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5 *The* Ludi Saeculares *and the* Carmen Saeculare†

DENIS FEENEY

Roman self-consciousness about the Greek component of civic cult did not disappear as time went on, but was always able to be activated. It provides a fascinating example of how self-conscious they could be about the contextual variability of their religious behaviour. As an example of this contextual variability, and as a way of focusing some of the main problems of talking about belief in a Roman context, it is worth looking in some detail at what is perhaps the most spectacular and systematic exploitation of the categories of Greek and Roman in cult, namely, the *ludi saeculares* staged by Augustus in 17 BCE.[1]

The first *ludi saeculares*, in 249 BCE, had been organised to expiate prodigies after the Sibylline books had been consulted by the *decemuiri*, the board of ten priests who supervised the Sibylline oracles and foreign cults in general.[2] Accordingly, in the *ludi* of 249 there was a markedly Greek stamp to the two deities honoured with three successive nocturnal sacrifices performed *Achiuo ritu*, 'according to the Greek rite' – Dis Pater (that is, Dives Pater, 'wealthy father', a calque for the Greek god of the underworld, Pluto, 'Wealth'), and his bride Proserpina (Persephone). Neither of these had cult in the city, and it was the first time that the state had honoured these gods of the underworld. Augustus' *ludi* some 230 years later were organised by the same board of priests responsible for foreign cult (though now fifteen in number, hence *quindecimuiri*). Augustus was himself a member of this panel, and oversaw the production of the Sibylline oracle which prescribed the occasion and the form for the *ludi*;

† Originally published in D. Feeney, *Literature and Religion at Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 28–38.

[1] Pighi (1965) has texts, with discussion, of the *Commentarium* (*CIL* 6. 32323; *ILS* 5050) and of the Sibylline oracle (*FGH* 257 F 37); [Beard, North and Price (1998)], vol. 2, no. 5.7b. On the *ludi saeculares* in general, see Nilsson (1920); on Augustus, see Price in [Beard, North and Price (1998)], vol 1. Ch. 4; Galinsky (1996) 100–6.

[2] Latte (1960), 246–8.

these Greek hexameter texts, traditionally under the care of the *quindecimuiri*, had recently been purged and transferred from the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus to the temple of Apollo Palatinus, part of Augustus' residential complex.[3]

Augustus transformed the atmosphere and purpose of the *ludi*, orientating them away from infernal expiation towards future fecundity[4] but the ritual still lay within the purview of the *quindecimuiri*, and Augustus retained the importance of a Greek component, even throwing it into relief with an intricately contrapuntal patterning of night- and day-time activities. There were still three successive night-time sacrifices, beginning with the night of 31 May, at the same site in the Campus Martius as before, performed – *Achiuo ritu* – by Augustus: the emperor probably sacrificed in Greek dress on the first night, and then, at all the succeeding ceremonies, in the toga, but with bare head in the Greek manner.[5] The underworld deities of 249 BCE, Dis Pater and Proserpina, yielded place to three more beneficent honorands, who nonetheless shared with Dis Pater and Proserpina the twin characteristics of being Greek in nomenclature and without cult in the Roman state: Moerae, 'Fates'; Ilithyiae, 'Deities of Childbirth'; and Terra Mater, 'Earth Mother', the [*Gaia*] of the oracle, but sounding like the Greek [*Dêmêtêr*] (and not, be it noted, Tellus, the name of Earth in civic cult).[6] Set against these doubly Greek nocturnal rites were three successive day-time sacrifices, performed by Augustus and Agrippa together, still *Achiuo ritu*, but this time in honour of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, the supreme Roman god and centre of Republican cult (1 June), then Juno Regina, his Capitoline consort (2 June), followed by Apollo and Diana on the Palatine (3 June), inhabitants of the Augustan temple dedicated only ten and a half years previously.

We have here an extraordinarily sharp set of demarcations: night/day, without/with civic cult, Greek/Roman, aniconic/iconic, personifications/individuals, un-Olympian/Olympian, chthonic/heavenly, outside/inside the *pomerium*, plain/hilltop, single/paired sacrificer. The arrangement of the sacrifices shows the *princeps* flaunting the ability of his state, his family, and himself to dominate and control the greatest possible range of religious meaning and power, as he

[3] The date of transfer is guaranteed by Tib. 2.5.17–18 and Virg. *Aen.* 6.72: Smith (1913), 444.

