

ABSTRACT

The Incorporation of Foreign Cults by the Romans: A Study of the Cults of Juno Sospita, Aesculapius, and the Magna Mater

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The Roman religious system was structured to be continually open to innovations, especially the introduction of new gods and goddesses into their pantheon. This thesis focuses on three cases of this phenomenon and examines the motivations for and effects of incorporating foreign cults. Utilizing a variety of archaeological, literary, and epigraphic evidence, I examine the attitude of the Romans themselves towards these gods, who occupy an unusual space between full acceptance into the Roman state and distance due to their exotic origins. The Romans use these cults to influence their religious, social, and political spheres; advancing their position in the Mediterranean and maintaining peace with the gods simultaneously. In all three cases, the Romans create and maintain a balance between the cult's original, foreign characteristics and Roman practices to create a new Roman identity for the cult.

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THE INCORPORATION OF FOREIGN CULTS BY THE ROMANS:
A STUDY OF THE CULTS OF JUNO SOSPITA, AESCULAPIUS, AND THE
MAGNA MATER

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Domine non sum dignus, ut intres sub tectum meum. Sed tantum dic verbo, et sanabitur anima mea.

INTRODUCTION

The study of Roman religion has fascinated scholars for millennia, for the Romans themselves contemplated the nature of their gods and rituals. Indeed, recent scholars such as John Scheid, Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price have sought to reorient the study of Roman religion toward a focus on Roman self-perception, which offers us an intriguing glimpse into not only how, but also why the Romans acted as they did.¹ In this thesis I will examine one of many unique aspects of Roman religion: the practice of adding new gods into their pantheon. Despite the continual addition of gods from the beginnings of Rome to the advent of Christianity and the vast similarities between certain gods verging on equivalence, the Romans did not hesitate to incorporate additional gods into their state. The Roman openness to new gods did not take account of redundancy, always seeing something beneficial that the god could add to the state. More importantly however, the Romans did take notice of the origin of the deity, and their response to the culture of origin is telling of how the Romans viewed that culture, the deity's role, and also themselves.

It will be useful briefly to establish some general principles of the Roman attitude towards “foreign” cults in order to have a firm base of understanding before embarking on a more specific discussion of each cult. The Roman practice of adding new gods, while sometimes organic, as in the case of the cult of Isis, who did not receive public funding until the principate of Claudius, was often instead an official adoption based

¹ Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion*; Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*.

upon the senate's decision. Often a specific deity would be intentionally sought out for admittance into the Roman pantheon, sometimes from thousands of miles away. This was often done on the advice of the Sibylline oracles, which touches upon another intriguing aspect of this practice of importing gods, namely the motivation behind the decision. The political, religious, and military analyses of the impact of the cult have been examined, with the political reading being the most predominant as of late.² While it is typical amongst scholars to read the motivation for the importation as just one of these, I contend that all played a role. There does not need to be one sole motivation for the importation of a god, and while the political ramifications certainly factored strongly into any decision, I have chosen to examine other potential factors due to the prevalence of scholarship already covering politically-based motivations. This allows me to consider the Romans' perceived reason for importing a deity, rather than focusing exclusively on the actual cause for the Senate's actions.

Within the ever-expanding pantheon of the Romans, not all deities were treated the same. One of the biggest distinctions drawn was that between native and foreign, although even those categories were not mutually exclusive. Festus discusses briefly what the Romans themselves considered "foreign":

Peregrina sacra appellantur, quae aut evocatis dis in oppugnandis urbibus Romam sunt conlata, aut quae ob quasdam religiones per pacem sunt petita, ut ex Phrygia Matris Magnae, ex Graecia Cereris, Epidauro Aesculapi: quae coluntur eorum more, a quibus sunt accepta. (Festus 268L)

They are called foreign rites, which either have been conveyed to Rome with the gods having been called out from warring cities, or which were sought during peace on account of certain religious scruples, just as the Magna Mater from

² Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion*; Orlin, *Foreign Cults in Rome*.

Phrygia, Ceres from Greece, and Aesculapius from Epidaurus: which are tended to by their own custom from which they were received.³

Festus distinguishes *peregrina sacra* from other types of cult based upon the reason for which they were brought to Rome. He emphasizes that these deities came to Rome specifically, recognizing the special and official status that importing a deity into Rome imparted to that cult. Thus this study will be confined to each cult as it existed in the city of Rome itself, in order to examine the specific phenomenon of each cult's official importation by the State. Festus' definition seems to assert that the intentionality of the importation bears weight upon the distinction of these rites as "foreign." For, as will be discussed in chapter 1, the determining factor for deciding that a cult is foreign does not seem to be proximity. He cites both peace and wartime as the occasions wherein foreign cults were brought in, therefore it is not the circumstances of the acquisition that determine the cult's status as *peregrina*. The only factor that makes sense, especially given the provided examples of the Magna Mater, Ceres, and Aesculapius, is that the Romans themselves decided that they would emphasize the foreign nature of the cults. With these three cults, two of which will be discussed in following chapters, the exotic aspects were not disregarded or ignored, but rather encouraged (and funded) by the State.

The Romans were very self-aware of foreignness. Rather than an uncontrollable aspect of the cult they imported, the Romans were able to construct a new identity for the deity based upon these exotic qualities. They frequently drew upon the foreign qualities of a cult in art and literature. For many of the deities, the Romans constructed elaborate mythologies that tell the story of the god's arrival in Rome. In addition, the transferred cult was never identical to the original. The Romans selected which aspects of the cult

³ All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

that they wished to emphasize, and augmented it with distinctly Roman practices and values. Thus they changed and manipulated the cults of these foreign gods, emphasizing the exotic nature of some of the deity's rites in order to suit their specifically Roman needs and create a Roman identity, even in the midst of the foreign cults.

In this thesis, I examine this phenomenon of the importation of foreign cults and its intended effects. I examine three specific cults that were established within the Roman pantheon at various points during the Republican period: Juno Sospita, Aesculapius, and the Magna Mater, to analyze the motivation of the Romans, as revealed by the art and literature that depict these deities. Each chapter will contain a brief discussion of the pre-Roman cult, the iconography of the deity, and any relevant historical context in addition to a close textual analysis of sources.

CHAPTER ONE

Juno Sospita

Juno Sospita was one of the earliest deities claimed by the Romans. A native Italic goddess, she functioned as the chief deity of Lanuvium, a small town located about twenty miles southeast of Rome, not far from the Appian Way.¹ This chapter will discuss the unusual nature of the adoption of the cult of Juno Sospita by the Romans and explore what this indicates about their mindset towards religion in general, and the “foreign gods” included in their pantheon.

An Italic Defender of the City

Juno Sospita was the tutelary deity of Lanuvium, serving as its primary protector and guardian. Just as Jupiter presided over Rome from the Capitoline Hill, Juno Sospita watched over Lanuvium from her temple on the citadel (*arx*) of the city.² Her iconography, considered more fully below, invariably depicts her as a warrior goddess. The epithet Sospita (also sometimes Sispes or Sispita), moreover, further supports the idea that Lanuvine Juno served as a protector of the city. Although modern scholars have not reached a unanimous consensus, the epithet is clearly related to *sospes*, which typically means “safe and sound, unscathed” in Classical Latin.³ Evidence from the lexicon of Paul the Deacon, a work of the eighth century A.D. derived from the *De*

¹ Gordon, *The Cults of Lanuvium*, 21.

² Harmon, *Religion in the Latin Elegists*, 1969; Schultz, *Women's Religious Activity in the Roman Republic*, 22.

³ OLD s.v. *sospes* 1; Harmon, *Religion in the Latin Elegists*, 1969.

verborum significatu (*On the Meaning of Words*) of the great Augustan scholar Verrius Flaccus, however, suggests that the word could also have a transitive meaning: *sospes salvus*. Ennius tamen *sospitem pro servatore posuit* (*Sospes* signifies one who is safe, though Ennius employs *sospes* for savior, 389, 6-7 L).⁴ Festus suggests elsewhere that Sospita was derived from the Greek verb “σώζειν” (to save), which indicates that the Romans themselves viewed her as a savior and protector.⁵

Despite this topographical, iconographic, and linguistic evidence, many scholars have understood Juno Sospita as a fertility goddess who was worshipped primarily by women.⁶ This is due to her association with the so-called “Snake Festival” and to the existence of inscribed dedications including the abbreviation ISMR, which may be resolved as Iuno Sospita/Sispes/Sispita Mater Regina, thus indicating that Juno Sospita was worshipped under the additional titles of “Mother” and “Queen.”⁷ As Robert Palmer and Celia Schultz point out, however, *mater* can be used as an honorific title without indicating that the deity is interested in fertility, as in the case of Vesta Mater.⁸ The evidence of the snake cult requires further discussion.

⁴ See also the more fragmentary entry in Festus (388, 25-36 L), which appears to include additional examples of this use. Harmon, *Religion in the Latin Elegists*, 1969, with further citations.

⁵ Festus 462, 5 L. Arguments against this interpretation (see especially Gordon, *The Cults of Lanuvium*, 35) are not convincing in light of more recent scholarship (Harmon, *Religion in the Latin Elegists*, 1969).

⁶ See, for example, Gordon, *The Cults of Lanuvium*, 28; Hänninen, “The Dream of Caecilia Metella,” 35-6.

⁷ Gordon, *The Cults of Lanuvium*, 35.

⁸ Palmer, *Roman Religion and Roman Empire*, 37; Schultz, *Women’s Religious Activity in the Roman Republic*, 23. For the title Vesta Mater, see Cic. *Font.* 47, *Dom.* 144, *Har.* 12; Verg. *Geor.* 1.498; Sen. *Con.* 4.2.

A ritual described as archaic and barbaric by Arthur Gordon, the serpent festival did not follow Juno Sospita to Rome.⁹ It occurred once a year in Lanuvium at the beginning of the agricultural season, and was designed to ensure fertility for the upcoming season of planting. As human unchastity was frequently thought to be the cause of infertility in the land, this ritual involved the testing of a young girl's chastity.¹⁰ In a grove of trees near the town there was said to be a cave where a sacred snake lived. A young, virgin girl was selected from among the inhabitants of Lanuvium (probably by lot, although that is not known with certainty), and then tasked with bringing a food offering into the cave to the snake.¹¹ If the offering was accepted, then the girl exited the cave, and all rejoiced knowing that the season would be fruitful. If the girl was not a virgin, however, then the offering would be rejected, and the girl would either be killed or sent out of the cave and punished by law (depending on the account).¹²

There are two theories about the means by which two apparently disparate areas of competence – protection of the city and fertility – came to be combined in the cult of Juno Sospita. Many scholars doubt the original associations of the snake festival with the worship of Juno Sospita, and point to her depiction with a snake as an attempt by the Romans to explain the connection between this festival and Juno Sospita, which has no satisfactory explanation.¹³ Arguments have been made that the serpent festival is the

⁹ There are neither mentions in literature nor archaeological evidence of a snake cult in Rome. Any further mentions of the cult specify that it is located in Lanuvium. See Propertius IV 8,-16.

¹⁰ Douglas, "Juno Sospita of Lanuvium", 71.

¹¹ Douglas, "Juno Sospita of Lanuvium", 71.

¹² Douglas, "Juno Sospita of Lanuvium", 70; Gordon, *The Cults of Lanuvium*, 37-38.

