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Celts and Romans: The transformation from natural to civic religion

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Celts and Romans: The Transformation from Natural to Civic Religion

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JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

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Dedication

To Verity, whose faith has been unwavering, and to my mother whose constant encouragement has let me reach this point.

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Abstract

This paper is a case study dealing with cultural interaction and religion. It focuses on Roman religion, both before and during the Republic, and Celtic religion, both before and after Roman conquest. For the purpose of comparing these cultures two phases of religion are defined that exemplify the pagan religions of this period. These are natural religion and civic religion. They have different foci and are represented by different sorts of deities, rituals, and priests.

Roman religion shifted from natural religion in the period of the monarchy to civic religion in the middle and late republic largely due to outside influences. Hellenistic and Etruscan beliefs entered Roman religion early in the Republic. These changed the focus of religion from agricultural production to reinforcing social order and propagation of the state.

Celtic religion in Gaul changed from natural religion at the period of conquest by Caesar to civic religion during Roman occupation of Gaul. Through methods of voluntary and enforced conversion the Celts largely adopted Roman models of religious practice, which themselves had been influenced by wider Imperial trends. The druids disappeared to be replaced by provincial civic elite, and sacred groves were built over with Roman temple complexes.

This paper looks mostly at primary sources to attempt to determine the early origins of religion in these two periods. Roman sources are plentiful even if they are sometimes not to be taken at face value. Celtic sources are more rare and largely are written by those with an agenda in dealing with the Celts. In spite of this the sources exist to construct a complex argument about early religion in these periods.

Introduction:

The religion a people practices provides a key to understanding the way they conceptualize the world around them. Their gods reflect their beliefs and what is most important to them. With the case of Rome, there is clearly a civilization in transition. Their early religion reflects a more indigenous Italian focus while the religion of the later period is thoroughly Hellenic in influence. This paper will show that the early religion was more similar to other religions indigenous to the region, specifically the Celtic religion in Gaul, and how Roman religion changed due to the influence of Eastern Mediterranean interaction through the Etruscans. Furthermore, it will explain how Roman and Celtic religions reflect different phases of religious understanding.

This paper is a case study dealing with cultural interaction and religion. The Romans, due to their unique method of incorporation called *interpretatio*,¹ which will be discussed in chapter two, changed their religion from a natural religion to a civic religion. For the purposes of this paper there are four broadly defined types of religion. These are animistic, natural, civic, and salvation religions. There are no distinct lines between these four phases, but religions generally fall more into one type than another and each religion has a different focus and form from each other. This paper will focus on natural religion and civic religion as these are the two that are applicable to Celtic Gaul and Rome.² All of these stages do not necessarily indicate differing time periods or levels of sophistication.

¹ The phrase *interpretatio* is a Latin word meaning an understanding of religion, in this case, through another culture's terms. The term comes from Tacitus where he used it in *Germania*, 43: "Praesidet sacerdos muliebri ornatu, sed deos interpretatione Romana Castorem Pollucemque memorant." Translated this means "A priest presides over them, dressed in woman's apparel; but the gods worshipped there are said, according to the Roman interpretation, to be Castor and Pollux." Greg Woolf, *Becoming Roman* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 232.

² All of these phases of religion are concepts put forward in this paper to explain differing ways that these ancient peoples viewed and used religion. They do not represent the progression of religion as different phases of religion are used throughout history in differing cultures. There is no hard and fast rule for when these phases are found.

Instead they indicate a difference in the way religion is used in the society.

The shift from natural to civic religion is one that has been often overlooked by scholars. This shift is often grouped into a large idea of the shifting nature of polytheism. Part of the purpose of this paper is to define these two categories of religion and to show how they are both different and relevant. Animistic religion and salvation religion are already notions defined in the historiography, but this middle period of transition is somewhat missing. It is not enough to say that pagan deistic religions were subject to periods of transition when these two types of religion clearly serve different functions, are arranged differently, and have different foci.

Natural religion is differentiated by several factors. Unlike animistic religion there are gods to whom sacrifices are given, and the religion is focused on a community instead of a smaller tribal group. These sacrifices propitiate the gods and prevent natural disasters such as flood and drought. Natural religion is primarily invested in fertility and natural harmony. Also, there is an organized priesthood which is imbued with special powers, taking sacred authority out of the hands of both the rulers and the common people. There is a specialized priesthood that is forced to remain separate from the people, usually through bans on their actions so that they retain their purity. The king retains some powers in the religion also, but the elite under him are limited in their roles if they intend to be religious figures. Perhaps most importantly, natural religion includes the understanding that the state is subordinate to religion.³

By contrast, civic religion is subordinate to, and has the purpose of supporting, the

³ In Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* this quote is discussing the Roman allies very early in Roman history, but the quote is generally more applicable to natural religion. "As a memorial of it, they brought an offering to Jupiter Optimus Maximus, in the shape of a golden crown. It was not a large one, as they were not wealthy States; their religious observances were characterised by devotion rather than magnificence." Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, III.58.

state. Civic religion is deeply invested in preserving the government. Unlike natural religion its priests are also governmental officials, and religious leaders are heads of state. This is possible because the priesthoods are less restrictive and allow a priest to pursue other paths of advancement. The urban elite dominate the religion and the focus of power is the city. Religion is used to bolster the power of the government at all levels. The focus of civic religion is less on fertility and more on order. The purpose of the gods is to keep civic order and ensure that the people and their government continue to expand and prosper. Civic religion is also keenly interested in maintaining social order. Gods and priests will dictate correct action and subordination of lower to higher. What separates this from salvation religion is that it purposefully excludes the lower classes in favor of the aristocrats, and does not necessarily promise a happy afterlife for all of its adherents.

The first chapter of this paper will deal with the religion of the early Romans. It will look at the gods, their functions, and the priests who serve them. The religion at this point is largely based on propitiation and mostly resembles natural religion. The literary sources reveal that the religion was largely defined during the monarchical period. Livy, a chronicler of Roman history, attests that King Numa was the original founder of the early priesthoods.⁴ In this period there are several major developments in Roman history that influence their religion.

The first of these events was the expulsion of the kings. Since Numa's time, the kings had become tyrannical and overbearing. The powerful aristocrats banished the kings and established a Republican form of government. This influenced their religion by redistributing the power of the king to several aristocratic priests. The second major development came with the expansion of Roman power and specifically the conquering

⁴ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, I.20.

of the Sabines. It is believed that after this period the first triad of gods was put in place with a Sabine god of protection, the Roman god of protection, and the shared high god. These were, respectively, Quirinus, Mars, and Jupiter.⁵

The second chapter of this paper deals with the incorporation of largely Eastern Mediterranean ideas into the belief structure of Rome. This started in the earlier period with the expansion of Roman authority across Italy and into the Mediterranean. Specifically, the conquering of the Etruscans was the major religious pivot point of this period. After the Etruscans, more and more Greek and other Eastern Mediterranean concepts were brought into the orthodoxy.

Greek gods imported through the Etruscans and from *Magna Graecia*⁶ became the dominant deities in Roman religion. Juno and Minerva replace Mars and Quirinus in the powerful triad of gods. Also, the indigenous gods of Rome were reconsidered and given new aspects. Jupiter himself changes from a god of just divine order to a god of civil order. This shows a major shift towards civic religion. Jupiter's priesthood was now deeply invested in keeping social order, and working to preserve the government. Both Mars and Neptune were synthesized with Eastern counterparts. Mars became far more a god of war, and Neptune a god of the sea, whereas previously he had been a god of fresh water.⁷

The priesthood in this period becomes intimately tied to the government. Aristocrats dominate both the priesthood and the upper echelons of government. In many cases, the same people were the heads of religion and government. Religion was used for

⁵ Mary Beard, John A. North, S. R. F. Price, *Religions of Rome: A History* (Cambridge, Mass: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 5.

⁶ Literally this means greater Greece. The Greeks spread their culture throughout the Mediterranean with colonies.

⁷ W. Warde Fowler, *The Roman Festivals* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1969), 185.

personal advancement and to influence civil authorities. These were more Eastern concepts of how religion should work. Priesthoods were now focused on keeping order and ensuring that wars of expansion and conquest were just and the soldiers waging them were pure. Auguries were done to ensure gods' approval of civic matters as well as more traditional religious matters.

The third chapter focuses on Celtic religion. It starts with an introduction to Celtic life because of the importance of context in understanding these societies. The Celts were more agrarian and less urban than their Roman contemporaries. Celtic religion provides an interesting point of contrast and comparison because it remained largely separated from Mediterranean culture. The religion of the Celts was thus largely more natural than civic in its focus. Most of the gods dealt with the fertility of the land and its people. Also, the priesthoods remained separate from political authority. This chapter compares how their gods differed from both the Romans and Greeks of their time period, but whose focus was largely similar to the early Roman period.

The fourth and final chapter deals with what happened to Celtic lands under Roman rule. The religion became largely syncretic. Earlier Celtic beliefs were sometimes incorporated, as with Epona, but mostly overwritten by Roman beliefs and structures. This includes the way that their priesthood is involved with their religion, being drawn from the civic provincial elite. They no longer are required to submit to the lifetime of devotion and study that was previously required. The change in structure also indicates a literal change in the structures of their worship. The old sacred groves are torn down and modern, Greco-Roman temple structures are put in their place. Their religion became largely civic-focused as well, dropping earlier natural foci, such as the focus on fertility and natural disasters. The focus of religion moves towards the more common civic beliefs

of most of their neighbors.

All of these chapters serve to show that religion was a constantly shifting concept for the people of this period. The unique adaptability of Roman religion to new circumstances and incorporation of foreign beliefs served them well in the administration of their continent-spanning empire. Their conception of the divine included the idea that foreign gods existed and they could be incorporated. The priests of these gods were also welcome, given that they fit into the Roman conception of the world and the divine plan that guided their conquest of it. This situation reorganized the religion over many years, and consequently had long-reaching effects for both Romans and more importantly those they conquered, like the Celts. Roman beliefs on religion allowed the shift from natural to civic religion, and later caused the shift in Celtic religion after the Romans conquered them.

Chapter I: Early Roman Religion

At the start of the Early Republic, Roman religion had already undergone many changes. To look at Roman religion in the Republic it is important to first understand a bit about the historical context prior to this period. The Romans were originally inhabitants of an otherwise unremarkable town in central Italy ruled by a king. Their imperialistic success eventually led to their conquering the Mediterranean, the only empire that has united the entire region. Most of this early period of monarchy is mythological and exaggerated in the early texts. In spite of this, many aspects of Roman religion were defined in this early period. It is with the expulsion of the kings that the religion starts to shift away from natural religion to civic religion. This early period clearly shows that the religion of the early Romans was natural instead of civic and had ties to the more indigenous religions of the region.

The early origins of Roman religion differ greatly from the later civic religion of the Empire. A large part of the prehistoric religion has been lost, but elements can still be seen of this early religion. The process of *interpretatio Romana* led to the incorporation of many different deities and practices over time through conquered peoples.⁸ The earlier Italic origins of Roman religion were specifically obscured by the incorporation of Greek influences. However, there were aspects of the ancient beliefs present until the end of the religion's common practice. It is through examining these elements that an understanding of the early religion can be discerned.

⁸ *Interpretatio* is a concept that will be discussed more fully in chapter II. Generally it meant an incorporation of foreign ideas and divinities into something that was comprehensible to the Romans. Woolf explains how this process worked. "Romans might recognize the distinctiveness of an alien god and accord her or him cult. This might follow *evocatio*, the ritual by which enemy gods were persuaded to defect to Rome; this institution of public cult to an imported deity such as Mater Magna or Aesculapius; or it might simply be a private initiative like the dedications made by soldiers to local gods all over the empire." Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, 214.

The gods of Rome represent the most obvious and ever-present facet of their religion. The gods were worshiped openly and explicitly, and are found throughout the literary record. Furthermore, these gods are useful because some changed form and function over time, which represented what was important to the Romans at that time and who they were interacting with. As the gods shifted, so did the focus of the religion. The earlier gods had a more nature-oriented focus on fertility and natural powers, and were believed to be the cause of natural disasters. Propitiation was the key act of supplication when dealing with these deities.

Livy is an obvious source to discuss when dealing with ancient religion. While he lived in the time of Augustus, he is the most prolific writer who focused on this early period whose work we still have. In book one Livy discusses how the religion was structured early on in Roman history. “He [Numa Pompilius, an ancient king] then turned his attention to instituting various priesthoods...to ensure the proper performance of the king's sacred duties he created the *flamen Dialis*, to be permanent and resident in Rome, distinguishing him by special dress...To this he added two more priesthoods, one for Mars, the other for Quirinus.”⁹ The *Flamen* acted as the high priest of a certain god, and took some religious responsibilities away from the king so that the king was more free to rule. In this case, there was one for each of the Archaic Triad of gods, Jupiter, Mars, and Quirinus.

Another position that was created in this early period was the *Rex Sacrorum*, or king of sacrifices. This priest essentially took over the religious role that the king had performed in the period of monarchy before the republic. This position was closely linked to the idea of monarchy, even including the word king in its title. This is revealed

⁹ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, I.20.

in Plutarch:

“Is it because in early times the kings performed greater part of the most important rites, and themselves offered the sacrifices with the assistance of found the priests? But when they did not practise moderation, but were arrogant and oppressive, most of the Greek states took away their authority, and left to them only the offering of the sacrifice to the gods; but the Romans expelled their kings altogether, and to offer the sacrifices they appointed another, whom they did not allow to hold office or to address the people, so that in their sacred rites only they might seem to be subject to a king, and to tolerate a kingship only on the gods' account.”¹⁰

In the case of the *Flamen* and the *Rex Sacrorum* we see that sacred power is being taken away from the king and granted to priestly authorities. This coincides well with natural religion in that there is a more clear separation of power. Sacred and secular power are not invested fully in the same people.

The religion of the ancient Romans was defined by their devotion to the gods. The god that was foremost in their worship through Roman history was Jupiter. Jupiter was the most powerful of the gods, the god whose plan ruled the universe. It has been theorized that Jupiter's name and the worship of him comes from an even older Indo-European root that also spawned Zeus. These names are etymologically linked, and they are both sky gods. Georges Dumézil, an important author in the field of comparative religion, would say that this proves that the religion was taken wholly from the older Indo-European root.¹¹ However, there are points that provide contradictions and evidence that Jupiter was uniquely Roman. While both Jupiter and Zeus retained the aspects of sky gods, Jupiter developed several aspects that set him apart, such as his role as the god of divination.