[4] Nilsson (1920), 1716.

[5] Turcan (1988), 2.9, on the evidence for Domitian in 88 CE.

[6] Latte (1960), 299, on the absence of these deities from Roman cult. On the strong links in Greece between Moirai and Eileithyiae, see Roscher (1884–1 937), 2.2.3091.

draws alien entities of birth and fecundity into the same ring as the ancient gods of the Roman Capitol, staging a pageant which probes the boundaries between the Roman state and the *oikoumene*. Augustus and his colleagues have condensed into one sequence the dynamic interplay between Greek and Roman categories that had served the state so well for so long.

These three days must have been among the most significant in Augustus' life, yet as soon as we start talking about 'personal belief' the structure that generates that significance falls apart in our hands. Augustus will have sacrificed to Jupiter Optimus Maximus many times before, yet he was the first person ever to sacrifice to the Moerae in the city of Rome, and no other Roman sacrificed to them again for sixty-three years, when Augustus' great-nephew Claudius next staged the *ludi saeculares*. Does this mean that Augustus and the many thousands of spectators believed in what he was doing during the first day-time rite, because it was Roman and traditional, but not in what he was doing during the first night-time rite, because it was Greek and unprecedented? Even to pose the question in these terms is to reveal its futility. It is precisely the intersection between the Roman and the Greek, the ancient and the novel, that generates the cognitive and emotional power of the three days. The rite as a whole articulates with remarkable economy that theme of rebirth within a reworked traditional framework which is the hallmark of the Augustan New Age ideology, and, indeed, of the régime as a whole.[7] The negotiation between the novel and the traditional is central to the exercise, and the apparatus is smashed if we concentrate on the novelty as an inorganic and less meaningful element, or worry away at which bit of the pageant meant more than the rest.

The rite comes clothed with an aura of tradition, but it is just as easy to apprehend it as revolutionary.[8] The final recipient of sacrifice, Apollo, the only Greek-named deity honoured in day-time, is as interesting a compound of the novel and the traditional as his protégé, Augustus. He had been established in the city for 400 years, but now he had a new temple and persona, living within the *pomerium* for the first time, and encroaching on the prerogatives of his father Jupiter. If we look at the distribution of offerings with Apollo in mind, we see interesting lines of connection being set up

[7] Zanker (1988), 49–53, on the new *regnum* of Apollo. As soon as the inscription was discovered, Mommsen (1905) immediately saw this interstitial character of the rite as crucial; cf. Nilsson (1920), 1717.

[8] Again, see Mommsen (1905), e.g., 356, on the revolutionary import of praying for the Roman people and the legions as separate entities.

across the apparently stark dichotomies of the rite. Augustus alone at night sacrificed nine female lambs and nine female kids to the Moerae, and a pregnant sow to Terra Mater, while Augustus and Agrippa together in the day each sacrificed a bull and a cow to Jupiter and Juno respectively. To the Ilithyiae Augustus offered twenty-seven cakes, divided into three categories (two of them transliterated Greek *words, popana* and *phthoes*); most remarkably, since (so far as we know) Apollo had never received bloodless sacrifice in Rome before,[9] Augustus and Agrippa offered the same to Apollo and the same to Diana. The choice of offerings cuts across the gulf of night and day, establishing Apollo and his sister as the mediators between the two categories of the pageant. Apollo's host and protégé, Augustus, likewise becomes the mediator between the epochs, cults and cultures of the *ludi*. The *quindecimuiri* had oversight of all foreign cults, in particular Apollo and the Magna Mater, the deities whose residences flanked Augustus' own; by Augustus' organisation, Jupiter and Juno have been, as it were, subsumed into the *Graecus ritus* of the whole pageant and of Apollo Palatinus in particular.[10]

