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Latin cults through Roman eyes

Myth, memory and cult practice in the Alban hills

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Chapter V: Conclusions

In the year 340 BC, tensions were running high in Rome. Constant interference in the military affairs of their neighbours had brought the Romans to the verge of a new war with the Latins and bloodshed seemed inevitable. Although, according to Livy, the Latins were confident that they could easily defeat the Romans in the field, the Latin commander Lucius Annius Setinus made his way up to the Capitol one last time to negotiate for peace. Before the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, he was received by the Senate, and – unimpressed by the sacred surroundings – he stepped forward ‘like some conqueror who had taken the Capitol by storm’, according to Livy.⁸⁷⁵ In the passionate speech that follows, Annius warns the Romans that they are up against a large majority of Latins, and that even their own colonies had turned against them. Nonetheless, the commander urges for friendship and unity among all who shared Latin blood, as Livy records:

“One consul should be chosen from Rome, the other from Latium, the Senate should be drawn in equal proportions from both nations, there should be one people and one state; and that we may have the same seat of empire and the same name for all, by all means let this be our city, since one side must make concessions,—and may good come of it to both peoples!—and let us all be known as Romans.”⁸⁷⁶

The bold statement was not taken lightly by the Roman consul Titus Manlius Torquatus, who swore before Jupiter that he would come to the Senate with his sword and slay every Latin who set foot in the Curia with his own hands.⁸⁷⁷ Unsurprisingly, the peace offer was turned down and one last brutal war was fought. That this would not end well for the Latins was clear from the start: their commander Annius, furiously coming down from in the Capitol, tripped over his own feet, fell down and was knocked unconscious. After their final defeat in 338 BC, the Latins were united with the Romans, but not on equal terms or to equal advantage, as they had to suffer the loss of lands, political independence and – in some cases – religious authority. All Romans may have been Latins, but in this case, not all Latins were Romans.

In this dissertation, I have studied the ways Romans engaged with their Latin past. By doing so, I have presented a dichotomy that is, in a sense, artificial: from their earliest beginnings, Romans

⁸⁷⁵ Liv. 8. 5.2: [...] Annius, tamquam victor armis Capitolium cepisset.

⁸⁷⁶ Liv. 8.5.5-6: *Consulem alterum Roma, alterum ex Latio creari oportet, senatus partem aequam ex utraque gente esse, unum populum, unam rem publicam fieri; et ut imperii eadem sedes sit idemque omnibus nomen, quoniam ab altera utra parte concedi necesse est, quod utrisque bene vertat, sit haec sane patria potior, et Romani omnes vocemur.*

⁸⁷⁷ Liv. 8.5.7-8: [...] gladio cinctum in senatum venturum se esse palam diceret, et quemcumque in curia Latinum vidisset, sua manu interempturum.

were Latins, and – as we have seen in many of the sources discussed in the chapters above – they were well aware of their shared kinship, history, language and religious background. At the same time, however, Latins were actively remembered as non-Romans, as enemies. As the passage above illustrates well, they may have claimed a share in the Roman success, but were also just the first of many conquered enemies – *peregrini*, as Livy labels them.⁸⁷⁸

In my research, I have investigated this dual relationship with the Latin past by focusing on a crucial element of that past: religion. In the case studies that form the core of my work, I have studied in detail the three large sanctuaries of the Alban hills and the deities that resided there: Diana Nemorensis, Juno Sospita, and Jupiter Latiaris. Located less than a day's travel southeast of Rome, these deities were among the first foreign cults to be added to the Roman pantheon through military conquest, but – as with the communities of the Alban hills – contacts existed long before Roman supremacy over the region was established. Notwithstanding this long communal history, the specific Latin history of the deities remained important as well, in literary discourse as well as in the material record. Making use of insights from the developing field of memory studies, I have argued that the Latin past of the Alban gods is best understood as something that was an active part of everyday cult practice: it was perceived, experienced, communicated and promoted by the worshippers who visited the cults. The discourses on the origins and early histories of the deities were not static relics of a distant past, but they were repeatedly reinterpreted, reframed and even reinvented by the communities and individuals engaging with that past. As such, worshipping a Latin deity could become part of sharing and performing a Latin identity.