Divination was important to religion in this period. Since most religious actions were performed as rites of propitiation, both in natural and civic religion, it was

¹⁰ Plutarch, *Quaestiones Romanae*, 63.

¹¹ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 2.

important to know the will of the gods. Jupiter was viewed as the most powerful god because it was his plan that ruled the universe. Fate and destiny were subsumed by this plan, and he was not subject to them unlike Zeus who was ruled by fate. Thus, he was worshiped as a god of augury and divination. As he wrote the plan, specialized priests could predict his will. This fits well into natural religion because of the nature of these priests. They were separate from other orders of Romans, and were necessary for the day to day running of the state. Augury and divination were key services provided by the priests, as the divinations decided when to plant crops, when to go to war, whether fights were auspicious, and other events essential to Roman life. Cicero speaks of this in his book, *de Divinatione*, on Divination. “Now I am aware of no people, however refined and learned or however savage and ignorant, which does not think that signs are given of future events, and that certain persons can recognize those signs and foretell events before they occur.”¹² Most of the gods were viewed as important for auguries within their purview, but Jupiter was held as the highest because it was his plan that all gods and men followed. At this point Jupiter had not evolved to his later position as a god who protected and planned the conquests of the Roman Empire. In the natural religion state he is a god who must be propitiated just like any other. He is also closely associated with his more natural powers at this point, such as his control over lightning. Livy recorded an example of Jupiter's punishment:

Tradition has it that the king consulted Numa's secret writings privately and, when he found described there certain secret sacrifices to Jupiter Elicus, hid himself away to perform them; but because he did not begin or carry them through correctly, not only did he receive no sign from heaven but, when Jupiter became angered at this perversion of religion, the god blasted him with a thunderbolt.¹³

¹² Cicero, *de Divinatione* (New York, NY : Oxford University Press, 2006), I.3. Cicero's work is actually declaiming divination, a point that must not have won him any favor with the priesthood, but it is important that he felt it was such a widespread practice that he needed to write a book.

¹³ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, I.31.

Given Jupiter's power over fate and position in the pantheon it was crucial to understand and follow his plan. The rituals for purification and augury were of paramount importance to the Romans. It was for this purpose that the high priest of Jupiter, the *Flamen Dialis*, was created. It was necessary for this priest to remain separate from common tasks that would cause him to be impure. This is one point in history where there is a clear, major distinction between natural and civic religion. No priest in civic religion would have a similar role because it invested too much power away from the state. No priest in natural religion would be completely without these bans because priests were tied to purity and knowledge. The power and mystery of their position demanded sacrifice. He was banned from performing a wide number of mundane activities. He was not allowed to touch dogs, horses, or raw meat, and was not allowed to wear any knots on his person.¹⁴ Further, he could only marry through a complicated ritual, *conferreatio*, to an equally prohibited and purified woman. The *Flamen Dialis* had to remain pure and unfettered by worldly connections. The *Flamen Dialis* and the other priests of Jupiter at this point had strong control over the religion, and even control over the government, clearly indicating natural religion's focus on religious power over political power. It was a priest of Jupiter who crowned Numa. As Livy says:

The augur seated himself on his left hand...placing his right [hand] on Numa's head, he prayed as follows: 'Father Jupiter, if it is heaven's will that Numa Pompilius whose head I am now touching be king at Rome, I ask you to sanction it by sending us incontestable signs within those boundaries I have fixed.' He then enumerated the auspices that he wished to be sent. And sent they were: Numa was declared king and descended from the sacred area of augury.¹⁵

This sort of cooption of enthronement by the priesthood would not be mimicked in later Roman life. The priesthood of augurs had considerable power in this stage of Roman

¹⁴ H.H. Scullard, *Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 15.

¹⁵ Livy, *Ad Urbe Condita*, I.18.

natural religion.

Jupiter was paramount in importance, but another god may have been more closely tied to Roman life. In this period of religion the god Mars follows in importance. It was his name that graced the first month of the Roman year,¹⁶ and festivals to him that were celebrated throughout it. Mars was a god of the Romans from the very beginning. In spite of his ancient lineage, his role changed greatly due to outside influences on Roman religion, specifically the incorporation of other war deities. If Mars was only involved in military festivals his difference from other war gods would be obscure, such as the Greek war god Ares. It would quite difficult to discern the function he played in the natural phase of Roman religion. Luckily, Mars was also involved in other more civilian aspects. Specifically, he was also a god of agriculture. The *lustratio Agri* was a ritual used to ensure a good harvest. Mars is invoked in this as a protector of fields and animals. ““Father Mars, I pray and beseech thee that thou be gracious and merciful to me, my house, and my household;...that thou keep away, ward off, and remove sickness, seen and unseen, barrenness and destruction, ruin and unseasonable influence.”¹⁷ Mars is also invoked in the *Carmen Arvale*, an ancient prayer of the Arval priests. In it they ask for protection of borders and avoidance of contamination. “And thou, Marmar, suffer not plague and ruin to attack our folk! Be satisfied, O fierce Mars! Leap over the threshold! Halt here, here!”¹⁸ The dual role of Mars as protector in battle and protector of agriculture represents an important point for Roman life. Romans were primarily soldiers

¹⁶ The first of March was the first day of the Roman year. They started their year with the coming of spring, which also coincided with the start of the campaigning season.

¹⁷ Marcus Porcius Cato, *De Agricultura; with an English translation by William Davis Hooper* (Cambridge, Mass : Harvard University Press, 1960), 141.

¹⁸ *Carmen Arvale*, http://www.forumromanum.org/literature/carmen_arvalee.html. Marmar was another name for Mars.

and farmers. These were the two professions they engaged in the most. Thus, aspects dealing with these two professions infuse their entire pantheon.

Mars in this period is a deity of natural religion that somewhat reflects this divide. His purview is based around protection and fertility of the crops. His later associations become more focused on civic life. He becomes a deity of war and borders, the deity who declares holy wars against unfaithful enemies. The third god of the Archaic Triad, Quirinus, also changes greatly in form. In this early period he was associated with production and the population of Rome, specifically with the cities and those who dwelt within them. He represented the average people. He also had a war-like domain in that he was a protector of the Roman citizenry. We see protection here instead of aggression, which he will be more associated with in civic religion. He was linked to protection of the city and its citizens while Mars was more linked to protection outside the city and for armies on campaign. There is also a theory that Mars was the Roman war god while Quirinus was a Sabine war god. Sabinium was incorporated so early in Roman history that it largely falls into the realm of prehistory.¹⁹

The Archaic Triad represented the gods most prayed to by the Romans, but they were by no means the only deities of this period. Their purviews were generally the most important to the everyday religion of the Romans, but there were other gods whose purpose was understood. Jupiter represented natural threats and divination, and both Quirinus and Mars represented protection and fertility of crops. These next deities generally represent ideas that are important to natural religion and are not covered by the Triad.

One other deity that has ties to natural disasters like Jupiter, and whose worship is

¹⁹ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 15.

focused on prevention of them, is Neptune. Because Jupiter was a sky god his purview did not necessarily extend to the waters. The original Neptune was a god of fresh water, thus a god of rivers and lakes, rainfall and irrigation. Prayers were offered to him to make sure that rivers did not dry up or overflow their banks, and that droughts did not wither crops on the vine. Romans were not tremendous sailors, and did not much care about the sea that surrounded their island in this period. They did care immensely about the crops that fed their citizens and troops, and prayed to Neptune to sustain them. In the festival of the *Neptunalia* the Romans would venture out to the rivers and construct huts of branches and foliage, under which they would presumably enjoy a day near the river and feast in honor of Neptune.²⁰ The ancient sources on this festival are less than verbose. The purpose of this festival was to ensure that there was no long-lasting drought, and were positioned at the point in the year when the water supply was likely to be at the lowest. Late in July the dry Italian summer is in full effect. The festival of *Neptunalia* was a way to propitiate this god of water as was important in natural religion, and to seek relief from the scorching and arid Mediterranean summer.²¹ There are clear ties here to Celtic deities also and festivals devoted to agricultural production and propitiation of the deities associated with natural disasters.

Aside from natural forces, some deities came to represent more concepts than physical forms. The first of these deities was Vesta. She was mentioned in the same quote from Livy from before, "...he also appointed virgins to serve Vesta...He paid them from public funds to ensure that they would be in constant attendance at their temple, further emphasizing their revered and inviolable status by the rule of chastity and other marks of

²⁰ Scullard, *Ceremonies and Festivals*, 168.

²¹ Fowler, *The Roman Festivals*, 185.

sanctity.”²² The worship of Vesta comes from the times of early Italian civilization where the fire of a hut's hearth was more important than any form of larger community. Her purview represents the early animistic religion with the spirit of the fire personified. The spirit of the fire needed propitiation so that it would continue to provide warmth and cook healthful food. Later on, as groups of nomads and settlers came together there was a need for a symbol that would represent the community. As the metaphor of the hearth extends to the communal fire her worship expands, incorporating more elements of natural religion such as an organized priesthood and sacred rites of propitiation. Even under civic religion she remains an important figurehead representing the community of the state. Vesta's hearth fire was figuratively transported to a public center, and burned as a symbol of the strength of the community. When a temple was built for this purpose a specialized priesthood was created to tend this flame.²³

The Vestal Virgins were an order of priestesses whose primary function was maintaining the flame of Vesta. Vestals were taken from their families between the ages of six to ten, and served Vesta for thirty years. They were afforded more respect than most women in Rome, but there were also a large number of prohibitions that they must follow on penalty of death. Their long devotion to the priesthood and the prohibitions on their actions represent the old foundation of their priesthood. Excepting the fact that Roman women were not allowed in political life, the devotion required of a Vestal would prohibit this as well. “They were required to remain undefiled by marriage for the space of thirty years, devoting themselves to offering sacrifices and performing the other rites

²² Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, I.20.

²³ Scullard, *Ceremonies and Festivals*, 149.

ordained by law.”²⁴ Marriage was one of the few ways that Roman women could advance their station in Roman society. However, it was likely not the intention of this ban to prevent Vestals from advancing in society. This prohibition against marriage speaks to natural religion's focus on priests and priestesses remaining pure to ensure that they were devoted. These rules were to ensure that they could propitiate the gods correctly. Keeping the fire burning was an important task. Livy remarks on this in an ancient speech, “And I do not need to mention the everlasting flame of Vesta and the image which is housed in her temple as guarantor of Rome's empire.”²⁵ They had to relight the fire using a primitive method of rubbing two sticks together, again tying the worship of Vesta back to the ancient roots.

Vesta was also celebrated as the patron of bakers at the festival of Vestalia, an activity that had ties back to her ancient worship. This festival involved a ceremony where a ritual loaf of bread was baked by the Vestals. The animals and millers that helped in the profession of baking were also honored. “Lo, loaves are hung on asses decked with wreaths and flowery garlands veil the rough millstones.”²⁶ Both the origin of this festival and what it represents seem distinctly Roman. Romans were a civilization of farmers, and it makes sense to have a festival honoring the end product of bread and the people who make it. This is another sign of the hearth, bread being a symbol of food and abundance. This festival has strong ties to natural religion where this sort of material plenty was a focus.

²⁴ Dionysus of Halicarnassus, “Roman Antiquities.” II.67, Lacus Curtius. <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/home.html> . He continues to describe what might happen, “While they are yet alive they are carried upon a bier with all the formality of a funeral, their friends and relations attending them with lamentations, and after being brought as far as the Colline Gate, they are placed in an underground cell prepared within the walls, clad in their funeral attire; but they are not given a monument or funeral rites or any other customary solemnities.” DHAR, 2-67.

²⁵ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, V.52.

²⁶ Ovid, *Fasti*, VI.311.

There was another deity whose purview was closely linked to Vesta, and that was Janus. The worship of Janus is likely as old as the worship of Vesta because they are based on similar ideas. To the Romans the two most sacred areas of the house are the door, *ianua*, and the hearth, *vesta*. This ancient sort of belief of the home indicates a pre-civilized time, tying back to the animistic worship of the threshold as a spirit of protection. Whereas Vesta came to represent the sacred flame of the community as she once represented the sacred flame of the home, Janus came to represent the dualistic nature of the universe.²⁷ He was depicted as having two faces, one seeing the beginning, and the other the end; one viewing the heavens, the other the earth. This represented a quintessentially Roman characteristic of dualism. Just as the Romans were farmers and soldiers, one action fostering life and the other destroying it, so to their gods often had conflicting or dual natures. Janus is the most conspicuous representation of this. Dualism is something that is also common in natural religion and is seen throughout the deities in Celtic religion.

The comparisons between Janus, Vesta, and the home continue in relation to their priesthoods and their function. Janus was the first deity to be invoked in a ceremony, and Vesta the last. Thinking about their positions in the home Janus would represent the entrance or the first point of entry that a stranger must cross. Vesta would represent the last, the hearth, where only strangers who had earned complete trust would be allowed to trespass. Similarly, the priesthoods would represent these ideals. The only priest of Janus would be the *Rex Sacrorum*, the only priest who ranked higher than the priest of Jupiter, the strongest and most divine and symbolic father of the household. The priestesses of

²⁷ Fowler, *The Roman Festivals*, 285.

Vesta were represented by the Vestal Virgins, the symbolic daughters of the household.²⁸ The *Rex Sacrorum* was also in charge of the Vestals in much the same way that the *paterfamilias* would be in charge of the daughters within his household. This metaphor holds well in natural religion because of the focus of the religion. These concepts of home and hearth were important in this early period. Threats were on a much smaller scale in Italy at this time, and the sanctity of the home was ensured by prayers to Janus, Vesta, and household deities. When the focus of religion moved to the state in civic religion threats to the state were of more importance in everyday worship than threats to individuals.