¹³ Douglas, "Juno Sospita of Lanuvium", 71; Gordon, *The Cults of Lanuvium*, 40.

original, archaic cult of Lanuvium, and that the cult of Juno Sospita was adopted from the surrounding Etruscans.¹⁴ This argument, however, has been entirely dismissed by Gordon, who supports the opposite view. Regarding the snake cult, he draws a closer parallel to Greek religious practice, in which snakes frequently functioned as oracles, rather than to an archaic Latin cult. E.M. Douglas corroborates this, believing that the cult had an oracular function in addition to the role it played in agricultural fertility, supporting a Greek origin.¹⁵ He thus argues that Juno Sospita as savior of the city was the original deity of the Lanuvine cult, and that later Hellenic influence combined the imported snake cult with her worship.¹⁶ Despite its unknown and questionable origins, the festival continued, and the snake remained as a well-known aspect of Juno Sospita.

As Celia Schultz has argued, the historical evidence indicates that despite the snake festival and the titles “mother” and “queen,” the cult of Juno Sospita was not exclusively associated with women or fertility.¹⁷ Unlike other Juno cults, such as the cults of Juno Regina and Juno Lucina, which included festivals exclusive to women, the participation of married women (*matronae*) is not well attested in the cult of Juno Sospita.¹⁸ Even the serpent festival does not provide a sufficient basis for attributing an emphasis on feminine affairs to the cult of Juno Sospita because the participation is by young, virgin girls, not by *matronae*, which gives the ritual and therefore the cult an

¹⁴ Summarized by Gordon, *The Cults of Lanuvium*, 38-39.

¹⁵ Douglas, “Juno Sospita of Lanuvium”, 71.

¹⁶ Gordon, *The Cults of Lanuvium*, 39-40.

¹⁷ Schultz, “Roman Insecurity in the Social War”, 217-221.

¹⁸ Schultz, “Roman Insecurity in the Social War”, 218. The temple of Juno Lucina in Rome, for instance, hosted the Matralia on 11 June, a festival concerned with the nurture of children (Ov. *Fast.* 6,473-562; Plut. *Q.R.* 17, *Cam.* 5.2; Festus (Paul) 113, 2 L).

entirely different social context. In fact, Juno Sospita had male priests, the *sacerdotes Lanuvini*, who traveled from Rome yearly to sacrifice at her Lanuvine temple.¹⁹

Additionally, dedications to Juno Sospita with known dedicants were all provided by men, many of them high ranking, notably a Lanuvine dictator (*ILS* 5683), a priest (*ILS* 6196), a soldier (*ILS* 9246), and the emperor Hadrian (*ILS* 316).²⁰ Juno Sospita acted primarily in the political and military sphere as a protector or savior, as indicated by her distinction as Juno *Sospita*.

The Iconography of Juno Sospita

The iconography of Juno Sospita tends to confirm her concern for military matters and the protection of the city. Cicero presents the most famous account of her imagery, which had been regularized by the late Republic, in the *De Natura Deorum*:

Tam, hercle, quam tibi illam vestram Sospitam. Quam tu numquam ne in somnis quidem vides nisi cum pelle caprina, cum hasta, cum scutulo, cum calceolis repandis. At non est talis Argia nec Romana Iuno. Ergo alia species Iunonis Argivis, alia Lanuinis. Et quidem alia nobis Capitolini, alia Afris Hammonis Iovis (1.82).

So much, indeed, that Sospita of yours. Whom you never see not even in sleep unless with a goat skin, with a spear, with a shield, and with flattened back shoes. But it is not so with Argive not Roman Juno. Therefore it is a different appearance of Argive Juno, different of Lanuvian. And indeed different than ours of Capitoline, another of African (Hammonian?) Jove.

Juno Sospita's spear, shield, and goatskin helmet were distinctive even amongst the other Juno cults, and were noticed as such by the time of Cicero. Her surviving depictions support her role as savior, especially in the context of war. The image is clearly one of a militaristic nature, and is intended to communicate that she is powerful (which makes

¹⁹ Orlin, *Foreign Cults in Rome*, 44.

²⁰ Schultz, "Roman Insecurity in the Social War", 212.

sense because she was the chief deity of Lanuvium) and able to defend her people. She is clad in several pieces of armor, the most unusual of which is the goatskin, which she wears with the horns on her head as if they were her own. The collection of images that depict her is small, but includes a large statue currently housed in the Vatican, a number of coins (mostly imperial in date), and a significant number of depictions with Hercules.

Juno Sospita's anthropomorphic form was most likely developed in the sixth and seventh centuries B.C. under the influence of Etruscan artists.²¹ The Etruscans were known throughout Italy for their devotion to religion and the proper worship of the gods. It is not surprising, therefore, that their craftsmen created some of the earliest representations of Juno Sospita. In fact, it seems that the Etruscans worshipped Juno Sospita as their goddess Uni, who was represented wearing the skin of a goat, and is interpreted as a combination of the Italic Juno Sospita and the Phoenician goddess Astarte.²²

In Etruscan art, Juno Sospita is frequently depicted alongside the Greek hero Herakles, or as he is called by the Etruscans, Hercle. There are more than a few artifacts that depict these two figures together, including a vase, rings, a three-sided bronze base, and bronze ornaments, all of which are considered to be of Etruscan origin or heavily influenced by them.²³ The combination of these two figures was important and widespread, which, may seem strange at first glance. In Greek mythology, the relationship between Herakles and Hera is not a peaceful partnership. Yet that is what is

²¹ Gordon, *The Cults of Lanuvium*, 34-35.

²² de Grummond, *Etruscan Myth, Sacred History, and Legend*, 81.

²³ Douglas, "Juno Sospita of Lanuvium", 64-67.

found depicted on most works of art produced in Italy. The Etruscan mythology of Hercle provides the missing context that makes sense of these images.



Figure 1 Etruscan black-figure amphora from Vulci showing Hercle and Uni/Juno Sospita (530 B.C. – 520 B.C.). London, British Museum. Photo © Trustees of the British Museum.

According to Etruscan myth, Hercle was always a god (whereas in Greek mythology he is originally a hero), whose original encounter with Uni was antagonistic. The conflict between these two gods is depicted on an amphora (Fig. 1) where Hercle, wearing the skin of the Nemean lion, intrudes upon Uni's sanctuary. She is wearing the goatskin helmet and holding a shield and spear, ready to attack. She is held back by her husband, Tin (the Etruscan equivalent of Zeus/Jupiter), who will eventually bring about their reconciliation.²⁴ Another interesting aspect of the relationship between Uni and Hercle that is not paralleled by any Greek myth is Hercle's adoption by Uni. Depictions of this event show a bearded Hercle nursing from the enthroned Uni, and one Etruscan mirror bears an inscription that may read: "This shows how Hercle, the son of Uni, was

²⁴ Simon, "Gods in Harmony: The Etruscan Pantheon", 51.

adopted” (Fig. 2).²⁵ Another scene often used in Etruscan bronze artwork (including the aforementioned bronze base and ornaments) shows Uni being attacked by satyrs and defended by Hercle.²⁶ The Etruscans, having adopted Juno Sospita into their pantheon from the surrounding Latin tribes of central Italy, created most early artwork depicting her, including scenes from their own mythology.



Figure 2 Etruscan mirror from Volterra showing Uni nursing Hercle in front of divine witnesses. Florence, Museo Archeologico Nazionale (Bonfante and Bonfante 2002, p. 155, Source 36, fig. 33).

Most of the extant examples of Juno Sospita’s iconography are found on coins from the late Republic and early principate. In every case, the moneyer apparently used the image of Juno Sospita to refer to the original cult and thus to communicate his place of origin as

²⁵ de Grummond, *Etruscan Myth, Sacred History, and Legend*, 82-83.

²⁶ de Grummond, *Etruscan Myth, Sacred History, and Legend*, 82. Simon, “Gods in Harmony: The Etruscan Pantheon”, 51.

Lanuvium.²⁷ All depict the goddess herself, identifiable by her goat-skin headdress. Some are simply that, just the head of the goddess with her most easily identifiable feature, with the reverse side bearing the name of the moneyer, but with a different image on the reverse.²⁸ Other coins featuring Juno Sospita depict the goddess on both the obverse and the reverse. In two examples, she is shown holding her spear and shield, one features a snake and the other a crow.²⁹ The coin depicts the crow perching on the shoulder of Juno Sospita, who is holding a shield and spear as she crowns the moneyer of the coin, who is shown as an augur, wearing a veil and holding a lituus. The snake is a reference to the snake cult at Lanuvium, and the coin may have taken the cult statue as a model.³⁰ Other coins also make use of the snake motif, including one which has the head of Juno Sospita on one side, and a girl and snake facing each other on the obverse (Fig. 3).³¹ This scene clearly depicts the ritual of the snake cult as described by Propertius.



Figure 3 Denarius of L. Roscius Fabatus showing a head of Juno Sospita on the obverse (left) and a girl facing a snake on the reverse (right), 64 B.C. (*RRC* 412/1). London, British Museum. Photo © Trustees of the British Museum.

²⁷ Crawford, *Roman Republican Coinage*, 323.

²⁸ BMCRR Rome 1615, BMCRR Rome 2977.

²⁹ Crawford #509? Paris, AF?, BMCRR Rome 3150

³⁰ Crawford, *Roman Republican Coinage*, 396.

³¹ BMCRR Rome 3394, BMCRR Rome 4025 (Other side is a bust of Victory, not Juno Sospita, but image still clearly references Lanuvine snake cult)

A *denarius* minted by L. Papius Celsus in 45 B.C. shows a “normal” head of Juno Sospita on the obverse with a wolf placing a stick on a fire and an eagle fanning the flames on the reverse (Fig. 4). This coin is unique. According to Michael Crawford, the scene on the reverse may depict prodigies associated with the founding of Lanuvium.³² If this interpretation is correct, then the coin could allude to another important function of Juno Sospita, her role as a giver of warnings. Throughout the Republican period, numerous prodigies of great importance were observed at the temple of Juno Sospita in Lanuvium.³³ The coin minted by Celsus could indicate that the Romans remembered and associated the goddess with these warnings.



Figure 4 Denarius of L. Papius Celsus showing a head of Juno Sospita on the obverse (left) and a wolf and eagle on the reverse (right), 45 B.C. (*RRC* 472/1). London, British Museum. Photo © Trustees of the British Museum.

Juno Sospita was still so inextricably intertwined with Lanuvium, that merely placing her image is enough to clearly communicate a Lanuvine origin, which must be a prominent city because the moneyer desires to be associated with it, perhaps because of

³² Crawford, *Roman Republican Coinage*, 482.

³³ Livy 23.31.15, 40.19.1-2. Cicero, *De Divinatione*, 1.99. Hermans, “Juno Sospita: A Foreign Goddess through Roman Eyes”, 331. Schultz, “Roman Insecurity in the Social War”, 221.

the temple to Juno Sospita. Based on all the coins that feature Juno Sospita, the Romans appear to be not as interested in the fertility (snake cult) aspect of her identity. These coins do depict her with a snake and armor, however, because by this time, with the earliest example being from 105 BC, these symbols were aspects of her appearance. In all of the examples of her numismatic representation, she is depicted with her goatskin helmet, and frequently with a shield and spear as well. More detailed coins may also depict a snake, but she is never without her battle gear. When the late Republican moneyers were designing the currency that would bear their name, they chose to depict Juno Sospita as a warrior, to emphasize her political and military associations. By that point, she was primarily associated with war, rather than fertility.

Rome Adopts Juno Sospita

In order to understand the significance of the adoption of the cult of Juno Sospita cult by the Roman Republic, it is necessary to understand the historical context. Beginning with the invasion of the Gauls and their capture of Rome in the early fourth century BC, the Romans were almost continually at war with their Latin allies.³⁴ Immediately following the Gallic sack, several towns in southern Latium gained confidence and revolted, and were not defeated until 376 BC.