By analyzing the cult practices for Diana, Juno and Jupiter in detail, I have reconstructed the process of memory making and the context in which this happened, not necessarily the memories themselves as fixed results of this process. At the same time, while I have chosen to emphasize the contextual and dynamic nature of the Latin past, I do not wish to deny or devalue the long continuity of worship that actually existed at the cult sites. As the overview of material remains presented in this thesis has clearly shown, the worship at the large sanctuaries of the Alban hills can be traced back to the pre-Roman and pre-urban world of the early Latins. Votive material from as early as the eighth century BC was found along the shores of lake Nemi; on the Colle San Lorenzo in Lanuvium a hut from this period was even identified as the earliest cult structure. Archaeological research in recent decades has focused primarily on these early beginnings, and even when I have questioned some of the arguments with which the excavators have connected the early finds to the later cult practice and to the mythological narratives in Roman literary sources, the religious continuity that can be deduced from these earliest nuclei of worship is in itself remarkable and

⁸⁷⁸ Liv. 8.5.7.

significant. My argument has been that, by focusing exclusively on the earliest beginnings in an attempt to pierce the Roman layers of interpretation and reach the original Latin core, we miss the role these gods and their pasts played in the contemporary society of the Roman Republic and Empire.

In our discussion of the three deities of the Alban hills, we have encountered many questions that have triggered decades of academic debate, but ultimately seem unanswerable. Can a hut from the eighth century BC in Lanuvium be identified as an early cult building? Was the temple of Diana Nemorensis older than that of Diana Aventinensis, or vice-versa? Was there or was there not a temple for Jupiter Latiaris on the *mons Albanus*? Even if future archaeological research would somehow resolve all these questions – and, certainly in the case of Jupiter Latiaris, new excavations may shift our understanding completely – these absolute chronologies would not produce absolute histories of the Latin deities. The past not only existed as an objective and observable reality on the cult sites, but also existed in the minds of the worshippers that visited the sites.

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So far, I have argued that the Latin past was an integral part of the cult practice for the deities of the Alban hills. But what were these deities like and what did worshippers expect of them? How exactly was the past relevant for the everyday rites that took place in the sanctuaries? As was clear from all three of our case studies, modern attempts to label the deities and ascribe to them one essential sphere of influence, are rarely supported by the ancient evidence. On the basis of literary motifs, Diana Nemorensis and Juno Sospita are both described in academic literature as women's goddesses, who dealt with feminine issues like fertility and maternity. When looking at the material traces left by their worshippers, however, no such feminine connection can be detected: the votive deposits contain models of (male and female) genitals in comparable quantities to other cults in the region, and the epigraphic evidence reveals both male and female worshippers, as well as priests who are mostly male.

This should warn us to not apply one central framework to our own interpretations: Latin identity in the cults could take many forms and shapes, according to the context it was expressed in and the medium that was used to express it. Nevertheless, some general patterns in the way the Latin cults were perceived can be detected.

First of all, the Latin cult practice could present itself as something foreign that was far removed from the ritual world of Roman state religion. This was most clearly expressed by the discourse surrounding the rex Nemorensis, the priest king of Nemi, who – as both the murderer of his predecessor and the victim of his successor – formed a violent and alien element in the story

world around the cult of Diana Nemorensis. Another example of such an apparent foreign element was presented by the agricultural rite in Lanuvium, which involved a giant *draco* in a cave and girls who had to feed it to prove their virginity and ensure a prosperous harvest. Both narratives were identified as literary *topoi* and can be connected to similar stories connected to cult sites all over the Mediterranean. As such, the strange and violent rites seem to have existed mainly in the words of the poets and had little relevance for the ‘actual’ cult practice of our deities. And yet, I have repeatedly argued that it makes no sense to try to isolate the literary domain from a material domain that was somehow more real or believable. Not only was the perception of a cult shaped by both literary and physical encounters with a god, we can also see these encounters overlapping and interacting. Thus, the serpent of Juno Sospita appears as a frequent companion on visual representation of the goddess, and the priest king of Nemi makes an appearance under the influence of famous visitors of the site, like the emperor Caligula. The alien elements cannot be smoothed out as dissonant factors in an otherwise venerable and stable cult practice, since this cult practice did not produce a coherent belief system to begin with.

The foreign connotation of the cults of the Alban hills could also be based on the fact that the deities were once, like the communities that worshipped them, enemies of Rome. As we have seen, historical sources preserved the fact that Juno Sospita was formerly – before the end of the Latin war in 338 BC – a specifically Lanuvian deity; one of the traditions surrounding the *feriae Latinae* attributed the origins of the festival to a pre-Roman gathering of Latin tribes. But in the case of Diana Nemorensis, this Latin tradition was slightly more explicit: the cult had kept not only a pre-Roman connotation, but was also associated with an anti-Roman past. This is illustrated by a fragment of Cato’s *Origines*, which seems to record a meeting in Diana’s *lucus* during one of the wars of the Latins against Rome. The fragment has considerable issues of interpretation, but gains significance if confronted with the traditions surrounding Diana on the Aventine in Rome. There, the foundation of the cult is presented as a deliberate attempt to unite Latins under Roman rule and was remembered as a vehicle for establishing relationships with new allies. In this light, the cult on the shores of lake Nemi may have been perceived as a rival for that in Rome, and – in a situation where the brutal wars with the Latin tribes were recorded as well – the Latin status of Diana Nemorensis could stand for something distinctly non-Roman.