A close ally of Janus was Saturn. He was originally a god of agriculture that brought the figurative seeds of knowledge to Rome. Here again is a focus on agriculture as an area of worship, a common thread in natural religion. He was a deity of agriculture, overseeing the planting and cultivation of crops, and as such was also a deity of wealth. He was the god who educated the Romans in how to farm according to ancient sources. “When Saturn arrived by ship, he was received hospitably by Janus and taught him agriculture; and when Janus improved his way of life, which had been wild and uncouth before the fruits of the earth were discovered, he rewarded Saturn by making him partner in his rule.”²⁹ The festival celebrated in Saturn's honor is called the *Saturnalia*. Its date corresponds to the last work of sowing seeds in the winter in Rome, and this may be the origin that is shrouded in antiquity. The mythic origin is just as fascinating. While Saturn ruled in his golden age, there was a time of perfect harmony in

²⁸ Fowler, *The Roman Festivals*, 288. To continue this analogy the three *flamin* representing Jupiter, Mars, and Quirinus would represent the sons of the family. The Vestals would be subordinate to all of these, just as women were subordinate in Roman society.

²⁹ Macrobius, *Saturnalia: Edited and Translated by Robert Kaster* (Cambridge, Mass: Cambridge University Press, 2011), I.7.21.

Italy. All men were equal and there was no need for government. This primeval utopia was celebrated during the Saturnalia, a time when Romans were expected to let loose. Slaves dined with their masters and this was the only time Romans played dice legally. There was also a ritual gift giving. “There was handed down the custom of exchanging candles on the *Saturnalia* and purchasing figurines fashioned from clay for people to offer to Saturn.”³⁰ Saturn is interesting in this case study because he is closely tied to the Greek titan Chronos, but has elements in Roman religion entirely separate from the titan. The seed sowing celebrated in the *Saturnalia* is clearly focused in natural religion as a festival of agricultural fertility. All of the Celtic festivals mentioned in chapter three are focused on this same topic, which makes sense given that they are both natural religions.

This wild festival was eclipsed by only one in debauchery, the festival of *Lupercalia*. This was a festival celebrating one of the most ancient of Roman gods, Faunus. Faunus was the god of the untamed wild; a god of hunting and nature. He is later associated with Pan and Cernunnos, a Celtic deity, but when he was first represented in myth he was presented as a trickster spirit that only with propitiation would he grant benevolent help. In this way he ties back to the earlier, possibly pre-deistic, animistic faith of the early Italians. He relates to an Italy before the protector gods Quirinus or Mars, or even Janus. Horace mentions Faunus “Faunus, lover of fleeing nymphs, may you walk gently through my property and the sunny countryside, and may you depart in kindness to my young flock.”³¹

The festival that was associated with him was the *Lupercalia*. This was a festival with ties to ancient wildernesses and fertility. The *Lupercalia* was a fertility festival,

³⁰ Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, I.11.49.

³¹ Flaccus, Quintus Horatius. <http://www.merriampark.com/horcarm318.htm> (accessed February 4, 2011) III.18.

intended to make the women of Rome fertile and healthy, an important point in natural religion. This festival makes complete sense in the context of natural religion, but was viewed as absurd and licentious in the later period of Roman religion. The origin of the events represented in the festival are lost in antiquity, but Ovid will attempt to explain it.³² Ovid will attribute the festival to Faunus. “The third morn after the Ides beholds the naked *Luperci*, and then, too, come the rites of two-horned Faunus.”³³ He will explain the various oddities, such as the *Luperci* being nearly naked, as things that are sacred to Faunus. “The god himself is nude and bids his ministers go nude...The Arcadians are said to have possessed their land before the birth of Jove, and that folk is older than the moon.”³⁴ This is a god and a festival that are solely about natural religion. Even in later times the rites of the *Lupercalia* were focused on fertility and natural concerns. Furthermore, there is another link that binds this festival to Roman natural religion. In 44 B.C. Mark Antony chose this date to give Julius Caesar a royal diadem, essentially passing on to him the role of King of Rome. The choice of this festival is likely not coincidental. There is some evidence that this festival had ties to the conferral and confirmation of power of the king.³⁵

As the religion shifts from natural to civic all of these deities change and take on new meanings. They are the oldest deities in the Roman religion, and are largely from Roman history itself or those people who are so closely linked and anciently incorporated as to make no difference. Much of the worship of these gods comes from the period before much contact with other civilizations, and for Faunus almost all of his practices

³² Scullard, *Ceremonies and Festivals*, 77.

³³ Ovid, *Fasti*, II.280.

³⁴ Ovid, *Fasti*, II.286.

³⁵ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 121.

come from a pre-civilized Italy. The gods of this period were focused mainly on protection and purity, and largely also were involved in the fertility of crops and productivity of farms. These are exactly the domains that are most applicable to Celtic gods in their natural religion. Only the worship of Vesta speaks to a knowledge of the sanctity of the state, and this is due to the adaptability of her domain and might be a later addition.

The priesthood in this period is defined by the gods, not by the state. Livy explains in *Ab Urbe Condita* that the first priests were *Flamines*. After them were appointed priestesses of Vesta, the *Salii* of Mars, and finally the *Pontifex Maximus*. Most of these were sole positions or were strictly limited in what they controlled. The priesthoods of the Republic or the Empire would work in concert with the politicians and with each other to bolster the power of their membership.

Priests were generally interested in the preservation of Roman people, but the will of the priests was more important than the will of the politicians. The king, too, was subordinate to the religion and played his role. This early period in Roman history represents a situation that resembled a theocratic monarchy. Over time the power of religion was diminished in the state until it became subordinate to the will of the Republic. Instead of the belief of '*do ut des*,³⁶ the phrase that characterised later Roman religion, Livy explains the Romans early feelings towards religion and their gods, "Because heaven's will was seen to be involved in human affairs, concern for the gods became ever-present and habitual, filling their hearts with devotion that good faith and regard for their oaths ensured good order rather than fear of punishment under the law."³⁷

³⁶ "I give so that you may give."

³⁷ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, I.21.

At this period religion was practiced without the cynicism and political motivation of the later period.

Chapter II: The Transition to Later Roman Religion

Two important events occurred in the early Roman republic that started the shift in their religion from natural to civic. The first event was the expulsion of the king, and with it the belief that great power should not be held by one man. Throughout the Republic there was a constant emphasis on shared power because of the belief too much power invested in one person would inevitably lead to tyranny. The oligarchy worked to insure that power was diffused through the citizenry, mostly concentrating in the aristocratic order. The second event was the conquering of the Etruscans. The Etruscans were a nearby power that the Romans fought against and eventually conquered. They were traders and had contacts with Greece, which greatly influenced their development. The Etruscans had their own pantheon which the Romans incorporated. These deities largely overwrote the earlier Roman deities and helped a great deal in shifting Roman religion from natural to civic.

The reason the Romans incorporated the Etruscan pantheon relates to the way Romans conceptualized religion in this period. The first factor that influenced how Roman religion grew, and eventually how it shifted to civic religion was the Roman belief that each location had its own specific gods. The Etruscans had their gods, just as the Romans had theirs. There was no incompatibility in this understanding. These alien gods were just as real as the Roman gods. Through *interpretatio* these foreign deities are examined and placed into the Roman world view. Sometimes the local aspects replace traditional aspects, as was the case with the Etruscans.³⁸ Finally, there was a ritual called *evocatio* that directly incorporated foreign deities into the Roman pantheon. *Evocatio* was performed when Romans were fighting a foreign power who had their own

³⁸ Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, 234.

pantheon. The *evocatio* was performed to call the deities from the foreign pantheon out to join the Roman side. There is a clear example of this in the calling out of Juno from the city of Veii. Juno *Regina* abandoned the Etruscans and ensured victory for the Romans.³⁹

To further explain the shift towards civic religion in this period, the diffusion of power in the priesthood grew. Religious authority was invested in the priesthood, but it was spread out among many different people. Just as republican governmental power was invested in multiple positions so that no one man controlled the state, so too was religious power. Thus, as time went on the sole positions of the *Rex Sacrorum*, and the *Flamines* lost prestige as the Republic grew to an Empire. Late in the republic, largely due to political upheaval, the position of *Flamen Dialis* was vacant for eighty years until Augustus reinstated it in the Principate. Cassius Dio records the person who claims the seat around 11 B.C., “At this same period the priest of Jupiter was appointed for the first time since Merula...inasmuch as the tribunes and aediles, who had previously been entrusted with this duty, were performing it through their assistants, and in consequence some mistakes and confusion occurred.”⁴⁰ That the main seat of power in the period of civic religion remained open for eighty years clearly shows that the shift away from religious authority to civic authority had taken hold. Because of the archaic bans and impossibility of a political career, the role of *Flamen Dialis* was seen as a burden instead of an honor.

One of the major transitions from natural religion to civic religion came with the

³⁹ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 41. *Evocatio* or calling out of the gods, was a common tactic in Roman warfare. It helped to raise the morale of the enemy, and later helped with the unification of former enemies. Juno *Regina* means Jupiter the Queen and represents a particular aspect of Juno called from Veii.

⁴⁰ Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, LIV, 36.

ousting of the king of Rome. The Senate took over much of his authority. With this came a sort of sacred authority as well. The powers of the priesthood would naturally pass down through the Senate over time and allow for Senate officials to perform religious duties. Many actions of the Senate were similar to those of the religious colleges. They met in secret just as the priests did, as opposed to the assemblies that always met in the open. They also did not talk about the nature of their meetings to those who were not government officials. They operated under arcane guidelines just as the priests did, invoking *auspicia impetrativa* before meeting.⁴¹ Both the Senate and the assemblies met in *templum*,⁴² but the Senate sometimes met in areas that were sacred to the Roman religion. On the first meeting of the year and when the senators were considering war they would convene in the temple of Jupiter.

Beard and Crawford in *Rome in the Late Republic* raise some interesting points about the religious implications of the Senate. While the priesthood officially controlled the religious life, “the Senate provided the principal link between men and gods and controlled men's behavior towards the gods.”⁴³ The magistrates of the Senate had clear religious functions, such as asking for and interpreting auguries. The Senate as a body also had the power to enforce religious rule where priests did not. It was also up to the Senate to determine which auspicious religious events had significance and which did not.⁴⁴

With much power resting in the senate, the priesthood was forced to adapt. The positions of the *Flamines Maiores*, tremendously powerful and respected positions in the

⁴¹ Kurt Raaflaub, *Social Struggles in Archaic Rome*, 133.

⁴² *Templum* was the term for a sacred space as defined by a priest. The Senate was only allowed to meet in a *templum* because it was auspicious to do so.

⁴³ Beard and Crawford, *Rome in the Late Republic*, 34.

⁴⁴ Beard and Crawford, *Rome in the Late Republic*, 34.

early republican and previous regal society of Rome, lost importance as time passed. The *Flamines Maiores* suffered under archaic bans that prohibited their holding office or any position outside of their duties as a priest. The shift toward civic religion meant that the newer priesthood would generally remain free from such bans. The old priesthoods were seen as unnecessarily restrictive on a person's ability to advance in government. Aulus Gellius recorded this in his work *Attic Nights*, "'The priest of Jupiter" must not touch any bread fermented with yeast. He does not lay off his inner tunic except under cover, in order that he may not be naked in the open air, as it were under the eye of Jupiter. No other has a place at table above the *Flamen Dialis*, except the *Rex Sacrificulus*.'"⁴⁵ Most of the priestly positions, such as the pontifices and augurs changed over time, but the *Flamines* and *Rex Sacrorum* retained their basic aspects throughout the empire. The politicized priestly roles adapted to the growing empire while the non-politicized roles remained largely the same.

The likely reason for the fundamental difference between the *flamines* and other priestly colleges is due to the solitary nature of this priesthood. Whereas the other colleges were represented by multiple members that all shared duties, the *flamines* often acted alone. One man performed the duties of his office. Beard, North and Price summarize this well, "It is the central characteristic of the *augures* and the *pontifices*..." as opposed to the *flamines*, "...that they were full colleagues - one could always act instead of another, so that limitations on their movements as individuals would never have been so necessary."⁴⁶ Such severe limitations were put on the *flamines* because there simply was no other way to ensure that their priestly responsibilities were met.

⁴⁵ Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights*, X, 15.

⁴⁶ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 29.

The original priests of Rome were expected to maintain their power and keep their secrecy. They were only drawn from the upper orders of society. As the Republic grew and prospered this changed. Lower orders served in the priesthood, and the choice of priests was often as political as it was about any sort of piety. In this period, the same men who served in positions in the government also served in the priesthood. Most positions within the priesthood were intended to be served with a position in the government. Beard, North, and Price elaborate on this point in their book on Roman religion, “Although they were in principle the guardians of religious, even of secret, lore, they were not specially trained or selected on any criterion other than family or political status.”⁴⁷ There were many priestly positions that a Roman could hold, but the two most sought after of these were entry into the college of augurs and the college of pontiffs. These are the two colleges that had the most direct control of Roman society.

The pontifical college was both influential and important in this period of civic religion. The pontiffs would order the year by adding in festival days and they divined the nature of individual days. Each day had its own sacred characteristics, and these may have precluded certain activities from happening on certain days. In this way, the pontiffs may have influenced whether the Senate or assemblies could meet.⁴⁸ Prior to the pontiffs performing this duty, it was the role of the *Pontifex Maximus*, a role performed by one man. Livy records this, “From the senators he enrolled as pontiff Numa Marcius, son of Marcus, and entrusted to his keeping all sacral lore which, written out and authenticated, specified with what victims, on what days, and at what temples sacrifices were to be

⁴⁷ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 27.

⁴⁸ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 25.

made.”⁴⁹ Here is a clear example of Republican Romans balking at so much power entrusted to one man. This is also an example of the spreading out of authority that comes along with civic religion. The power of the priesthood is largely undermined by the power of political authorities. They even in some cases merge.

To continue this point, several priesthoods became politicized while others remained non-politicized. The religious orders of the *Flamines*, and the *Rex Sacrorum* bore many marked differences to the priestly orders formed later. Only one man acted as these priests at a time. These positions entailed a large religious responsibility that would require constant service and devotion. In addition, only the *Flamines* and the *Rex Sacrorum* were not allowed to serve any other position in government. Exceptions to their serving another position in government were rare, and required interference from powerful political figures. Unlike the colleges, the sole priestly officials had no assistance in their religious duties, and were expected to work alone, a task which often took too much time to pursue any other sort of office.⁵⁰

The positions of the pontifical college and the augurs were held by multiple people, all of them able to assume the religious duties of their office. Even then, not all of the pontiffs had to participate in all decisions, “Whatever three pontiffs have decided, has at all times appeared to the Roman people, and to the senate, and to the immortal gods themselves, sufficiently holy, sufficiently august, sufficiently religious.”⁵¹ All prominent positions in the Roman system were based on a belief in shared power. Even the consuls, the most monarchical of positions in the republic, were limited to a short term of service and shared equal power with their co-consort. Final power in all things rested with a

⁴⁹ Livy, I.20.