In 380 BC, in the midst of the Latin revolt, the Romans annexed the large and prosperous Latin town of Tusculum, giving its citizens full Roman citizenship but allowing the town to retain quite a bit of political autonomy.³⁵ There was a relative amount of peace in Italy between 376 and 363 BC. In 362 BC however, the Romans

³⁴ Mackay, *Ancient Rome*, 45.

³⁵ Mackay, *Ancient Rome*, 45.

returned to the conquest of Latium.³⁶ The allies were given updated treaties more favorable to Rome, and the Etruscans to the north were finally defeated and signed peace treaties. During the late 340s, Rome became involved in a dispute between some of their neighbors, the Campanians and the Samnites, who lived in south-central Italy and were not yet under the control of Rome. They sided with the Samnites, while many of their Latin allies sided instead with the Campanians. This conflict resulted in a widespread uprising amongst the Latins, beginning in 341 BC.³⁷ They were resisting the total dominion of Rome, and possibly seeking equal rights as citizens. This was not to be. By 270 BC, Rome was in control of the majority of peninsular Italy. At the battle of Trifanum in 340 BC, the Romans resoundingly defeated the Campanians and the Latins, spending the next two years ending any remaining resistance throughout Latium. Following this, the Romans ended any treaties between the Latin towns and compelled each of them to sign an individual treaty with Rome that varied from city to city.³⁸ According to the historian Livy, the senate debated the case of each defeated town individually and according to their merit (*pro merito cuiusque*, 8.14.1).

Upon their defeat in 338 BC, Lanuvium, as one of the Latin allies, signed a treaty with Rome, the terms of which are recorded by Livy:

Lanuvinis civitas data sacraque sua reddita, cum eo ut aedes lucusque Sospitae Iunonis communis Lanuvinis municipibus cum populo Romano esset (8.14.2).

Citizenship was given to the Lanuvians and their sacred things were returned, with the understanding that the temple and grove of Juno Sospita should be common to the Lanuvian citizens and the Roman people.

³⁶ Mackay, *Ancient Rome*, 46.

³⁷ Mackay, *Ancient Rome*, 46.

³⁸ Mackay, *Ancient Rome*, 47.

In addition to sharing the worship of their goddess, Lanuvium received *civitas sine suffragio* (citizenship without the vote). Later, they would become fully enfranchised as a *municipium*, which granted the residents of Lanuvium the full rights of a Roman citizen. They were now able to vote in the assembly, be elected to a magistracy, and receive any benefits given to citizens.³⁹

The treaty of 338 is the first mention of Juno Sospita by Livy, and it presents a rather unexpected outcome. The Romans have already established that they are willing and able to take for themselves whatever they desire, and this includes the gods of other cities. In 396 BC, they had performed a ceremony known as an *evocatio* (a calling out) and transferred the allegiance of Juno Regina from Etruscan Veii to Rome. In 338 B.C., they had already defeated Lanuvium, and could have moved the cult to Rome with little difficulty. In fact, this might have been expected given the harsh punishments they imposed upon other rebellious states:

in Veliternos, veteres cives Romanos, quod totiens rebellassent, graviter saevitum: et muri deiecti et senatus inde abductus iussique trans Tiberim habitare...ceteris Latinis populis conubia commerciaque et concilia inter se ademerunt (8.14.5, 10).

The Veliternians, who had long been Roman citizens, were dealt with severely because they had revolted so many times: their walls were knocked down and their Senate having been led away from the city were ordered to live beyond the Tiber... they deprived the remaining Latin people of the right to intermarry, the right to trade, and the right to councils amongst themselves.

Thus punishing Lanuvium harshly would not have been unexpected. Eric Orlin comments on the situation, observing, “that the *sacra* needed to be restored implies of course, that the Romans had taken these when they conquered the city, but that they should have

³⁹ Gordon, *The Cults of Lanuvium*, 22.

decided to returned them to this town, alone of the towns mentioned, is curious.”⁴⁰

Lanuvium was singled out for this mild treatment, and in return the Romans were able to share the cult of this goddess, whom Livy has not mentioned up until this point.

Following the treaty with Lanuvium, the consuls came from Rome each year to sacrifice to Juno Sospita in her temple there, as stated by Cicero: “*nolite a sacris patriis Iunonis Sospitae, cui omnis consules facere necesse est, domesticum et suum consulem potissimum avellere*” (be unwilling to tear away from the paternal sacrifices of Juno Sospita, to whom it is necessary for all consuls to sacrifice, that consul who belongs to her household and is her own most especially, *Mur.* 90). The local Lanuvian priests also continued in their sacrifices to her cult.⁴¹ It was thus shared between Rome and Lanuvium, receiving double the amount of sacrifices, and allowing the Lanuvian temple of Juno Sospita to remain the center of her cult worship.

Although the reasoning behind allowing Juno Sospita to remain in Lanuvium and embarking upon a plan of joint worship is not explicitly stated in Livy’s account, it can be deduced through his discussion of the treatment of other Latin towns. Harsher punishments were dealt out to more treacherous allies, such as those who had rebelled before or who sided with the Gauls, while comparatively mild and sometimes even beneficiary treatment was given to allies who had aided the Romans or served them in some way. Livy refers to Lanuvium as a “*fidelissima urbs*” (most friendly city, 6.21.2)⁴², and so it can be concluded that Lanuvium’s past loyalty was looked on favorably by the

⁴⁰ Orlin, *Foreign Cults in Rome*, 43.

⁴¹ Gordon, *The Cults of Lanuvium*, 25, 48.

⁴² Livy 6.21.2.

Romans when making the treaty.⁴³ The granting of the *civitas sine suffragio* was one method to reward and incorporate Rome's allies. In addition to Lanuvium, the Aricini, Nomentani, and Pedani were received into citizenship by the same law which Lanuvium was,⁴⁴ although without the stipulation about any cults or *sacra*. The added provision in the treaty with Lanuvium regarding Juno Sospita is unique amongst both the rewards and punishments listed for the allies, which suggests that the Romans were particularly interested in this deity and her cult.

The Romans, who were not attempting to punish Lanuvium, presumably did not want to offend its citizens or their patron goddess. Rather than performing an *evocatio* to claim the goddess for themselves, a decision that would have antagonized the citizens (and possibly the goddess herself), they chose to hold the cult in common. Quite possibly the Romans also believed that the location of the temple and grove was especially holy. Even during the imperial period, Lanuvium was called the "*Iunonia sedes*" (seat of Juno, Sil. *Pun.* 8.360). Thus the Romans may have regarded the location of the cult as fundamental to her worship. Livy specifies that the temple and grove of Juno Sospita were to be shared by the two peoples. As we have seen, the temple was located on the citadel and associated with Juno Sospita's role as protector and savior. This suggests that the Romans were particularly interested in this aspect of the goddess, rather than her snake cult. In practical terms, holding the cult in common meant an increase in the sacrifices and honor due to the goddess, further enticing her to protect the Romans as well as their allies the Lanuvians. In conclusion, during the first phase of their adoption

⁴³ Schultz, "Roman Insecurity in the Social War", 209.

⁴⁴ Livy 8.14.3.

of Juno Sospita, the Romans did not attempt to change her location, but rather added new rituals at her traditional cult site.

Juno Sospita During the Second Punic War

The Second Punic War was the context for many outpourings of religious devotion by the Roman state and its individual citizens. It was a time of great distress and uncertainty, with Rome facing the possibility of defeat for the first time in several centuries. In 219 BC, the Carthaginian general Hannibal crossed over the Alps with his army, and having met with his allies from Gaul, brought war to Italian soil once again.⁴⁵ The Roman army was defeated in numerous battles in Northern Italy, and they feared lest Rome itself be placed in danger. In addition to the heavy losses the legions suffered due to Hannibal's military genius, the Romans had to contend with Hannibal's political strategy as well. The Gauls in Italy had already augmented the numbers of the Carthaginian army with an alliance. In doing so, they also rebelled against Rome. Hannibal continued this stratagem of attempting to turn Rome's Latin allies against them, releasing all of the non-Roman prisoners captured after each battle for free. This was a particularly effective strategy for fighting the Romans, because much of their strength in arms relied upon the manpower of their allies. By winning those allies over to his cause, he augmented his own troops while striking a blow to the strength and confidence of the Romans. Then in the spring of 217 BC, Hannibal's superior tactics resulted in an overwhelming defeat for the Romans, with 25,000 men either killed or captured, including a consul.⁴⁶ The Romans in this war were facing the possibility of loss— large

⁴⁵ Mackay, *Ancient Rome*, 67.

⁴⁶ Mackay, *Ancient Rome*, 68.

scale crushing loss, and in their home territory no less— and when seeking an explanation and a solution for their troubles, they examined their relationship with those who should be the protectors of their homeland: the gods.

Maintaining a good relationship with the gods was essential to the prosperity of Rome. Conversely, if the gods were angered and driven to abandon the Romans, no human strategy, however clever, would be effective. The Romans believed that the gods communicated their displeasure through portents. Prodigies occurring throughout Rome's territory were collected each year and evaluated by the senate, which decided whether to accept these portents as official and determined, on the advice of the priestly colleges, how they were to be expiated. According to the information presented by Livy, during the Hannibalic War there was an increase in the number of prodigies observed and recorded by Roman people.

Not all prodigies occurred in Rome. Indeed, Livy tells us that among the portents reported in 215 BC, several occurred at Lanuvium: "*signa Lanuui ad Iunonis Sospitae cruore manuere lapidibusque circa id templum pluit, ob quem imbrem nouendiale, ut adsolet, sacrum fuit; ceteraque prodigia cum cura expiata.*" (The statues in the temple of Juno Sospita at Lanuvium sweated blood, and it rained with stones around that temple, on account of this shower there was a *novendiale sacrum*, as is the custom; and the remaining prodigies were expiated with care, 23.31.15). The *novendiale sacrum* was a rite that took place on the last of nine days of festivities, and was most frequently used to expiate the prodigy of showers of stones, as in this case. This rite was prescribed by the state after the prodigy was accepted.⁴⁷ It is interesting that the displeasure of the gods is

⁴⁷ Brill's New Pauly, "Novendiale Sacrum".

revealed to the Romans partially through the Lanuvine temple of Juno Sospita, who although usually a protector, delivers the message that if the gods are not placated, more bloodshed is in Rome's future. These portents were expiated, Livy tells us, with care (*cum cura*).

In treating seriously portents arising from the temple of a prominent Latin deity, the Romans were acknowledging their Latin allies and indicating that they valued those alliances. Thus there may have been a political as well as a religious rationale for accepting and expiating these particular portents. For the Romans, wishing to deter their allies from defecting, showing respect to the traditional goddess of Lanuvium showed respect to the Lanuvians as well. Honoring this particular goddess, moreover, might also have served as a warning against defecting to the Carthaginians, reminding everyone of a time when Rome defeated the Latins. When the Romans expiated these prodigies, it was a clear indication that Juno Sospita was a Roman deity, which was only possible because of Lanuvium's defeat in the Latin revolt in the fourth century.

Juno Sospita Receives a Temple at Rome

In 197 BC, only a few short years after the final treaty with Carthage was ratified in 201 BC, the consul Gaius Cornelius Cethegus vowed to construct a new temple in Rome to Juno Sospita if she should grant the Romans victory:

Consul principio pugnae vovit aedem Sospitae Iunoni, si eo die hostes fusi fugatique fuissent; a militibus clamor sublatus compotem voti consulem se facturos, et impetus in hostes est factus. Non tulerunt Insubres primum concursum (Livy 32.30.10-1).