THE CARMEN SAECULARE

In the Sibylline oracle's prescriptions for the *ludi* (18–22), following the itemising of the sacrifices are prescriptions for paeans sung in Latin ([*aeidomenoi te Latinoi/paianes*]), performed by youths and maidens, all with their parents still living, in separate choruses. The *Acta* record that a *carmen* was sung twice on the last day, first before Apollo Palatinus and then before Jupiter Optimus Maximus. It was sung by twin choruses of twenty-seven boys and twenty-seven girls with parents still living (one boy for each of the cakes given to Apollo and one girl for each of the cakes given to Diana). The *Acta* further record: *carmen composuit Q. Horatius Flaccus* ('the hymn was composed by Q. Horatius Flaccus'). This *carmen* of course survives in Horace's corpus, as the *Carmen Saeculare*, and in it we may trace a poetic engagement with the ritual categories so carefully built and rebuilt by the *princeps*. If the *ludi* themselves illuminate how self-consciously the Romans could manipulate different contexts and categories in their cult, the distinctive discourse of the *carmen* adds another dimension to that self-examination.

Horace's *carmen* acknowledges the night/day distinctions of the

[9] Gagé (1955), 631–2.

[10] Gagé (1955), 635–7.

sacrifices, grouping the three foreign night-time deities in sequence (13–32) and speaking of 'games crowded three times in bright day and as many times in pleasing night' (*ludos* | *ter die claro totiensque grata* | *nocte frequentis*, 22–4). From the beginning, however, the hymn concentrates on following up the ritual's use of Apollo and Diana as a bridge across the categories, affirming more openly than the ritual itself their status as the end aimed at by the trajectory of the whole three days.[11] The *carmen* begins with an invocation of the Palatine pair: *Phoebe siluarumque potens Diana*, | *lucidum caeli decus* ('Phoebus, and Diana with dominion over woods, shining adornment of heaven'). This language already collapses the night/day distinction, for the singular phrase 'shining adornment of heaven' refers jointly to the pair, the brother shining as the sun at day and the sister as the moon at night. The second stanza, referring to the fact that the *carmen* is being sung at the command of the Sibylline verses, glances at the new role of Apollo as the custodian of those verses. The third stanza catches at another new role of Apollo when the choruses turn to Sol, the Sun, saying that he is born 'another and the same', *alius ... et idem* (10). These words allude not only to the physical illusion that the sun is 'another' sun at each new day, but also to the 'otherness and sameness' of Apollo's syncretism with Sol/Helios. In the oracle, Apollo is likewise named as 'the one who is also called Helios' ([*hoste kai Helios kikêsketai*], 17); we must remind ourselves that when the choruses first sang they were facing the temple of Apollo Palatinus, on whose roof stood a representation of the chariot of the Sun, to which the choruses point at the beginning of this stanza, with the words *curru nitido*, 'shining chariot' (9).[12]

After these first three stanzas concerned with the Palatine pair in one manifestation or another, the choruses address Ilithyia, the goddess of childbirth. The movement of the *carmen* uses this ordering to establish the links between Ilithyia and Apollo and Diana that Augustus had established by choice of sacrificial offering. A further connection across these categories is forged when Horace uses 'Lucina' as a possible title for Ilithyia (15), reminding us that Diana herself could be regarded as Lucina, controlling the same sphere as Ilithyia. Prayers to the Fates and Earth follow (25–32), before the choruses once more return to Apollo, mild and calm as in the Palatine cult statue, and Diana (as Luna, 36).

We are now half-way through the *carmen* and there has not yet

[11] Gagé (1955), 635.
[12] Hardie (1993), 125–6.