⁵⁰ Mary Beard, John North, *Pagan Priests* 19.

⁵¹ Cicero, *Haruspicum Responso*, XII.

group of some sort, whether this was the senate, the comitia, or the priestly colleges. The positions of sole authority among the priests were never popular because they did not share power. The republican fear of tyranny ensured that these positions never grew too powerful. Thus, the sole positions did not entail any real political advantage like the collegial positions did. As such, plebeians never agitated for these positions like they did for the pontifical college and the augurs.

The incorporation of Etruscan deities into the Roman pantheon happened early on in the republic. In the earliest section of Livy's history of Rome he states that, "He also built substructures over an area on the Capitol that would support a temple of Jupiter. He had vowed the temple in the Sabine war, and in his mind already foresaw the greatness of the place."⁵² The Capitoline temple would place Rome squarely in the center of Italian religion. Temples built later would often be built on its model. Evidence of this can be seen throughout the later Roman Empire.⁵³ Brenda Lewis will reiterate this point, "Another source of Roman religion, which had itself absorbed Greek influences, was the faith of the Etruscans in Etruria, in northern Italy. The Romans looked on the ancient, highly cultured Etruscans as their mentors, and absorbed many Etruscan concepts into their own faith."⁵⁴

These gods in some cases replaced or dethroned the gods of Rome. After the incorporation of the Etruscans, religion shifted greatly towards civic religion. One reason that religion changed so much in this period was because of a process of incorporation the Romans used called *Interpretatio*. It is basically a way of conceptualizing new and

⁵² Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, I.38.

⁵³ Beard, North and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 3.

⁵⁴ Brenda Ralph Lewis, *Ritual Sacrifice: A Concise History* (Gloucestershire, UK: Sutton Publishing, 2001) 57.

foreign deities as aspects of traditional Roman deities. In this way Caesar comments that the god the Celts worship most is Mercury, whereas they likely did not worship Mercury by name at all.⁵⁵ Indigenous deities are given Latin names and personas and the influence of *interpretatio* is so great that sometimes even local adherents adopt this new name and persona for their deity.

While this process may be useful to both cultures in creating a sort of syncretic religion it can also be destructive. Roman religion often used epithets to describe different and unique aspects of gods that had larger images. Even so, the quirks and unique functions of local deities may be lost due to the overwhelming influence of non-native forms.⁵⁶ *Interpretatio* is clearly used in this period in Roman history with the incorporation of Etruscan and later Greek deities. *Interpretatio* goes further than simply ascribing new names and aspects to foreign deities by incorporating aspects or even new gods into the old pantheon. This is true with the overwriting of Quirinus and Mars and also with the incorporation of deities such as Venus and Epona.

Syncretism of religion can lead to better understanding between the two peoples and a more powerful presence of religion in society, but much is also potentially lost. In the case of the Romans they lost the early origins of their religion and shifted from natural to civic religion because of this process. Jupiter, Neptune, and Mars are all ancient Roman deities that largely changed in function and image, moving from a focus on natural order and fertility to social order and victory. Because of this process the gods' purviews generally became focused on the betterment of the state, and the priest's role in society became one of subordination to governmental authority. The older gods either

⁵⁵ Caesar, *The Conquest of Gaul*, VI.17.

⁵⁶ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 234.

lessened in importance or were forced to change their roles to adapt to civic religion. Jupiter's plan grew to incorporate Roman imperialism, and Mars became a god of war instead of a god of agriculture.

In the Republic the Romans had a civic religion. The power of the religion bolstered the power of the state, and not the other way around. Romans celebrated festivals and priests performed ceremonies to ensure continued Roman supremacy. In some ways, it is difficult to classify the difference between the religion and government because they were intimately linked together. As Mary Beard says in her book, *Rome in the Late Republic*, “The real problem, however, is that in the Roman world those two categories did not exist as distinct entities, but were inextricably entwined. Indeed there is no exact equivalent in Latin of our words ‘religion’ and ‘politics’.”⁵⁷ By the point in Roman history where they had a full civic religion their government and priesthood were inextricably entwined, to the point that they no longer had separate sacred and secular functions.

Mars' ability to ensure victories in war was essential to the civic religion of this period. Rome grew from a small town in central Italy to a vast empire, dominating the Mediterranean. The Romans did this through what they viewed as just and pious wars. To ensure the justness and piety of their wars the priests of Mars, headed by the *Flamen Martialis*, interpreted omens and ensured the purity of the soldiers through religious festivals. If the gods objected to actions that Romans were going to take, the actions were postponed or dismissed. For this reason he had festivals at the start of the campaigning season, March, and at the end of it, October, both for purification purposes. This ritual is similar in intent to natural religion, interpreting the will of the gods to ensure actions

⁵⁷ Beard, *Rome in the Late Republic*, 35.

were just. However, it is important to understand the focus on this event. The priests of Mars were asking for his justification in declaring wars as a state, most often against another state. This would have place in natural religion, the focus of which was not these sorts of divinations.

As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, the festival calendar was important to the natural phase of roman religion, and it continued to be in the civic phase. The holy month of Mars, March, was a month of festival and celebration for the Romans. As the start of the campaigning season and the start of the year, Mars held particular influence over this month. Mars' priesthood performed rituals that tied back to ancient origins. The *Quinquatria*, the *Equirria*, and the *Tubilustrium* were all days of ritual purification. These were to prepare the soldiers for the year to come, and these festivals were taken seriously by both citizens and soldiers. In 190 B.C. Scipio Africanus was out with his army while this festival was going on. He was also priest of Mars, and there was a prohibition that any priest that was not at the ceremony was not allowed to take part in any troop movement for the month. He camped his army across the river from the anxious enemy army for the entire month.⁵⁸ That he was serving as a priest while on campaign speaks to the nature of civic priesthood as well. There is a certain utility in having a priest of Mars lead an army in battle. He would have insight into how to do the auguries that would foretell a successful battle. In this way a priest of civic religion can also be useful in aiding the republican government. This dual service would have been unheard of in natural religion. Except for extreme circumstances priests would not lead military expeditions.

On the other end of the festival calendar there was another day devoted to Mars,

⁵⁸ Scullard, *Ceremonies and Festivals*, 86.

which again shows how his focus shifted in this period. In October, at the end of the campaigning season, there was the festival of *Armilustrium*. Whereas the early festivals prepared the soldiers for war, this brought them back to Rome. The purpose of this was to wash away the literal and spiritual infection from strangers and bloodshed. Soldiers would put their weapons away for the winter and the divine armaments of Mars would be locked up in his temple.⁵⁹ This was to signify a return to a more civilian way of life. All of these festivals were there to reinforce the power of the army, which gives an example of how the religion shifted to civic religion. Mars' focus shifted from protection to aggression and his priests were actively supporting and justifying Roman imperialism.

In this shift from natural to civic religion, Mars fared well. He maintained his importance to the Roman people, even if his early foci were lost. His compatriot in the Archaic Triad, Quirinus, did not fare as well. Quirinus is not nearly as important a deity later in the republic or the empire, being known mostly for his associations with Romulus. Even his early representations became colored by associations with Mars. Livy will describe him as a war god. “What of your shields, Mars Gradivus, and you, father Quirinus?”⁶⁰ In this quote he is associated with Mars as bearing sacred shields. One of the few aspects that remains of the early Quirinus is that he is a protector of the city, while Mars is the protector while in the field. However, as can be seen by this quote, they crossed paths frequently. Quirinus all but disappeared later in Roman history. The agricultural fertility and protection offered by Quirinus did not transfer well into the period of Roman civic religion.

⁵⁹ Scullard, *Ceremonies and Festivals*, 195.

⁶⁰ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, V.52. This quote also highlights an important aspect of studying Roman gods, the use of epithets. The gods were invoked in different forms and called by different names depending on the purpose the invoker wished them to serve.

Instead of the Archaic Triad, Roman religion in this period was dominated by the Capitoline trio. These were the gods Jupiter, who retained his power as the chief god, Juno and Minerva, both Etruscan imports. Quirinus and Mars were demoted from the divine trio, but Mars still retained a supreme importance. Juno, Vesta, and Minerva all had similar aspects to Quirinus, and his worship lessened in the Republic.

The Goddess Juno is one of the chief gods imported from the Etruscans. She is linked with Hera of the Greek pantheon because they overlap in their domains. Juno has dominion over births and the married life of women. Women who were forced to live in impurity were expected to avoid Juno. According to A. Cornelius Gellius, “Let no concubine touch the temple of Juno; if she touch it, let her, with hair unbound, offer up a ewe lamb to Juno.”⁶¹ She also was worshiped as having influence over young soldiers in a matronly way. She was entirely subordinate to Jupiter in the Capitoline trio.⁶² The incorporation of Juno indicates a shift in how religion is used in the Republic. The worship of Juno as a god of mothers and childbirth, and her societal influence, clearly indicates that the Romans of this period were focused on ensuring social order among women. The restrictions that were placed on impure women from interacting with her clearly indicates this. Generally, civic religion enforces social order, and Juno is a good example of this.

The festival of the *Matronalia* was a good example of civic religion enforcing social order. It was a celebration of married women and mothers. Specifically, those mothers and daughters who were acting according to their proper role in society were honored in this festival. This festival was sacred to Juno, and was observed by Romans

⁶¹ Gellius. A. Cornelius. “Attic Nights.” Lacus Curtius.
<http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/home.html> (accessed February 4, 2011).

⁶² Beard, North and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 16.

showing respect to its wives and mothers. Mothers were given gifts and wives were afforded respect by their husbands. In a society that was as patriarchal as Rome's this was quite an inversion. Whereas the *paterfamilias*, the male head of the household, typically had the power of life and death over anyone under his household this day respect was given to the female members of the home.

It may seem odd that this festival, which was dedicated to Juno and the mothers that she represented, was held at the start of the month sacred to Mars, but the ancient Italic origins make sense. Speaking as Mars, Ovid writes, “Hence the Sabine mothers acquired the duty, no light one, To celebrate the first day, my Kalends. Either because they ended that war, by their tears, In boldly facing the naked blades, Or because Ilia⁶³ happily became a mother through me, Mothers justly observe the rites on my day.”⁶⁴ We see from this that Juno plays a role in the military as well. All of the gods in civic religion are seen as working in harmony to maintain the social and divine order that the civic religion represented.

All of the gods and goddesses were expected to work together for the betterment of the state. Of course those in the major triad were the most revered. The other goddess that made up the Capitoline triad was Minerva, who bore a striking resemblance to Athena, but differed in several crucial ways. Firstly, she did not represent the protection of the state like Athena did. That role was taken up by several other deities already in the Roman pantheon such as Mars and Vesta. Because both Vesta and Mars were important

⁶³ Ilia, also known as Rhea Silvia, was the legendary mother of Romulus, the ancestor of the Romans. Mars was believed to be the mythical father as was noted in Livy, “The Vestal was forcibly violated and gave birth to twins. She named Mars as their father, either because she really believed it, or because the fault might appear less heinous if a deity were the cause of it.” Livy, 1-4. Livy does not paint as gentle a picture as Mars.

⁶⁴ Ovid, *Fasti*, III.234.

to Roman religion their worship adapted to changing conditions in civic religion. This left little room for many of Athena's aspects when she was incorporated as Minerva. She was represented in various forms as the the inventor of music, crafts, and the goddess of medicine.⁶⁵ The role she played here was not necessarily filled by another god before her, which indicates a changing focus in Roman society at this point.

However, much of what made Athena such a popular goddess to the Greeks was already part of what made Juno, Jupiter, Mars, and Vesta popular among the Romans. Mars and Vesta both looked after the state in a way that Minerva had no way of interrupting. Juno espoused the cause of women in Rome, and Jupiter represented knowledge. All of these aspects meant Minerva was more limited in her divinity than her Grecian counterpart. She was still an important and well-loved deity, often being invoked by military leaders and politicians alike especially due to her importance as a healing goddess. She is often invoked as part of the triad. In this instance, the focus on civic religion can be seen where three deities whose purview was not militaristic are presented as protecting soldiers. "Jupiter Optimus Maximus, Queen Juno, Minerva, all ye gods and goddesses who dwell in the Capitol, do ye suffer your soldier and defender to be thus persecuted by his enemies? Shall this right hand with which I drove the Gauls from your shrines be manacled and fettered?"⁶⁶

The deities of the Capitoline Trio represent the intermediate step between the ancient Roman deities and the importation of later Greek deities. Juno and Minerva are both somewhat similar to their Greek counterparts, at least far more than the older deities. They have been adapted by the Romans for distinctly Roman purposes, though.

⁶⁵ Cicero, *de Divinatione*, II.123.

⁶⁶ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, VI.16.

As time passes there is a shift in the religion such that the gods that are imported and the religion that is practiced becomes more Hellenistic in character. As a consequence of this the religion shifts further towards a civic religion instead of a natural religion. The Greeks themselves were practicing a more civic religion instead of a natural religion as indicated by the deities and practices incorporated by the Romans from them.

As the process of becoming a civic religion continues over the course of the Republic, more deities are imported from the East. These deities had important ties to civic religions there, and became equally important for these aspects in Roman religion. Venus was a later import and a good example of this. Her sphere of influence was mostly extended into the realms of women, love, and desire. In perhaps a clever tribute to her, the *curule Aedile*, a Roman public official, built her first temple with fines collected from adulterous women.⁶⁷ This is a clear example, just as Juno was, of a god and priesthood whose purpose is to mandate societal order. It is likely that there was no archaic cult for her as there was for all of the deities previously discussed. She had no *Flamen*, or high priest, and there was no festival for her on the oldest calendars. The earliest cult to her likely had Greek origins, and thus she was likely an import in later years. Ovid will reinforce her Greek origins. “but I surmise that the month of Venus took its name from the Greek language: the goddess was called after the foam of the sea.”⁶⁸ The reason it is important to point out her case is that all of the reasons that identify her as an outsider also set a criteria for determining who the insiders were. The other deities already mentioned all had high priests, ancient cults, and festivals devoted to them. Venus did not really gain much prominence as a goddess until the time of the late Republic when a

⁶⁷ Scullard, *Ceremonies and Festivals*, 177.