At the beginning of the battle, the consul vowed a temple to Juno Sospita if on that day the enemy was routed and put to flight; the shouts of the soldiers assured the consul that he would fulfill his vow. An attack was made against the enemy, and the Insubres did not stand up against the first charge.

Juno Sospita is here called on in a military context to save and protect the Romans from defeat by the Insubres, a Gallic tribe from northern Italy.

It was not until 194 BC, however, that her temple in Rome was dedicated, as recorded briefly by Livy:

Aedes eo anno aliquot dedicatae sunt: una Iunonis Matutae in foro olitorio, vota locataque quadriennio ante a C. Cornelio consule Gallico bello...⁴⁸

In this year several temples were dedicated: one to Juno Matuta in the Forum Holitorium, having been vowed and marked out four years before by the consul C. Cornelius during the Gallic War...

There appears to be some confusion in the text, as Juno Matuta is not mentioned anywhere else in Latin literature. As Livy has told us in book 32 that the consul C. Cornelius vowed a temple to Juno Sospita during the Gallic War, most scholars agree that the temple dedicated in 194/3 B.C. belonged to this goddess.⁴⁹

The temple was dedicated during a period of great religious growth in Rome, with fifteen temples (including Magna Mater's) dedicated between 194-173 BC, the period immediately following the Second Punic War.⁵⁰ Following the traumas and devastating losses of this war, an outpouring of religious fervor is in keeping with the Roman mentality towards religion. They thanked the gods for their victory and placated them so that such a war would not happen again. Thus the new temple to Juno Sospita was not an isolated incident, but part of a larger movement in the aftermath of the Second Punic War.

⁴⁸ Livy, 34.53.3.

⁴⁹ Schultz 2006: 210, Orlin 1997: 63-4, Richardson 1992: 217-218.

⁵⁰ Orlin, *Foreign Cults in Rome*, 180.

The new temple to Juno Sospita in Rome, however, is rather unique. The temple in Lanuvium was still visited yearly by the consuls for the purpose of sacrificing, and prodigies continue to be recorded at this temple rather than the temple in Rome.⁵¹ Normal portents, such as earthquakes, were reported. However there was also the troubling prodigy that mice were gnawing the sacral shields at Lanuvium.⁵² This portent connects directly to Juno Sospita, and the symbolism of the defense of the state being gnawed away cannot be ignored. One of the strangest prodigies reported at this time is that the statue of Juno Sospita wept (*Lanuvini simulacrum Iunonis Sospitae lacrimasse*, 40.19.2). This portent occurred at the temple in Lanuvium, though by this point (181 BC), the Roman temple had been dedicated for more than ten years.⁵³ This occasion is noteworthy because, if the central focus of the cult had shifted to the Roman temple, which in the span of ten years it had ample time to do, then why would a portent with such magnitude of import occur at the older, farther away temple in Lanuvium? The explanation is that the Lanuvium temple was still the center of the worship of Juno Sospita.

Juno Sospita During the Social War

In 90 BC, the cult of Juno Sospita was again at the forefront of Roman religious concerns. Caecilia Metella, a Roman *matrona* (married woman) from a prominent patrician family, reportedly saw a vision of Juno Sospita fleeing the city. As a result of this vision, the Senate ordered a restoration of the temple. The section of Livy's histories

⁵¹ Hermans, "Juno Sospita: A Foreign Goddess through Roman Eyes", 331.

⁵² Cicero, *De Divinatione*, 1.99.

⁵³ Livy, *The History of Rome*, 40.19.1-2

that recorded the dream has been lost. Fortunately, we possess the summary of Julius

Obsequens:

Metella Caecilia somnio Iunonem Sospitam profugientem, quod immunde sua templa foedarentur, cum suis precibus aegre revocatam diceret, aedem matronarum sordidis obscenisque corporis coinquinatam ministeriis, in qua etiam sub simulacro deae cubile canis cum fetu erat, commundatam supplicationibus habitis pristino splendore restituit (40.19.1-2).

Caecilia Metella in a dream [saw] Juno Sospita fleeing, because her temples were being defiled by the unclean, since she was pleading, with difficulty she had been called back by her prayers, the temple having been befouled by the sordid and indecent works of the body, in which even beneath the image of the goddess there was the den of a dog with its offspring, she restored it having been cleansed, with supplication having been kept, to its former grandeur.

This event, much like the dedication of the Roman temple, must be understood within the context of a war. The Social War, which plagued Rome from 90-86 BC, consumed the state with violence. Throughout the second century, tensions had gradually been building between the Italian allies and the senate. The Latins, who spoke Latin, shared a common culture, and believed they were Roman, wanted to have Roman rights. The poor wanted to be paid equally for the same amount of military service, and the elite to vote and be elected to Roman magistracies. There were several attempts by senators to grant the allies various degrees of citizenship, however they were opposed by other members of the senate and never implemented. The discontent of the allies grew, and when the tribune of the plebs, Marcus Livius Drusus, who forced through several laws that would benefit the plebeians and reform the court system, was killed, the revolt loomed imminently. The situation descended into open warfare upon the murder of a Roman praetor and other Roman citizens in the Latin town of Asculum in 91/90 BC. A number of Latin towns joined into a coalition that rebelled, protesting their unequal treatment. They won several major battles against the Romans, killing a consul and then a commander before the other

consul, Lucius Julius Caesar, brought them under control with a decisive victory. In 89 BC he also passed a law that granted the Latin allies the citizenship they desired, but war continued for several years until resistance was ended and Rome was once again in control.

This context is especially significant because there are the precedents of both the Latin War and the Second Punic War, during which the Romans showed renewed interest in the cult of Juno Sospita. In each of these situations, there was a great and unusual threat to the state. Schultz notes, moreover, the large number of portents that were reported during each of these conflicts.⁵⁴ During the Social War, Rome faced political instability at home and, even more importantly, a threat from their allies, as they had during the Latin War and the Second Punic War. As during the Latin War, the Social War ultimately resulted in a change in status for Rome's allies. It would seem that once again, when the Romans believed the state to be in mortal danger, they turned not only to their own gods for assistance, but especially beseeched Juno Sospita, an Italic goddess and a protector of the state. The decision to restore her temple is no small matter. It was very much a public affair, as recorded by Cicero in the *De Divinatione*:

Nec vero somnia graviora, si quae ad rem publicam pertinere visa sunt, a summo consilio neglecta sunt. Quin etiam memoria nostra templum Iunonis Sospitae L. Iulius, qui cum P. Rutilio consul fuit, de senatus sententia refecit ex Caeciliae, Baliarici filiae, somnio (1.4).

Truly serious dreams, if they seemed to pertain to public business, were not disregarded by the high council. Indeed, even in my memory L. Iulius, who was consul with P. Rutilius, restored the temple of Juno Sospita, according to the decision of the Senate on account of the dream Caecilia, the daughter of Baliaricus.

⁵⁴ Schultz, "Roman Insecurity in the Social War", 221.

Cicero here emphasizes the role of the Senate, that it was they who were the ultimate source of the restoration (*de senatus sententia*). This indicates that the restoration of the temple was also an important affair, as it was handled directly by the ultimate political and religious authority.⁵⁵ Thus the Romans considered the dream of Caecilia Metella very serious, and acted upon it with such vigor because they believed Juno Sospita, as protector, could aid them in their dire plight.

Conclusion

The adoption of Juno Sospita and her subsequent treatment by the Roman State reveals their understanding of the goddess' role within the state. As a political decision, the adoption of Juno Sospita helped the Romans to appear sympathetic to their Latin neighbors (while still controlling them), and allowed them to tie themselves to a culturally different people by adopting some of their culture. Nevertheless, she consistently appears in a variety of texts following her adoption, and is an important figure in Roman history. These texts show that when the Romans beseech Juno Sospita, they need her as a warrior, not as a fertility goddess. There are portents reported at her temples when they are losing wars, and temples pledged to her dependent on success in battle. Juno Sospita and the Roman battle effort are inextricably intertwined, with her playing a role in all conflicts since the Latin Wars in which Rome's relationship with her allies has been challenged. When the Romans are attempting to build a new system of alliances following their victory in the Latin War, they return the cult and also adopt it for themselves, affording the goddess new honors and using her worship to help create lasting ties with their allies. During the Second Punic War, Hannibal was successful at

⁵⁵ Schultz, "Roman Insecurity in the Social War", 223.

convincing some of Rome's allies to defect, and many unusual portents were reported from the temple of Juno Sospita, resulting in direct action from the state. The Romans turned to Juno Sospita again for help in a battle when their alliances were at risk, expiating the prodigies relating to her cult in the hope that she would maintain the ties between her suppliants. Finally, during the Social War her cult again received attention from the state, at a time of instability which threatened the peaceful coexistence of Rome with her allies. The restoration of the temple in Rome which was the result allowed Rome to express the importance of Juno Sospita and her role, to protect the Romans and their relationship with their allies.

CHAPTER TWO

Aesculapius

The introduction of the Greek god Asclepius at Rome in 293 BC shows an expansion of the same principles that were used in the incorporation of Juno Sospita. The success of Aesculapius' incorporation also paved the way for the later, very similar case of the Magna Mater in the later second century BC. Aesculapius was a god of healing and health, who was thought to both cure and prevent illness. As a popular god during the Greek classical period and then of the Romans under the late principate, Aesculapius was worshipped in Greece as early as the archaic period and received cult in Greece and at Rome well into late antiquity. Despite the cult's long history, however, this chapter will focus exclusively on the incorporation of Aesculapius into the religious landscape of the Roman Republic.

Asclepius — A Greek Deity

The Greek god Asclepius, who according to tradition was born in Epidaurus, was a popular god of healing and medicine, discussed even in ancient times by many authors who addressed his life as a mortal hero, his cult practices, and the character of the god himself. Although there is no consensus among modern scholars concerning the etymology of the name "Asclepius", the ancients believed that it was a compound. There was general agreement that the second half of Ἀσκληπιός derived from the adjective

ἥπιος,¹ which means “gentle, kind, soothing.”² Even in antiquity the first half of the name was resolved several different ways, with some positing σκέλλειν (to dry up, parch) with an alpha privative,³ others Ἄσκλην after the tyrant of Epidaurus, whom Asclepius is said to have cured,⁴ and still others ἀσκεῖν (to work on, smooth).⁵ Edelstein and Edelstein suggest that all of these etymologies cast Asclepius as the perfect physician who, though mild, is able to delay the ravaging of death and disease.⁶

Although the mythology surrounding Asclepius varies, the hero is first mentioned in the *Iliad* in the catalogue of ships.⁷ According to Greek tradition, he was a mortal; thenceforth, for centuries he was worshipped in a hero cult before being acknowledged as a divine being.⁸ The ancients themselves debated the moment of Asclepius’ deification, with some claiming that he was made a god following his death at Troy and others who claimed that his deification was the work of the slowly changing opinion of man.⁹ Both Pindar¹⁰ and Apollodorus¹¹ told the myth of the birth Asclepius, although the latter

¹ Plutarchus, *Decem Oratorum Vitae*, 8.845 B; Eustathius, *Commentarii ad Homerum Odysseam*, 2.319; Scholia in Homerum, *Ad Iliadem* 4.195; Scholia in Lycophronem, *Ad Alexandram*, 1054. For discussion of the epigraphic evidence, see Edelstein and Edelstein (1998) 80-82.

² *LSJ* s.v. ἥπιος 1.1, 2.1.

³ Porphyrius, *Quaestiones Homericae*, α.68; Eudocia Augusta, *Violarium*, XI. *LSJ* s.v. σκέλλω, 1.