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For most worshippers visiting the cults in the Alban hills, however, the association with an ancient Latin cult was not opposed to, but constitutive of their Roman identity. In the competitive world of the Roman Republic, an *origo* in an esteemed Latin municipality could be made into an asset, and the

deities of the Alban hills frequently functioned as symbols of their hometowns. This seems to have been the case, for example, for the Arician moneyer Accoleius Lariscolus who put an ancient cult statue of Diana Nemorensis on his coins, but also for the various *tresviri monetales* from Lanuvium, who used an apparently well-known archaizing image of Juno Sospita to refer to the town and promote their *gens*. That this expression of local pride and religious commitment did not conflict with Roman loyalties but went hand in hand with them is famously illustrated by the large scale monumentalization of the sanctuaries of Latium Vetus in the second and first centuries BC. The constructions in Nemi and Lanuvium may be considered a deliberate reference to and promotion of a local identity, but at the same time these were only made possible by the wealth streaming in from the Roman conquest wars and fitted within the trend of similar religious structures in the region. In other words, the local identity of a deity from the Alban hills explicitly took shape in a larger regional and Roman context, and worshippers in the sanctuaries were reminded of the local and individual characteristics of the cult, but also of the shared Latin history.

For our reconstruction of this process of local memory making, the epigraphic evidence was of crucial importance. It revealed how the cults of the Alban hills were visited by worshippers from all over the Mediterranean, but how they were also very much embedded in the civic life of their administrating communities. Especially in the case of Lanuvium, we have identified an intricate cultic network that included many of the town's inhabitants and thus offers an interesting insight into the people concerned with the rites for Juno Sospita. We can image that some of these groups, such as the local *iuvenes*, had a marked presence in the village and on the sanctuary grounds, and as such were able to put their mark not only on the cultic procedures but also on the representation of the goddess, which they helped spreading by issuing *tesserae* with her image. Interestingly enough, the cult site of Jupiter Latiaris on the Alban hill – for which we have barely any traces of local involvement – seems to have had a fairly elaborate organization of priestly offices associated to it. This reminds us that not all ritual activity leaves an imprint in the archaeological record: some of the most defining moments in the cult practice of Jupiter Latiaris – such as the ritual meal on the *mons Albanus* that defined the relationship between cult, god, landscape and Latin peoples – were passed on through the generations in the form of actions, gestures and prayers. As such, this type of ritual behaviour is difficult to investigate for the modern observer.

The priestly offices reported in the region reveal one other important element: a clear reference to the shared Latin past of the area. We have identified several cultic officials with titles that have an archaic ring to it: *dictatores* connected with each of the sanctuary grounds, several *salii* and two *reges sacrorum*, for example. We know these titles from the early history of Rome itself and may suspect that they were religious relics of functions that were once political in nature. At the

same time, the relatively late arrival of these functionaries on the scene (most of the inscriptions date to the second century AD or later) implies that the titles were archaizing rather than archaic. Perhaps they reflected the intellectual efforts of new elites (especially those of the equestrian class) to connect themselves to the core of Roman religion, thereby reinventing rather than recovering the ancient offices. In any case, the epigraphic material shows the appeal of the distant Latin past – be it imagined or not – for the participants in the Alban cults, and it also provides us with evidence as to how the narratives on this distant Latin past were woven into the cult practice of the Roman present.

As we have seen, the cult practices in the Alban hills could – depending on the context they were perceived, presented and remembered in – take on a foreign and un-Roman dimension, as well as a local dimension that was specifically connected to one of the *municipia* of the area. However, in the context of the cult for Jupiter Latiaris and the *feriae Latinae*, the Latin past presented itself as the mirror image of the Roman past. Paradoxically, Jupiter Latiaris – the primordial example of a Latin god – becomes manifest as a god only in the context of rituals related to the Roman state. Here it is not the animosity or strife with the Latins that is being remembered; nor is there room for personal or community advertisement of a Latin deity. What is being celebrated here is the dual relationship and joint cause of Latins and Romans, a bond that was preordained through their shared blood and strengthened in their earliest encounters, but which remained relevant in the context of the growing Roman empire. Celebrating *Latinitas* meant celebrating being Roman.