⁶⁸ Ovid, *Fasti*, IV.62.

temple was built for her by Pompey,⁶⁹ and Caesar claimed that she was the patron goddess of his family.⁷⁰ This represents the Hellenization of the late republic and early empire.

There is evidence in the literature that, even though Venus was brought into the religion relatively late, older sacrificial practices were still used for her. There is an example from Plautus in *Little Carthaginian* of an unsuccessful supplicant. “For damn me – here I am, my gods in a dreadful rage, six times today I've sacrificed a lamb, but I haven't been able to do one sacrifice that suits Venus.”⁷¹ In this section there is evidence that Venus was worshiped conventionally as ancient deities were. The sacrifice of lambs was a classic example many different religion's of early sacrificial ritual practice. In this way Venus was brought in to the common practices of other, ancient deities. The focus of religion shifted from natural to civic, but the practices that tied Romans to their ancient roots did not necessarily change. It was important, especially for these newer deities, to fit into the existing hierarchy.

There was one other deity who showed a clear transition from natural religion to civic religion. As was discussed earlier, Neptune's early origins are focused on natural religion. He was a god of fresh water and devotion to him ensured agricultural fertility and rainfall. Neptune's early origins are almost entirely overwritten by the importation of the Greek deity Poseidon. His later connection to the sea came when Romans started to sail the seas and interact more with the Greeks. The Romans encountered the god Poseidon, whose domain was the entire sea, and they appropriated him into Neptune. Most of the information on Neptune is filtered through this link with Poseidon. An

⁶⁹ Scullard, *Ceremonies and Festivals*, 191.

⁷⁰ Warrior, *Roman Religion*, 76.

⁷¹ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 153.

excerpt from a poem by Catullus reads, “Of all near islands...of every sort that in pellucid lakes or vast ocean fresh or salt Neptune bears-.”⁷² In this poem we see Neptune still bore the fresh water aspects of his early godhood, but also bore the aspect of the sea that came much later. There is also a clear indication of the influence of civic religion as opposed to natural religion. Neptune's influence becomes one of reinforcing naval power. Previously he was devoted to agriculture as a god of fresh water. This shift shows the difference between a god whose focus is on the natural order to one who is focused on order in the empire.

The gods of this section represent a time period that encompasses most of the republic, ca. 509 B.C. to 27 B.C. Venus only gains importance in the third century, while Mercury and Neptune both have older roots, but a more recent Hellenic association. The early deities of Vesta, Janus, Faunus, and Jupiter all represent a period of Rome when the citizens were relatively cut off from outside influences. The worship of these gods is therefore a direct representation of what was important to the Romans at this time and clearly reflected their natural religion. Vesta and Janus in particular are interesting cases because they have no Greek counterpart, and both lose power and influence in the shift to civic religion. These gods are distinctly Roman, and can be used to determine far more specific insights into Roman life than the deities that were imported from Etruscan and Greek sources..

By the same token, the deities Quirinus and Mars are both useful in determining what was important for the Romans. They form a picture of what was important to the Romans in the period of the smaller scale conflicts within Italy, and before the shift

⁷² C. Valerius Catullus, *The Poems of Catullus* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 31.

towards civic religion. Mars is always an important god to the Romans, but his early aspects represent a different character than his later ones. The same holds true for Quirinus. While he represented the common citizen early on, he came to represent something quite different later on. As a representation of the deified Romulus he came to represent a divine kingship, something the Romans would have repudiated in the republic.

This is perhaps why the Capitoline trio came to replace them. Juno and Minerva both represented aspects of Roman culture, but they were far more influenced by outside forces than the earlier gods and goddesses. The earlier deities reveal a distinct character that is not found elsewhere in the ancient Mediterranean world. Mars protected the Romans while they were on campaign. Vesta and Janus protected their society, and Quirinus protected their cities. Throughout it all, Jupiter sat atop his throne and ensured continued prosperity. It was all according to his plan. Romans were farmers and soldiers, and their success indicates that they were quite good at both. They appealed to the deities of their pantheon to ensure that they remained so.

The shift to civic religion is shown throughout this period. The priesthoods become open and even restricted to the nobility and lose the bans and strictures that were common in the period of natural religion. The focus of the gods also shifts from fertility and agriculture to social and civic order. In addition to his role as maintaining cosmic order Jupiter also in this period takes on the role of maintaining social order. Meanwhile, the gods that have no meaningful way to interact with the civic religion and its focus on civic order are replaced or forgotten. Early Roman religion not only bears more resemblance to Celtic religion, but barely resembles its later form due to Hellenic

influences.

Chapter III: Celtic Religion

When the Romans conquered the Celts, Roman religion was entirely civic. Greek influences largely overwrote the early Roman belief structures. By comparing early and late Roman religion to Celtic religion it is possible to see how Roman religion changed. Even though the period of interaction is much later in time, the Celts still practice natural religion as opposed to civic religion. Their society was more rural and their concerns were more based on natural order than civic order. Their gods were primarily deities of fertility and natural protection. Also, unlike the later Romans, they did not use the power of religion to bolster the state. Religion was of paramount importance while the state came second. Celtic religion represents more the natural religion that is also evident in the Monarchy and early Republic of Rome.⁷³

The Celts were not as homogenous and were more disparate than the Romans. Their territory covered a much broader range of both ecologies and populations. It is for this purpose that it is necessary to present a certain amount of background on the Celts. This will help explain some of the shared heritage, both linguistic and archaeological, that influences their religious beliefs and cultural patterns.

Broadly speaking the term Celt refers more to a language group than it does to an

⁷³ On the nature of Roman sources when dealing with the Celts there are several problems that need to be addressed early on. The Romans were not going to provide an unfantastic representation of the Celts because it is his intention to emphasize the bizarre nature of Celtic society. Woolf explains this well, "Classical testimony of this sort is difficult to use, partly since it is rarely clear which Gauls are meant by each reference and partly since observations were naturally filtered through a whole series of Roman preconceptions. On the whole classical observers either focused on the bizarre; on human but not 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 the election of the Aeduan magistrates." Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, 213. Sources in the ancient world tended to practice embellishment of events to enhance their stories. For this reason it is difficult to use ancient sources for their face value when it comes to historical truth. This paper largely attempts to look at what is suggested and what is important to the ancient authors. In cases such as the establishment of the priesthood by Numa it is more important that it is the belief that the king had this power than necessarily that it was factual that he did so, even though it is likely that he did. Religious records generally were better kept than some other sorts of records in Roman society.

actual political or societal grouping. Generally there was some consistency of cult practices across a large portion of temperate Europe, which seem to all link back to a common ritual tradition from the Bronze Age. It is possible to see this because the remains left behind and found by archaeologists were subjected to manipulation, likely through religious ritual.⁷⁴ The Celts were not unified under a common political structure like the Romans or Greeks. Instead, they represented a shared culture across tribal boundaries. They demonstrated the ability to rise occasionally into well-organized fighting forces, as the Romans learned to fear early on. Charismatic leaders and forced migrations caused this unity more often than a desire to link tribes together. The Celts of the sixth to the first century B.C. provide a useful contrast to their continental contemporaries because even though they were not as cohesive, they were as intricate and complex.⁷⁵

From 1800 to 1200 B.C., proto-Celtic settlers claimed the lands north of the Alps in Europe. Their land extended from southern Germania to central Gaul. They preferred hilly land with high plains and river valleys. This was the best combination for their practice of combining agriculture with pastoralism. They would winter their animals in the lowland river valleys. They would then herd them to the newly melted, and fertile, grassland in the hills and mountains in the spring for summer pasturage. The Celts marked these events on their calendar with sacred festivals, incorporating their religion into their agricultural lives, just as the Romans did in their early religion. This clearly indicates a focus on natural religion. Their concerns were based on natural order, fertility

⁷⁴ Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, 209.

⁷⁵ Bernhard Maier, *The Celts*, 6. The Celts also pose a unique study because Celtic culture still exists in several places in the modern world. In fact, it was not until modern times that these societies realized and came to appreciate their shared heritage.

of the land, the people, and the animals, and their agriculture. Their deities are more wild and more based on the animals and land around them.

Little is known about the early period of Celtic history because the sources simply do not exist to give more information. Celtic artifacts are dated as early as the eighth century, but archaeologists have had trouble finding sites dated earlier than that. As Gerhard Herm says, “No people enters into history fully equipped with language, national customs and culture, as Athena emerged from the head of Zeus.”⁷⁶ They were not necessarily involved in the intense Mediterranean cultural interactions like the Romans, though there were Greek colonies in Celtic lands. The religion at least remained largely non-Hellenistic and based more on natural phenomena.

The next period of development for the Celts is called the Hallstatt Culture, between 1200 and 500 B.C.⁷⁷ Successful farming practices led to overpopulation. Thus, the Celts spread across Europe. This expansion started in 1200 B.C. when they expanded into southern Gaul and northern Iberia. The rise of warrior culture, a growing cultural and religious uniformity across Celtic lands, and the development of hill forts define this period. Like the proto-culture, the Hallstatt culture comes to an end before the majority of sources are available about the Celts.⁷⁸

The fifth century marks the start of the La Tène culture and the start of any useful primary written evidence. The first use of the term Celt comes from Herodotus in the fifth century when he says “The Celts live beyond the Pillars of Hercules, and are

⁷⁶ Gerhard Herm, *The Celts*, 107.

⁷⁷ Some of the best resources for studying this period are necessarily archaeological. Hallstatt culture is so called because of the first archaeological site discovered dealing with Celts in this period. 193 graves and over three thousand objects were collected. This period rose to significance seemingly overnight. Gerard Herm, *The Celts*, 102.

⁷⁸ At this point the Romans were engaged in the Apennine culture which represented the Italian Bronze Age. The later Iron Age was called the Villanovan culture.

neighbours of the Cynesians who are the westernmost European people.”⁷⁹ He only knew of them from second-hand accounts. It is in this period that the Celts refine their metallurgy and become fierce and well-equipped warriors.

Overpopulation and successful campaigning led the Celts to expand in all directions. The Celts marched over the Alps and settled in northern Italy in this period. Rome, taking umbrage at this invasion of barbarians, sent an army to deal with the Celts. The Celts from Gaul crushed the Roman army and marched on the city of Rome in 387 B.C. The Romans left in the city abandoned everything except the Capitoline hill, the center of their government and religion. Livy recorded this situation well and said of those who protected the hill, “Yet, though afflicted and weighed down by great misfortune, they were not so crushed that...they were unprepared to defend the Capitol courageously, however small it was, however ill-provided, the sole remaining bastion of liberty.”⁸⁰ Livy painted a positive picture of their defense, but it was not until the Romans paid a punishingly expensive tribute to the Celts that the invaders stopped sacking the city and left Rome. This marked the lowest point of Roman history and one of the higher points of Celtic history.

At this point we reach the time period of comparison, when Caesar conquered the Gauls and instigated widespread cultural interaction, in the 50s B.C. onwards. This is the point when the religions come into direct interaction. The second Celtic incursion into Italy in the La Tène period did not go as well for the Celts. The Celts had expanded their culture group to its largest extent and were attacking Roman territory for new lands. The Romans of this period were a different, stronger enemy than before. They were only

⁷⁹ Herodotus, *Histories*, II.33.3-4.

⁸⁰ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, V.42.

starting their ascent to power and were a more organized fighting force. They slowly but irresistibly conquered the Celts in Italy, then Britannia. Unconquered Celtic people fleeing Roman incorporation were forced to migrate north away from Roman expansion. When Caesar first encounters people from Britannia, he says, “The interior of Britain is inhabited by people who claim...[to be] Belgic immigrants who came to plunder and make war.”⁸¹ He was talking of a tribe of Celts known as the Belgae, who had only settled Britannia less than a century before.

The interaction between the Celts and Romans helps to inform the argument about their religions. Celtic religion was a natural religion, largely separate from outside influence until the invasion of the Romans. Just like the early Romans, the festivals of the Celtic religion link back to ancient times and reveal the nature of their religion. These were generally tied to the fertility of the land, and thus the major festivals correspond to the seasons and reflect their agricultural significance. Their gods generally were focused on purity, fertility, and agricultural productivity, just as the early Romans were. Their priests were separate and in ways more powerful than their political figures, just like the early Romans. The later conquering Romans do not see their own religion reflected in Celtic practices, but *superstitio*.

Like all writers who encountered them, Caesar's first impression of the Celts was that, “As a nation the Gauls are extremely superstitious.”⁸² Anyone who saw a Celtic village would immediately notice the severed heads posted on pikes outside of homes. Warriors would seize fallen enemies' heads and put them outside of their homes as

⁸¹ Caesar, *The Conquest of Gaul*, V.12.2.

⁸² Caesar, *The Conquest of Gaul*, VI.16.

protective charms.⁸³ This would seem quite alarming to foreign, Roman eyes. Their daily devotions and foreign practices led the Romans to view them as extraordinarily concerned with superstition. This reaction shows that the Romans had lost contact with their own origins and superstitious practices. The practice of natural religion is necessarily more central to the family and smaller groups. The Romans, whose religion was largely based in the city and highly organized into ritual practices based on temples and priests, did not see the correlation to their own origins.

There were certainly differences between their religions at this period. One of the ways that Celtic religion was quite different was the Celtic view of the afterlife. They believed in reincarnation. When a Celt died, he would briefly pass on to the Otherworld where gods and goddesses dwelt. Their afterlife was not moralized as later salvation religions were or the current Roman civic religion's afterlife was. Those few spirits who were unlucky enough to be reincarnated suffered the worst fate. "These spirits rose to the aerial purgatory after they had for long years tormented and been tormented, but they could not reach the moon, which repelled them; they were condemned to reincarnation in new bodies, either of men or of beasts, and were once again delivered to the fury of the passions."⁸⁴ The Roman afterlife was based on the idea of a spirit that is judged based on your actions on earth. Those spirits who did not act heroically were not granted the best afterlife. They still could gain admittance into a decent afterlife if they were good Roman citizens. This is a good yet again of how Roman religion in this period is civic because of the Roman conception of the afterlife. The religion of the Romans said that a person was to be punished if they did not live their life as a proper citizen. Those who did not

⁸³ Ross, *Everyday Life of the Celts*, 155.