been any mention of the Roman deities who received sacrifice on the first and second days, Jupiter and Juno; this sense of exclusion is strengthened by the closural force of the address to Apollo and Diana in 33–6, for that address takes us back, by ring-composition, to their initial invocation in the first stanza.[13] Since the discovery of the *Acta* in 1890 it has been clear that Jupiter and Juno must be the gods now addressed as the *carmen* turns at the half-way point (*Roma si uestrum est opus* ..., 'if Rome is your business ...', 37), for the next three stanzas lead up to a description of Augustus sacrificing to these addressees with white oxen (49), and the *Acta* make it plain that Jupiter and Juno were the only gods who received such offerings during the *ludi*.[14] But – in an elision which is practically unthinkable in a hymn, where the proper naming of the invoked deity was considered vital – Jupiter and Juno are not named as they are addressed. Hence the universal assumption amongst commentators before 1890 that this entire section was likewise addressed to Apollo and Diana. The Sibylline oracle, which until 1890 had been the only evidence for the form of the rite, states explicitly that Apollo should receive the same bovine sacrificial offerings as Jupiter and Juno (11–18): only the discovery of the *Acta* revealed that there had been a change of plan, and that Apollo had in fact received the same offerings as the Ilithyiae. With only the misleading evidence of the Sibylline oracle to go by, and without any explicit mention of a change in addressee, the white oxen mentioned by Horace in line 49 would inevitably be taken to refer to Apollo's sacrifices.

Jupiter and Juno are not named, then, although the choruses are now directly addressing them. With this dramatic omission, Horace alludes to and corrects the suppression of the names of Apollo and Diana at the beginning of Virgil's *Georgics*, where Apollo and Diana are invoked anonymously as 'the extremely bright lights of the universe' (*clarissima mundi* | *lumina*, 1.5–6);[15] throughout the hymn, Horace compensates abundantly for that suppression, parading one name after another for Apollo and his sister (Phoebus, Sol, Apollo; Diana, Lucina, Luna). Juno in fact is never named at all in the course of the *carmen*, and Jupiter (apart from brief mention as the sky-god in 32, *Iouis aurae*) finds his way only into the last stanza, where he does no more than approve the favourable response of Apollo and Diana, whose praises close the hymn (*doctus et Phoebi chorus*

[13] As Richard Tarrant points out to me.
[14] Mommsen (1905), 357–8.
[15] As Richard Thomas points out to me.

et Dianae | dicere laudes, 75–6). It is hard to know whether this suppression of Jupiter and Juno would have been more striking during the first performance of the hymn in front of Apollo Palatinus, or during the second performance in front of Jupiter Capitolinus. The eclipse of the old Capitoline deities by the Palatine gods of the *princeps* is most remarkable, and it has been exposed more nakedly in ten minutes of singing than it had been in three days of ritual action. And as the *carmen* progresses on its career in Horace's lyric corpus, leaving further and further behind the ritual context which makes it possible to glimpse Jupiter and Juno as the addressees here, it paradoxically stresses more and more powerfully the ritual's suppression of the Capitoline deities in favour of the Palatine pair.

The paean is by origin a hymn to Apollo and Artemis,[16] and Horace's hymn, as the paean called for by the Sibylline oracle, is capitalising on this ancient formal feature in order to reinforce the ritual's emphasis on the Palatine pair. If the *carmen* exaggerates this theme of the ritual, however, in other ways it represents not an exaggeration but a departure. In particular, its way of naming the Greek deities who received night-time sacrifice is an interesting variation upon Augustus' emphases.[17]

In line 14, Ilithyia is addressed with her Greek title, for which there was no exact Latin equivalent, but Horace immediately presses the alternative naming style of hymns into novel service when he goes on to say *siue tu Lucina probas uocari | seu Genitalis* ('whether you prefer to be called Lucina or Genitalis', 15–16). Here he offers the Greek goddess 'a choice between two Latin cult names, *Lucina* and *Genitalis*: "Ilithyia – shall we (in Latin) call you Lucina or Genitalis?"'[18] The renaming of the alien divinity, hitherto outside the cult of the *res public*, is strongly marked, for her unprecedented function is now to assist the success of Augustus' marriage legislation. It is in order to highlight the stresses of this cultural transference that Horace in the next stanza turns to another world of language altogether, with his notorious evocation of Latin constitutional jargon, so often dismissed as a mere blunder: *patrum ... | decreta super iugandis | feminis* ('the decrees of the fathers concerning the yoking of women', 17–19). The next Greek deities invoked are the Moerae. They are Latinised as *Parcae* (25), with another

[16] Procl. *Chr.* in Phot. *Bibl.* 320a21 (my thanks to A. Barchiesi for this point). In C. 4.6.37–8, Horace refers to the *Carmen Saeculare* as a hymn to Apollo and Diana.
[17] McDermott (1981), 1665.
[18] McDermott (1981), 1665, n.71; Bentley's emendation to the Greek *Genetyllis* destroys this point.