⁴ Scholia in Lycophronem, *Ad Alexandram*, 1054, Eustathius, *Commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem*, 4.202; Eudocia Augusta, *Violarium* XI.

⁵ Scholia in Homerum, *Ad Iliadem*, 4.195; Scholia in Lycophronem, *Ad Alexandram*, 1054; Eustathius, *Commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem*, 4.202; Suidas, *Lexicon* s.v. Ἀσκληπιάδης. *LSJ* s.v. ἀσκεῖω, 1.

⁶ Edelstein and Edelstein, *Asclepius: Interpretation*, 81-83.

⁷ Hom. *Il.* 2.729-733.

⁸ Edelstein and Edelstein, *Asclepius: Interpretation*, 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁰ Pindar, *Pythiae*, 3.1-58.

version of the myth seems to have been better known in antiquity and was the basis for the retelling of the myth by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*. In the Apollodorian version, Asclepius was the son of Apollo and Coronis, a Thessalian maiden, whom Apollo killed when her infidelity was discovered. Apollo then snatched the unborn child from his mother's womb and gave him to Chiron, a great healer and the tutor of many notable Greek heroes, to raise and teach.¹² Chiron's daughter even offered a prophecy regarding his future vocation as a healer and eventual deification:

adspicit infantem "toto" que "salutifer orbi
cresce, puer!" dixit; "tibi se mortalia saepe
corpora debebunt, animas tibi reddere ademptas
fas erit, idque semel dis indignantibus ausus
posse dare hoc iterum flamma prohibebere avita,
eque deo corpus fiet exsanguis deusque,
qui modo corpus eras, et bis tua fata novabis (Ov., *Met.* 2.640-648).

She [i.e., the daughter of Chiron] looked upon the infant and said, "child, healer to the whole world, thrive! To you often mortal bodies will owe themselves. It will be permissible for you to restore the souls of those who have been carried off. Having dared this once with the gods resenting, you will be prevented from being able to give life a second time by your grandfather's flame, and from a god you will become a bloodless body, and as a god, who was recently a body, you will twice renew your fates."¹³

The role of Asclepius has always been a healer, and his former life as a mortal hero and dedication to saving men probably contributed to his widespread popularity amongst people of all social and economic statuses.

In addition to his father Apollo, Asclepius is routinely depicted and invoked with several other members of his family: his wife, Epione (Gentle), and his children Aceso

¹¹ Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 3.10, 3, 5-4, 1. I will only discuss Apollodorus' text because I only seek to provide a general background to the cult, rather than provide a discussion of the differing versions of the myth.

¹² Ov., *Met.* 2.628-636.

¹³ All translations are my own.

(Healing), Iaso (Cure), Panacea (Universal Health), Hygieia (Health), and Aegle (possibly Glory or Radiance).¹⁴ All of his children and his wife are personifications of abstract medical concepts, and they are solely associated with Asclepius after the fourth century BC, even if they previously were known independently. This suggests that the cult of Asclepius was powerful and influential enough to eclipse other contemporaneous healing cults, attracting them all into one cult.

Hygieia is the most famous of Aesculapius' children. While the others eventually fade from the popular cult, she was generally the only one invoked with Aesculapius and was worshipped alongside him in his temples.¹⁵ The cult of Hygieia, while a subcult dependent upon the cult of Aesculapius, also received dedications at her cult statues.¹⁶ Michael Compton argues that Hygieia fulfilled an important aspect of the healing cult, providing healthy worshippers with an outlet for their worship. He posits that the healthy, not seeking a cure from the physician Asclepius, came to Hygieia to ask for the continuance of their health.¹⁷ Hygieia thus functioned as an extension of her father's abilities, and this is represented by her mythological relationship to Asclepius as her father: Health is the result of healing and medicine. Hygieia as the partner of Aesculapius also contributed to his characterization as the ideal physician because together they cured

¹⁴ Edelstein and Edelstein, *Asclepius: Interpretation*, 86-89. Pauly-Wissowa, s.v. Aceso, Aegle, Epione.

¹⁵ Pauly-Wissowa, s.v. Hygieia.

¹⁶ Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, II, xi, 6.

¹⁷ Compton, "The Association of Hygieia with Asklepios in Graeco-Roman Asklepieion Medicine", 324-325.

the sick and then maintained the healthy.¹⁸ The worship of the two deities together allows a variety of aspects of healing to be contained in one cult without being contradictory.¹⁹

When the cult of Aesculapius was introduced into Rome, the cult of Hygieia was identified with the already existent cult of Salus (Health). Previously, the cult of Salus was one of many deified personifications that received temples during the Republican period, typically vowed by generals during battle.²⁰ In 313 BC the censor Gaius Junius Bubulcus Brutus vowed a temple to Salus during the Second Samnite War, which was constructed in 302 BC on the Quirinal.²¹ After 293 BC, the mythology of Hygieia is sometimes applied to the goddess Salus, and other times she is conceived of as a powerful force rather than solely as the companion of Aesculapius.²² As in Greece, Salus/Hygieia was invoked alongside Aesculapius and received worship. As the Roman Hygieia, she continued to be associated with Aesculapius in art, although the cult of Salus never was as popular as the cult of Hygieia in Greece. One begins to build a picture of the ancients' perception of Aesculapius as the god who was closely associated with Health, and to understand the importance of viewing Aesculapius not as the physician who comes when disaster strikes, but as the one who constantly averts disaster.

¹⁸ Edelstein and Edelstein, *Asclepius: Interpretation*, 90.

¹⁹ Ibid., 325.

²⁰ Marwood, *The Roman Cult of Salus*, 1-5.

²¹ Livy, 9.43.25, 10.1.9.

²² The cult of Salus becomes very important during the Imperial period as the force which sustains the health of the emperor, the imperial family or the state and was thus known as: Salus Caesaris, Salus Augusti, and Salus Publica, with a few additional, but less attested, uses. For a discussion of this role of Salus, see Marwood (1988).



Figure 1 Roman marble statue of Aesculapius leaning on a staff entwined with a snake (~ AD 200). London, British Museum. Photo © Trustees of the British Museum.

Iconography

Asclepius' Hellenistic iconography cannot be disassociated from the ancients' conception of Asclepius. He was depicted as a bearded adult, carrying a staff and accompanied by a snake. Additionally he sometimes wore a cape or a crown of laurel upon his head.²³ He was generally shown in two poses, either sitting and enthroned as a god, or standing with the snake and staff, of which the latter was the most common (Fig. 1).²⁴ His cult statue at Epidaurus was described by Ovid:

²³ Edelstein and Edelstein, *Asclepius: Interpretation*, 225.

²⁴ Pauly-Wissowa, s.v. Asclepius, II.

cum deus in somnis opifer consistere visus
ante tuum, Romane, torum, sed qualis in aede
esse solet, baculumque tenens agreste sinistra
caesariem longae dextra deducere barbae.²⁵

When the help-bringing god stands in your sleep, seen before your bed, Roman,
but just as he is accustomed to be in his temple, holding a rustic staff in his left
hand and he stroking the hair of his long beard with his right hand.

Ovid states that the image of Aesculapius he describes is the same which a Roman would expect to see in their dreams, thus it implies that this iconography carries over to the Roman visualization of the god. Edelstein and Edelstein trace the origin of the staff to his role as a traveling healer, an important aspect of the epic tradition regarding the hero Aesculapius.²⁶ This theory also seems to fit with the god Aesculapius as well, who travels between his major sanctuaries to heal his supplicants. Both the Greeks and the Romans developed their own interpretations of Aesculapius' iconic symbols, all the way until the time of Festus, who provides a description of Aesculapius in the 2nd century AD:

In insula Aesculapio facta aedes fuit, quod aegroti a medicis aqua maxime sustententur. eiusdem esse tutelae draconem, quod vigilantissimum sit animal; quae res ad tuendam valitudinem aegroti maxime apta est. canes adhibentur eius templo, quod is uberibus canis sit nutritus. bacillum habet nodosum, quod difficultatem significat artis. laurea coronatur, quod ea arbor plurimorum sit remediorum. huic gallinae immolabantur.²⁷

A temple was built for Aesculapius on the island, because the sick are preserved by physicians especially through the use of water. The guardian of this same temple is a snake, which is a most watchful animal; which is especially fitting for protecting the health of the sick. Dogs are invited into his temple, because he was nourished by the teats of a dog. He has a knotty staff, which signifies the difficulty of the art. He is crowned with laurel, because this tree contains many remedies. To him hens are sacrificed.

²⁵ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 15.654-656.

²⁶ Edelstein and Edelstein, *Asclepius: Interpretation*, 228-229.

²⁷ Festus, *De Verborum Significatu*, 110 M.

Not only does Festus describe Aesculapius, but he analyzes his symbols as well, understanding all as concerned with helping the sick, emphasizing the god's dedication to healing. Others such as Pliny, Pausanias, Aelian, and even Eusebius comment on the meaning of Aesculapius' attributes, especially his association with snakes.²⁸ In general, the snake is viewed as a symbol of vitality and of healing because it sheds its old skin for the new, and is thus renewed, just as the god will renew his suppliants.²⁹ Festus, on the other hand, believes that the snake is associated with Aesculapius due to its vigilance, while Pliny suggests that it is because of the numerous remedies that can be made from the venom of a snake. The staff is interpreted metaphorically as the support Aesculapius provides for the ill, as the symbol of his wisdom, or even, in the instance of a knotted staff, of the difficulty of the practice of medicine.³⁰ The laurel wreath could harken back to his father, Apollo, to whom the laurel is sacred, or allude to the many remedies produced from this tree. These symbols form the basis for a general description of Aesculapius in art, however there are attestations of elaborations upon this basic form, with some depictions including pinecones and dogs, though these never become widely used.³¹

Numerous depictions of Aesculapius also include Hygieia/Salus, often with her standing next to or just behind the god (Fig. 2). On occasion, Hygieia is shown with a snake and carrying a small dish known as a *patera*, with which she feeds the snake in

²⁸ Plinius, *Naturalis Historia*, 29.4(22).71-72; Pausanias, *Descriptio Graeciae*, 2.10.3, 2.27.2, 2.28.1, 9.39.3; Aelianus, *De Natura Animalium*, 8.12, 16.39; Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, 3.11.26.

²⁹ Edelstein and Edelstein, *Asclepius: Interpretation*, 230.

³⁰ Edelstein and Edelstein, *Asclepius: Interpretation*, 228.

³¹ Edelstein and Edelstein, *Asclepius: Interpretation*, 226-227.

some representations. While the snake is almost certainly an attribute derivative from that of her father's, the inclusion of the *patera* is interpreted by modern scholars either as a symbolic feeding of health and vigor, or as a literal depiction of a religious ceremony.³²



Figure 2 Roman lamp depicting Aesculapius and Salus (AD 175-225). London, British Museum. Photo © Trustees of the British Museum.