⁸⁴ Franz Cumont, *After Life in Roman Paganism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1922).

participate correctly in the social order that was reinforced by civic religion were not allowed proper rest in the afterlife. Most Celts believed that they simply returned to the material world after a brief period of rest and reflection regardless of whether they lived as good citizens. There is a clear divide between natural and civic religion on this point, natural religion not necessarily reinforcing the social order while civic religion is.

In spite of natural religion not reinforcing social order, it did often espouse personal virtue. The belief in reincarnation pairs well with the Celtic belief that their men and women should emulate the warrior-heroes in their religion and myths. This powerful warrior ethos espoused in their religion was seen in the literary tradition as well. As Strabo says, “To the frankness and high-spiritedness of their temperament must be added the traits of childish boastfulness and love of decoration. They wear ornaments of gold torques on their necks, and bracelets on their arms and wrists.... It is this vanity which makes them unbearable in victory.”⁸⁵ At the same time, they were expected to remain pious. A Celt who did not properly respect the gods not only doomed himself but everyone in his village. Strabo describes the Celts, a description that they likely would agree with, “The whole race...is madly fond of war, high spirited and quick to battle, but otherwise straightforward and not of evil character.”⁸⁶ While there were aspects of the Celtic religion that espoused a warrior ideal it is important to note that these still fit well in the idea of natural religion. Unlike Mars whose purpose later on was to ensure victory in battle, the Celtic gods and their ideal warriors sought personal glory. Civic religion focused on victory as an army instead of personal victory. This was reflected in the example of human sacrifice called the *devotio* which was a self-sacrifice to ensure a

⁸⁵ Cunliffe, *The Ancient Celts*, 93.

⁸⁶ Cunliffe, *The Ancient Celts*, 93.

greater Roman victory. Most rituals in Celtic warfare were meant to obtain personal glory, such as the taking of heads.

Personal victory and valor are tied up intimately with the idea of masculinity as well in Celtic culture. Warriors were expected to triumph through their own strength and they would be rewarded both in this world and the next. When not at war, Celtic belief stated that the world required the binary force of male and female coming together. There is not a similar aspect in Roman religion at this period, or perhaps in the earlier period either. A culture that practices natural religion generally has a more egalitarian outlook about the roles of the sexes. Civic religion is the form of religion that strongly enforces social order and reinforces the patriarchy. That the Celts believed in the separate and valuable contributes of both sexes speaks to a religion that is put in place before an entrenched patriarchy. This is represented well in the festival of Samhain when Morrigan couples with Dagda, a god whose name can be translated as simply, "The Good." Dagda was a powerful warrior, wielding a phallic club and bearing a cauldron, a yonic, or feminine, symbol of rebirth. Dagda is just one form of the all-powerful tribal god that shows up numerous times in Celtic religion. This tribal god is mated to an earth goddess, which ensures fertility of crops and the land. At the same time he represents the force of arms in battle, and she the magical forces that interfere.⁸⁷ There is no analogue for this in Roman religion in this period. The closest links to this sort of natural religion come from the festivals devoted to the gods of Rome's own natural religion period. The Lupercalia in particular, with its focus on fertility, was quite similar to this rite.

Tied up in this idea of natural religion being more allowing of women participating in culture was the point that Celtic women were allowed to participate far

⁸⁷ Ross, *Everyday Life of the Celts*, 160.

more in society and had more rights under Celtic law. The natural religion of the Celts was not focused on regulating social order as the Roman civic religion was, or as the later Gallo-Roman religion would be. Women could participate in a wider range of professions than they could in Greece or Rome. They could be lawyers and judges, as well as priests and warriors. This respect for women extended into the supernatural realm. Celts valued women because they believed women had gifts of foresight and divination that men lacked. Women were accepted into the priesthood just as men were. Female druids are recorded both in Celtic myth and in Roman histories. Both Greek and Roman sources speak of Dryades, or female druids.⁸⁸ In recording the battle of Mona, Tacitus spoke of these female druids, but not by name. “Facing them on the shore was the enemy line, a dense array of arms and men, and amongst them rushed women who, like furies, wore funereal clothing, had disheveled hair, and brandished torches...urging each other not to be alarmed a horde of fanatical women, they charge forward.”⁸⁹ Celtic religion reflected the special and more equal position of women in Celtic society. The presence of women in the priesthood also showed clear ties to natural religion. The only priesthood open to women in Roman society was the Vestal virgins, and that was formed when Rome had a natural religion. Even though female deities were incorporated into Roman civic religion, no new female priesthoods were established. Even the worship of Vesta was not expanded.

One point of contrast between Roman and Celtic natural religion comes from their priestesses. Celtic women were allowed to conduct their work without a male priest overseeing them. The Vestals had strict bans placed upon them. “They were required to

⁸⁸ Ellis, *The Druids*, 91.

⁸⁹ Tacitus, *Annals*, XIV.

remain undefiled by marriage for the space of thirty years, devoting themselves to offering sacrifices and performing the other rites ordained by law.”⁹⁰ Also, these women were under the close supervision of the *Rex Sacrorum*. He was responsible for punishing them if they failed in their duties. Roman natural religion at even the early periods was more patriarchal in nature. In spite of this, the natural religion period in Rome gave them the only major female role in the priestly orders, that being the Vestal Virgins.

Natural religion did emphasize the role of women, but male priests were still the more powerful and prominent religious figures. The male counterparts, Druids, were unique, fascinating and powerful priests of the Celtic religion.⁹¹ The first mention of druids occurs in the third century B.C. by Diogenes Laertius. He says, “Some say that the study of philosophy originated with the barbarians. In that among the Persians there existed the Magi...and among the Celts and Gauls men who were called Druids.”⁹² This indicates an awareness of the druids in contemporary cultures, and an awareness by contemporary cultures as the Celts as somewhat unified group. This also represents at least a small respect for the druids, implying that philosophy came from them. Caesar spoke of the druids as the most important social group. He related that they were the keepers of theology, philosophy, astrology, and natural history for the Celts. This is important for the comparison of religion because it is the priests who are seen as the most knowledgeable, the most important group. In Roman society at this time the most

⁹⁰ Dionysus of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, II, 67.

⁹¹ The Druids by their nature are elusive in the historical record. They did not record their own religion or much about themselves, and were abolished not long after Roman conquest. As such, there is almost no record of their voice in the literary record. Even so, they remain a subject of intense interest and also intense scrutiny by scholars and amateur historians alike. Woolf says something on this as well, “The bibliography on the Druids is immense, and much of it speculative. Druids were already mythologized in the ancient world – as natural philosophers at the edge of the world...and have been again on several occasions.” Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, 213.

⁹² Diogenes Laertius, *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, 1,1.

important group were clearly the politicians, emphasizing the role religion played in supporting civic power. The druids did not share their power with the politicians. They had clear sacred authority and some authority over the secular realm as well. Caesar said that the druids supervised sacrifices to the gods and judicial affairs. Only druids were allowed to preside over murder cases.⁹³ Their knowledge and prestige was unquestionable. This shows more than anything else the power these priests had. That they were exempt from military service and paying taxes shows this further. Caesar mentions this in his commentaries, “The Druids do not go to war, nor pay tribute together with the rest; they have an exemption from military service and a dispensation in all matters.”⁹⁴ In Celtic natural religion the kings and their administration were subordinate to the priests in sacred matters and there was little overlap where secular rulers had sacred power. Druids retained their special place in society and their authority also bled over into the secular realm with their exemption from taxes and their judicial authority.

It is very important to say at this point that the druids did not run the state. They were a separate power structure, more like the early Roman priests. Caesar continues his description of the Romans, “The Druids officiate at the worship of the gods, regulate public and private sacrifices, and give rulings on all religious questions. Large numbers of young men flock to them for instruction, and they are held in great honour by the people.”⁹⁵ Druids were the priests of the Celtic religion, but they were also far more than that. They were the keepers of oral tradition and the educated class of the Celts. While

⁹³ Caesar, *The Conquest of Gaul*, VI.13.

⁹⁴ Caesar, *The Conquest of Gaul*, VI.14.

⁹⁵ Caesar, *The Conquest of Gaul*, VI.13. Caesar was writing this as he was attempting to conquer the Celts. He is willing to both embellish their worth as enemies and demean them to further the idea that they are worth destroying. His understanding of the Celts also must filter through Roman perceptions of religion, which means that he is likely to remark more on their dissimilarities from Roman priests.

their government was not a theocracy, the influence that druids had over all elements of secular society shows the respect Celts had for their religion. Druids had the final say in both secular and sacred matters, but Roman priests of the civic religion phase were both subordinate to and highly linked with the government. Roman priests supported government institutions instead of chastising them.

The priesthood that was maintained in Roman religion that most similar was the Vestal priesthood. They too were taken at an early age and trained for most of their life as priestesses. These priests, too, were created during the natural religion phase of Roman religion. Druids clearly represent a natural religion priesthood. They are authority figures even to the king, and they serve their whole life for religion just as the early positions in Rome, such as the *Rex Sacrorum* and *Flamines* did. Thus, the priesthood of the early Roman period is far more similar to the Celtic priesthood of this period. The *Flamines* and *Rex Sacrorum* were positions that were held for life, just like the role of druids, and they were expected to work alone in their duties. The later priesthoods of the augurs and the college of pontiffs were not necessarily held for life, and they worked in concert with the priesthood's other members. This allowed them to divide duties amongst multiple members, and even to pursue other careers and civic positions. In addition, these civic priests held responsibilities that were not necessarily related to religion, such as political and military careers.

In addition, another point of comparison comes from the fact that the druids held their beliefs secret, even believing that their religion should not be written down. Partly this was so their position in society could not be stripped from them, just as was the case with early Roman priests. They believed that sacred authority needed to rest with the

priesthood, and should not be shared with any other members of their society. The druids were the only people who retained the knowledge necessary to propitiate the gods. They also did not want their religious beliefs to fall into the hands of foreigners.⁹⁶ The priesthood of Roman natural religion acted in a similar manner to retain their secular and sacred authority. The early laws were maintained by the priesthood and kept secret from the majority of the population. It was not until the Plebeians successfully agitated for them to be written down that the priest acceded this right. This resulted in the Twelve Tables. “Orders were made that in the first place search should be made for the treaties and laws - these latter including those of the Twelve Tables... - as far as they were still extant.” Even then some areas were kept secret only to the priesthood. “Some were made accessible to the public, but those which dealt with divine worship were kept secret by the pontiffs, mainly in order that the people might remain dependent on them for religious guidance.”⁹⁷

Also similar to the druids, the *Rex Sacrorum* and *Flamines Maiores* were both afforded considerable respect in their society. Plutarch recorded this respect when he asked the question of why the *Rex Sacrorum* had the service of governmental officials, “Is this similar to the conditions in some parts of Greece where the priesthood had a dignity commensurate with that of the kingship, and they appointed as priests no ordinary men?”⁹⁸ For those Romans who had no desire for a political career, these positions were good opportunities. Druids were similarly tremendously respected in Celtic society. They performed a wide range of roles and in some cases even had more power than kings.

“Just how important the Druids were was expressed in the *Texts of the Tain*, a great book

⁹⁶ Herm, *The Celts*, 239.

⁹⁷ Both quotes are from Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, VI.1.

⁹⁸ Plutarch, *Quaestiones Romanae*, 113.

of Irish myths, which states: 'The men of Ulster must not speak before the king, the king must not speak before his Druid.'⁹⁹

One reason that the druids and the early Roman priests had such authority is that natural religion does not necessarily support the social order, and reinforces the power of priests. Unlike civic religion, which enforces the power of civic officials and the government, the gods and the priests of natural religion did not share power with the government. These priests were, ultimately, the mouthpieces and interpreters of divine will. The gods and goddesses of natural religion also reflect this retention of power within the religion.

Celtic goddesses in particular enjoyed a special position in Celtic society not afforded to goddesses in other pantheons. The original creator deity of the Celts was a goddess while most other societies of Europe and the Mediterranean had all-powerful male creator gods.¹⁰⁰ This alone speaks volumes about the Celts. The goddesses of the Celtic pantheon were powerful female deities. They were generally associated with fertility, the earth, sexual pleasures, and war.¹⁰¹ It is difficult to surmise whether Roman goddesses had similar power and functions early on in the Republic. Certainly Vesta had a unique role in their religion, but most other female deities were either stamped out or overwritten by Hellenistic imports.

One of the goddesses of Celtic natural religion that largely retained her power and image in later civic religion was Epona. She was one of the most important goddesses for

⁹⁹ Brenda Ralph Lewis, *Ritual Sacrifice: A Concise History* (Gloucestershire, UK: Sutton Publishing, 2001), 68.

¹⁰⁰ Jupiter was the head of the Roman pantheon, while Zeus headed the Greek. Odin was known as the all-father of the Norse, and the Egyptians viewed Ra as their creator god. Persian Zoroastrianism had two creator deities, Ahura-Mazda and Ahriman, both of them male.

¹⁰¹ Ross, *Everyday Life of the Celts*, 165.

this discussion because her worship lasted far longer than other deities and ranged widely across Celtic lands and the later Empire. She was the goddess of horses, a deeply symbolic animal for the Celts. She is often depicted riding sidesaddle, sitting between two horses, or as a horse herself.¹⁰² Celtic natural religion did not necessarily anthropomorphize Epona or other deities. This may have been a tie back to Celtic animistic religion. Something that becomes quite important in the Gallo-Roman period is that she was sometimes shown as a horse herself. This idea has close ties to animistic religion, and it was not until the Romans conquered Gaul and the Gallo-Romans adopted civic religion that many of the Celtic deities were anthropomorphized.