Latin equivalent for their Greek name, *fatta*, also placed emphatically as the last word of their stanza (28). Finally, Augustus had sacrificed to 'Earth' under the name *Terra Mater*, deliberately choosing a title which was not part of the state religion, but Horace chooses instead the word *Tellus* (29), which was the name of Earth in civic cult; he reinforces the link with the 'Earth' of civic cult by associating Tellus with Ceres (29–30), for Ceres' statue stood outside the temple of Tellus.[19]

In rewriting the Greek nomenclature used by the *princeps*, the Grecising hymn is more concerned to establish a Latin atmosphere than is the state ritual itself. If we are to read off 'degree of authenticity of belief' against a scale of Latinity or Romanness, we will end up saying that the *carmen* is more 'authentic' than the ritual, at which point we may well conclude that we are not using helpful terminology. Instead, we might see the *carmen* as engaging with the dynamics of the ritual, not replicating them, but setting up a tangentially related set of categories and perspectives for the audience to manipulate as they are challenged to use the *carmen* as a way of looking back over the last three days and forward over the next one hundred and ten years.

Augustus' pageant is a semiotic system of the utmost intricacy, and Horace's *carmen* does not – indeed, can not – reflect or re-embody it. By altering emphases and collapsing distinctions as well as observing them, the *carmen* insistently calls attention to the fact that it is not the rite, that it is not tautologous. It accomplishes this, above all, by marking out a space for poetry as a distinctive discourse. The thorough Latinising of the deities addressed is a sign of this ambition, as is the way the *carmen* looks forward to its reception as a further piece of Horatian lyric.[20] More significant still is the dialogue with the *Aeneid* of Virgil, dead not two years before. Throughout, the *carmen* is acknowledging the fact that the *Aeneid* has already become the cardinal medium for conceptualising the new ideology.[21] Further, Horace depicts the present actions of Augustus as the fulfilment of the text of the *Aeneid*. Augustus is 'superior to the one waging war, gentle to the prostrate enemy' (*bellante prior, iacentem | lenis in hostem*, 51–2), and his empire is world-wide (53–6). Augustus has here become the subject and the addressee of Anchises' prophecy in *Aeneid* 6, which had prophesied world dominion for Augustus

[19] [Pliny *Nat.*] 34.15; cf. Ov[id] *Fast.* 1.671–3.
[20] Barchiesi (1996), 8–9.
[21] Fraenkel (1957), 375.

(6.792–800), and which had itself become a Sibylline oracle at the end. When Anchises turns to the 'Roman', and commands him 'do you, Roman, remember |... to spare the conquered and war down the proud' (*tu ... Romane, memento | ... parcere subiectis et debellare superbos*, 6.851–3), he is using Sibylline language of the same kind used by the Sibylline oracle for the *ludi saeculares*: 'remember, Roman' ([*memnêsthai, Rhômaie*], 3). The poetic prophecy of a predecessor has here become more than text to be alluded to: its oracular Sibylline power is now reanimated. Horace's chorus makes the Latin hexameters of Virgil collaborate with the Greek hexameters of Augustus' Sibylline oracle, which is an instrument and cause of ritual, but also, after all, a poetic text of a certain kind in its own right. Our categories of poetry and ritual break down as the *carmen* tells us that both Virgil's and Augustus' Sibylline oracles have made this 'happen'.

