted Tiberius into taking action against the cult. According to Josephus, this resulted in the crucifixion of Isiac priests and the demolishment of the temple of Isis.[45]

While the Roman reasoning for the repression of the Egyptian cults is not immediately clear from the passages from Tacitus and Suetonius, from the description from Josephus we may understand the ban of the adherents of the Isis cult as an attempt to restore Roman morals and values, or rather religious uniformity. Whether or not there is any truth to Josephus' version of the events, from the supposed involvement of the Isiac priests in the scandal we may assume that the cult was one of those blamed for the supposed moral deterioration, which was to be remedied by moral and religious sanctions.[46] The year in which this is said to have taken place, 19 CE, was filled with all sorts of problems, such as problems in the grain supply from Egypt and Tiberius' impaired authority due to Germanicus' actions in Egypt. These and other problems in the Eastern provinces created social and political instability, which Tiberius attempted to rectify by the expulsion of a number of the Jews and adherents of the Isis cult, because both could easily be connected to the problems in the Eastern provinces.[47] In this light it may be argued, that most persecutions of foreign cults could take place on moral grounds. In reality, reasons like the restoration of religious uniformity or the maintenance of public order would have been more feasible, and in this case the Jews and the adherents of the Egyptian cults were convenient scapegoats.

During the reign of Caligula the official position towards the Egyptian cults seemed to shift to a tolerance of the cults by the emperors, although the literary sources of the period still present a mostly negative tone.[48] The gradual acceptance of the Egyptian cults in the public sphere is also evident from the appearance of Isiac festivals in the Roman calendar. An example of this is an almanac from Rome, which dated approximately to the first century CE.[49] Although quite different from official calendars, it mentions several festivals, amongst which a sacrifice to Isis Pharia and the Sarapia in April. Beard notes that these festivals were probably not yet included in the official Roman calendar in the first century CE, however, a calendar from the fourth century CE, known as the ‘Calendar of Filocalus’ or

[45] Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae* 18.64-80
[46] Takács, pp. 83-86; Heyob, pp. 117-119
[47] Moehring, pp. 294-296
[48] Takács, pp. 87-91; Roullet, p. 2
[49] Beard (1998a), pp. 250-253; Frankfurter, D., *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and resistance*, Princeton (1998), pp. 56-57; *ILS* 8745; Degrassi *Inscriptiones Italiae. Vol. XIII: Fasti et elogia*, (1963), p. 288; Beard (1998b), pp. 67-69

the ‘Chronography of 354’, mentions the Sarapia on 25 April.[50] It's not possible to indicate the exact moment of the transition from banned or tolerated cult to officially recognised cult, however it must have been a gradual process.

The manner and extent of imperial support remained varied. Building projects such as the building or restoration of temples and shrines, seem to be the most common. Aside from Caligula, emperors such as Vespasian, Domitian, Hadrian, Caracalla and the Severi were the greatest contributors and restorers of Isea and Serapea.[51] Under the reign of Domitian, the Iseum Campense was again rebuilt after it was burned down by a fire in 80 CE, and an obelisk was erected in commemoration, depicting Domitian crowned by Isis. The depiction on the obelisk is interesting because it is in contradiction with the traditional depiction of pharaohs in supplication to the gods.[52] This demonstrates that the Romans adjusted aspects of Egyptian religion to suit their interests.

1.4 Aegyptiaca and Roman perspectives

By determining what kind of imagery was associated with Egyptian religion and which elements were deemed acceptable in the public sphere, our understanding of the Roman conception of Egyptian religion will improve. Important in this regard, is the shift in the modern understanding of Aegyptiaca during the past few decades. In the past, Egyptian artefacts were usually associated with the Isis cult. However, more recent research (particularly by Malaise, Bricault and Versluys) has sought to rectify this. Much of the recent research has focused on uncovering the meaning of *Aegyptiaca* in their Roman context, such as reflections of exoticism or imperial power.[53] According to Versluys, Malaise and Meyboom, the traditional view about Egyptian image culture in Rome was that the presence of Aegyptiaca signified affinity to the Egyptian deities.[54] The Aegyptiaca were therefore placed in a religious context, which often led to a direct connection to the Isis cult. Therefore it is difficult to determine which Aegyptiaca had religious significance or were viewed as religious objects. For a considerable number of objects the context is unclear or cannot be reconstructed, and there is a large degree of variation between different types of objects. For example, the great majority of the Nilotic

[50] CIL 1.256ff = RICIS 501/0221
[51] Roullet, pp. 2-5; Takács, pp. 114-116
[52] Takács, pp. 99-107
[53] Bricault and Versluys (2010), pp. 17-19
[54] Versluys (2002), pp. 26-33, Meyboom, P.G.P., *The Nile mosaic of Palestrina: Early evidence of Egyptian religion in Italy*, Leyden (1995), pp. 83-85; Malaise, M., “La diffusion des cultes égyptiens dans les provinces européennes de l'Empire romain”, In: *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II. 17.3, Berlin (1984), p. 1627

scenes hail from a private context, while sanctuaries and shrines are often public.[55] Versluys argues the following.

> 'The original meaning of the objects from Egypt therefore does not seem of primary importance; they were shipped to Rome also as exotica. The same seems to apply to the Egyptianizing artefacts manufactured in Rome after Egyptian examples. This does not mean that such artefacts, which after all were placed in a sanctuary, would not have had a function connected with the cults of the Egyptian gods. It does, however, indicate that the associations of the Roman observer would not have been solely religious.' [56]

It is very difficult to assess what Romans thought of the various Aegyptiaca, religious or otherwise. There is little doubt that the popularity of Aegyptiaca increased immensely after 31 BCE, since the amount of objects became considerable larger and the number of objects imported from Egypt was insufficient to satisfy the demand. In Egypt, the pharaonic monuments and temples were certainly admired. However, any opinions of Roman authors about Aegyptiaca are scarce, and are for the most part related to temples and zoomorphic deities, such as in Strabo and Cicero.[57]

However, also Aegyptiaca without a clear religious purpose may tell us something of the Roman concept of Egyptian religion. For example, reliefs, mosaics and Nilotic scenes often portray religious scenes, temples and other religious elements, and the frequent appearance of religious elements suggests that religion played an important part in the Roman conception of Egypt.

Two types of Aegyptiaca which are especially useful in depicting Roman conceptions of Egypt and Egyptian religion are reliefs and Nilotic scenes. These reliefs typically depicted scenes from Isiac ceremonies, including temples and ceremonies. The following two are of interest because of that. The first relief (figure 2), from a tomb in Ariccia, depicts a ritual ceremony or dance in front of a portico containing shrines with figures. The figures probably depict Isis, flanked by two figures of the Egyptian god Bes, who is seated between baboons. Other animals in the relief are birds, ibises, and a statue of the Apis bull.[58]

[55] Versluys (2002), pp. 248-251
[56] Versluys (2002), p. 355
[57] Strabo, *Geographica* 17.1.28; Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 1.29.81, 3.19.47
[58] Museo Nazionale Romano, no. 777255, as referred to in: Roullet, pp. 27-29 and fig. 20

Figure 2: Relief from Ariccia.
Source: Diffendale, D., *Navigium Isidis relief*, https://www.flickr.com/photos/dandiffendale/3965081710

A second relief, from Rome, depicts Isis holding a *cornucopia*, thereby associating her with prosperity.[59] She is accompanied by a sphinx, an Apis bull, an adherent and three priests, of which one is shown feeding crocodiles, an act which has also been mentioned by Strabo.[60] The relief also depicts a small temple, thought to be the Iseum Metellinum, which may have been the provenance of the relief.[61] Because of this, the relief may have had religious significance. The figures of Isis, the sphinx, the Apis bull and the priests are shown to be common elements associated with the Egyptian cults.

Nilotic scenes are depictions of the flooded Nile and its flora and fauna, but they also depict people and temples.[62] They are usually found as frescoes, paintings or mosaics. The well-known Nilotic scene from Praeneste has been studied by Meyboom and a comprehensive study about Nilotic scenes has been done by Versluys.[63] The Nile flood and its associated fertility were amongst the things the Romans, and the Greeks before them, admired and regarded with fascination. However the meanings and functions of Nilotic scenes are dependent on their context and location.[64] The second and first centuries BCE were characterised by very realistic depictions and representations of Egypt. Later Nilotic scenes were more stereotypical representations with lotus flowers, Egyptian fauna,

[59] Musei Vaticani, no. MV 2599
[60] Strabo, *Geog.* 17.1.38
[61] Versluys (2002), pp. 58-59
[62] Versluys (2002), p. 26
[63] Meyboom (1995); Versluys (2002)
[64] Versluys (2002), pp. 27-28

festivals, sanctuaries and Nilometers. Versluys argues that the conquest of Egypt thus led to a more stereotypical, less accurate view of Egypt, instead of a more accurate and detailed view.[65] Hence, religious elements, such as (flood) festivals and temples, are shown to have been part of a stereotypical view of Egypt.

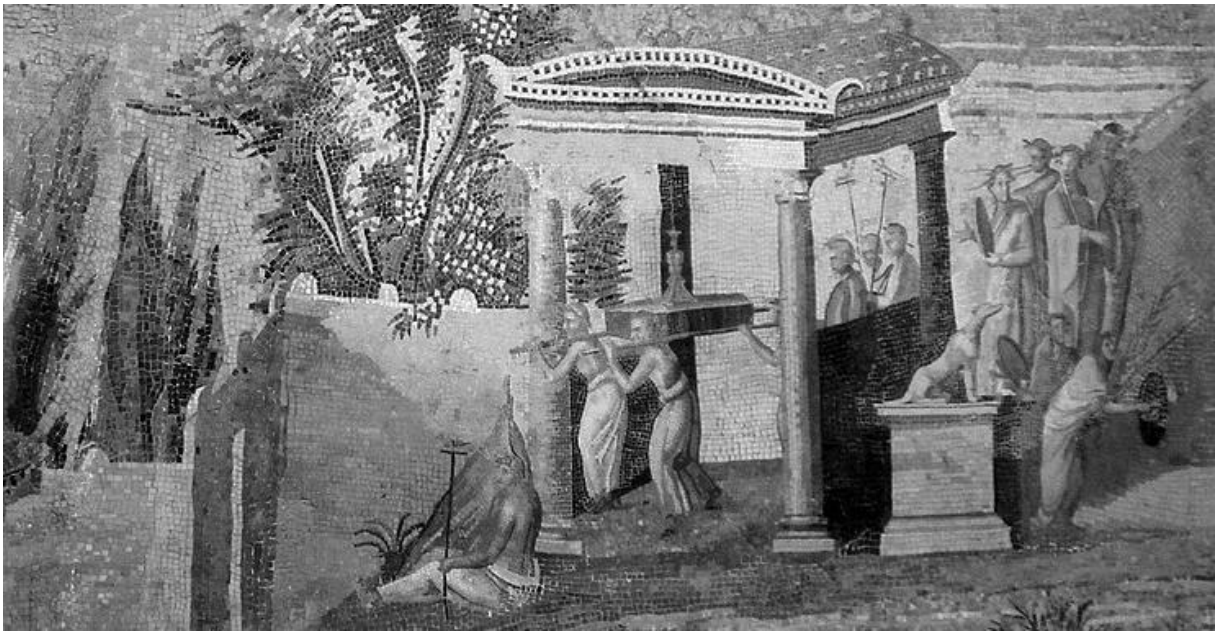

Figure 3: Religious procession. Detail from the Nile mosaic from Praeneste (modern Palestrina).
Source: Grahamta, *Religious Procession*, https://www.flickr.com/photos/polutlas/7487714882

One of the best known Nilotic scenes is the reconstructed mosaic from Praeneste, which was originally located in the vicinity of a sanctuary of Fortuna and was perhaps the Nile mosaic mentioned by Pliny.[66] It is possible to date it to the first century BCE. The Egyptian elements depicted in the mosaic probably constitute a good representation of the image of Egypt that existed among Romans, although it was probably more realistic that later scenes. The mosaic consisted of a complete representation of the Nile from Ethiopia to the Delta, and included Egyptians in priests' garb, Greek or Roman soldiers, temples and Ptolemaic or Hellenistic buildings. The lower part of the mosaic depicted Egypt and was divided into different scenes. One of the scenes depicted a festival related to the Nile flood (figure 3), possibly the *Khoiak* festival dedicated to Osiris, according to Meyboom.[67] He reasons that the depiction was a general impression of the festival, which included a procession with the newly revived mummy of Osiris in its sarcophagus, and he argues that it would have been understandable to

[65] Versluys (2002), pp. 288-289; for further analysis of the various elements of Nilotic scenes see pp. 262-266, 270-271, 274-276
[66] *The Oxford handbook of Roman Egypt*, pp. 684-685; Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia* 36.64.189
[67] Meyboom (1995), pp. 55-60, 71-75

both Romans and Egyptians.[68] Egyptian religious motifs also appear on coinage, such as the *sistrum*, the *situla* and the throne-like headdress of Isis, both during the Republic and in the imperial period, although the appearance of Isis is limited to imperial coinage.[69]

After analysing the different types of Aegyptiaca, it may be observed that Isis and several other deities, temples, priests, festivals and objects such as the *sistrum* were important motifs with which the Romans identified Egyptian religion, and it was clearly an important factor in the Roman conception of Egypt. Considering the frequent and widespread use of these motifs, it is reasonable to assume that they were generally accepted.

[68] Meyboom (1995), pp. 144-146
[69] Takács, pp. 34-38, 43-49; Curl, J.S., *The Egyptian Revival: Ancient Egypt as the inspiration for design motifs in the West*, London (2005), p. 56; Versluys (2002), p. 351; Meyboom (1995), pp. 155-158

Chapter 2

Roman authors on Egyptian religion

In this section, the opinions of Roman authors concerning various aspects of Egyptian religion shall be analysed. In general, Roman authors took very little notice of Egyptian religion, either in Rome, in Italy or in Egypt, prior to the conflict with Cleopatra and Mark Anthony.[70] With the exception of Varro, Cicero and Diodorus, all the major works by Roman authors about Egyptian religion stem from after the victory at Actium in 31 BCE.