The Sibylline Oracles

The grand introduction of Aesculapius into Rome in 293 BC was the end of a process that had begun several years earlier in 295 BC with a consultation of the Sibylline Oracles. The Sibylline Oracles were a collection of three scrolls of Greek hexameters thought to contain prophecies from a Sibyl. During the Republic, they were kept in the temple of Capitoline Jove, and a special priestly college, the *quindecimviri*,

³² Compton, "The Association of Hygieia with Asklepios in Graeco-Roman Asklepieion Medicine", 314-315.

were tasked with keeping and consulting the oracles.³³ The Sibylline books were consulted by order of the Senate when there was a particularly serious prodigy. The books were thought to provide instructions to repair breaches in the *pax deorum*, a unique use of Sibylline prophecy in the Mediterranean, where Sibylline oracles generally foretold disaster rather than providing the solution.³⁴ When the Senate ordered that the Sibylline books be consulted, at least one of the *quindecimviri*, for not all fifteen needed to be present, would consult the books alone. Although the Senate retained the ultimate control over the Sibylline books, they were not allowed to be present during the ceremony. The priests would choose a selection from the oracles by an unknown method, and then an acrostic was created from these few lines, constituting the oracle.³⁵ The oracles were consulted generally in response to public disasters from a famine or pestilence, to the more general prodigies such as showers of stones or even hermaphrodites. One of the most frequently cited reasons for the consultation is a pestilence.³⁶ A plague was thought to symbolically represent a sickness in the relationship with the gods, an assumption found elsewhere in classical literature.³⁷ There was no general response expected from the oracles, but the *quindecimviri* might advise immediate ceremonies or even a more permanent institution, such as the establishment of a temple or even the importation of a new cult. In a ritual known as a *lectisternium*, an

³³ Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion*, 132-136.

³⁴ Parke, *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity*, 137.

³⁵ Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion*, 121-123.

³⁶ Reported fourteen times in the extant selections of Livy, with the oracles consulted nine times: 436, 433, 364, 346, 295, 293, 272, 249, 187, 181, 180, 174, 165, 142 BC; Orlin, *Temples, Religion, and Politics in the Roman Republic*, 86-88, 203-207.

³⁷ Orlin, *Temples, Religion, and Politics in the Roman Republic*, 87. See Hom. *Il.* 1.

imitation of a Hellenic ritual, the statues of the gods were grouped in pairs on couches, and feasted. This ritual became the general method for addressing plague, and was introduced at Rome first on the recommendation of the Sibylline oracles.³⁸ However, in the instance of the plague of 293 BC, the *lectisternium* was not recommended, but rather the importation of a new cult.

The Summoning of Aesculapius

During the period preceding the Senate's decision to summon Aesculapius, Rome was handling both a war in Northern Italy and a plague ravishing their people at home. The Second Samnite War (326-304 BC) saw the Romans, most likely of their own volition, marching into northern Campania and clashing with the Samnites over a new Roman colony and the city of Neapolis. After a brief interlude following a major Roman defeat, during which the Romans gained control of more territory in Campania, they resumed the war in 316 BC, and the Samnites were defeated along with their allies, the Etruscans and Umbrians. By 304 BC the situation in Campania was generally under control. 298 BC marked the beginning of the Third Samnite War, initiated by the Samnites sending forces into Etruria. The Samnites and their allies suffered a serious defeat in 295 BC, and by 290 BC the Samnites were once again Roman allies.³⁹ In 293 BC, the pestilence continued to beset the city of Rome, and a decision was made to consult the Sibylline oracles, as related by Livy:

Multis rebus laetus annus vix ad solacium unius mali, pestilentiae urentis simul urbem atque agros, suffecit; portentoque iam similis clades erat, et libri aditi quinam finis aut quod remedium eius mali ab dis daretur. Inventum in libris

³⁸ Parke, *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity*, 193-194.

³⁹ Mackay, *Ancient Rome*, 47-48.

Aesculapium ab Epidauro Romam arcessendum; neque eo anno, quia bello occupati consules erant, quicquam de ea re actum, praeterquam quod unum diem Aesculapio supplicatio habita est.⁴⁰

The year, a happy one on account of many events, was scarcely able to offer consolation for one evil, a plague burning the city and the countryside alike. Its devastation was now on the level of a portent, and the books were consulted in order to determine what end or what remedy for this evil would be given by the gods. It was discovered in the books that Aesculapius must be summoned from Epidauros to Rome; but nothing could be accomplished concerning this matter in that year, because the consuls were occupied with war, except that for one day a supplication to Aesculapius was held.

Livy states that the damage caused by the plague reached its peak before the decision to consult the Sibylline oracles was made. It is only fitting that the healing god was the one chosen to heal the literal sickness of the Roman people, and also the perceived sickness between the State and the gods, although it is interesting that the cure for the *pax deorum* was not to expiate a mistake or to appease the gods with a *lectisternium*, but to bring in an entirely new deity. This is a break from the established tradition, seemingly without any difference in circumstance. Yet it was not uncommon for the Sibylline oracles to recommend the construction of a temple to a new deity in Rome. The Sibylline oracles recommended the importation of more than a few deities: Ceres, Liber and Libera before Aesculapius, and Hercules Custos, Flora, Mens, Venus Erycina, Magna Mater, and Venus Verticordia following.⁴¹ Thus it seems that there were potentially other concerns the Romans wished to address alongside the pestilence, which would necessitate a different response, although one still within the realm of normalcy.

In addition to ridding Rome of a pestilence, Eric Orlin argues that the importation of Aesculapius served several political functions. He writes, referring to the year that

⁴⁰ Livy 10.47

⁴¹ Orlin, *Temples, Religion, and Politics in the Roman Republic*, 97.

elapsed between the time when the Sibylline Books were consulted and the embassy was sent to fetch Aesculapius, “The lapse of time suggests that initially the Romans had no plans to import Aesculapius from Greece, but a change in Roman circumstances led to a change of course.”⁴² However, there is no precedent for the Senate ignoring the advice of the *quindecemviri*, with the only recorded instance not concerning a deity, as Orlin himself acknowledges. In 144 BC the task of to help bring about *alias aquas* (Frontinus 17.1-3) to replenish Rome’s declining water supply was given to the urban praetor Quintus Marcius Rex. This resulted in the senate’s decision to construct a new aqueduct, the Aqua Marcia. The construction of the aqueduct, specifically its proposed termination on the Capitoline hill, was then opposed by the *quindecemviri* in 143 and 140 BC, on the basis of a Sibylline prophecy. The oracle itself is slightly suspect, because the books were not originally consulted concerning the aqueduct, yet that is what the *quindecemviri* reported an oracle about. M. Gwyn Morgan argues that the *quindecemviri* opposed the construction because of the practical implications that the aqueduct would have on the Capitoline hill, although she does acknowledge the legitimate role that religious concerns may have played.⁴³ The implications of the prophecy on the construction were debated in the senate on both occasions, and ultimately the construction of the Aqua Marcia was approved. Thus the only recorded instance of the Sibylline oracle’s rejection is in the context of an already questionable prophecy, over a project which they had already begun, and the senate’s decision still seems to be based upon the literal health of the Roman people. In addition to the fact that the Romans generally followed the advice of

⁴² Orlin, *Foreign Cults in Rome*, 62-65; *Temples, Religion, and Politics in the Roman Republic*, 106-109.

⁴³ Morgan, *The Introduction of the Aqua Marcia into Rome*, 144 - 140 B. C., 50-58.

the Sibylline Books, they were also continually open to adopting new deities into their pantheon. If they put off importing Asclepius, they must have had a good reason for doing so. Orlin's assumption that a delay in the implementation of the oracle, sending the embassy to Greece and founding of the temple, was caused by a decision not to import Aesculapius is not supported by any sources. He claims that, with the tide turning against the Samnites, the Senate turned their attentions to their new colony of Venusia, located in Southern Italy. Thus he claims that this is when the Senate decided bringing in a Greek deity would be politically expedient, and rescinded their earlier rejection of the Sibylline oracle.⁴⁴ While it is certain that the Romans were aware of the potentially positive impact that importing a Greek god would have on the cities of Magna Graecia, I would argue that Orlin overemphasizes the role of politics. The "religious" and "political" logics were inextricably intertwined because politics and religion did not have much of any distinction. The Romans did not make political decisions without consulting the gods, and no religious innovation was undertaken without the approval of the senate. In fact, many of the *quindecimviri* were also senators.⁴⁵ Orlin verges on stating that reasons of political manipulation were the sole causes of the decision. Orlin seems to put forward the consultation of the oracles as purely a tool for political manipulation, without considering that the consultation of the oracles was prompted by a plague upon the people and the city, as well as by concern for Rome's relationship with her allies. I would argue that the Romans imported the cult of Aesculapius not just for one specific

⁴⁴ Orlin, *Foreign Cults in Rome*, 63-65; *Temples, Religion, and Politics in the Roman Republic*, 106-108.

⁴⁵ Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion*, 18-22, 129-143; Rüpke, *Religion of the Romans*, 5-38, 205-235.

circumstance or motive, but to heal the breach in the *pax deorum* in all aspects, physical, civic, and political.

Bringing Asclepius to Rome

About a year after the senate ordered the consultation of the Sibylline books, an embassy was sent with the consul Quintus Ogulnius to Epidaurus, the most famous of Aesculapius' sanctuaries and his mythological birthplace.⁴⁶ That a consul was sent on such an errand outside Italy seems to indicate the gravity of the situation for the Romans. The god was brought back to Rome, and a temple was founded to him under the Latinized title Aesculapius on Tiber Island in 291 BC. While the text of Livy breaks off before the conclusion of Aesculapius' narrative, the voyage to Greece and the founding of the temple are recorded by Valerius Maximus:

e uestigioque Epidauri Romanorum legatos in templum Aesculapii, quod ab eorum urbe V passuum distat, perductos ut quidquid inde salubre patriae laturos se existimassent pro suo iure sumerent benignissime inuitauerunt. quorum tam promptam indulgentiam numen ipsius dei subsecutum uerba mortalium caelesti obsequio conprobauit: si quidem is anguis, quem Epidauri raro, sed numquam sine magno ipsorum bono uisum in modum Aesculapii uenerati fuerant, per urbis celeberrimas partes mitibus oculis et leni tractu labi coepit triduoque inter religiosam omnium admirationem conspectus haud dubiam prae se adpetitae clarioris sedis alacritatem ferens ad triremem Romanam perrexit pauentibusque inusitato spectaculo nautis eo conscendit, ubi Q. Ogulni legati tabernaculum erat, inque multiplicem orbem per summam quietem est conuolutus. (1.8.2)

Straightway the Epidaurians conducted the Roman envoys to the temple of Aesculapius, which is five miles distant from their city, and invited them most generously to feel free to take from it whatever they thought would be salutary to their country. The power of the god himself followed up their prompt indulgence, approving the words of mortals by celestial compliance. For the snake which the Epidaurians had venerated as Aesculapius, rarely seen and never except to their great benefit, began to glide through the most populous parts of the city, mild of eye and drawing gently along. For three days he was watched amid the religious

⁴⁶ Edelstein and Edelstein, *Asclepius: Interpretation*, 252-253; Orlin, *Foreign Cults in Rome*, 62-63.

wonderment of all, showing no uncertain eagerness for the more illustrious dwelling that he sought, and so made his way to the Roman trireme. The sailors were frightened by the novel spectacle, but he ascended where stood the tent of the envoy Q. Ogulnius and in perfect calm wound himself into a circle of many coils.⁴⁷

Valerius Maximus emphasizes that the Romans have divine sanction for their actions, and even more so that the god himself wishes to come to Rome. The Romans do not seize the god, but the Epidaurians most cheerfully (*benignissime*) give them permission, and Asclepius, in the form of his sacred snake was seen in the streets of Epidaurus excitedly traveling towards a home described as more illustrious: “bearing the eagerness of seeking after a more illustrious residence” (*adpetitae clarioris sedis alacritatem ferens*). His eyes are described as “*mitis*”, or gentle, reminiscent of the meaning of his name. After he curls up peacefully on the Roman ship, the Roman assembly performs the appropriate sacrifices and learns his rituals from the priests. This demonstrates the piety of the Romans, who express thanks and learn how to properly propitiate the god. In addition, Valerius Maximus explains why sacrifices to Aesculapius were performed in the Greek rite, with the exception that prayers were offered with the head covered, as in the Roman rite.⁴⁸ Later, supplicatory rites are also modeled after the Greek form.⁴⁹

Ovid in the *Metamorphoses* also relates the story of Aesculapius’ journey to Rome.⁵⁰ He, even more so than Valerius Maximus, emphasizes the fulfillment of fate which the Romans bring about by bringing Aesculapius to Rome. This account begins with the consultation of the oracle at Delphi, rather than the Sibylline Books, which is not

⁴⁷ Translation is from the Loeb Classical Library.