Cernunnos was a second deity that was not always anthropomorphized, and who had clear ties to ancient Celtic religion. He was seen as a masculine warrior figure and a fertility god. He shared influence with other Celtic deities over the forces of nature, but he is perhaps the one most tied to wild nature. He had influence over the forces and was intimately tied to the land and the animals. Ross will say of Cernunnos, “The fact that in later Christian illuminated manuscripts he has become the devil and anti-Christian forces is indicative of his fundamental importance to the Celtic religion.”¹⁰³ Cernunnos was linked to the power of nature more than any other deity in the Celtic pantheon. He shares marked similarities to Faunus, the Roman god of wild nature from the period of natural religion. It is possible that they shared an earlier animistic root. Both were deities of wild places and animals and devoted to fertility. Also, they were both deities formed early on in each culture's natural religion.

To further the argument that Celtic natural religion was tied to animals, as with

¹⁰² Miranda Green, *Symbol and Image in Celtic Religious Art* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1989), 16.

¹⁰³ Ross, *Everyday life of the Celts*, 162.

Epona, and to nature, as with Cernunnos, it is beneficial to look at Celtic festivals. As with Roman festivals from the natural religion period there are ties to agriculture and pastoralism. Celtic society and economy depended heavily on agriculturalism and pastoralism for food and trading. Rigidly marking time with these festivals made sense in a society that needed to know when to plant crops and pasture animals. They have a festival to celebrate the coming of each new season, and also important times for agricultural and pastoral activities. Beltane celebrates the coming of summer, Lughnasa the coming of fall, Samhain the coming of winter, and Imbolc the coming of spring. Each of these dates is tied to the mythology and the gods and goddesses of Celtic religion, just as the festival and calendar in early Rome are tied to the deities and their days of worship.

The ties to agriculture are obvious when considering the rituals that made up the festivals. Samhain was the festival at the end of fall, and it represented their natural religion in two ways. Firstly, it represented two important agricultural activities. The first of these was the moving of animals to lowland winter pasturage. The Celts would drive their herds into more protected winter fields, where hungry wolves and winter cold had a harder time reaching them. The second agricultural activity was that this festival coincided generally with the last day to harvest crops from the field. There was a feast thrown at Samhain with these harvested crops, the pigs the Celts could not keep for the winter, and game animals they could catch in the wilderness. This feast has ties to natural religion because there was always an undertone of fear. Even though that year's harvest was done there was always the possibility of a harsh, long winter, or a bad harvest the next year. The focus of natural religion on fertility of land and propitiation of

the gods fits clearly here at this festival of harvest.

Beltane is the other festival that lends insight into Celtic natural religion. It was celebrated on May first and was a festival devoted to fertility. The origins of this holiday and its links to agriculture and pastoralism are fairly obvious as well. Beltane occurs at the height of the growing season when plants flower and careful propitiation of the gods is necessary to ensure a good growing season.¹⁰⁴ The festival of Beltane also marked the time when cows were taken from winter pasturage to freshly melted summer fields. These were the most plentiful lands available for the Celts to feed their herds. The crops at this point were in the ground but were not necessarily ready to harvest. It was important in this period for the Celts to propitiate the gods and ensure that the harvest was fruitful. This shows a clear tie to natural religion because of the focus on agriculture and fertility. It also corresponds well with Roman natural religion in that both Beltane and the Roman *Neptunalia* were celebrated in summer and for similar reasons. Both of these festivals ask for the favor of natural gods and good harvests.¹⁰⁵

The festivals that the Celts celebrated indicated that they viewed the world as a constant cycle of life and death that required sacrifice and faith to keep working. This basically summarizes one of the tenets of natural religion. The major function of a druid and other priests in natural religion was to perform these sacrifices to keep the gods

¹⁰⁴ Ross, *Everyday Life of the Celts*, 152.

¹⁰⁵ The modern traditions dictate that a young male and young female were named the May King and May Queen and then symbolically married. This represented the coming together of the masculine and feminine, and ensured protection just as it did on Samhain. This is the holiday that the ceremony of building a Maypole comes from. The villages would erect a large trunk of wood in a clearing and then ritually decorate it with flowers. The symbolism of this was fairly obvious. The festival gained its reputation for a day of promiscuity because of a tradition associated with the Maypole. The night before the Maypole was erected the young people of the village were expected to go out into the forest to collect flowers. These unsupervised young people did exactly what unsupervised young people do. The Maypole ceremony is still practiced in remnant Celtic communities, but was temporarily banned in 1644 by influential puritans. They railed against the 'Greenwood weddings' and believed that any girl that went 'a-maying' did not come back a virgin. Perhaps this part, too, was a practice endorsed by the Celts to ensure fertility of the land.

propitiated. This is an aspect that the Celts shared with the Romans. Priests would assist the state through their offerings of sacrifice. They would be responsible for giving these sacrifices to the gods on holy days. Romans were selective in which animals were sacrificed. During the sacrifice they looked at the animal's internal organs and if they did not fit the priest's desire another animal was found. "Once the animal had been killed, its vital organs-liver, gallbladder, intestines, lungs and heart-were examined to make sure they were healthy and therefore acceptable to the god. If not, then another animals was sacrificed and examined and none was offered to the god until the *popae*, or sacrificers, were satisfied."¹⁰⁶

These sacrifices share similarities, indicating a link between these two natural religions. One similarity is that the sacrifices were different depending on what sort of god they were sacrificing to. For the Romans sacrifices to sky gods were burned, sacrifices to sea deities were thrown into the water, and underworld gods were sacrificed to in pits.¹⁰⁷ The Celts had similar practices. "Lucan recorded how sacrifices to Taranis, who was probably a Celtic sky god, were burned. For offering to Teutates, the protector god, sacrifices were drowned, or they were hanged in the case of Esus, god of the arts."¹⁰⁸ The animal sacrifice also depended on the intended effect. Bulls were the most expensive, and the most propitiation could be bought and religious devotion shown through their sacrifice. Other animals that were commonly sacrificed were sheep and goats.

There is one aspect of sacrifice where the Romans actually grew closer to the Celts after incorporating elements of Etruscan worship. This was with human sacrifice.

¹⁰⁶ Lewis, *Ritual Sacrifice*, 59.

¹⁰⁷ Lewis, *Ritual Sacrifice*, 59.

¹⁰⁸ Lewis, *Ritual Sacrifice*, 69.

There is not a record of the Romans performing human sacrifice before encountering the Etruscans. The Romans gained the ritual of human sacrifice from them and practiced it when they thought it was necessary. There are three instances in Roman history of human sacrifice. In each case two Celts and two Greeks were gathered and buried alive in the Forum Boarium.¹⁰⁹ It is an intriguing point that all three of these sacrifices were ordered by the Senate, not a religious official because it shows the sacred power invested in the government in their civic religion in this period. A Celtic king would not request a sacrifice, but would instead consult the Druid, who may suggest one. This indicates the difference between natural and civic religion sacrifice.

As for the Celts, most ancient sources agreed that they practiced some form of human sacrifice, but do not agree on what sort. A small amount of archaeological evidence clearly supports this practice. A body found in Cheshire dates back to the first or second century. He was struck on the head, strangled, and his throat was slit, an example of the three-fold death that would be indicative of sacrifice.¹¹⁰ Posidonius, a Greek writer and one of the major sources for the Celts, relates that the Celts sacrificed their war prisoners. This is not unique in this period, but what is unique is that the Celts made this sort of sacrifice a religious experience, honoring their deities with the captured dead. It is difficult to place human sacrifice in the phases of religion. It is not necessarily tied to either natural or civic religion, as will be shown with the case of *devotio*. It was used in both natural and civic religion, and is of interest mostly because of the intention of the sacrifice.

¹⁰⁹ Lewis, *Ritual Sacrifice*, 57. The first instance was when the Romans were threatened by the Gauls. The second was when Hannibal was rampaging around Italy. The third sacrifice was performed when the Senate was threatened by Marius.

¹¹⁰ Barry Cunliffe, *The Ancient Celts* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1997), 192.

One of the most enduring images from Celtic religion is human sacrifice. The most infamous of these was the “wicker man,” a giant human-shaped cage of wood whose purpose was to imprison and burn many sacrifices at once. Caesar described it in detail:

“Some tribes have colossal images made of wickerwork, the limbs of which they fill with living men; they are then set on fire, and the victims burnt to death. They think that the gods prefer the execution of men taken in the act of theft or brigandage, or guilty of some offense; but when they run short of criminals, they do not hesitate to make up with innocent men.”¹¹¹

Whether wicker men existed is up to debate for there is no archaeological evidence one way or the other. The purpose of these wicker men is up for debate, but with such a large sacrifice it is likely that the Celts expected large act of propitiation or reward. Lactantius Placidus painted a more positive picture of sacrifice, this time evocative of civic religion:

“The Gauls had a custom of sacrificing a human being to purify their city. They selected one of the poorest citizens, loaded him with privileges and thereby persuaded him to sell himself as a victim. During the whole year he was fed with choice food at the town's expenses, then when the accustomed day arrived, he was made to wander through the entire city; finally he was stoned to death by the people outside the walls.”¹¹²

There are two other examples of human sacrifice in Rome that have no parallel in Celtic society. The first of these was a self sacrifice. Only three records of this sacrifice remain. It was, understandably, viewed as a last resort, as the person who invoked the gods forswore their own life. The rite of *devotio* is a method of voluntary sacrifice. A soldier, most likely a general or someone named by a general, offered his life to the gods and at the same time offered up the enemy troops as well.¹¹³ Livy records a famous example of this by a consul named Decius. “Then he girded up his toga in the Sabine manner, leaped fully armed on to his horse, and rode into the midst of the enemy-asight to admire for both armies, almost superhuman in its nobility, as if sent from heaven to

¹¹¹ Caesar, *The Conquest of Gaul*, 6,16.

¹¹² Ellis, *The Druids*, 147.

¹¹³ Bloch, *The Origins of Rome*, 132.

expiate all anger of the gods and deflect disaster from his own people to the Latins.”¹¹⁴

The Romans, encouraged by this show of courage, win the day. This practical invocation of the gods surely did wonders for the morale of Roman troops. It is important that a consul, a governmental official, could invoke this rite and have his troops bolstered by their faith in the state religion. It is also important that the intention of this sacrifice was that the welfare of the state would be maintained through the victory in battle. This indicates that this sort of sacrifice fit well into the idea of civic religion.

The other sort of human sacrifice was an import from the Etruscans and had clear ties to civic religion. This was the gladiatorial games. They evolved over time to be more festive and less ritualistic, but originally they were religious events. “They were part of the rituals, first recorded in Rome in 264 BC, that accompanied the funeral of Junius Pera, a member of the prestigious Brutus family. On that occasion three pairs of swordsmen fought each other to the death, presumably for the honour of giving the dead man an armed guard in the next world.”¹¹⁵ Fighting these gladiatorial not only was a public spectacle, but originally they were sacrifices for the public welfare.

These sacrifices were only performed in places that were considered sacred. This brings in a final aspect that is similar to both Roman and Celtic natural religion. This was the sort of areas that were considered sacred. The Celts left no extant temples like the Greeks or the Romans did in the Republic. The reason for this is simple. They did not build them. They believed that gods and goddesses should not be confined to a structure, and thus practiced their worship in the open. Celts would not understand the idea that

¹¹⁴ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, VIII,9. Decius was leading a wing of the Roman army against a coalition of enemies including the Celtic Gauls, Etruscans, and Sabines. When their attack pressed through Roman lines he performed this sacrifice which was a tremendous boon for Roman morale. The Romans, spurred by his devotion, fought back and defeated the coalition.

¹¹⁵ Lewis, *Ritual Sacrifice*, 59.

religion could be limited to only certain places and times. Any place considered sacred to the Celts emphasized connections between them and the natural world. Groves of trees and river shores were sacred places to the Celts. Lucan records one instance of this in the

Pharsalia:

There stood a grove/which from the earliest time no hand of man/had dared to violate; hidden from the sun/Its chill recesses; matted boughs entwined/Prisoned the air within. No sylvan nymphs/Here found a home, nor Pan, but savage rites/And barbarous worship, altars horrible/On massive stones upreared; sacred with blood/Of men was every tree.¹¹⁶

The only religious buildings that were constructed were earthwork structures with symbolic elements and pits to put ritual sacrifices in. These have been found throughout the majority of areas where Celts settled.¹¹⁷ Celts were also known to build stone circles and monuments in places sacred to them.¹¹⁸ All these constructions would be linked more to nature and natural, local materials.

A parallel can be drawn in early Roman society with the help of Livy. Early in the monarchy Numa named a grove as sacred:

There was a grove watered by a fountain of never-failing water that poured forth from a shaded grotto in its centre. Numan often made solitary visits there to meet, as he said, with the goddess; he consecrated this grove to Camenae because it was there that they conferred with his spouse Egeria.¹¹⁹

Normally Romans worshipped in temples that were placed in cities. These were the focus of both the early and later religion. This is perhaps an anachronism pushed back onto the early Romans. As seen here, they worshipped in open air groves just as the Celts did.

This could speak to an earlier form of worship in natural religion

For the Celts, the seasons would come on their own, but it was only through worship of the gods and goddesses that a favorable harvest and a short winter could be

¹¹⁶ Lucan, *Pharsalia*, III.453.

¹¹⁷ Ross, *Everyday Life of the Celts*, 139.

¹¹⁸ It is unknown what role the druids had with Stonehenge. Certainly it fit in with their style of outdoor worship, and they did construct stone structures. However, it is more likely that the immediate predecessors to the Celtic druidic society built this monument, and the druids appropriated it.

¹¹⁹ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, I.21.

obtained. These festivals ensured a continuation of Celtic life. Both Beltane and Samhain brought together the feminine and masculine to create a powerful whole. Celtic society is unique in this period for respecting the feminine as much as the masculine. Women had unparalleled rights in Celtic society, some of them not matched until the modern era. Goddesses, too, shared in the more equal society of the Celts. The most powerful, loved, and feared deities in the Celtic pantheon were all female.

Religion to the Celts was not a practice but a way of life. They did not shelve their gods or confine them in temples, but worshiped them always. Society was aligned in such a way as to reinforce the power of their religion. Druids enjoyed a special role as both the history keepers and arbiters of justice. The warrior-kings of society even bowed to the druids, fearing and respecting the power they represented.