The subjects discussed by the Roman authors can be divided in several groups: mythology, the Egyptian cults within Rome, animal worship and zoomorphic deities, and Egyptian priests. In a number of works, there is a contrast between appreciation of Egypt's monuments and knowledge on the one hand, and revulsion towards its priesthood, animal worship and the Egyptian cults on the other hand. A good example of this contrast can be found in Juvenal's fifteenth satire, in which his distaste for animal worship is obvious, while he also displays admiration for the statue of Memnon.[71] Other significant examples may be found in the accounts Diodorus and Cicero.[72] It should be kept in mind, that knowledge of Egypt and Egyptian religion was not evenly dispersed among Roman authors, and that some authors possessed greater knowledge through personal experience or through their literary traditions, while other authors' knowledge was superficial and limited to generalities.

2.1 On the Isis and Osiris mythology

One of the most important sources about the Isis and Osiris mythology is Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride*.[73] While based on the Egyptian myths, it is viewed from a Graeco-Roman philosophical perspective, and it attempts to make the myth understandable and acceptable for a Graeco-Roman audience. In Plutarch's manner of thought, Isis and Osiris represent the earth and moisture, life giving and receiving elements. Seth or Typhon, as the enemy, represents drought and the other destructive elements of nature. Plutarch uses this dualistic approach, creation and destruction, and compares it to

[70] Maehler, pp. 203-205
[71] Juvenal, *Sat.* 15, lines 1-6
[72] Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* 1.83 and 84; Cicero, *De Republica* 3.9.14
[73] Plutarch, *De Iside* 12-79

Persian religion, with its own dualistic mythology: Oromazes (Ahura Mazda) and Areimanios (Ahriman). In addition, this dualistic approach was recognizable to Greek philosophy, which was very much occupied with such opposites.[74]

The extent of dispersion of Plutarch's text and its use by other authors confirms that this version of the myth was widely accepted, although not by all ancient authors. It is clear however, that in Rome, prior to Plutarch's account, the intellectual circles had very little knowledge of Osiris and possibly only a very general picture of Isis.[75] This is apparent from the very general picture presented by the Republican and Augustan poets, with the possible exception of Tibullus. From what Plutarch includes *and* excludes in his version, we may draw some conclusions as to which elements were acceptable and which were not.[76]

Central to the myth are the themes of continuation and rebirth, and the emphasis on the family unit and family values.[77] Roman acceptance and emphasis of these themes may be expected, since the functioning of the family was an important aspect of Roman culture as well. Likewise, the use of violence in overcoming evil is a recognizable theme. Diodorus identifies Isis and Osiris as the creators of civilization and connects them with the invention of agriculture, putting an end to cannibalism and the introduction of laws.[78]

In contrast, there are several notable aspects of the original Egyptian myths that have been removed or moderated by Plutarch, and we should consider these were incompatible with the Graeco-Roman view. The most important of these were three instances with a sexual background: The adultery of Osiris, the seduction of Horus by Isis, and homosexual relations between Seth and Horus.[79] Matters of royal incest and homosexuality were unacceptable to the Romans. The Greeks probably had less problems with such subjects, as proven by the continuation of royal brother-sister marriages by the Ptolemies. However, Plutarch has suppressed any mention of adultery. Diodorus does not mention Osiris' adultery with their sister Nephthys explicitly, however, Isis' search for Anubis

[74] Plutarch, *De Iside* 47; as discussed in: Solmsen, F., Isis among the Greeks and Romans, London (1979), pp. 62-65
[75] Maehler, pp. 210-211
[76] Plutarch, *De Iside* 12-79
[77] Alvar, p. 47
[78] Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. Hist.* 1.15; Solmsen, pp. 34-35; Heyob, pp. 1-2
[79] Alvar, pp. 45, 48

— the product of the extramarital union — is mentioned, and the latter assists Isis in searching and assembling the parts of Osiris' body.[80]

Other parts of the myths that have been omitted are the castration and dismemberment of Seth and the amputation of Horus' hands.[81] Instead, the emphasis is on the ideal family unit represented by Osiris, Isis and Horus/Harpocrates and the sovereignty over Egypt, both of which are threatened by Seth (*Typhon*), and by which the cosmic order (*Ma'at*) is disrupted. Plutarch and Diodorus both emphasise Isis' qualities as a wife and mother, and Osiris' civilising qualities.[82] This emphasis is also apparent from the mother and child statues of Isis and Horus. The latter is represented as a symbol of continuation of the family unit as well as of political power. Another aspect of the myth, is the female weakness accorded to Isis, when she releases Seth from his chains, and the fury shown by Horus. In Plutarch's version, Isis' crown is torn off by Horus, however, in some Egyptian versions of the myth, Isis is decapitated.[83]

Aside from the descriptions by Plutarch and Diodorus, there are also the hymns or aretalogies that are common to the Isis cult, which usually listed Isis' name or names and her various achievements, with or without her husband Osiris.[84] Although these come from a more Graeco-Egyptian background, there are several elements that also occur in the adapted myth by Plutarch. The most important of these are the establishment of laws and justice; the invention of agriculture; the teaching of worship; the end of cannibalism.

Another aspect of the aretalogies is the omnipotence with which Isis is associated. The following example comes from an aretalogy from Kyme in Asia Minor.

> 'Whatever I decide is actually accomplished. To me everything yields. I free those in chains. I am mistress of seamanship. I make the navigable unnavigable whenever I decide. (...) I conquered fate. To me fate listens.' [85]

Book eleven of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* also includes an aretalogy.[86] In the passage Apuleius gives examples of deities under whose guise she is supposedly worshipped. Amongst those are the Athenian Minerva, the Cretan Dictynna Diana, Stygian Proserpina, and the Eleusinian Ceres. The deities named by Apuleius are extremely varied, and must be understood as Roman interpretations of

[80] Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. Hist.* 1.87.2-3, Alvar, pp. 41-52
[81] Alvar, p. 48
[82] Heyob, p. 74; Alvar, pp. 51-52, 323
[83] Alvar, pp. 47-48
[84] Beard (1998b), pp. 297-298; Solmsen, p. 42
[85] IG 12 Supp. 14; Inschr. Kyme no.41; translation: Beard (1998b), pp. 297-298
[86] Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.5-6, 11.23-25

various local goddesses. The relevance of this compiled list is ambiguous, as, in all probability, it was compiled by either Apuleius himself or by other adherents of the cult. There are few known references to equations of Isis with most of these deities, aside from Ceres, the Roman equivalent of Demeter, whom the Greeks identified with Isis. The other goddesses have, at most, a very marginal connection to Isis.[87] Hence, the list was probably compiled to assert Isis' universality.

2.2 On the Egyptian cults

The previous paragraph discussed sources which wrote mainly from a Greek philosophical perspective. However, authors who wrote from a more conservative Roman perspective had a very different outlook on Egyptian religion.

In various ways, purity and morality, as well as various kinds of abstention, have been observed as important aspects of the Isiac cults. However, the views asserted by a number of Roman authors, particularly the Augustan and elegiac poets, are in conflict with this. The reasons for these conflicting views are varied. On one side they must certainly have had a political background, given that most of the poets were situated in Rome. Octavian's campaign to restore religious uniformity and his propaganda campaign against Cleopatra must have been significant influences. In addition, the spectacle of the Egyptian cults with their use of mystery and emotion, to which Roman religion was not accustomed, may have been perceived as exotic or incongruous by some, and therefore not acceptable.[88]

Several aspects or rites of the Egyptian cults would have been regarded with distrust by outsiders, such as the alleged large number of women that frequented the temples and shrines, or the practice that adherents could spend the night at a temple. The Roman elegiac poets and satirists could easily imply the immorality of such ideas. The earlier mentioned scandal discussed by Josephus, involving the deception of the Roman matron Paulina by Decius Mundus at the temple of Isis, is a good example of how unfamiliar religious practices could perhaps be shown as threatening or

[87] Beard (1998b), pp. 298-300
[88] Heyob, pp. 112-113

immoral.[89] In addition, the presence of a significant number of women, though certainly not as much as was often claimed, was seen as suspicious in the eyes of Roman writers and poets.[90]

The cult's female adherents were described as easy of virtue and of loose morals. At the same time, several elegiac poets complain about their mistresses having to fulfil sexual abstinence during certain days, thus presenting us with an ambiguous view. The first author to allude to loose morality in connection to the adherents of the cults, was the late Republican poet Catullus.[91] However, his reference is vague, because his comment concerns a woman of uncertain involvement with the cult of Sarapis. More direct statements about the temples of Isis are found in Ovid's *Amores* and *Ars Amatoria*.[92] Ovid's comments are not explicit, but are suggestive of indecent behaviour between men and women, particularly when seen in the context of the texts themselves, particularly in the *Amores*, where he urges the reader not to enquire into 'what may go on in the temple of linen-robed Isis'. Similar comments concerning the temple of Isis as meeting place for men and women are found in Martial and in Juvenal's Satires.[93]

> 'After all, it's not so long ago, as I recall, that you were often to be found at the shrine of Isis and at Ganymede in the temple of Peace and at the secret Palace of the imported Mother and at Ceres (is there then any temple where women do not prostitute themselves?), a lover more notorious than Aufidius, and (something you keep quiet about) laying their husbands too.' [94]

These passages sketch a rather negative image of the Isis cult and its temples in the eyes of these poets. However, as indicated in the above passage from Juvenal, the allegations of immorality and prostitution were directed to multiple temples. Other passages from Ovid present the same allegations to the temples of Bona Dea, Venus and Apollo, and several other public places.[95] Therefore, the alleged immorality of the Isis cult was not connected to the fact that it was an originally foreign cult, but rather because it was a generalisation.[96]

Whilst considering the previous passages by Ovid and Juvenal, it is not surprising that the repression of the Isis cult and the following scandal mentioned in Josephus was described as an

[89] Josephus, *Ant. Jud.* 18.64-80
[90] Heyob, p. 112
[91] Catullus 10.24-32; Versluys (2002), p. 428
[92] Ovid, *Ars Amatoria* 1.77-78; *Amores* 2.2.25
[93] Martial, *Epigrammaton* 2.14.7-9, 11.47.3-4; Juvenal, *Sat.* 6, lines 488-89; *Sat.* 9, lines 22-25
[94] Juvenal, *Sat.* 9, lines 22-25, translation: S.M. Braund, *Juvenal and Persius*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Massachusetts) and London (2004), p. 353
[95] Ovid, *Ars Ama.* 1.67-68, 3.633-37; *Am.* 2.2.26
[96] Heyob, p. 115-116

offense motivated by passion.[97] The notion of the temple as meeting place for men and women of loose virtue had been connected to the alleged immoral actions of the priests of the cult, thereby legitimizing actions to be taken against the cult.[98]

The authors exhibit a view of temples and certain public areas functioning as meeting places for men and women. The supposed immorality of the Isis cult is therefore not related to the fact that the cult had Egyptian origins, nor that the cult had particularly immoral practices, but rather that the poets and later authors saw the temple as another location where immoral practices could thrive. Another indication of this, is that poets of the same period also complained about the Isis cult's stringent observation of chastity days. Ovid, Propertius and Tibullus all commented on a period of sexual abstinence.[99] These passages illustrate that sexual abstinence was observed on a regular basis, which was, with some exceptions, unfamiliar to Roman religion.[100] It is therefore far more likely that the Isis cult was known for its asceticism and chastity rather than for sexual excesses. A passage in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, in which the protagonist Lucius laments the harsh rules regarding abstinence and chastity, supports this.[101] Furthermore, there is sufficient inscriptional evidence, mostly funerary inscriptions, that confirms that the adherents of the Isis cult practiced, or were thought to practice, chastity.[102]

2.3 On festivals and processions

One of the most familiar elements of the Isis cult in the Roman period is the procession. Due to their public nature, the integration of festivals and processions demonstrates which aspects of Egyptian religion were accepted by the Roman public. The two festivals of the Isis cult, the *Navigium Isidis* and the *Isia* were tolerated outside the *pomerium* and the *proastion*. The *Navigium Isidis* revolved around the annual opening of the naval season and celebrated Isis Pelagia as the patroness of navigation, and it has been argued that the *Isia* (also known as the *Inventio Osiridis*) revolved around the death and resurrection of Osiris and the lamentation of Isis.[103] Unlike the *Navigium Isidis* however, there is very little detail known about the festival. It seems that the festival included an imitation of Isis' lament

[97] Josephus, *Ant. Jud.* 18.64-80
[98] Moehring, pp. 298-301
[99] Ovid, *Am.* 1.8.73-74, 3.9.33-34; Propertius 2.33.2; Tibullus, 1.3.25-32
[100] Heyob, pp. 116-117; Maehler, p. 209
[101] Apuleius, *Met.* 11.19; Heyob, pp. 118-124
[102] Heyob, pp. 120-124
[103] Apuleius, *Met.* 11.17; CIL 1.256ff = RICIS 501/0221; Alvar, pp. 296-298

over Osiris' death and her search for the parts of his corpse.[104] Nearly all literary sources that mention the festival, describe it with an air of great amusement and mockery, which is most evident with the poets and satirists of the Augustan age. Particularly Juvenal's sixth satire exhibits such mockery, for example in a passage in which he ridicules women's religiosity.