⁴⁸ Edelstein and Edelstein, *Asclepius: Interpretation*, 185.

⁴⁹ Edelstein and Edelstein, *Asclepius: Interpretation*, 183.

⁵⁰ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 15.622-744.

the usual tradition. While it is unclear why Ovid chose to change the report given by Livy, whose account there is no reason to mistrust, it seems poetically fitting that Apollo, the Greek god of healing and oracles, refers the Romans to his son, Asclepius the god of medicine, in an oracle. The subsequent appearance of Asclepius in a dream to the members of the Roman embassy to Epidaurus, in addition to making even more explicit the divine sanction of the Roman embassy and the identity of the snake, also references the practice wherein Asclepius would often appear in dreams to suppliants during incubation. Rather than the peaceful and calm version of Maximus, Ovid's divine snake causes the entire temple to shake with a hiss, and his eyes are described as powerful or even dangerous: "it cast around eyes shining with fire" (*oculos circumtulit igne micantes*).⁵¹ The account as a whole emphasizes the might and divinity of the god. The Roman ship is described as sinking into the water when the snake boards, in an image of the ship itself bowing to the deity: "It felt the burden of the divinity, and the ship is pressed by the weight of the god" (*numinis illa / sensit onus, pressa estque dei gravitate carina*).⁵² Reiterating the power of the god would validate the tradition that immediately upon landing in Rome, Aesculapius cured the city and its people of the plague.

Another aspect of the myth, related by both sources, is the embassy's stop in Antium. However, while Valerius Maximus states that it is a temple to Aesculapius, Ovid claims it is a temple to Apollo. Valerius Maximus seems to use this event to validate the identity and godhead of the snake, while Ovid uses it as a bookend to Aesculapius' time in Greece; Ovid's tale began with an oracle from Apollo, and near the end Aesculapius

⁵¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 15.674.

⁵² Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 15.693-694.

returns to his father's temple before reaching Rome. They both, however, emphasize the snake's agency in both going to the temple and returning to the ship, because the Romans forcing the god to come with them would say something very different about the relationship between Rome and their gods. Ovid concludes his narrative with the account of Aesculapius' arrival in Rome. He states that the Vestal Virgins were there to welcome the god into Rome, as the guardians of the eternal hearth of Vesta, are also considered responsible for the health of the *pax deorum*. Their specific mention in the welcome of Aesculapius casts them as representatives of the Roman state as a whole, signifying the universal welcome of Aesculapius into the Roman pantheon. This is reminiscent of the welcoming of the Magna Mater, as will be discussed in the next chapter. Both accounts also describe Aesculapius' choosing of Tiber Island as the location for his sanctuary, and this sanctuary remained the most prominent temple to Aesculapius in Rome.⁵³

Immediately upon landing, both authors relate the cure of the plague at Rome, validating the power of Aesculapius and the Senate's decision to import the god.

Interestingly, a very similar procedure was followed when the cult of Asclepius was brought to Athens in 420/19 BC.⁵⁴ In 430 BC a devastating plague began to afflict the Athenians, eventually killing possibly up to a third of the city's population.⁵⁵ The importation of Asclepius into Piraeus, the Athenian port city, ten years later is generally accepted to be connected to this plague. A monument uncovered in the Askleion on the south side of the Acropolis, the Telemachos Monument, documents the importation. It

⁵³ Renberg, "Public and Private Places of Worship in the Cult of Asclepius at Rome", 90-95.

⁵⁴ Parke, *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity*, 194. For additional analysis see Garland (1992).

⁵⁵ Garland, *Introducing New Gods*, 130-132.

shows that the god, in the form of a snake, was brought by ship from Epidaurus to Piraeus, most likely accompanied by Epidaurian priests who would instruct the new priesthood in the proper rites.⁵⁶ Less than a year later Asclepius was moved to the sanctuary on the Acropolis, accompanied by Hygieia. Robert Garland views this procedure as a normal expression of a community seeking to make official their acceptance of a new god, and notes the importance of the accompanying ritual of transferring a symbol of the god's presence.⁵⁷ The similarities between Asclepius' importation into Athens and Rome cannot be ignored. It is possible that Rome followed the precedent set by Athens, having noted their success in a similar circumstance and hoping that the same solution would help. Through the importation of Asclepius, the Romans also established themselves as a part of Hellenic world. They adopted a Greek god in the manner of the Greeks, thus showing themselves the heir to Hellenic culture in the Mediterranean.

The Cult of Aesculapius in Rome

The sanctuary to Aesculapius on Tiber Island was the largest and most prominent of Aesculapius' sanctuaries within the city of Rome, and even throughout Roman Italy, although it never reached the prominence of most Asklepia in Greece, such as Pergamon, Epidaurus, and Athens.⁵⁸ The temple no longer exists, although several columns and other architectural elements are built into the medieval church of S. Bartolomeo all'Isola, which sits on the site of the ancient Asklepon. The temple was located on the

⁵⁶ Garland, *Introducing New Gods*, 118-121.

⁵⁷ Garland, *Introducing New Gods*, 121.

⁵⁸ Renberg, "Public and Private Places of Worship in the Cult of Asclepius at Rome", 87-88.

southeastern side of the island, and was most likely surrounded by porticoes.⁵⁹ Also on the southeastern end of the island, carved into a travertine retaining wall placed to give the island's southern point the appearance of a ship's stern, there are several reliefs, most significantly a bust of a man with a staff wound with a serpent, which is likely Aesculapius.⁶⁰ There was also a natural spring near the temple, preserved today in the form of a well head near S. Bartolomeo. This spring may have contributed to choosing this site for the temple, as suggested by Plutarch, Festus, and Vitruvius, due to the ancients' conception of the importance of water for healing the sick.⁶¹ If the site of the healing shrine was chosen for practical reasons, the location of it on an island would be logical, for it provides additional separation from the city and any pestilence, and quarantines the sick from the city.⁶² There were several other temples on the island, including one to Tiberinus and a possible temple to Jupiter. Following the foundation of the Aesculapius sanctuary, however, in addition to being called the *Insula Tiberina* or the *Insula inter duos pontes*, the island was known as *Insula Aesculapi*, presumably because of the importance of Aesculapius' sanctuary.⁶³ Remaining literary and archeological evidence would seem to indicate the popularity of the shrine, due to the number of votive offerings attributable to the shrine and its copious references in literature. In addition, the

⁵⁹ Renburg, "Public and Private Places of Worship in the Cult of Asclepius at Rome", 101-102.

⁶⁰ Renburg, "Public and Private Places of Worship in the Cult of Asclepius at Rome", 99-100.

⁶¹ Plutarch, *Quaestiones Romanae*, 94; Festus, *De Verborum Significatu*, 110 M; Vitruvius, *De Architectura*, 1.2.7.

⁶² Renburg, "Public and Private Places of Worship in the Cult of Asclepius at Rome", 97.

⁶³ Renburg, "Public and Private Places of Worship in the Cult of Asclepius at Rome", 95.

refurbishment of the temple at the end of the Republic proves an interest in the cult amongst the nobility as well as the plebeians.⁶⁴

This is the only public sanctuary to Aesculapius known with certainty to have existed in Rome, however there are several known shrines and cult sites.⁶⁵ There are several fairly well documented shrines of *collegia* in and around Rome dedicated to both Aesculapius and Hygieia or Salus, within their roles as patron deities of the *collegia*, not as healing shrines.⁶⁶ However, the largest number of dedications uncovered in Rome came from soldiers and other military personnel, specifically the Praetorian Guard. From the distribution of dedications, it appears that many came from shrines located within the city's military camps.⁶⁷

One of the most common methods by which worshippers in republican Rome expressed their devotion to a particular cult was through the dedication of votive offerings. Votive offerings were small terra cotta representations of common items, anything from hands, to feet, to eyes, to horses, or even to children, used to make a vow with a god.⁶⁸ It is unclear whether these were given alongside the initial vow, or as a token of gratitude for its fulfillment. Aesculapius, as a healing deity, received many of these, as they were often requests that a particular ailment be cured (indicated by

⁶⁴ Around 62 BC. Varro, *De Lingua Latina*, 7.57.

⁶⁵ There is debate among scholars concerning a possible sanctuary on the Esquiline, but no consensus has been reached. See Renberg, "Public and Private Places of Worship in the Cult of Asclepius at Rome", 90-91.

⁶⁶ Several were funerary *collegia*, another of imperial masons. Renburg, "Public and Private Places of Worship in the Cult of Asclepius at Rome", 109-111.

⁶⁷ Specifically, the *Castra Praetoria* and *Castra Ravennatium*. See Renburg, "Public and Private Places of Worship in the Cult of Asclepius at Rome", 115-119.

⁶⁸ Schultz, *Women's Religious Activity in the Roman Republic*, 102-104.

whichever body part the dedicant vowed). On or around Tiber Island, almost 500 anatomical votives have been uncovered. Although it is probable that some originated from other nearby cult sites, this is still a large number. In addition, they date to the third or second century BC, indicating the almost immediate acceptance and popularity of the cult of Aesculapius.⁶⁹ Celia Schultz argues that the votives should not necessarily be limited to a literal interpretation, but could have a metaphorical meaning as well: feet could represent a journey, ears a request that a prayer be heard, and so on.⁷⁰ Aesculapius, although a healing deity, should not be assumed to receive votive offerings exclusively for physical ailments, although they did likely constitute a large portion.

Another common practice within the cult of Asclepius was incubation. Ill and afflicted worshippers, having bathed and sacrificed, would spend the evening asleep in a set area of the sanctuary. There they would be visited by the god in a dream. He would either prescribe remedies to his patients, or on occasion cure them immediately.⁷¹ Numerous inscriptions testify to the effectiveness of Aesculapius' cures, and this practice is attested at the Greek sanctuaries of Asclepius, however it may or may not have occurred at the Tiber Island sanctuary. Despite the presence of porticoes, which could have been used to house the incubants, there is no direct literary or epigraphic evidence that confirms incubation on Tiber Island.⁷² Evidence concerning incubation at the Tiber Island sanctuary remains ambiguous, and it seems as if the lack of references to what is

⁶⁹ Renberg, "Public and Private Places of Worship in the Cult of Asclepius at Rome", 95.

⁷⁰ Schultz, *Women's Religious Activity in the Roman Republic*, 105.

⁷¹ Edelstein and Edelstein, *Asclepius: Interpretation*, 148-152.

⁷² For more on the question of incubation at the Tiber Island sanctuary, see Renberg, "Public and Private Places of Worship in the Cult of Asclepius at Rome", 127-134.

so well attested in the Hellenic world would indicate incubation was not occurring. The Romans claimed to worship Aesculapius in accordance with his native tradition, and processions in his honor were modeled after the Greek pattern.⁷³ Yet the Romans also prayed to Aesculapius with their heads covered, as in the Roman rite.⁷⁴ This would indicate that the Romans' worship of Aesculapius was, in all likelihood, not exactly what was found in Greece, and there is no reason to assume incubation was occurring by citing precedent. Aesculapius still visited his suppliants in dreams, and offered them cures, but probably not at the temple itself.