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Throughout the discussion in the three case-studies, I have used insights from the field of memory studies to understand the role of the Latin past in the Roman present. By focusing on the ways worshippers perceived and communicated the past of the Latin cults, and on how they were confronted with it in the daily routine of the cult practice, I have identified religious memory as a defining factor in Latin identity. At the same time, from the beginning of my study, I have been conscious of the risks of terminological vagueness. Whose memory are we actually talking about? And how collective was the Latin identity that was being shaped through the worship of Diana Nemorensis, Juno Sospita and Jupiter Latiaris? Although the evidence often does not allow us to systematically name, count and describe individual worshippers, some general remarks about specific groups involved in the process of memory making can be made.

The voice of the common, non-elite visitors of the sanctuary is – as so often, in the study of ancient religion – hard to trace. While we can detect their presence through the large quantities of votive offers found on the sites, the largest group of worshippers must unfortunately remain

anonymous. We may hypothesize that the performative element in some of the rites – such as the sacrificial meal on *mons Albanus* or the yearly visit of the consuls to Juno Sospita in Lanuvium – evoked images of the Latin past that were comprehensible for large groups of participants. However, the ritual actions themselves left little to no imprint in the material record, and we cannot (or hardly) reconstruct the way the ‘ordinary’ – and perhaps illiterate – visitor made sense of the Latin past in the Alban hills. For other groups identified in the cult practice, this situation is different. We have encountered several freedmen in the epigraphic evidence, who were active in the cultic organization of the sanctuaries or acted as donors, such as Fundilius Doctus in the case of Nemi. Their presence is not an indication of the special care of the Latin gods for slaves or former slaves – as *liberti* are overrepresented in the epigraphic record in general – but it does show how people with a relatively humble social status (but who possibly had considerable sums of money to spend) affiliated themselves with the time-old worship on the sanctuary grounds. Hence the position of Agilius Septentrio, for example, who as an imperial freedman and pantomime player seems to have gained prominence in the town of Lanuvium during the reign of Commodus and was thus adopted into the aristocratic *ordo* of the *local iuvenes*.

For members of the equestrian class, the Latin past invoked by the cult practice seems to have had a special appeal. As stated above, we can observe their participation in the rites mainly through the epigraphic evidence from the second and third centuries AD, which testifies to a priestly organization that was full of ostensibly ancient function titles. The priesthoods could establish a connection between a prominent *equus* and a specific *municipium* in the Alban hills, as was the case for the *sacerdotes Lanuvini*. These priests were rich outsiders, who were probably awarded with the religious honour by the Senate of Lanuvium. In the case of the *sacerdotes Cabenses*, the religious office holders were probably from the area itself but in the reference to Cabum we can observe a strong archaistic element. Their function title formed a link between the individual *equus*, the cult practice on the Alban mount and the (reinvented) past of the area. Apart from titles referring to specific (real or imagined) communities, we also see titles appearing that refer to the wider Latin history, such as the *dictatores* and *reges sacrorum*. For the *equites*, I have argued, these priesthoods were a way of religiously distinguishing themselves; they did not only connect the holders with honourable Latin *municipia*, but also with the time-old religious and political traditions of the Roman state. Because of their involvement with the deities of the Alban hills, the equestrian priests influenced the perception of the cults and so, the Latin past gained new prominence and meaning in their presence.

Finally, for the aristocratic families from the Lanuvium, Aricia and (to a lesser degree) Bovillae, the relation between Latin identity and religious memory was perhaps most directly

experienced. Many of the interferences in the cult practices that we have studied – from the visual representations on coins of Juno Sospita to the involvement of the Iulii with the *feriae Latinae* – can be related to the competitive world of Roman aristocracy. For the *gentes* in the Roman Republic, the religious commitment to the gods in their Latin hometowns was part of their public representation: the claims of the *gens Papii* on the Lanuvian heritage or of the *gens Voconia* on the cult practice of lake Nemi, stood in direct competition with similar (and perhaps competing) claims of other *gentes* on the Latin past. The promotion of these Latin roots remained important in the empire, as we can observe for example through the involvement of the Antonine emperors in the cult of Juno Sospita. For these elites, their Latin identity was very much part of a Roman identity: this is where Cicero's two fatherlands (*duae patriae*) came together. But, although the value of a Latin *origo* was recognized and utilized by many, we should not assume that this resulted in a fixed framework of collective Latin identity. The power of the Latin past lay in its ability to be flexible, so that it could suit many political and religious purposes.

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My research has analysed the various ways in which worshippers of Diana Nemorensis, Juno Sospita and Jupiter Latiaris engaged with the past of the cults, and has also identified the individuals and groups involved in this process of memory making. Taken together, my findings show that the past of the Latin cults remained an important point of reference throughout Roman history, because new groups of people found new ways of associating themselves with the cult practice and recognized its strong symbolic value. As such, the Latin past was an active and integral part of the Roman present.