> 'Consequently, the highest, most exceptional honour is awarded to Anubis, who runs along, mocking the wailing populace, surrounded by his creatures in linen garments and with shaved heads.' [105]

The most informative source concerning Isiac processions and festivals is Apuleius' novel *Metamorphoses*. Although it is a novel in the first place, and descriptive rather than opinionated, the relevant passages are positive and express admiration for the procession.[106] He describes the elaborate dress of the adherents and priests, objects carried by the priests, and the use of music and musical instruments.[107] Particularly the Egyptian *sistrum* is often used by Roman authors in their narratives about Egypt. It is often associated with Isis, but also with Cleopatra, because of her personal identification with Isis. Particularly the Roman poets of the Augustan age, such as Virgil and Lucan,[108] make use of the *sistrum* as instrument of both Isis and Cleopatra in their narratives.[109]

2.4 On animal worship and zoomorphic and hybrid deities

The most discussed subjects of Egyptian religion, apart from the Isis cult, are animal worship and zoomorphic or hybrid deities. An analysis of most Greek and Roman works that mention animal worship has been conducted by Smelik and Hemelrijk. While not all Roman authors have a negative attitude (or an identifiable attitude at all) towards animal worship, most attitudes vary between embarrassment, confusion and revulsion. Some authors attempt to explain the phenomenon from a particular philosophy, while others simply dismiss or criticise it. Some authors, often writing from a Greek background, have a more positive attitude concerning animal worship. The attitude of some Greeks towards animals, was similar to that of Egyptians, albeit to a lesser degree. Animals, like humans, were viewed as creations of the gods, and therefore not subject to humans, according to Smelik and Hemelrijk. Therefore it was not thought unnatural to worship a god in the shape of an animal or to worship the animal itself. Romans probably did not have a much different outlook than the

[104] Heyob, pp. 54-55
[105] Juvenal, *Sat.* 6, lines 532-534, translation: Braund, p. 285
[106] Apuleius, *Met.* 11.9-10
[107] Alvar, pp. 311; Beard (1998b), pp. 134-137, pp. 303 (section 12.4e); Maehler, p. 208
[108] Virgil, *Aeneid* 8.696; Lucan, *Pharsalia* 8.832
[109] Beard (1998b), pp. 135-136, p. 303; Maehler, p. 208

Greeks, however the large numbers of animals dying in the Roman arenas were likely influential to Roman opinion.[110] In addition, the zoomorphic and hybrid representation of Egyptian deities was misunderstood by the Romans. To Egyptians, the iconographic representation of these deities was merely an interpretation. The gods were neither anthropomorphic nor zoomorphic; their depiction was merely a way to portray the various aspects of their nature in the best manner. The aesthetic value of the representation was also influential, and a lot of Egyptian deities had more than one iconographic representation. It is clear from the sources that Roman authors considered the representation of the Egyptian zoomorphic and hybrid deities much more a representation of the reality.[111]

In the following paragraphs, a selection of texts concerning animal worship and zoomorphic and hybrid deities will be discussed to formulate a more concrete Roman perspective. Attention will also be devoted to whether authors had visited Egypt, were familiar with its culture or had a certain affinity with the Egyptian cults. Those authors whose knowledge of Egypt or its culture was slight or limited to basic knowledge constituted a majority. Not entirely unexpected, the lack of genuine knowledge or full understanding is often coupled with a negative attitude. In such instances where authors lacked the necessary knowledge to understand the Egyptian practices, it is logical to assume they fell back on Roman concepts of proper religion.

The attitude of Cicero is mainly negative concerning animal worship. However, his attitude towards Egypt and Egyptians is not necessarily negative in *De Republica* and *De Natura Deorum*. In *De Republica*, he refers to Egypt as ‘that most uncorrupted nation’, before lamenting that the Egyptians hold all manner of monsters and beasts sacred.[112] In *De Natura Deorum*, he praises the fact that the Egyptians never plundered and desecrated their temples, whilst later on, an enumeration of mostly Egyptian sacred animals is used to reflect a sense of revulsion.[113] Thus, negative opinion focused on very specific aspects such as animal worship and sacred animals.

In the *Aeneid*, celebrating Octavian's victory at Actium, Virgil inserts a religious sphere around the battle.[114] Naturally, Octavian is supported by the Roman gods, while Mark Anthony and Cleopatra are backed by the Egyptian gods. It's significant that he does not associate Mark Anthony and Cleopatra with the most obvious and best known deities in the Egyptian pantheon, Isis and

[110] Smelik and Hemelrijk, pp. 1858-1859
[111] Smelik and Hemelrijk, pp. 1861-1864
[112] Cicero, *De Rep.* 3.9.14; as discussed in: Smelik and Hemelrijk, pp. 1956-1957
[113] Cicero, *Nat. Deor.* 1.29.81 and 3.19.47; as discussed in: Smelik and Hemelrijk, pp. 1956-1957
[114] Virgil, *Aeneid* 8.698-700, as discussed in: Smelik and Hemelrijk, pp. 1853-1857

Osiris/Sarapis. Instead, he associates them with zoomorphic and hybrid deities: ‘Monstrous shapes of every species, including Anubis the barker’. The purpose was clearly to instil revulsion of Octavian's opponents. In this light, the fact that Egypt's best known anthropomorphic deities, Isis and Osiris, were not mentioned in this context at all, underlines that Virgil attempted to vilify Mark Anthony and Cleopatra by associating them with only 'monstrous gods'. By this period (the first century BCE), Isis and Sarapis were already well known in the Graeco-Roman world, and association with them would not have had Virgil's desired intent.[115] In extension, it would seem that there was no such resistance against Isis or Sarapis.

The negative attitude is even more clearly felt in a number of texts of late Republican and Augustan poets and satirists. Some, like Ovid, mention sacred animals only in passing and without any kind of opinion. On the other hand, the works of satirists Juvenal and Lucian are, for the most part, expressions of aversion and distaste. A passage from Lucian's *Imagines*, in which he speaks admiringly of an Egyptian temple’s architecture, he expresses his distaste when he notes that the deity within was an animal. A similar passage is found in Strabo further on.[116] More interesting is his *Deorum Concilium*, in which a number of deities are questioned by Zeus.

> ‘You there, you dog-faced, linen-vested Egyptian, who are you, my fine fellow, and how do you make out that you are a god, with that bark of yours? And with what idea does this spotted bull of Memphis receive homage and give oracles and have prophets?’ [117]

In the passage, both Anubis and the Apis bull are ridiculed, and the paragraph continues with the mention of ‘ibises, monkeys and goats and other ludicrous creatures that have been smuggled into heaven’. The interesting part of the *Deorum Concilium* is that, further on in the passage, it is mentioned that the animalistic aspects of the deities are symbolism, thus expressing an entirely different view.[118]

Juvenal's fifteenth satire relates a conflict between the citizens of two Egyptian towns, Ombos and Tentyra, which originated from the different animals each town worshiped.[119] Such conflicts are also mentioned by Pliny and Strabo.[120] Juvenal mentions a person from one of the towns being

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[115] Maehler, pp. 208
[116] Lucian, *Imagines* 11; Strabo, *Geog.* 17.1.28
[117] Lucian, *Deorum Concilium* 10 (533); translation: Harmon, A.M., *Lucian: in eight volumes*, vol. 5, London and Cambridge (1936), p. 431
[118] Smelik and Hemelrijk, pp. 1967-1969
[119] Juvenal, *Sat.* 15, lines 1-6, 32-92 and 110-116
[120] Strabo, *Geog.* 17.1.44; Pliny the Elder, *Nat. His.* 8.38.92 and 28.3.31; Aelian, *De Natura Animalium* 10.21 and 10.24

lynched in considerable detail and with no small amount of distaste.[121] His antipathy towards animal worship, but also towards Egypt in general is very clear. Unlike Cicero and Lucian, who fell back on a traditional revulsion of practices that did not conformed to Roman ideas, Juvenal's revulsion towards Egyptian culture probably originated from his banishment to Egypt. However, only at the start of the text does Juvenal reveal some knowledge about animal worship. He mentions the veneration of the crocodile, the ibis and several others, however these examples may have been common knowledge.[122]

A negative attitude is also present in Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*. However, here it is clearly Pliny's personal view of religion that forms the foundation of his negative view of animal worship. He rejects the idea that animals could be divine and that divine beings were or could be anthropomorphic figures or inanimate objects. He states that he considers it a human weakness to inquire into the form of God or divisions into different gods.[123] Aside from this passage, Pliny mentions animal worship only at one other occasion. The passage itself lacks a negative attitude, which is attributed by Smelik and Hemelrijk to Pliny's regard for the ox, because of its value to agriculture.[124] Considering the small amount of information in his work, it is likely that Pliny's knowledge about or interest in Egyptian culture went no further than generalities.

It may be assumed, that the information about animal worship, such as presented by Statius, Cicero and Virgil, was general knowledge in Roman intellectual circles. The worship of the Apis bull was clearly known, as was the veneration of hybrid deities such as Anubis. However it is likely that most authors knew little more than that.[125] More knowledgeable authors are found in other writing traditions. On the one hand, Strabo briefly mentions a number of animals which were venerated in specific cities, however, this is done without any explanation. However, in a passage in which he discusses Egyptian temples in general, he remarks that the *pronaoi* of temples had ‘no statue, or rather no statue of human form, but only of some irrational animal’.[126]

On the other hand, there are several authors which discuss and attempt to explain animal worship from a philosophic or symbolic point of view. The most important of these are Plutarch and

[121] Smelik and Hemelrijk, p. 1965
[122] Smelik and Hemelrijk, pp. 1965-1967; Maehler, p. 212
[123] Pliny the Elder, *Nat. His.* 2.5.1-10; 8.70-71; Smelik and Hemelrijk, pp. 1959-1960
[124] Pliny the Elder, *Nat. His.* 8.183-185; Smelik and Hemelrijk, p. 1960
[125] Smelik and Hemelrijk, pp. 1959-1960
[126] Strabo, *Geog.* 17.1.28, as discussed in: Smelik and Hemelrijk, pp. 1958-1959

Diodorus, and to a lesser degree Aelian, all of whom wrote from a Greek rather than a Roman tradition.

Plutarch and Diodorus both have a greater understanding of the worship of animals and zoomorphic deities, although to both authors the practice is ultimately unacceptable and incompatible with their own philosophies. Plutarch uses symbolic explanations to justify the worship of various animals, such as the Apis bull, the ibis and the crocodile, and uses Greek examples to make them more comprehensible.

> 'But the public ceremonies which the priests perform in the burial of the Apis, when they convey his body on an improvised bier, do not in any way come short of a Bacchic procession; for they fasten skins of fawns about themselves, and carry Bacchic wands and indulge in shoutings and movements exactly as do those who are under the spell of the Dionysiac ecstasies. For the same reason many of the Greeks make statues of Dionysus in the form of a bull.' [127]

In the passage, the burial of the Apis bull is related to practices from the Dionysian mysteries. The association with Dionysus is not unusual, since Osiris and the Apis bull are commonly identified with the Greek deity. Plutarch ultimately believes that the actual veneration of animals as deities, as opposed to veneration as the sacred animals of specific deities, leads to superstition and godlessness. At the same time he does not regard the idea of the divine in zoomorphic, but also in inanimate, forms as inferior and inconceivable, though it is unacceptable to his own religious views.[128]

Diodorus' manner of approach and reasoning are different from Plutarch's. In general, he is very positive about many aspects and customs of Egyptian religion and considers them moral and acceptable.[129] His discussion of animal worship is very different. Diodorus displays a nervous attitude towards the subject, and Smelik and Hemelrijk suggest that he expected a negative reaction from his audience.[130] Diodorus' own opinion remains somewhat ambiguous, but in general he seems to be of opinion that it led to excessive fanaticism and disorder, as is clear from the passages in which he discusses the penalties for the intentional or unintentional killing of sacred animals.[131] The ambiguity of his opinion is apparent in the fact that he does not explicitly reject the concept of the divine appearing

[127] Plutarch, *De Iside* 35; translation: Babbitt, F.C., *Plutarch's Moralia*, Vol. 5 (The Loeb Classical Library), London and Cambridge (1936), pp. 85-87
[128] Plutarch, *De Iside* 71-75, as discussed in: Smelik and Hemelrijk, pp. 1961-1964
[129] Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. Hist.* 1.91-93; Smelik and Hemelrijk, p. 1899
[130] Smelik and Hemelrijk, p. 1900
[131] Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. Hist.* 1.83.6-8

in zoomorphic form, nor the divine nature of animals, and that he is astonished by the dedication of the Egyptians to animal worship.[132]

Aside from Diodorus' obvious distaste for the excesses and fanaticism, he comments very little on the actual practices. The majority of the text is dedicated to the explanation and rationalization of the practice, rather than on commentary. Diodorus attempts to explain the practice by referring to mythical and historicised events that claim to have brought about animal worship, and by rationalizing animal worship through the usefulness of particular animals.[133]

The third Roman author who seeks to offer explanations of animal worship and zoomorphic deities rather than a straight out disapproval, is Aelian. He often refers to animal worship in his discussion of various animals. His work is predominantly based on earlier Greek authors, whom he often cites. Aelian is extraordinarily positive about animal worship, which is probably due, according to Smelik and Hemelrijk, to his reliance on Greek sources and his particular interest in animals.[134] He most often makes use of rationalizing and moralizing interpretations, and in that respect he deviates from Diodorus and Plutarch, who make more use of historicizing and symbolic interpretations. His interpretations sometimes make use of comparisons of particular animals in Egyptian and Greek religion and mythology, such as the hawk, which he regards as sacred to Apollo or Horus.[135] Aelian also differs from Diodorus and Plutarch, in the respect that he does not seem to express any embarrassment about animal worship, however, this may also be due to his reliance on Greek sources or his interest in animals.[136]

2.5 On Egyptian priests

Another of the recurring subjects in Roman opinion about Egyptian religion is the priesthood, which prior to the Roman conquest wielded enormous economic and political power. The Roman conquest brought on confiscation of the majority of temple-land and a thorough reorganization of the priesthood,

[132] Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. Hist.* 1.12.9, 1.83-84, as discussed in: Smelik and Hemelrijk, pp. 1898-1903
[133] Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. Hist.* 1.86.4-5, 1.87-89
[134] Smelik and Hemelrijk, p. 1971
[135] Aelian, *Nat. Anim.* 10.14, 10.22, 10.27, Smelik and Hemelrijk, p. 1972; Scholfield, A.F., *Aelian. On the characteristics of animals: in three volumes. II*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Massachusetts) and London (1959), pp. 303-305
[136] Smelik and Hemelrijk, p. 1973

ultimately causing the impoverishment and abandonment of many temples.[137] Despite the loss of economic and political power, the priesthood lost little of its social and cultic significance, particularly in the sphere of festivals and practices of divination and magic. Roman opinion about the priesthood is focused on its capacity and potential for charisma and leadership, and its ritual and magical expertise.[138] The image of Egyptian priests in literary sources is not unanimous, although there are oft repeated characteristics. The main image of Egyptian priests in Apuleius' work and the aretalogies, was that of a caring priest who guided initiates, with a shaved head and white robes.[139] However, this image seems to be unique amongst the Roman sources, because most opinions of Egyptian priests are considerably less favourable. Even the severity and strictness noted here, are often absent in most Roman authors. However, there is little reason to doubt Apuleius' credibility, his position towards the cult was certainly closer than that of other authors, and his background certainly allows for a more positive point of view.[140]