Epilogue and Conclusion:

The effect of Mediterranean influences changed Roman religion from natural to civic. The comparison with Celtic religion shows how much it had in common at the start and how much it had changed by the time of the late Republic. Likewise, under Roman rule, Gaul was subjected to similar influences, as well as various Roman beliefs. The process of cultural change whereby Gaul became more like Rome generally greatly changed Celtic religion. The purpose of this chapter is to show that Celtic religion became generally civic as well, syncretizing Celtic beliefs with larger Imperial influences to create Gallo-Roman religion. It will also contextualize the conquest of the Celts by the Romans.

At the time of conquest, Gaul had a natural religion, focused on agriculture, fertility, and natural protection. The druids were the priestly class, and they were kept separate from the ruling hierarchy. The state was clearly subordinate to the religion with the king not allowed to speak when his druid was speaking.¹²⁰ During Roman rule the religion shifted. Instead of a separate class of druids, provincial elites became the more common priests. Ancient rites were replaced with Roman festivals, and temples were built over ancient groves.

Incorporation of Imperial religious structures coincided with the more widespread incorporation of Roman practices. Under Roman rule, Gaul urbanized immensely. Large grid patterns were put in place to create efficient cities. Roman education was brought in where the elites would send their children to learn Roman history, law, and rhetoric in Latin. Further Roman influence came from Roman officials, imported from the heartland and placed in the provinces. It made sense then that the Celts adapt to Roman rule by

¹²⁰ Lewis, *Ritual Sacrifice*, 68.

becoming more Roman themselves. The Romans for their part did not force the Gauls to accept Roman religious practices. They did ban certain religious activities while promoting other more Roman beliefs. Temples were built on ancient groves, Gods were anthropomorphized, and priests replaced druids.

When the Romans incorporated Gaul into the Empire, they sent Roman administrators to run the province. Both military units, such as legionaries, and civic officials who ran the day to day Imperial affairs aided this synthesis. Legionaries spread traditional Roman religion to the provinces and spread indigenous religion when they were reassigned. The worship of Epona, popular amongst horsemen, was found across most of the European empire in places like Britannia¹²¹ and Germania.¹²² Iconography even exists as far away as Dacia, bordering the Black Sea.¹²³ Civic officials had one particular role that meant they had enormous influence in religious affairs. The granting of official citizenship in the Empire was accompanied by a survey of local cults and assigning civic officials to administer them. Then new buildings were constructed, transforming the old space to fit with more Roman ideals.¹²⁴

Roman administrators also set up schools in the provinces, where the children of provincial elite would learn what it was to be Roman. These elites would learn in schools that it was in their best interest to support Roman rule. Here they would learn that the conquering of Gaul was just one part of the larger Roman divine mandate that the known world should become part of their empire. Pliny the Elder mentions this in his work, "I

¹²¹ *Epon(ae)*, found in Alcester, United Kingdom. <http://edh-www.adw.uni-heidelberg.de/offen/suchen2.html?hdnr=015980>

¹²² *In h(onorem) d(omus) d(ivinae) h(oc) Eponae*. Found in Ohringen, Germany. <http://edh-www.adw.uni-heidelberg.de/offen/suchen2.html?hdnr=024702>

¹²³ *Epon(a)e sanct(a)e / pro salute / C(ai) Iuli Septimi / Castini leg(ati) Aug(usti) / pr(o) pr(aetore) III Daciar(um) / Libella superi(u)/mentarius eius / [votum s]olvit*, Found in Alba Iula, Romania. <http://www.ubi-erat-lupa.org/imagelink/index.php?Nr=11265>

¹²⁴ Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, 224.

shall first then speak of Europe, the foster-mother of that people which has conquered all other nations, and itself by far the most beautiful portion of the earth."¹²⁵ They would also learn that this mandate depended on maintaining the correct relationship with the gods - Roman gods. As Woolf says in his book on cultural change in Rome, "Roman success seemed to confirm Roman claims about the worship of the gods. That sense that the destruction of the Druids and the victory of Rome demonstrated the inadequacy of ancestral cults and accepted wisdom may well have been more widely felt in Gallic society."¹²⁶ In this sense, the Gauls could pull from and contribute to a new order where the Romans were the natural masters of the world.

Roman administration also made differentiations depending on citizenship. Different levels of religious devotion and conformity were appropriate for each type of citizen. Colonies and *municipia*, a designation which indicated full citizenship, were expected to have cults and practices that did not deviate from Roman norms. Communities farther on the edge and those not as incorporated into Roman administration were allowed some more leniency in their religious practices.¹²⁷

Aside from these issues, not much reform came from Roman elites. Most of the conversion happened because of Gauls' own citizens. As Woolf says, "The civilizing process, thus conceived, did not entail the propagation of a particular cosmology or theology, but rather of a particular ritual tradition and its associated sensibilities such as *pietas* and *religio*."¹²⁸ Worship of indigenous deities was just as acceptable in Roman

¹²⁵ Pliny, *The Natural History*, III.1. Found on: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Plin.+Nat.+toc&redirect=true>

¹²⁶ Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, 231

¹²⁷ Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, 215.

¹²⁸ Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, 215. Both *religio* and *pietas* were Latin terms that speak to the way Roman religion is practiced. Both deal with the idea of piety and sacrifice, along with religious duty. Tied to this was also a belief in the duty to a larger order, in this case to the Empire.

Gaul, so long as they fit into the Roman world view. They must become anthropomorphized if they were not already, such as Epona.¹²⁹ They must also abandon native forms. Cernunnos lost his horns in later depictions. Both of these deities would be shown with more classical iconography, such as *cornucopiae*.¹³⁰ These and other Celtic gods were worshipped throughout the Empire's reign, long after other unique aspects of Gaulish culture had disappeared.

These provincial elites and their children contributed to the processes that helped to transform Celtic religion in Gaul into a Gallo-Roman religion. These elites benefited under Roman rule and encouraged adoption of many Roman practices, including religion. The Gallo-Roman elite had much to gain from cooperation with Roman occupation. Their obeisance to Roman rule went along well with their continued placement on top. Romans aided provincial elites and actively incorporated them in Imperial affairs.¹³¹ In much the same way that Roman aristocrats were incorporated into the Roman priesthood, the Gallo-Roman elite played a large role in the new religious hierarchy.

The money for these new cult activities and places of worship was largely from the Gallo-Roman elite. The Roman practice of euergetism encouraged active donation from the wealthy to improve public welfare. The old places of worship were developed

¹²⁹ Epona was often represented as just a horse in her devotions. Later forms would show her as a human woman with or on horses.

¹³⁰ Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, 235. *Cornucopiae* were horns of plenty, a common symbol in religion.

¹³¹ Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, 231. There was not necessarily an easy transition to Roman rule in this province. There were numerous revolts, some led by religious leaders. This likely too led to the abolition of druids. "While men of high distinction were thus endangered, it raises a blush to record how a certain Mariccus, a common Boian, dared to take a hand in Fortune's game, and, pretending the authority of heaven, to challenge the Roman arms. And this liberator of the Gallic provinces, this god — for he had given himself that honour — after collecting eight thousand men, was already plundering the Aeduan cantons nearest him, when that most important state, with the best of its youth and the cohorts which Vitellius gave, dispersed the fanatic crowd. Mariccus was taken prisoner in the battle. Later, when he was exposed to the beasts and the animals did not rend him, the stupid rabble believed him inviolable, until he was executed before the eyes of Vitellius." Tacitus, *Histories*, II.61.

into temple structures, and many elites built more public buildings, such as theaters in cities and on their own holdings.¹³² There was also a sense of making the native peoples more Roman. This comforted those Romans who were in the provinces. Tacitus mentions this in the *Agricola*, "In order, by a taste of pleasures, to reclaim the natives from that rude and unsettled state which prompted them to war, and reconcile them to quiet and tranquility, he incited them, by private instigations and public encouragements, to erect temples, courts of justice, and dwelling-houses."¹³³

One area where Romans made their power felt in religion was with the abolishment of the Druidic priesthood. This effectively eliminated the previous religious elite, striking an entire order of people from Celtic society.¹³⁴ The new priesthood far more closely resembled a civic religion elite. Priests were drawn from the ranks of the nobility and were expected to advance the welfare of the state. It is somewhat incidental that this came to be. Caesar's work showed no particular hatred or hostility towards them. Mostly he was remarking at just how foreign they seemed. The reason that druidic priesthood was banned was due to its link with human sacrifice, whether real or imagined. By the period of conquest Romans banned human sacrifice across the empire, and with it a priesthood closely associated with it.

This allowed the other distinctive order of Gauls to gain more prominence, at least those that were left after Caesar's conquest. The knights, as he called them, were the military order and were the most distinguished by birth and resources. They controlled a number of vassals and had their authority enforced by their military prowess and

¹³² Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, 225.

¹³³ Tacitus, *Agricola*, XXI. The *Agricola* was written about Britannia but there were many similarities between Gaul and Britannia at this period. Not the least of which of these changes was that they were both recently conquered Roman provinces undergoing cultural change.

¹³⁴ Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, 230.

resources.¹³⁵ When the druids ceased to be as a class, the knights were able to step into the role as the sole provincial elites. This fits far better into the civic model as Roman elites were expected to serve in the military as well.

Even though the priesthood changed it is clear that indigenous deities continued to exist through many years of Roman rule. However, Roman deities and deities which represented the wider cosmopolitan empire were worshipped in Gaul as well. Jupiter and Mars were prominent, as is natural for Roman beliefs. Also the worship of deified emperors and to the emperor's guiding spirit were commonplace in Gaul as they were throughout the Empire. Syncretic deities such as Silvanus-Sucellus¹³⁶ and other Celtic deities that had been syncretized and granted local epithets were also worshipped.¹³⁷ Also indicative of the wider trends in the empire deities such as Cybele and Mithra were worshipped in Gaul.¹³⁸ Both of these deities were Eastern in origin.¹³⁹

Gallo-Romans were actively engaged in the processes that were shaping the larger Roman empire. Through *interpretatio* and *evocatio* the Romans gained new deities and incorporated them into the Roman faith. In much the same way, Gauls incorporated Roman beliefs into their structure, and adapted their faith to a more Roman ideal. This syncretism led to a religion that was acceptable to both the roman rulers and Celtic citizens. As well, this compromise allowed the Gauls to participate in the more useful facets of Roman life, such as urbanization and intercontinental trade.

As seen in this chapter there was clear participation by the Celts in the

¹³⁵ Caesar, *The Conquest of Gaul*, VI.13.

¹³⁶ Sucellus was an indigenous Celtic deity while Silvanus was a Roman deity of the wild and forests.

¹³⁷ Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, 228-229.

¹³⁸ Deo / Mercu/rio Mi/thrae / T(itus) T() O(ptatus) p(osuit), found in Gallia Narbonensis, Apta, http://oracle-vm.ku-eichstaett.de:8888/epigr/epiergebnis_en

¹³⁹ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 43.

syncretization of their religion with the more cosmopolitan Roman religion. There was also a clear break from their earlier natural religion to a civic religion, just as the Romans had. This transition is a parallel to the transitions that occurred in Roman religion from the Monarchy to the Republic, and which continued during the Empire.

Both of these transitions occurred because of the uniquely flexible nature of Roman religion. Through the processes of *interpretatio*, *evocatio*, and wider contact with the outside world Roman religion grew more diverse and civic focused. Roman religion's incorporation of the other religions as well as the tolerance for new religions defines the transitions in the function and form of their religion.

Early Roman religion was defined by a Roman king and the formation of separate and powerful priesthoods. This early religion's priesthood remained separate from the political structure. They were necessary to ensure the continuation of Roman success and propitiate the gods. Religion in this period was about the survival of the people and the prevention of disaster, both natural and from foreign invasions.

The transition from this early natural religion to the later civic religion is accomplished throughout the Republic. The priesthood largely becomes a tool of the aristocratic elite. New priestly positions are created which allow for advancement in politics and are not necessarily life-long commitments. Priesthoods are often given to the children of priests and to those Romans who can afford to buy priestly positions. The focus of the religion also shifts away from survival of the people and towards promotion of the state.

When the Romans encounter the Celts, they encounter a people whose religion was in many ways similar to their own natural religion, but is quite different from their

civic religion. The Celtic priesthood is kept apart from the populace and from politics. Becoming a priest requires a life-long devotion and many years of study. Their use of human sacrifice astounds and surprises the Romans who had given up the practice many years before. This, more than anything else, is why the Romans do away with the Druidic priesthood.

The Romans administration of Celtic lands led the Celts themselves to adopt a more Roman model. Their religion grew to be more civic in nature largely on Roman lines. Priests were drawn from the elites, just as happened in the Republic in Rome. Priesthoods became the focus of an elite, political career instead of a long life of devotion and sacrifice. Adapting their religion was just one way the Gauls changed their ways and beliefs to participate in the larger Roman world.

This case study has two major areas of comparison. One of them is chronological, while the other is largely based on relations between empires. The early case study shows how the Romans adapted their outlook when it came to religion to incorporate ideas that were successful in other nations. Romans largely lost the significance of their earlier religion in this transition, but they gained a great deal as well. It is unclear what effect their natural religion had on social order, but civic religion certainly helped the Romans administer their continent spanning empire.

When the Romans conquered the Gauls they set up the second case study, namely, what happened to the Celts under Roman rule. They also largely lost the thread of their ancient natural religion. The Gallo-Roman elite took over as the arbiters of the priesthood just as those who worked with the Romans prospered under their rule. Civic religion was not as kind to the Gauls as it was to the Romans, but the fact is that the Gauls were a

conquered people. The will of their Roman conquerers, as well as the troops stationed there, meant that Celtic society largely evaporated in favor of a more cosmopolitan, urban society.

Religion is an important key to understanding the way a people conceptualize the world around them. Looking at the gods and their domains tells you what is most important to them. Looking at their rituals tells you what is materially important, and how they believe the spiritual world is to be appeased and honored. This paper's purpose was to understand how the Romans and the Gauls viewed their world. These were two peoples that were not greatly separated by space, but were separated greatly by culture. As it turns out, in the end both cultures were changed more by time and interaction with Mediterranean cultures than from interaction with each other. They still pose a valuable comparison because before this transition to civic religion both religions share a great number of purposes and practices.

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