One of poetry's distinctive powers is its capacity to outstrip time, and Horace's long-standing obsession with this topic is in play here. Horace believes that his poetry can celebrate and preserve memory more powerfully than other media, more powerfully than marble or bronze monuments;[22] the Horatian motif acquires extra power in this ritual context, for the state itself is concerned to preserve the memory of the *ludi*, with seven lines of the inscription devoted to a *senatus consultum* ordering the erection of two monuments, in bronze and marble, for the future memory of the event (*ad futuram rei memoriam*, lines 58–63). In the *carmen*, Horace is celebrating and preserving a particular moment of sacred time (*tempore sacro*, 4), and his characteristic lyric interest in that function is especially charged, for the *ludi* are themselves all about time. Their preservative ritual is designed to create a new cycle of time, a permanence for the state that transcends any individual's lifetime: the *Acta* twice refer to the fact that no one will again see this ritual, that no mortal may see the games twice (lines 54–6). Horace's lyric obsession with transience and permanence is in a novel dialogue with the ritual's obsession with transience and permanence, and with the state's attempts in bronze and marble to preserve the memory of that ritual.[23]

[22] Putnam (1986), esp. 300–6; Hardie (1993); Barchiesi (1996), 18–22.

[23] In C. 4.6.44 Horace mentions his name for the only time in the *Odes*; in a poem about the performance of the *carmen saeculare*, this citation clearly alludes to the commemoration of his name on the inscription; but it is significant that he reinscribes that commemoration into the future speech of one of the girls of the chorus, once again stressing the superiority of his own genre.

The *carmen*'s self-consciousness about the fact that it is a poem, and cannot be co-extensive with the rite, is obliquely reflected in the interest modern scholars show in debating whether or not it was 'part of' the rite. In some senses it was (it had been prescribed by the Sibylline verses, and its singing was commemorated on the inscribed *Acta*);[24] in some senses it was not (it was not a *precatio*, 'cult prayer', strictly speaking, and its actual words were not engraved on the marble as were the words of Augustus' and Agrippa's *precationes*).[25] The odd position of the *carmen* within the rite is not a gaffe, but a sophisticated acknowledgment of its nuanced relationship with the rest of the proceedings. As we shall see in Chapter 4, 'Ritual' [*Literature and Religion at Rome*, pp. 127–33], one of the most important contributions from the revisionist studies of Roman religion has been the recognition that exegesis and interpretative dialogue help constitute Roman religious practice, rather than being something extraneous or added on. The *carmen* and the *ludi*, independent yet mutually implicated, are our clearest test case. Interpretation is already explicitly a part of the whole three-day spectacle.

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[24] Cairns (1992), 29 n. 92.

[25] Scheid (1993), 113. Interestingly, the words of the new *carmen* for Septimius Severus' games of 204 CE were engraved in the *Acta*: Pighi (1965), 165–6 (fr. Va, 60–71).

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6 *Cults, Myths, and Politics at the Beginning of the Empire*†

JOHN SCHEID

translated by Philip Purchase

In a relatively recent study of Augustus' religious practice,[1] which notably addresses his "religious politics," as the author puts it, we find gathered in one place a set of commonly held beliefs concerning the nature of public cults, myths, politics, and the links between them. According to this line of thought, Caesar and Augustus, cut off from the piety of the people (in the romantic sense of the term), and acting from their aristocratic vantage point, took religion out of the realm of the sacred only to abuse it for political ends. In order to glorify their achievements and their undertakings, they did not hesitate to falsify myths, and in so doing they hastened the decline of myth and belief in the gods.

This article is, to be sure, beginning to look a little dated, but it summarizes a set of opinions that are still quite current. For this reason, the immediate usefulness of the present reflection on Roman mythology will lie in its reaffirmation of truths that we believe – often too hastily – to be universally accepted. I will not linger over the old theme of religious decadence, which has come under such vigorous attack this past decade, nor will I deal with the hazy definition of myth underpinning such studies. For a number of years now, we have tried to demonstrate that public religion was necessarily linked to politics, and even to questions of political advantage, as it expressed the relations of the Roman people (as a juridical entity rather than a group of individuals) with the gods, their divine partners. The language of this religion was that of civic relations, its field of operation the political community of divine and human beings, its

† Originally published as "Cultes, mythes et politique au début de l'Empire," in F. Graf, ed., *Mythos in mythenloser Gesellschaft: Das Paradigma Roms* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1993), pp. 109–27.

[1] W. Speyer, "Das Verhältnis des Augustus zur Religion," *ANRW* 2:16:3 (1984), 1777–1805.