One of the more common views of Egyptian priests, is that of the charlatan. In Juvenal's sixth satire, which describes the celebration of the death of Osiris, a priest representing the deity Anubis was described as a swindler, jeering amongst the crowd mourning the deity's death. Juvenal's representation of this feature, gives the impression that Anubis was laughing at or ridiculing the cult. A priest impersonating Anubis was also described begging forgiveness from Osiris if a female adherent fails the sexual abstention. He does allude, emphasizing the Egyptian cults' corruptness, that the main reason for the forgiveness was the offering of a goose and a sacrificial cake.[141] Likewise the Isiac priests, particularly those who practice divination and astrology, were considered charlatans by Cicero. In the passage, he refers specifically to *Isiacos coniectores* in the context of other practitioners of divination which he disapproved of.[142]

Concerning magical practices, we may observe an unsurprising difference in the manner magic is regarded by Roman authors, particularly novelists, and the Roman authorities. While Roman authors, such as Apuleius, Lucian and Heliodorus, appear to have varying degrees of fascination with magical practices, the Roman authorities supposedly became ever more opposed to the public

[137] Frankfurter, pp. 198-200
[138] Frankfurter, pp. 204-211
[139] Apuleius, *Met.* 11.21
[140] Beard (1998b), p. 212
[141] Juvenal, *Sat.* 6, lines 522-541; Maehler, p. 212
[142] Cicero, *De Divinatione* 1.132; Versluys (2002), p. 426

practices of magic and produced laws that forbade them. Such as the Severan ban on divination from 198/199 CE which labelled Egyptian temple oracles as deception.[143]

> 'Encountering many who believed themselves to be deceived by the practices of divination, I quickly considered it necessary, in order that no danger should ensue upon their foolishness, clearly herein to enjoin all people to abstain from this hazardous inquisitiveness.' [144]

In Rome also, astrology and divination were often repressed because of its perceived dangers to the public and the authorities. Astrology was only acceptable as part of divination in an official Roman religious context or in the service of the imperial court. It is particularly in that last capacity that we find any mention of Egyptian magicians outside novels, where these figures were mostly regarded in a positive light.[145] One such is the Egyptian *hierogrammateus* Arnuphis in the entourage of Marcus Aurelius.[146]

> 'Indeed, there is a story to the effect that Arnuphis, an Egyptian magician, who was a companion of Marcus, had invoked by means of enchantments various deities and in particular Mercury, the god of the air, and by this means attracted the rain.' [147]

This Arnuphis is perhaps the same historical figure who dedicated an altar to Isis in Aquileia.[148] It was probably dedicated in 169 CE, when Marcus Aurelius spent the winter there, thus providing the best connection between Cassius Dio's passage and the historical Arnuphis.[149]

As the case of Arnuphis demonstrates, Egyptian priests were associated with extraordinary acts and the possession of sacred knowledge. The reason that Egyptian priests and magicians were chosen for this literary role, may be because Egypt had an old historical tradition.[150] It is possible that Egyptian priests encouraged this image of possessing sacred knowledge and magic, and assumed a broader Mediterranean and Near Eastern image of magician-priests.[151] Frankfurter describes it as follows.

> 'Besides a purveyor of magic the Egyptian priest was constructed (like all Near Eastern priests) as a philosopher, astrologer, and diviner: one who lived a life of perfect moderation, studied actual ancient

[143] P. Yale Inv. 299 = P. Coll. Youtie I 30; further discussion in: Rea, J., "A New Version of P. Yale Inv. 299", in: *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, Vol. 27, (1977), pp. 151-156
[144] P. Yale Inv. 299 = P. Coll. Youtie I 30, translation: Rea, pp. 152-154
[145] Frankfurter, p. 220
[146] Smelik and Hemelrijk, p. 1936
[147] Dio Cassius, 72.8, translation: Cary, E. and H.B. Foster, *Dio's Roman history: in nine volumes. vol. 9*, Cambridge and London (1927), p. 29; The use of Mercury here probably referred to the Egyptian god Thoth.
[148] AE 1934, 245
[149] Kovács, P. 'Epigraphic records', in: M. van Ackeren (ed.), *A companion to Marcus Aurelius*, (Blackwell companions to the ancient world), Chichester (2012), pp. 84-87
[150] Takács, pp. 109-112
[151] Frankfurter, p. 225

> texts, knew volumes about the heavens and their interpretation, and had numerous authentic techniques through which to tell the future.[152]

This image of the magician-priest was also prevalent among Graeco-Roman novelists. Well-known examples of such magician-priests are Kalasiris in Heliodorus' *Aethiopica* and Panchrates in Lucian's *Philopseudes*.[153] In general, it is clear, that Roman authors have focused on the magical aspects and knowledge of the divine in their discussions of Egyptian priests.

To conclude, the above analysis demonstrates that there is not a single view of Egyptian religion that covers the opinions of all authors, but rather a variety of different opinions. These views were influenced by socio-political factors and ideas about morality, and show a considerable degree of variation. The Roman views often expressed mockery, revulsion and embarrassment. Despite that, the Romans admired the Egyptian religious dedication, their respect for their gods and temples, and Egyptian wisdom.

[152] Frankfurter, pp. 220-221
[153] Heliodorus, *Aethiopica* 2.27; Lucian, *Philopseudes* 34-36; as discussed in: Frankfurter, p. 217-220

Case study 2

Roman perspectives on the religions of ancient Gaul

In contrast to the variation in the Roman perspectives on Egyptian religion, Roman discourse on Gallic religion seems strikingly homogeneous. It should be kept in mind that knowledge about Gaul amongst Roman authors varied, and that the majority of them probably relied on very little knowledge and on generalisation. Others were perhaps motivated by their own personal experiences and writing traditions. On the other hand, most of the aspects of Gallic religion which ancient authors wrote about, such as human sacrifice, didn't truly lend itself for a varied perspective. Still, in other religious aspects we may find some degree of variation. Nevertheless, the impression arises that either Roman opinion was fairly homogeneous and that most Roman discourse was based on very few sources.

The three major subjects under discussion are human sacrifice, the Druids and the barbarity of the religion. Aside from that there is some minor discussion about divination and the deities worshipped by the Gauls. The majority of literary sources range from the early first century BCE to the late second century CE.

Because still very little is known of Gallic religion prior to the conquest, comparisons of Gallic religion before and after the conquest are inadequate and fragmentary at best. Therefore the first part of this case study will be devoted to religion in Roman Gaul, particularly the transformation of Gallo-Roman deities and the introduction of the imperial cult. Due to the frequent references in literary sources, Druidism and human sacrifice will be briefly discussed as well, in order to determine whether they were still relevant during and after the Roman conquest, and to provide a context for the literary tradition.

The second part of the case study will concentrate of the perspectives of Roman authors on Gallic religion. Therefore a further examination of the Roman concepts of *barbaritas* and *humanitas* will be beneficial, and will provide a broader context for the Roman perspectives about Gallic religion.

Due to the lack of local written sources that predate the Roman conquest of Gaul, our knowledge and understanding of Gallic religion is extremely limited. One of the earliest surviving accounts that described Gallic religion to an extent, is Caesar's *De Bello Gallico*, and it remains the

most informative text on Gallic religion. Parts of the account were probably based on older, Greek sources, possibly the lost work of Posidonius, but it is unclear which parts this concerns. Other major works are those by Diodorus and Strabo, which probably contain parts from Posidonius as well.

Of the majority of texts that concern the religion of Gaul, it is unknown or uncertain how the authors obtained their knowledge. Posidonius' work probably had the handicap of being limited to the region surrounding Massilia, which was the only region of Gaul that Posidonius visited. Therefore, the sections in Diodorus and Strabo which were possibly derived from Posidonius' work, probably do not reflect Gaul in its entirety.[154] In addition, Gallia Narbonensis had been conquered some decades before Posidonius wrote his work, therefore the Greek and Roman presence was already notable.

Other parts of the Gallic provinces probably had very little or no interaction with Mediterranean culture prior to the Roman conquest, therefore the degree of Romanisation in the South was probably much greater than in the regions further inland. In general, it can be said, that certain aspects of Roman life were adopted, such as education and architecture, while other aspects, such as religion, were selectively integrated.[155] According to Woolf, the understanding that some Gallic tribes had of their culture's history was almost completely classical. This classical influence was not solely Roman, but included significant Greek influences as well. Either way, there is very little evidence of the late La Tène society in accounts by Roman authors, as well as in for example the Gallo-Roman panegyrics.[156] Aside from the influence of Roman concepts about *humanitas* and barbarism, it is probable that the way the Romans regarded Gallic religion, but also other North and West European religions, was also influenced by the restoration of Republican values and religious uniformity, as discussed in the first case study. Roman opinion was presumably less restricted in the provinces, than it was in Rome, but such views were likely still influential.[157]

[154] Webster, J., "At the end of the world: Druidic and other revitalization movements in post-conquest Gaul and Britain", in: *Britannia*, vol. 30 (1999), pp. 8-9
[155] Woolf, pp. 8-10, 18-21
[156] Woolf, pp. 3-5, 242
[157] Derks, T., *Gods, temples and ritual practices: The transformation of religious ideas and values in Roman Gaul*, Amsterdam (1998), p. 27

Chapter 1

Religion in Roman Gaul

Figure 4: Map of Roman Gaul after the reorganisation by Domitian approximately 84 CE: Gallia Narbonensis, Gallia Aquitania, Gallia Lugdunensis, Gallia Belgica, Germania Inferior and Germania Superior.
Source: Encyclopædia Britannica Online, *Roman Gaul* (2011), http://www.britannica.com/media/full/1627

The general consensus has been that Rome only rarely intervened in religious life in its provinces, and, in such a case, usually only in reaction to practices and beliefs that conflicted with their own. Like in Egypt, the Romans probably intervened in Gaul. Possibly in the case of the Druids and human sacrifice, although, for both subjects, such an intervention is debated. The view that Rome only exceptionally intervened in the religious practices in Gaul is sometimes contested with the argument,

that the role of the local elite has been exaggerated and that Rome must have played a greater role in the transformation of Gallic religion.[158]

Gallic religion prior to the Conquest was not static and in its functions and composition, it was very similar to other Indo-European religions. Watson argues that Gallic religion was changing prior to the Roman conquest, and that the only major changes were the introduction of epigraphy and perhaps the increase in the anthropomorphic portrayal of deities.[159] Internal political and social changes probably caused changes prior to the Conquest, but probably also through Greek influence. I propose, therefore, that the interaction with Rome perhaps gave the largest impulse of change in Gallic religion, but that it was part of an ongoing process.

Prior to the Roman conquest, the Mediterranean region of the Gallic provinces was influenced by Greek and other Mediterranean cultures. This is particularly the case in the region surrounding Massilia.[160] Greek and Mediterranean influences — including those from Rome and Italy — were less intense and of a much later date further north. Religion was an important factor in the political climate in the Gallic provinces during the period directly after the conquest. This is clear from the installation of the imperial cult at Lugdunum in 12 BCE, after a period of unrest in the region and after revolts in Britain and Germany.[161] The installation of the imperial cult in the Western provinces is clearly a counteraction against the rebellions and opposition there.

Reactions to the Roman conquest and the subsequent transformation of Gallic culture must have been varied, depending on many factors such as region, tribe, social position and personal experience, and must have ranged from outright opposition to acceptance to striving for Roman citizenship and endorsing Graeco-Roman culture. The acceptance and incorporation of Roman culture could have had many advantages and opportunities for the elite, such as important positions and functions, distinction, power and education.[162] For example, the priesthood offered new positions of authority that were previously only available to the Druids and other religious groups.[163] At the other end of the spectrum were those who stood to lose the most under Roman dominion. The Druids can

[158] Derks, pp. 27-28; Woolf, p. 11
[159] Watson, A., Religious acculturation and assimilation in 'Belgic Gaul' and 'Aquitania' from the Roman Conquest until the end of the second century CE, Oxford (2007), p. 4
[160] Woolf, p. 218
[161] Woolf, p. 207
[162] Derks, p. 35
[163] Woolf, p. 231

certainly be placed at this end, although their position was already declining before the Conquest. Even so, their decline created opportunities for new religious functions according to Roman models.

What the position of the population was, is nigh impossible to determine. The sources do not give the impression that, from a religious point of view, there was much opposition to Roman religious influence, and the relatively fast spread of Roman religion suggests the same. Opposition seems to have had political and social reasons rather than cultural reasons.

There has been a great deal of discussion about whether the transformation was enforced from above or adopted from below.[164] Neither a complete top-bottom or a bottom-top approach seems realistic, and the answer must be found somewhere in between. Rome was probably the dominant partner in this, but the influence and cooperation of the Gallic elite should not be discounted. In general, Roman religion and rituals must have had a significant amount of appeal in order to justify the widespread application of Roman ritual tradition.[165] Unfortunately nothing of this development has been documented.

It is probable that the Gallo-Roman elite, along with settled veterans, were the first patrons of the transformed religious system. However, the lower masses must have supported the new system as well, since many aspects of Roman culture were adopted. This is clear in the widespread use of Roman-style rituals in private religion as well as the appearance of Roman and syncretised deities. In general, it may be said that most cults were neither imposed nor banned, but it is likely that the Gallo-Romans were encouraged to adhere to the new cults. A high degree of Roman involvement is unlikely, because province-wide social reform and reorganisation would be expensive, and Romans tended to avoid more expense than was strictly necessary.[166]

1.1 The transformation of Gallic religion

Associations between native and Roman deities were a product of local interpretation, probably during the period between the Conquest and the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius.[167] These associations must have required local elites to have had some knowledge of Graeco-Roman myths, and there must have

[164] Aldhouse-Green, M., *Caesar's druids: Story of an ancient priesthood*, New Haven (2010), p. 238
[165] Woolf, p. 229
[166] Watson, p. 1
[167] Derks, p. 100

been some exchange of ideas and knowledge.[168] No cosmologies or panthea have survived, but if we follow the reasoning of Derks, who supposes that Gallic religion did not significantly vary from that of other Indo-European societies, Gallic cosmologies and creational myths would have had similar structures.[169]

In contrast to the large amount of archaeological evidence of Gallo-Roman deities, there are few mentions in literary sources. Caesar mentions only five different deities, and all are identified by Roman names and functions.[170] It is highly unlikely that Caesar's interpretation covered the aspects of all deities worshipped by the Gauls, and the Gallic pantheon with its local variations must have been very complex. Caesar's description of the deities must therefore be seen in the light of clarifying and structuring it for a Roman public.

It should be kept in mind that the deities put forward by Caesar (Mercury, Apollo, Mars, Jupiter and Minerva) did not correspond to a single deity on the Gallic side. The deity named Mercury corresponded to a number of deities throughout various regions that exhibited similar functions of the Roman Mercury, and in many cases epithets point to regional variations.[171]

Lucan supplied the names of three native deities: Teutates, Esus and Taranis. However, it is difficult to elaborate on their possible functions only on the basis of their names. Furthermore, it is not certain whether all three were Gallic deities, since at least Teutates is only mentioned in inscriptions from outside Gaul. Esus and Taranis both have only a handful of inscriptions dedicated to them, therefore it is likely that they were local deities.[172] Lucan probably derived the three names from an ethnographic account, perhaps that of Posidonius, and it is unlikely he himself had significant knowledge about Gaul.[173] Other deities with native names mentioned in Roman literary sources are Poeninus (who was later identified with Jupiter) and Epona.[174]

Aside from the above mentioned deities, others have been preserved in archaeological remains, although generally their names remain unknown. An important recurring deity is the Antlered deity,

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[168] Derks, pp. 109-110
[169] Derks, pp. 74-75
[170] Caesar, *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* 6.16; translation: Edwards, H.J., Caesar: *The Gallic war*, London and New York (1930), p. 341
[171] Andringa, W. van, *La religion en Gaule Romaine. Piété en politique (Ier-IIIe siecle apr J-C.)*, Paris (2002), pp. 135-137
[172] Watson, p. 50
[173] Watson, pp. 49-50
[174] For Poeninus: Livy 21.38.9; For Epona: Juvenal, *Sat.* 8, lines 155-157; Plutarch, *Parallela Graeca et Romana* 29; Apuleius, *Met.* 3.27

sometimes identified as Cernunnos, whose depiction continued for a considerable time in Belgica and Aquitania after the Conquest.[175]

Following Derks' hypothesis about the similarity to other Indo-European religions, we may assume that Gallic deities did not have significantly different functions as in other Indo-European religions. Caesar's description of the Gallic pantheon in Roman guise, certainly seems to confirm this, although Caesar may be projecting a very general and selective picture. However, from his description, the main areas related to worship seem to have been agriculture, fertility, medicine, healing, commerce, prosperity, protection and warfare. From the Caesar's perspective, and presumably others also, the functions that Gallic deities fulfilled, appeared to be quite similar to those of Roman deities.

The major differences are therefore found in iconography and naming. The syncretism in Gallo-Roman deities took different forms. Deities could be depicted with a variety of Roman, native and syncretised iconography and names.[176] However, making assumptions based on iconography and names is complicated. Inscriptions for a deity with only a native name cannot immediately be regarded as an expression of an unchanged indigenous cult, and neither can a deity with a Roman name be regarded as a traditional Roman deity without any indigenous influence. It is complicated in the case of deities who were syncretised in both name and appearance, such as Hercules Magusanus or Mars Camulus.[177]

It is assumed, that local deities were increasingly worshipped in the guise or form of Roman deities. This is not explicitly stated in literary sources, but it is commonly accepted in the case of Roman Gaul.[178] Gallic elements of iconography are best identified by their lack of a Roman precedent, such as the depiction of the wheel. Many elements in Gallic iconography — objects, flora and fauna and forms of dress — can be considered as Gallic, since they often do not occur in the Roman iconography of that particular deity. Some examples of such syncretised iconography are the 'Pillar of the Boatmen', which depicts a mixture of classical, native and syncretised deities, and the Jupiter columns, which are a mixture of Gallic and Roman iconographic elements.[179]

[175] CIL 13, 03026 (4, p 36) = AE 1958, 00031; AE 1959, 00062; as discussed in: Watson, pp. 57-62, 77-78; Derks, p. 82
[176] Woolf, p. 233
[177] Derks, pp. 91-92
[178] Derks, pp. 91
[179] Woolf, p. 233; Watson, p. 74

The ‘Pillar of the Boatmen’ depicts a number of deities, which are a mixture of Classical and native: Venus, Mars and Vulcan are depicted along with Boudana, Esus and even an antlered Cernunnos.[180] The Jupiter columns, which occur for the most part in Belgic Gaul and Aquitania, seem to have developed under Roman influence, but make use of Gallic iconography. Most of the columns date from between 150 to 260 CE, well after the conquest of Gaul.[181]

Figure 5: The Gallic deity Cernunnos on the ‘Pillar of the Boatmen’.
Source: Radatto, C., *Pillar of the Nautes (Thermes de Cluny)*, https://www.flickr.com/photos/carolemage/5081418559

The base was usually decorated with images of Mercury, Hercules, Apollo, Juno and Minerva. The column was further decorated with a combination of Roman and Gallic motifs: Images of the days of the week, the seven planetary deities, the four Seasons and the Hours, were mixed with patterns of leaves or acorns, which are presumably Gallic or Celtic in origin.[182] The figure on top of the capital depended on the region of the column: In the Rhineland we find a figure of Jupiter sitting on horseback trampling a giant, whilst in Gallia Belgica and Germania Inferior the figure of Jupiter sits on a throne. The decoration of the bases and the octagonal stones shows the Roman influence, but the rest of the column, particularly the pattern of leaves and acorns and the horseman trampling the giant, are foreign to Roman iconography and must have had some Gallic or Celtic origin. The horse itself was not

[180] Woolf, p. 233
[181] Watson, p. 74
[182] Watson, (2007), p. 73

foreign to Rome, but it does not feature in the iconography of the Roman Jupiter. Furthermore, the horse is important in Gallic culture.[183]

Several types of names occur amongst Gallo-Roman deities: native names, such as Esus, Taranis and Cernunnos[184]; Roman names, such as Mercury, Mars and Jupiter; and syncretised names or double names, such as Apollo Grannus, Mercury Iovantucarus and Mars Lenus.[185]

Another thing of note are the differences between male and female deities. Male deities generally tended to have either a Roman name or a double name, whilst amongst female deities native names were prevalent and double names occurred only sporadically.[186] This might be due to the private nature of the cults of female deities and the *matres* and *matronae*. In public cults, female deities seem to have had less importance and played a secondary role. Hence there is a greater variation in names amongst female deities than amongst male deities, since the official cults, which consisted of predominantly male deities, tended to follow Roman examples.[187] Why this was the case remains unclear. It is possible that this may have been a reflection of pre-Conquest Gallic religion, and where the areas of worship, such as warfare, protection and commerce, were dominated by male deities.

1.2 Introduction of the imperial cult

The Introduction of the imperial cult in Gaul brought its native population into close contact with Roman religious practices and ideologies, and it may have been one of the major contributors to the changes in Gallic religion.[188] It was introduced after a period of unrest and revolts in the Gallic and Germanic provinces. As such, it can be regarded as an increase of Roman influence and an attempt to foster loyalty to Rome. Derks argues that the foundation of the altar dedicated to Roma and Augustus at Lyon is evidence of Rome's involvement in Gaul. It can also be argued that the altar had a purpose of unification as well, since delegations from a large number of *civitates* convened there every year.[189]

[183] Watson, p. 74
[184] For Esus and Cernunnos: CIL 13, 03026; For Taranis: CIL 13.6478
[185] For Apollo Grannus: CIL 13.03635; For Mercury Iovantacarus: CIL 13.4256; For Mars Lenus: CIL 13.4030=AE 1973.361
[186] Derks, p. 93
[187] Derks, p. 119
[188] Derks, p. 1
[189] Derks, pp. 33-35

Archaeological evidence shows that the imperial cult in Gaul was successful, and was wholeheartedly adopted by the Gallic elite. Inscriptions that mention priests of Roma and Augustus are found throughout Gaul and the priests originated from a variety of tribes. In addition, the cult endured for a long time, since it is still mentioned by Dio Cassius in the late second or early third century CE.[190]

One of the first cult centres dedicated to the imperial cult was built at Lugdunum in 12 BCE.[191] Inscriptions confirm that the imperial cult was later dispersed throughout all of Gaul.[192] Aside from official forms of worship, Ramage argues that there is evidence that several cities arranged their own worship to Augustus. Such as altars dedicated to the *numen Augusti*, the *domus divina* or the emperor's *imago*.[193] According to Ramage, there are indications that Octavian did not oppose such dedications, and may even have encouraged these types of worship.[194]

Worship for Augustus was probably chosen, because his figure was less abstract than the deity Roma.[195] The personification of a city which few Gauls had presumably ever visited was less likely to receive support, than a deified person who was associated with qualities which the Gauls could value themselves, whose monuments were visible and who visited Gaul on several occasions.

This corresponds to the recurring themes in Roman propaganda, which include victory and loyalty to Rome. Octavian is often represented as world conqueror, and there are several Victory monuments in Gallia Narbonensis, which show the Roman supremacy over the Gauls or which celebrate the *Victoria Augusta*, such as the arches of Orange and Saint-Rémy.[196] These monuments depict a variety of elements connected to Roman victory, such as winged victories, battle scenes, chained captives, captured weaponry and trophies. Presumably, victory and warfare were concepts which were respected by both the Romans and the Gauls. The worship of Roma and the victorious Augustus was therefore a means to bind the native inhabitants to Rome with concepts with which they were familiar, and to remind them of their loyalty to Rome.

[190] Ramage, E.S., "Augustus' Propaganda in Gaul", in: *KLIO* 79 (1997, issue 1), p. 151; Woolf, p. 217; Dio Cassius 54.32.1
[191] Woolf, pp. 216-217
[192] Van Andringa, pp. 164-167
[193] Ramage, pp. 152; CIL 12.4333=ILS 112; Van Andringa, pp. 167, 170, 175-181
[194] Ramage, pp. 154-155; Van Andringa, pp. 165-166
[195] Ramage, p. 150
[196] Ramage, pp. 124-128

1.3 The Druids

For the subject of the Druids, the bibliography is immense, but speculative. They were already mythicized during antiquity and there is no archaeological evidence that can be connected to them. However, such archaeological evidence would only be present if particular inscriptions of monuments or sanctuaries would mention them.[197]

Druidism was known to the Greek world by the end of the third century BCE,[198] and references of the Druids' role as religious officials, teachers, philosophers, judges and arbitrators are found in Caesar, Strabo and Diodorus.[199] It is possible that a portion of Caesar's work was based on observation and second- and third-hand information, however, parts of his account must have been outdated, because it is probable that he made use of earlier works as well.[200] Later accounts were all by authors who never visited Gaul, and consisted of outdated information most likely taken from Posidonius or other narratives.[201]

For example, the united order of Druids described by Caesar probably belonged to the period prior to 121 BCE or even earlier, when Gaul was united rather than split into different tribes.[202] In his description, the Druids were the dominant element in Gallic society, formed a pan-Gallic organisation and were in charge of civil administration. Taking into account the fragmented situation of the Gallic tribes, it is improbable that the Druids were part of such a pan-Gallic organisation.[203] The Druids of the first century CE and later are from a different tradition, and are depicted as prophets, healers and magicians. It is possible that these Druids did not originate from the same elite as the Druids of the first century BCE, if any Druids still existed by this time.

Several factors are thought to have contributed to their decline. The advancement of Graeco-Roman culture, in particular philosophy, was one of the main contributors. This had already started with Greek influences in the south, and was increased by the conquest of Gaul. Roman education was established in Gaul very early on. In 21 CE, colleges for the elite had been established in

[197] Aldhouse-Green, p. 12
[198] DeWitt, N.J., "The Druids and Romanization", in: *Transactions and proceedings of the American philological association*, Vol. 69 (1938), p. 320; Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae* 1.1
[199] Caesar, *B.G.* 6.14; Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. Hist.* 5.31.2-5; Strabo, *Geog.* 4.4.4
[200] Webster, pp. 8-9; DeWitt, pp. 326-330
[201] Webster, p. 10
[202] DeWitt, pp. 319, 326-327
[203] Aldhouse-Green, pp. 13, 57-58

Augustodunum, according to Tacitus.[204] This would certainly have further undermined the Druids' functions.

Aside from this, the development of *res publica* must have had a large influence. The power of the Druids was not compatible with the organised and developed state that Gaul was becoming. The juridical powers were being taken over by the Roman state.[205] However, already in the time of Caesar, it is probable that the Druids were already in decline.[206] Aside from his description of the Druidic order, the Druids are conspicuously absent from the rest of his account, thus suggesting they no longer played any significant political or juridical role. With the Roman Conquest, their religious function was undermined by the installation of the imperial cult and other Roman cults.[207] The conquest was therefore not the main reason of the decline of Druidism, but merely contributed to an already existing process.

Some modern scholars, such as Webster, place the decline of Druidism as a direct result of the Roman conquest, and argue that Druidism opposed the conquest through millennial protest.[208] This is difficult to assess, since it is only based on a small number of passages in Tacitus, Pliny and some later sources such as the *Historia Augusta* and the Christian writer Hippolytus of Rome.[209] However, in the eyes of the Romans, the Druids clearly involved themselves in prophecy. Whether there was a significant danger from such prophets and Druids is debatable, but the literary sources depict that prophecy directed against the Roman state and the emperor was taken seriously. In the first century BCE and first century CE, there are several sources that make mention of measures that were taken against astrologers, prophets and other practitioners of magic. However, it is likely this was only relevant to Rome. Whether there was any significant action against such figures outside Rome is unclear, and it should be considered whether such actions were even possible in such a large area.[210]

Tacitus states that the Druids prophesised the end of Roman dominion. He relates this to the burning of the Capitol in the Year of the Four Emperors (68/69 CE).[211] The reasons for this passage are circumspect: Tacitus compares the burning of the Capitol to the mythicized sack of Rome by the

[204] Tacitus, *Ann.* 3.43.1; Webster, p. 12
[205] DeWitt, pp. 328-330
[206] Aldhouse-Green, p. 14
[207] De Witt, p. 319
[208] Webster, pp. 1-5;
[209] Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.30, *Historiae* 4.54; Pliny the Elder, *Nat. His.* 29.52 and 30.4, as discussed in: Webster, pp. 13-16; *Historiae Augustae Alexander Severus* 60.6; Hippolytus, *Philosophumena* 1.25
[210] Webster, p. 13; MacMullen, R., *Enemies of the Roman Order: treason, unrest and alienation in the Empire*, Cambridge, MA (1992, 1966), pp. 132-141
[211] Aldhouse-Green, p. 97

Gauls, which was surely considered a humiliating experience. The anxiety caused by the burning of the Capitol, as well as by several Gallic revolts in the first century CE, should not be underestimated. Furthermore, such references to Druidic prophecy may have been a convenient literary tool to help vindicate the measures taken to repress this kind of trouble.[212] In the eyes of the Romans, the Druids used prophecy as a means to express discontent and incite unrest.[213] In any case, such prophecies were only mentioned in times of crisis or during uprisings.

Whether or not the Druids were persecuted by the Romans remains a point of debate. Some scholars argue that no full scale persecution took place or that it was irregular or infrequent.[214] In addition, the supposed opposition to Rome by the Druids has only been documented after the alleged persecutions took place.[215] Three state proscriptions against the Druids have been mentioned by literary sources, of which Suetonius mentions two.

> 'Augustus had been content to prohibit any Roman citizen in Gaul from taking part in the savage and terrible Druidic cult; Claudius abolished it altogether.' [216]

Suetonius claims that Augustus only banned Roman citizens from participating in the Druidic religion, while Claudius — or, according to Suetonius, Claudius' wives and freedmen[217] — banned it completely. A passage from Pliny provides the third possible action against the Druids.

> 'For the Principate of Tiberius Caesar did away with their Druids and this tribe of seers and medicine men.' [218]

The passage in Pliny is part of his discussion of magic, and he clearly considers the Druids to be practitioners of magic. The abolition of the Druidic religion he clearly sees as something positive, because further in the passage he says: 'It is beyond calculation how great is the debt owed to the Romans, who swept away the monstrous rites, in which to kill a man was the highest religious duty and for him to be eaten a passport to health.' [219] Pliny clearly connects the supposed Druidic religion with human sacrifice, therefore the above proscriptions against the Druids were meant as proscriptions against human sacrifice rather than against the Druids. From the Roman viewpoint, the Druidic religion clearly consists of human sacrifice and other practices usually ascribed to barbarian peoples. In short,

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[212] Aldhouse-Green, pp. 232-234
[213] Webster, pp. 14-15
[214] Woolf, pp. 221-222
[215] Last, H., "Rome and the Druids: a note", in: *The journal of Roman studies*, vol. 39, parts 1 and 2 (1949), p. 2
[216] Suetonius, *Divus Claudius* 25.5, translation: Graves, R., *The Twelve Caesars. Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus*, Harmondsworth (1957), p. 197
[217] Suetonius, *Divus Claudius* 25.5
[218] Pliny the Elder, *Nat. His.* 30.4, translation: Jones, W.H.S., *Natural History. VIII: Libri XXVIII-XXXII*, London and Cambridge (1963), p. 287
[219] Pliny the Elder, *Nat. His.* 30.4

the Romans did not have a problem with the dogma of Druidic religion — which remains unknown — but rather with the supposed practices and rituals involved in it. In addition, the fact that only two Roman sources make any significant mentions of the suppression of the Druidism in Gaul may indicate that such suppressions were not very significant, and it raises the impression that Druidism, in whatever form, was not the problem it was made out. Such groups of magic practitioners existed in many ancient societies, and it is probable that in the first century CE the remaining Druids were such a group.

Several reasons can be suggested as other objections against the Druids, such as objection to a separate priestly class, which could theoretically undermine the authority of the Gallo-Roman priesthood.[220] In addition, there is the trend of religious uniformity, started by Octavian, which included the promotion of the imperial cult in the Roman provinces.[221] This uniformity would not have been as extensive in the provinces as it was in Rome, but the introduction of the imperial cult shows that religious uniformity was implemented in other ways.

1.4 Human Sacrifice

Literary evidence of human sacrifice is quite abundant, however, it is highly ambiguous. All the references are general in nature, and none describe sacrifices actually taking place. Nearly all the descriptions appear to be based on second-hand knowledge, either through older texts that have not survived or through other means.

The archaeological evidence is very sparse and ambiguous. What evidence there is, predates the first century BCE, or cannot be related to human sacrifice with certainty.[222] Brunaux argues that, due to the lack of such archaeological evidence, the practice of human sacrifice was not as commonplace as is suggested by the literary sources, but was in fact very rare and infrequent.[223] Watson argues that human sacrifice probably took place up to the third or possibly the second century BCE, but no later.[224]

[220] Woolf, pp. 221-222
[221] Webster, p. 13
[222] Watson, p. 149
[223] Watson, pp. 161-163
[224] Watson, p. 164

The lack of detail in the literary sources leads to the impression that either the ancient authors did not possess any knowledge about the frequency, or that such sacrifices were infrequent and induced by crisis or danger. This scenario was therefore perhaps not much different than it had been for the Romans, whose mythicized history also mentions some instances of human sacrifice. For example, the sacrifices of the two Gauls and two Greeks in the Forum Boarium in 228 BCE and 216 BCE [225] or those of the Vestals.[226] In all these references, the reason for the sacrifices was the circumvention of crisis, danger or a supposed threat to Rome.[227]

The same is illustrated by passages from Tacitus and Caesar concerning human sacrifice in Gaul and Britain. In Tacitus, the supposed sacrifice may have been performed to fend off the Roman attack on Mona.[228] According to Caesar and Mela, the Gauls thought that danger to a person could only be avoided by sacrificing an equal life, and that they considered humans the most pleasing sacrifice.[229]

To conclude, it is probable that human sacrifice was only practiced in extraordinary circumstances, and that it had, by the time of the Roman conquest, become obsolete.[230] Therefore, it is not probable that the supposed abolition of human sacrifice in 97 BCE by the Roman Senate, as related by Pliny, was very significant in banning the practice in Gaul.[231]

[225] Cassius Dio, 47; Livy, 22.55-57; Plutarch, *Marcellus* 3; Plutarch, *Quaestiones Romanae* 83
[226] Livy, 22.57.1-6; Livy, *Periochae* 63; Plutarch, *Quaes. Rom.* 83
[227] Beard, pp. 81-82, 137
[228] Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.30.3
[229] Caesar, *B.G.* 6.16.2-3; Pomponius Mela, *De Chorographia* 3.18
[230] Watson, p. 145
[231] Pliny the Elder, *Nat. His.* 30.3.12

Chapter 2

Roman authors on Gallic religion

The focus of the sources is mainly on four subjects: the Druids, human sacrifice, and, to a lesser extent, on Gallic deities and the religiosity of the Gauls. Most authors only comment on the first two subjects, and most often only on one of them, although for some authors, such as Caesar, Diodorus and Strabo, there is commentary on more than one aspect.

One of the problems with the sources that discuss Gallic religion, is that the views they portrayed were probably based on a small number of older sources and perhaps took a fair amount from no longer preserved Greek sources. In such cases, it is probable that the information was outdated, and the views of these authors were therefore no longer accurate or relevant. As we will see, this is the case for several subjects.

Caesar's account is, without doubt, the most extensive, detailed and one of the most objective texts about Gallic religion. Only in a number of instances can a negative tone be detected. The reason behind this may be sought in the purpose of Caesar's work, which was probably to ensure the continued support of the tribunes of the plebs. The text is straightforward and clear, but also seems to possess propaganda and political value, since the text describes Caesar's achievements and they portray him as the bringer of order and civilization. Though this is done without the pomp of a biography and with the focus on the achievements rather than on Caesar himself.[232] The objectivity in the work of other authors varies. For instance, in the case of Cicero, his objectivity depends on the work itself, and Cicero is considerably more objective or even approving in *De Divinatione* than he is in *Pro Fonteio*.[233] For a better understanding of what have influenced Roman thought about native religions, we will first consider several Roman concepts.

[232] Kelsey, F.W., *Caesar's Gallic War: With an introduction, notes and vocabulary*, Eugene (2007, 1897), pp. 18-19

[233] Cicero, *Div.* 1.90; *Pro Fonteio* 30-32

2.1 The Roman concepts of *humanitas* and *barbaritas*

What the Gauls clearly lacked in the eyes of Roman authors, was *humanitas*. Therefore they lacked a number of concepts that the Romans identified themselves with, such as education, civilization, morality, *pietas* and *dignitas*; all of which expressed expectations and obligations regarding conduct.[234] This was important, because the administration of provinces depended a great deal on the cooperation and communication with local elites. Romans were naturally more inclined to cooperate with those of the elite that had similar values and conceptions as themselves.

Woolf argues that Roman authors considered that only by attaining *humanitas* one became truly human. The lacking of *humanitas* therefore could be considered as being non-human, or barbarous. Similar Greek ideas of civilization, such as *paideia* and *philanthrôpia*, were racially closed concepts: Barbarians were their opposites, naturally inferior, without morals and non-Greek. Although the Roman concept of *barbaritas* followed similar Greek concepts for the most part, one of its major differences was that it was not racially closed.[235] The Roman concept of *humanitas* was therefore far more accessible and attainable — being a cultural and political concept — than its Greek counterpart. *Humanitas* was something that could be learnt or attained, and this paved the way for the acculturation of Gallic society after the Conquest.

The Roman concept of *barbaritas* (and similar terms such as *immanitas* and *feritas*) was the absence of *humanitas* and the idea that such people were not proper human beings. Similar to *humanitas*, the concept of *barbaritas* was equally open: through education and civilization, barbarian peoples could attain *humanitas*.[236]

The Roman perception of Gallic society and culture may have been influenced by the mythicized Gallic invasion and sack of Rome in 390/387 BCE and the Gauls' presumed antipathy towards Rome. Cicero, Tacitus, Diodorus and Lucan have made remarks about this supposed antipathy and the wars that the Gauls fought against the Romans.[237]

The Roman image of the barbarism of Gaul is fairly well known. It is reflected also in the *Panegyrici Latini*. For example, Panegyric V contains an appraisal of the supposed invitation that the

[234] Woolf, p. 63
[235] Woolf, pp. 54-60
[236] Woolf, pp. 59-60
[237] Aldhouse-Green, pp. 31; Woolf, pp. 60-61; Cicero, *Font.* 12, 33-36; Tacitus, *Hist.* 4.5.4; Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. Hist.* 5.28; Lucan, *Phars.* 3.402-405

Aedui issued to the Romans to invade Gaul.[238] In the passage, the Aedui are presented as having united the Celts and Belgae into a peace treaty with the Romans, and that only those joined in the treaty had been found worthy by the Romans and therefore separated from the barbarians.[239]

Roman discourse also saw such barbarism in Gallic religion. Human sacrifice is the most obvious and visible example of such religious barbarism. Roman notions of *religio* and *superstitio*, and the focus on the more unusual aspects of religion, have played an important role in the Roman perception as well. Woolf argues as follows.

> 'On the whole classical observers either focused on the bizarre; on human but not on animal sacrifice, on sacred lakes and groves but not temples, and on Druids rather than the more recognizable priests of the kind who had a role in de election of Aeduan magistrates, or else they familiarized alien cults to the point where they become unrecognizable.' [240]

Woolf argues that their view of barbarian cults was not based on a failure to worship the right gods, but a failure to worship them in the right manner.[241] From this perspective, the native deities of Gaul would have been acceptable in a Roman guise, such as Mercury, Mars or Hercules, provided that the rituals did not conflict with the Roman ritual tradition, such as the practice of human sacrifice or the deposits of human or animal remains. In this sense, the Roman conception of religion was open.

2.2 On religiosity and superstition

The supposed religiosity of the Gauls and their adherence to ritual is usually mentioned in connection to human sacrifice. Roman authors usually see it as a consequence of the Gauls' fear of their gods. The Gauls' adherence to ritual is also seen in context of their religiosity and is also viewed as superstition. This image is found in Mela for instance.

> 'The peoples are crude, superstitious, and sometimes even so monstrous that they used to believe that to the gods the best and most pleasing sacrificial victim was a human being. Traces of their savagery remain, even though it has been banned now. Nevertheless, after they have led their

[238] Woolf, pp. 3-4
[239] Nixon, C.E.V. and Rodgers, B.S., *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors: The Panegyrici Latini*, Berkeley and Los Angeles (1994), pp. 268-271
[240] Woolf, pp. 212-213
[241] Woolf, p. 215

> consecrated human victims to the altars, they still graze them slightly, although they do hold back from the ultimate bloodshed.' [242]

Further on in his narrative Mela elaborates on the Gauls' superstition, when he argues that some threw themselves on the pyres of the dead as if they were going with them.[243] Mela's view of the Gauls is negative in general, therefore it is probably very much in line with general ideas about barbaric cultures.

A similar passage can be found in *Pro Fonteio*, where Cicero argues that the Gauls defiled the altars with human sacrifices out of fear and in order to placate their gods.[244] A more general mention in Caesar states that the Gauls were greatly devoted to ritual observances.[245] The recurring image of the Gauls seems to be that they were either very dedicated to fulfilling their obligations to the gods, or too fearful of their gods.

2.3 On Gallic deities

Very few references about Gallic deities can be found in classical texts, and aside from accounts such as those of Caesar and Apuleius, the majority are negative. Lucan refers to them as ruthless and savage deities.

> 'And those who propitiate with horrid victims ruthless Teutates, and Esus whose savage shrine makes men shudder, and Taranis, whose altar is no more benign that that of Scythian Diana.' [246]

The passage must be seen in its context; Lucan's purpose was to emphasise the otherness of the past practices of these Gallic tribes compared to those of the Romans. The mention of savage deities and human sacrifices is clearly meant to reinforce that. There is also archaeological evidence for these deities, but none of the inscriptions indicate that these deities were connected to any savage practices. It is probable that either he or his source placed these deities in a context of barbarism.

Further on in the third book, he elaborates that the images of the gods were made of blocks of felled tree-trunks which struck terror into the worshippers. According to him, men felt more awe for deities worshipped in unfamiliar forms, and that it increased the worshippers' fear, to not know their

[242] Pomponius Mela, *Chor.* 3.18; translation: Romer, F.E., *Pomponius Mela's description of the world*, Ann Arbor (1998), p. 107
[243] Pomponius Mela, *Chor.* 3.19
[244] Cicero, *Font.* 31
[245] Caesar, *B.G.* 6.16.1
[246] Lucan, *Phars.* 1.444-1.446; translation: Duff, J.D., *The civil war: Books I-X*, London and New York (1928), pp. 35-37

gods.[247] This passage can also be seen as an attempt to emphasise the otherness and barbarity compared to Roman deities.

Juvenal's mention of Epona in his eighth satire is negative and contemptuous. It follows his other references about foreign deities and cults.

> 'Though he slays, in Numa's fashion, lambs and russet steers, he swears before Jove's high altar by none but his revered Goddess of horses [Epona], and images daubed on the stinking stalls.' [248]

The themes of this satire are the decadence of the nobility and the worth of personal excellence. The passage underlines the inferiority of the Gallic goddess in the eyes of Juvenal, and Epona's association with horses was probably the reason for Juvenal's use of this specific deity.

Apuleius' reference to Epona, whom he calls the Mare-headed Mother and describes as a zoomorphic deity, is more respectful. From the perspective of his *Metamorphoses*, his view of the zoomorphic Epona is understandable, since animal transformation is a central theme.[249]

2.4 On the Druids

The early views of the Druids found in Caesar, Diodorus and Strabo are different from the views found in later authors from the mid first century CE. The Druids of the earlier authors were described as natural philosophers, judges, teachers, and keepers of knowledge and tradition, whilst the Druids of later authors were described as magicians, seers and prophets.[250]

Along with a transforming conception of the Druids, the views of Roman authors became more negative over time. The emphasis is placed on the magical and prophetic powers of the Druids, and they are frequently associated with prophecy against the Roman order.

In several texts allusions are made to the Druids as being secretive, and they describe the Druids as being against committing their knowledge to writing. According to Caesar, the Druids did so because they wanted to prevent their knowledge from becoming commonly known, and thought that relying on written knowledge would neglect memory.[251] Such a practice would have ensured the

[247] Lucan, *Phars.* 3.412-3.417
[248] Juvenal, *Sat.* 8, lines 154-157; translation: Creekmore, H., *The Satires of Juvenal*, New York (1963), p. 142
[249] Apuleius, *Met.* 3.27; Aldhouse-Green, pp. 241-242
[250] Aldhouse-Green, pp. 13; Webster, pp. 10-11
[251] Caesar, *B.G.* 6.14

Druids of a position of power with regards to the preservation and passing on of knowledge. The same allusion is made by Lucan, who relates that only the Druids possessed divine knowledge.[252]

Various early Roman authors viewed the Druids as moral and natural philosophers and, in extension, as teachers. In this capacity they are usually viewed favourably. Caesar considers their most important teaching that of the immortality of the soul, which, after death, passed to another.[253] Other subjects they studied were astronomy, nature and the divine.[254]

Diodorus refers to them as philosophers (*φιλόσοφοι*) and theologians (*θεολόγοι*),[255] whilst Strabo connects them with moral and natural philosophy.[256] Both authors also interpreted the Vates as both diviners and natural philosophers, so this view may have originated in an older source. The passages in Diodorus and Strabo are objective, particularly compared to other parts of their work, therefore providing more proof that this view originated elsewhere. It is interesting that this aspect was mentioned, because Roman authors usually focused on the bizarre.[257] However, from the Roman perspective, it was unusual that a barbarian people practiced a discipline that they considered part of a civilized culture. On the other hand, this fits in with the Roman concept of *humanitas* being accessible.

Another positive view of the Druids as philosophers can be found in Mela, who refers to them as teachers of wisdom, despite the fact that he considers the Gauls superstitious and barbaric. The subjects of nature, astronomy, divination and the divine are repeated by Mela, as well as their teachings about the soul.[258]

The most notable negative view of the Druids as philosophers comes from Lucan, whose rites and ceremonies he refers to as barbaric and strange. Their teachings on the soul and the afterlife are considered doubtful by him.

> 'To them alone is granted knowledge — or ignorance, it may be — of gods and celestial powers; they dwell in deep forests with sequestered groves; they teach that the soul does not descend to the silent land of Erebus and the sunless realm of Dis below, but that the same breath still governs the limbs in a different scene. If their tale be true, death is but a point in the midst of continuous life. Truly the nations

[252] Lucan, *Phars.* 1.450-1.458
[253] This occurs also in Strabo, *Geog.* 4.4.4
[254] Caesar, *B.G.* 6.14
[255] Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. Hist.* 5.31.2-5
[256] Strabo, *Geog.* 4.4.4
[257] Woolf, pp. 212-213
[258] Pomponius Mela, *Chor.* 3.18-19

> on whom the Pole star looks down are happily deceived; for they are free of that king of Terrors, the fear of death.' [259]

Lucan's point here is, that the beliefs of the Druids were so fundamentally different from those of other peoples, that the views of the Druids must have been wrong.[260] Since this is a theme that occurs in various authors, it is probable he based this on an earlier source, perhaps even Caesar or Mela.

The Druids' belief in the transmigration of the soul, as far as we have knowledge of it, was inherently different from the Roman belief of what happened after death, which is probably why Roman authors commented on it.[261] Diodorus informs us that the Druids' beliefs were similar to those of Pythagoras, and that they were reborn into a new body after a specific number of years. His mention of Pythagoras is significant, in the sense that, although the Druidic belief of life after death was supposedly different from the Roman belief, it was not completely alien, since Stoicism had similar beliefs, which were popular in Roman intellectual circles.[262]

Aside from a few rare negative views, the image of the Druids as philosophers is, for the most part, positive or objective, and may have originated from a Greek tradition. Diogenes Laertius cites two lost Greek works, (pseudo-) Aristotle's *Magicus* and Sotion's *Διαδοχή*, as sources who refer to the Druids in relation to the study of philosophy.[263] Therefore, the image of the Druids as philosophers may have been an originally Greek view, rather than a Roman one.

A different view of the Druids is that of diviners and prophets, which is represented by both early and late authors. One of the most prominent mentions comes from the *De Divinatione*, in which Cicero refers to his guest Diviciacus, whom he admired for his skill at divination.[264] His admiration for an Aeduan or Gaul is remarkable because of his less favourable view of the Gauls in *Pro Fonteio*.[265]

> 'Nor is the practice of divination disregarded even among uncivilized tribes, if indeed there are Druids in Gaul — and there are, for I knew one of them myself, Diviciacus, the Aeduan, your guest and eulogist. He claimed to have that knowledge of nature which the Greeks call *physiologia*, and he used to make predictions, sometimes by means of augury and sometimes by means of conjecture.' [266]

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[259] Lucan, *Phars.* 1.450-458; translation: Duff, p. 37
[260] Duff, pp. 36-37
[261] Lucan, *Phars.* 1.441-445; Caesar, *B.G.* 6.14; Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. Hist.* 5.28
[262] Aldhouse-Green, p. 170
[263] Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae Philosophorum* 1.1
[264] Cicero, *Div.* 1.90
[265] Aldhouse-Green, p. 95
[266] Cicero, *Div.* 1.90; translation: Armistead Falconer, W., *De Senectute, De Amicitia, Div.*, London and New York (1922), pp. 321-323

Cicero's passage shows that Gallic divination had some familiar aspects for the Romans — particularly augury — even though he considers the Gauls themselves a barbaric people.

In Pliny, the image of the Druids as diviners, as well as in general, takes on a more negative tone. Pliny's Druids exist outside civilization, while for the previously discussed authors there may have been varying degrees of admiration for their skills in divination and philosophy, for Pliny they exist only as part of the Gauls' barbaric culture. He refers to the Druids as seers and medicine men (*et hoc genus vatum medicorumque*), who were supposedly abolished by Tiberius.[267] He discusses them only in the context of a discussion about magic. This is reinforced by his use of the word *magos*, and his mention of their interest in mistletoe, which the Druids held sacred, according to him.[268]

The remainder of the passage, creates an image of strange rituals and superstition, which has not appeared in any work prior to Pliny. He speaks of the Druids hailing the moon and performing ritual sacrifices.[269] No similar descriptions occur in Caesar, Diodorus or Strabo. This passage was therefore either a fabrication by Pliny or his source, or based on an unknown source. It is evident however, that this image of the Druids as magicians and mystics with an interest in mistletoe was also followed in the works of other authors, such as Mela and Lucan.[270] A passage with a similar view on superstition and magic is that concerning the Druid's Egg.[271] Here Pliny makes note of the habit of magicians in hiding their deceptions, which the Druids did in his view.

> 'But nothing had encouraged them to believe that the end of our rule was at hand so much as the burning of the Capitol. "Once long ago Rome was captured by the Gauls, but since Jove's home was unharmed, the Roman power stood firm: now this fatal conflagration has given a proof from heaven of the divine wrath and presages the passage of the sovereignty of the world to the peoples beyond the Alps." Such were the vain and superstitious prophecies of the Druids.' [272]

Another negative view is expressed in the above passage from Tacitus, which discusses Druidic prophecy in the context of the rebellions in Gaul. Tacitus relates that the Gauls believed the Roman dominion was over because of the burning of the Capitol. The authenticity of this may be doubted, because the fires must have caused a significant amount of anxiety among the Romans, and because such mentions of prophecies only have appeared in times of crisis. In combination with the already

[267] Pliny, *Nat. His.* 30.4
[268] Pliny, *Nat. His.* 16.249
[269] Pliny, *Nat. His.* 16.249-251
[270] Mela, *Chor.* 3.2.18-19; Lucan, *Phars.* 1.450-458; as discussed in Webster, pp. 10-11
[271] Pliny, *Nat. His.* 29.52
[272] Tacitus, *Hist.* 4.54; translation: Moore, C.H., *Tacitus : in five volumes. III: The Histories : books IV-V*, Cambridge and London (1931), p. 103

mostly negative image of the Gauls as a superstitious and god-fearing people, this may have led to Tacitus' mention of these prophecies.[273]

The *Historia Augusta* also makes mention of female Druids acting as prophets, however, along with a significant part of the *Historia Augusta*, these mentions are problematic. The emperors mentioned are all of a much later period. The first was Alexander Severus (222-235 CE) and the last was Diocletian (284-305 CE). The mentions have in common a certain type of interaction between the Druidess and the (future) emperor, and concern the future of the emperor or of imperial power. The passage concerning Alexander Severus concerns his defeat and death in battle,[274] that of Aurelian about whether his descendants would retain imperial power,[275] and the passage about Diocletian concerns him becoming emperor.[276] The authors' choice in choosing female Druids is curious, since female Druids are rarely mentioned. Another peculiar point is that the mentions of prophecy about imperial power are at odds with the various bans on divination and prophecy, such as the Severan ban, as well as the previously discussed repressions of the Druids. Why then were female Druids inserted in these narratives? Perhaps it was because of their familiarity un-Romanness. Female Druids would certainly be situated outside of the conception of what Romans considered acceptable religion. From that point of view, it would not be strange to have an 'outsider' fulfil the function of prophesising the future of imperial power, which a Roman could not be associated with. This is only a possibility, but it offers a view of the Druids that was still distinctly non-Roman and represents them as mystics and prophets.

Views or mentions of the Druids in their capacity as religious officials and diviners are remarkably scarce, unlike their representation as philosophers and prophets. The most important references are by Caesar and Diodorus, both of whom may have gained their knowledge from earlier works. The passage in Caesar is a simple mention of the Druids' function as officials.

> 'The former [the Druids] are concerned with divine worship, the due performance of sacrifices, public and private, and the interpretation of ritual questions.' [277]

[273] Tacitus, *Hist.* 4.54
[274] *Historiae Augustae Alexander Severus* 60.6
[275] *Historiae Augustae Divus Aurelianus* 44.4
[276] *Historiae Augustae Numerianus* 14
[277] Caesar, *B.G.* 6.13; translation: Edwards, pp. 335-337

As with the majority of Caesar's narrative, it is difficult to establish what his opinion was. The same is true for a passage in Diodorus, which exhibits only some astonishment and wonder at some of the practices of the Gauls.[278]

Beyond these two passages, there are very few views of the Druids as religious officials. Their function as diviners is portrayed in a much more informal capacity. It is probable therefore, that the Romans had little or no knowledge of this function, or that is was not extraordinary enough to be of interest to them. The inclusion of this aspect in the works of Caesar and Diodorus is natural because of the nature of their works, but other authors seem to have focused on less familiar aspects of religion. There are some references of the Druids acting as officials of human sacrifice, such as by Pliny and Lucan, but otherwise the Druids are absent as religious officials.[279] It is possible that when Caesar, Diodorus and Posidonius wrote their accounts, there were still Druids practising as religious officials, or that there was evidence that they had done so. On the other hand, the impression arises from the lack of literary and archaeological evidence, that this function was already declining. By the time of Pliny and later authors, the position of the Druids would have greatly changed, and it is probable that they would no longer have fulfilled any official functions. Consequently, the view of the Druids amongst later Roman authors was to a large degree dependent on their personal views of such unofficial religious or magical figures.

2.5 On human sacrifice

The perspectives of Roman authors on human sacrifice are, fairly homogeneous. The reason for Roman authors' interest in the subject must be because they viewed it as non-Roman or at least uncivilised, and it is possible that it served as antithesis of civilized Roman religion.[280]

Human sacrifice is a feature in the literary sources about various barbarian peoples, such as the Scythians, Germans, Celts and Thracians.[281] The large variety of peoples suggests that human sacrifice was commonly associated with ideas about barbarism. It can be argued that the label of barbarian implied a certain type of behaviour of those associated with it, such as in this case, the

[278] Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. His.* 5.31.4-5; translation: Oldfather, C.H., *Diodorus of Sicily. In twelve volumes. III*, London and Cambridge (1939), p. 179
[279] Pliny, *Nat. His.* 30.4; Lucan, *Phars.* 1.444-446
[280] Aldhouse-Green, p. 67
[281] Strabo, *Geog.* 5.3.12, 7.2.3; Tacitus, *Ann.* 13.57.3; Cicero, *De Re Publica* 2.9.15; Porphyry, *De Abstinentia* 2.56.8

practice of human sacrifice. It could therefore be a generalisation, rather than a reflection of Gallic religion. A good example of human sacrifice being a characteristic of barbarism is a passage from Cicero.

> 'How many, such as the inhabitants of Taurica along the Euxine Sea — as the King of Egypt Busiris — as the Gauls and the Carthaginians — have thought it exceedingly pious and agreeable to the gods to sacrifice men?' [282]

The many references by Roman authors, are therefore best considered as either negative propaganda or a repetition of ideas that associated barbarian peoples with human sacrifice. The reason for the many references of human sacrifice may be the fascination with barbaric and bizarre behaviour, combined with an element of negative propaganda.

As has become clear in the previous sections, the most descriptive account is that of Caesar, followed by those of Strabo and Diodorus.[283] Most of the information about the performance of human sacrifice comes from these three authors. As stated at the beginning of this case study, Caesar's work is distinguished by its neutral tone.

> 'The whole nation of the Gauls is greatly devoted to ritual observances, and for that reason those who are smitten with the more grievous maladies and who are engaged in the perils of battle either sacrifice human victims or vow so to, employing the Druids as ministers for such sacrifices.' [284]

The absence of condemning opinions tells us little about what Caesar truly thought of the practice, if it was still performed at this time. He may have had the same opinion of it as Diodorus or Lucan.

The great majority of texts are negative or condemning. For the most part, the accounts of Diodorus and Strabo are different in tone from that of Caesar. Strabo's passage on human sacrifice is much less neutral than Caesar, while Diodorus' is outright condemning. In his discussion of the Gauls, Strabo terms them simple and witless, and another of their customs, headhunting, he calls barbarous and exotic. He specifically refers to the customs 'connected with the sacrifices and divinations that are opposed to our usages', namely human sacrifice and anthropomancy, which he clearly found unacceptable.[285]

[282] Cicero, *Rep.* 3.9.15, translation: Keyes, C.W., *De re publica; De legibus*, London and Cambridge (1928), pp. 195-197
[283] Caesar, *B.G.* 6.16.1-5; Strabo, *Geog.* 4.4.5; Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. Hist.* 5.32.6
[284] Caesar, *B.G.* 6.16.1-3; translation: Edwards, p. 341
[285] Strabo, *Geog.* 4.4.5

The most condemning views have been expressed by Diodorus, Pomponius Mela, Lucan and Plutarch. Diodorus commented on the savagery and impiety of the sacrifices.[286] Mela states that, because the Gauls were so superstitious, that they turned to human sacrifice, believing that humans were the best and most pleasing victims. According to Mela, the practice was replaced by a bloodletting, which he still considered a trace of their savagery.[287] In Lucan's *Pharsalia*, the savagery of the Gallic sacrifices is also commented on.

> 'No rural Pan dwelt there, no Silvanus, ruler of the woods, no Nymphs; but gods were worshipped there with savage rites, the altars were heaped with hideous offerings, and every tree was sprinkled with human gore.' [288]

Lucan's intention was clearly to create a contrast with the civilized Graeco-Roman deities, who were the opposite of the cruel, savage and alien deities worshipped by the Gauls. From Lucan's passage, it is clear that he refers to the past, so it is probable that he obtained this description from an older text.

In the first case study, whilst discussing Egyptian animal worship and the mythology of Isis and Osiris, Plutarch clearly made attempts to explain or discuss those subjects. For the subject of human sacrifice he does not attempt an explanation, but condemns the practice and reasons that having no conception of the gods would be better than believing in 'the existence of gods who take delight in the blood of human sacrifice and hold this to be the most perfect offering and holy rite'.[289]

References to human sacrifice also appear in works unrelated to Gallic religion, such as the speech from Cicero in defence of Marcus Fonteius.

> 'Finally, can anything appear holy or sacrosanct to men who, if ever they are so worked upon by some fear as to deem it necessary to placate the gods, defile the altars and temples of those gods with human victims, so that they cannot even practise religion without first violating that very religion with crime? For who does not know that to this very day they retain the monstrous and barbarous custom of sacrificing men? What then, think you, is the honour, what is the piety, of those who even think that the immortal gods can best be appeased by human crime and bloodshed?' [290]

In Cicero's view, the Gauls feared their gods, and, because of this, performed human sacrifices to appease them. He refers to the practice as monstrous, barbarous and honourless. Cicero's

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[286] Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. Hist.* 31.13; translation: Oldfather, C.H., *Diodorus of Sicily. In twelve volumes. VI*, London and Cambridge (1954), pp. 343-345
[287] Pomponius Mela, *Chor.* 3.18
[288] Lucan, *Phars.* 3.402-3.405; translation: Duff, p. 145
[289] Plutarch, *De Superstitione* 13; translation: Babbitt, F.H., *Plutarch's Moralia : In sixteen volumes. Vol. II: 86b-171f*, London and New York (1928), p. 493
[290] Cicero, *Font.* 31; translation: Watts, N.H., *Cicero: The Speeches. Pro T. Annio Milone, In L. Calpurnium Pisonem, Pro M. Aemilio Scauro, Pro M. Fonteio, Pro C. Rabirio Postumo, Pro M. Marcello, Pro Q. Ligario, Pro Rege Deiotaro*, London and New York (1931), p. 339

perspective on Gallic religion was not unanimous, since his view on the Druids is not negative. The context in which Cicero wrote his various works is of importance. Here the purpose is clearly to blacken the name of Fonteio's opponent, by connecting him with such a barbarous image.

To conclude, several opinions of human sacrifice recur. Most often it is seen as a barbarous and inhuman practice. The texts that offer a more objective view of the practice must be seen in the light of the type of narrative that is written by the author.

Conclusions

One of the main factors that have defined the Roman attitudes towards other religions was certainly the Roman conception of what comprised appropriate religion (*religio*) and what belonged to the realm of improper religion or the excess of religiosity or piety (*superstitio*). The Romans valued orthopraxy over orthodoxy, therefore the proper conduct and performance of religious rites was valued more than a particular dogma. Native religions were therefore viewed favourably if their rituals and sacrifices did not conflict with Roman practices. Subsequently, the aspects that drew their attention, and which were typically discussed, were those which they found unusual, unfamiliar or unacceptable, such as animal worship and human sacrifice. More familiar subjects, such as wisdom and philosophy were remarked on because they were likely found unusual in barbarian and uncivilised peoples.

Two other concepts which have had an apparently large influence on Roman thought about native religions are *humanitas* (usually understood as civilisation) and *barbaritas* (barbarism). In the case of Gaul, it is clear that the image of a barbaric culture and equally barbaric religion endured in the literary sources for a sustained period, presumably advanced by a number of revolts in the Gallic and Germanic provinces. In the case of Egypt, its antiquity and culture seems to have worked in its favour, although actual aspects of Egyptian religion were still perceived as negative.

It is clear that Roman perspectives were influenced a great deal by their views of the culture in question, as well as by their owns views on religion. Egyptian culture (though not in general its people) was viewed reasonably positive, therefore Roman perspectives were likely less influenced by notions of *barbaritas*, and they were viewed less of an uncivilised culture, because of admiration for their antiquity and architecture. In contrast, Gallic culture and religion were probably judged more severely because of a lack of admirable aspects in the eyes of the Romans.

In both case studies a significant part was dedicated to the opinions of Roman authors on various aspects of Egyptian and Gallic religion. For Egypt those were animal worship, the Egyptian cults in Rome, the mythology of Isis and Osiris, and Egyptian priests. For Gaul those were primarily its deities, the Druids, human sacrifice and the supposed barbaric nature of Gallic religion. In addition, both case studies have attempted to provide a context for the opinions by sketching the religious situation and the relevant changes within those religions. Opinions alone are insufficient to cover the

Roman attitude toward native religions because of their selective and fragmentary nature. When combined with their religious contexts, in some cases a completely different image is shown.

For instance, in the case of Egyptian religion, Roman opinion related a mostly negative view of the Egyptian cults, and particularly the Roman poets exhibited a strong dislike. However, upon examination of the religious context, it becomes clear that the negative views about the Egyptian cults were more likely a result of various socio-political factors during the late Republic and the early Empire, as well as deliberate attempts by the state to remove particular non-Roman religious elements and cults from the public sphere. Subsequent repressions of the Egyptian cults, which must have been infrequent and had little long-term effects, were not motivated by ideology or any reasonable dislike. As far as we know, the cults themselves did not conflict with Roman religion on ideological grounds, nor because of moral objections. Before the victory of Octavian at Actium in 31 BCE, the dislike of the Egyptian cults can be connected to the conflict with Cleopatra and Mark Antony. Afterwards, while there is continuity of the negative opinions in literary sources, the official position of the Roman cults gradually changes and there is an increased interest in Egyptian culture and art.

Something similar is at work in the case of Gallic religion, in the discussion of the negative views on human sacrifice. There is little doubt that the practice of human sacrifice was condemned by nearly all Roman authors wherever it may have existed, whether in Gaul or elsewhere; and realistically, there could hardly be any positive view of such a practice from the Roman viewpoint. However, from the historical context, it becomes clear that the actual practice of human sacrifice is highly controversial; the literary evidence is abundant but doubtful, and the sparse archaeological evidence is ambiguous and predates the first century BCE. Without any evidence for its practice in the discussed period, at best it seems either a practice which had long since become obsolete, or a generalisation on the part of the Romans, who clearly considered human sacrifice a marker of barbarism and associated it with other peoples as well. Therefore it is possible that the classification of barbarian was sufficient to be associated with human sacrifice.

A similar division exists in the case of the Druids. Between the first century BCE and the first century CE two very different views of the Druids exist. In the earlier views the Druids are very powerful and revered religious officials, philosophers and educators, whilst in the later views they are shown as diviners and prophets, mainly in the negative sense, and practitioners of magic. The Roman conquest of Gaul has often been named the perpetrator of this change. While the conquest had an

undoubtedly large influence in the religious changes, it is probable that the earlier view of the Druids was incorrect or outdated. Religious changes were probably already underway due to the spread of Graeco-Roman culture prior to the conquest and this had likely already affected the Druids and caused their decline. A lack of significant mentions of the existence of the Druids, the Druidic order and their alleged repression by Rome in literary and non-literary sources supports this.

The result is that in both case studies there are various views expressed by the Romans which do not reflect the historical reality. For the situation concerning Egyptian religion, and particularly the Egyptian cults in Rome, it has been shown that social and political factors influenced this. In the case of Gallic religion, about which Roman authors knew much less, generalizations about barbarian culture, as well as outdated and ambiguous predating sources, could account for many of the inconsistent views. Other factors, such as the personal views and background of the author, or the amount of knowledge about the culture in question seem to have had considerable influence.

The views on human sacrifice, the Druids and the Egyptian cults, but also those that concern animal worship and non-anthropomorphic deities, have proven to be extremely tenacious in Roman discourse, as they are often repeated after the first century CE. Other reasons for this continuity is a lack of understanding of certain aspects of these religions, such as animal worship and zoomorphic deities.

Recurring views in the literary sources about both Egyptian and Gallic religion are superstition, godlessness, excessive fanaticism or religiosity, and disorder; while, at the same time, there is also some admiration by specific authors for this religiosity and dedication to ritual. In the case of Egypt, the emphasis on religion and religiosity can also be found in the frequent depiction of temples, festivals and other religious elements in reliefs, mosaics and Nilotic scenes. These are not necessarily negative, but they show that religion was an important element of the Roman concept of Egyptian culture. In the case of Gaul, such depictions of religiosity are lacking, and is only present in literary sources. These literary sources sometimes mention images of deities, such as in Lucan (3.412-417), although there are few mentions of other types of depictions.

In hindsight, many of these negative views seem to have had very little effect on the religious situation in the long run. The Egyptian cults were gradually accepted in the public sphere, and traditional Egyptian religion in Egypt continued for several centuries. In Gaul, the religious changes

were the result of a combination of factors, of which the expansion and adoption of Graeco-Roman culture and religion, the introduction of the imperial cult and the local transformation of Gallo-Roman cults were probably the most important.

Many of the Roman views fit into a broader context. For example, the Roman views about Egyptian priests, whom were viewed with varying degrees of fascination, contempt and ridicule (but were associated with extraordinary acts) fit into the broader image of Mediterranean and Near-Eastern magician-priests. Another, more general, aspect that fits into a broader context, is that excessive religiosity was a marker of un-Romanness.

To conclude, the dominant themes in Roman perspectives about Egyptian and Gallic religion were ideas about barbarism, excessive religiosity and improper religious practices. Less evident is their admiration for certain aspects, such as philosophy and knowledge of the divine. The lack of attention on other subjects either points to a lack of knowledge on the Roman authors' part, or that such subjects were simply too commonplace to warrant any remarks. Roman opinion noticeably differs from historical reality on several subjects, although this is often due to socio-political factors, lack of knowledge or due to a generalisation of ideas about barbarism and religiosity. Other sources besides the literary sources, mainly archaeological evidence and inscriptions, show us that Egyptian and Gallic religion was acceptable on various levels. Not in their original forms perhaps, but selective and moderated versions of cults, mythology, iconography and other aspects endured after the respective conquests of these provinces. The opinions of Roman authors were perhaps mostly negative or dismissive, but the continuity of the various aspects of Egyptian and Gallic religion shows a more moderate perspective.

Notwithstanding, there is a marked difference in the basis for the Roman views in both case studies. For the views about Egyptian religion, its basis is formed by several components: common knowledge about the religion, personal views and experiences, writing traditions, and often by direct contact with the Egyptian cults in Rome or elsewhere. Aspects of Egyptian religion which were viewed negatively are mostly the result of a lack of understanding and knowledge, and socio-political factors, rather than a true dislike. In contrast, the views on Gallic religion are mostly formed by a lack of knowledge or by outdated or incorrect knowledge. Gallic culture was viewed as cruel, barbaric and savage, undoubtedly influenced by the already negative view of the Gauls as a barbaric and savage people, and this is seemingly reflected in the Roman conception of their religion.

Did the concepts of barbarism (*barbaritas*) and excessive religiosity (*superstitio*) define the Roman perspectives on the religions of Gaul and Egypt? These Roman concepts were undeniably part of the Roman attitude, but it was influenced by other factors and concepts also. The socio-political situation was a considerable contributor to Roman conceptions, as well as the lack of knowledge and understanding on aspects of those cultures and religions. The Roman attitude towards native religions, whether inside or outside their borders, varies per situation, region and period. Nevertheless, in general, Roman perspectives looked unfavourably on practices and religious aspects which did not fit into their concept of appropriate religion and the appropriate expression of religion, which was based on their own religious practices. Aside from that, much depended on the situation, the author, the period, the availability of information and knowledge, and the general image that the Romans had of a particular culture. However, for a more complete understanding of the Roman attitudes towards various native religions, further research should be done.

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