Conclusion

The importation of the cult of Aesculapius into Rome is, in many ways, not surprising. Rome had a cultural openness to new gods and a history of establishing new cults in times of need. However, the importation of the cult of Asclepius, one of the first Greek gods to be imported, is distinct. After being thoroughly supported by the state at its beginning, the cult of Aesculapius, although it remains funded, fades from the public eye. It becomes the cult of the people and of the soldiers, with numerous small shrines throughout the city of Rome. Nevertheless, Aesculapius is invoked by the state when plague strikes Rome, and is supplicated to heal Rome physically. These pestilences were also considered portents, so in seeking the help of Aesculapius to cure the pestilence, the Romans also asked that he cure the *pax deorum*. Asclepius, although a foreign deity, was incorporated into the Roman state through his mythology, by which his cult is explained

⁷³ Festus, *De Verborum Significatu*, 237 M. Edelstein and Edelstein, *Asclepius: Interpretation*, 183.

⁷⁴ Edelstein and Edelstein, *Asclepius: Interpretation*, 185.

and justified. Although they acknowledge the Greek origins of Aesculapius through his mythology and through the performance of his rituals in the Greek rite, the cult of Asclepius was Romanized. The worship at small, private shrines and the practice of praying with the head covered are both distinct from the Greek cult to Asclepius, while it is questionable if the Greek practice of incubation was practiced at all. The Greek goddess Hygieia is even identified with the Roman goddess Salus, an explicit example of the Romanization of the cult of Aesculapius. The myth shows that the god himself wished to go to Rome and that he chose to protect the Romans. Certainly the culmination of the importation of Aesculapius is the reception of the god into Rome by the Vestal Virgins. These public priestesses, guardians of the safety of the State, welcome Aesculapius and, in a way, share responsibility for the Republic with him. This final detail of the legend allowed the Romans to indicate fully their adoption of Aesculapius and his reciprocal duty to heal and preserve the state in all aspects: physical, civic, and political.

CHAPTER THREE

The Magna Mater

Possibly the most famous of all the foreign cults at Rome was that of the Magna Mater. Imported in the late third century BC, the adoption of the Magna Mater follows that of Aesculapius closely, yet as will be shown, was treated very differently. The cult of the Magna Mater, famous in antiquity for its vibrant, exotic displays and unusual priests, the Galli, expanded and remained in practice until the fifth century AD. This chapter will examine the cult and its rituals as they were at the time of import or shortly thereafter, thus not addressing many aspects of the late antique cult that only come into practice during the Empire.

Origins of the Cult

The Roman cult of the Magna Mater had its origins in Phrygia, modern day Turkey. There she was known as simply *Matar* (mother), occasionally with the adjective *kubileya*, a word derived from the natural landscape, most likely a mountain.¹ She was conceived of as the mother of the gods, and connected with the wilderness. It is clear that her Greek names, Μήτηρ Θεῶν and Κυβέλη, and her Latin names, Magna Mater and Cybele, trace back to these original Phrygian titles. The goddess emerged in the Greek world around the late seventh century, and her cult grew in popularity amongst the public as well as in private cult.² A popular recipient of votive offerings since the fifth century

¹ Roller, *In Search of God the Mother*, 66-68.

² Roller, *In Search of God the Mother*, 143.

BC, her temples continued to receive offerings in the form of the goddess, Dionysos, Attis, dancing women, theater masks, fruit, reproductive organs, breasts, pinecones, a variety of domesticated animals, and lions.³ The cult which later came to Rome was most likely the Hellenized cult, even though the Romans claimed to have brought the goddess' cult statue from Phrygia, and yet was distinct from the Greek tradition. For example, despite her later associations with fertility in the Roman cult, the Phrygian and Greek cults do not appear to engage with that as part of their tradition. The Romans adopted the cult in its Hellenized form, however they modified and changed it to fit more with Roman cult.

Iconography

Depictions of the Magna Mater made by the Romans retained her Hellenized form, based upon a cult statue made in the fifth century BC by Agorakritos of Paros for the Athenians.⁴ She was most often depicted seated on a throne, wearing a chiton, with two lions seated on either side of her. She is also shown standing in a chariot being pulled by the two lions. She holds a tympanum, and in the other hand she holds a phiale, an open bowl used for libations.⁵ She wears a turreted crown on her head.⁶ Not every depiction has all of these attributes, with most having some combination of two or three. This iconography is fairly standard within the Mediterranean world following the 6th c.

³ Roller, *In Search of God the Mother*, 275-278.

⁴ Borgeaud, *Mother of the Gods*, 7; Roller, *In Search of God the Mother*, 145.

⁵ Borgeaud, *Mother of the Gods*, 6-7.

⁶ Roller, *In Search of God the Mother*, 144-145. The turreted crown is not present in the earliest Greek depictions. Instead The Magna Mater wears a polos (a low crown), and the turreted crown was not introduced until the Hellenistic period. However it was always used in the iconography of the Roman cult.

BC.⁷ During the Roman period, several authors explain the significance of the Magna Mater's attributes. Lucretius relates them to her roles as Earth, mother goddess, and protectress of cities (Fig.1):

Hanc veteres Graium docti cecinere poëtae
sedibus in curru biiugos agitare leones,
aëris in spatio magnam pendere docentes
tellurem neque posse in terra sistere terram.
adiunxere feras, quia quamvis effera proles
officiis debet molliri victa parentum.
muralique caput summum cinxere corona,
eximiis munita locis quia sustinet urbes. (2.600-607)

She it is of whom the ancient and learned poets of the Greeks have sung, that seated in a chariot she drives a pair of lions, thus teaching that the great world is poised in the spacious air, and that earth cannot rest on earth. They have yoked in wild beasts, because any offspring however wild ought to be softened and vanquished by the kindly acts of the parents. And they have surrounded the top of her head with a mural crown, because embattled in excellent positions she sustains cities.

Lucretius imparts to the Magna Mater's iconography a series of universal truths, indicating the goddess' wide-reaching importance and applicability to a variety of far-scattered and culturally different people, such as those in the Roman Empire. He continues with a discussion of the priests of the Manga Mater, the Galli. Lucretius does not ignore the strange or unsavory aspects of the cult, rather he presents them as endorsements of Roman values through his allegorical reading.⁸ In this way, Lucretius and other authors are able to influence the perception of the cult, rehabilitating certain aspects to align with Roman culture while not eliminating the foreign influence. Varro also justifies this foreign imagery allegorically: the tambourine represents the earthly disc, her turreted crown represents the cities under her protection, the clashing cymbals

⁷ Roller, *In Search of God the Mother*, 145.

⁸ Roller, *In Search of God the Mother*, 297-299.

recall the noise of agricultural tools, and the tamed lions reveal that there is no soil too hard that it is unable to be cultivated.⁹ The effort to justify and make acceptable the aspects more shocking to the Romans occurs not only in such a straightforward manner, but also in how the Romans regulate the cult itself, as will be discussed later. Literature, however, played an important role in bringing the Magna Mater into her Roman identity.¹⁰ Livy relates the importation at length, emphasizing the Magna Mater's inclusion in the history of Rome and Roman success and focusing on recasting her as a Roman deity.



Figure 1 Bronze statuette of Cybele on a cart drawn by lions (AD 150- 200). New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. © Trustees of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

⁹ Varro, *Eumenidies*, 16-27.

¹⁰ Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire*, 39-40.

Rome Receives the Magna Mater

Livy uses his account of the adoption of the Phrygian Magna Mater to communicate the piety and divine favor enjoyed by the Romans while also more subtly asserting the importance of Roman identity throughout. Livy begins his discussion of the Magna Mater with a characterization of the Roman people, stating that they had acquired “sudden religious scruples” (*repens religio* 29.10.4) on account of a prophecy from the Sibylline books. This is a significant way to start out his account, for he begins by attributing the desire to act with reverence to the gods and to the “citizenry” (*civitatem* 29.10.4), rather than just the consuls or the senate. Livy presents this as a communal sentiment because he is making a statement about the religiousness of the Roman state as a whole, down to the simple citizens. They are a pious people, who take seriously communication from the gods, such as prophecy, the Sibylline oracle, and prodigies, including the showers of stones which he cites as the cause for the prophecy. The prophecy itself offered an unexpected and specific course of action for their current situation:

quandoque hostis alienigena terrae Italiae bellum intulisset, eum pelli Italia vincique posse, si mater Idaea: a Pessinunte Romam advecta foret.

Whenever a foreign enemy would have brought in war to Italy, it is possible that he be expelled from Italy and defeated, if the Idean Mother will be brought to Rome from Pessinus. (29.10.5)

This oracle seems to be addressing the exact situation the Romans were in: when this prophecy was issued in 205 BC, Rome was at war with Carthage, and the Carthaginian general Hannibal remained in Italy, albeit with diminished forces. There are two arguments presented by scholarship concerning the Magna Mater's relationship to the Second Punic War. In 1912 Henri Graillet, upholding the report in Livy, argued that the

Magna Mater was imported in a direct response to Hannibal's activities, which was the dominant scholarly opinion until Erich Gruen's 1990 work, which claimed that Hannibal was no longer a serious threat to Rome and thus the importation of the Magna Mater must be due to other factors, most likely political.¹¹ Relations with King Attalus of Pergamon had just been established in 210 BC, and thus the importation of the cult served to reinforce Roman ties in the east. Attalus and Rome were allies in a fight against Philip V of Macedon, an ally of Carthage. It is humorous that Ovid in the *Fasti* mentions the "*orbedomito* (4.256)", when the occasion that at least ostentatiously necessitated the consultation of the Sybilline oracles resulting in the importation of the Magna Mater was the Second Punic War, in which the Romans were beaten severely several times in their homeland, at the battles of the River Trebbia and Cannae. Scholarship is thus divided about the reason for the importation of the goddess. Eric Orlin argued that the Romans were not coerced into importing the goddess by any external cause, but adopted her of their own desire, providing a third opinion on the cause of her adoption.¹² Despite the nuances of this heavily contested issue, it is important to note that the Romans did willingly act upon the prophecy to bring the Magna Mater to Rome as soon as possible.¹³ They acted enthusiastically and without second thoughts, dedicated to bringing the goddess to reside in Rome.¹⁴ In addition, the prophecy stated that the enemy would be

¹¹ Burns, "The Magna Mater Romana: A Sociocultural Study of the Cult of the Magna Mater in Republican Rome", 60-64.

¹² Orlin, *Foreign Cults in Rome*, 78-79.

¹³ Orlin, *Foreign Cults in Rome*, 78.

¹⁴ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 96.

both defeated and driven from their territory, and at the time of the prophecy neither of these things had happened.

Although the Romans may have known they could defeat Hannibal without the prophecy or the Idean mother, Livy presents them as a people concerned, above all, with maintaining good relationships with the gods. This is evident because Livy states that the people desired her importation due to their religious scruples, not their fear of Hannibal. More than that, however, the Sibylline books were consulted due to a recurring prodigy, and prodigies themselves are signs from the gods that they are displeased. The Romans were concerned, probably not exclusively, but at least to a large extent with preserving the Pax Deorum, and this is consistent with the information presented by Livy.¹⁵ In addition to the prophecy, the Romans consulted the oracle at Delphi twice for approval of their actions. They first sent ambassadors following the reception of the prophecy, and received a propitious (*laeta* 29.10.6) response. The ambassadors also reported that “the response of the oracle was that a much greater victory than the one from whose spoils they had brought gifts was awaiting the Roman people” (*responsum oraculo editum maiorem multo victoriam quam cuius ex spoliis dona portarent adesse populo Romano* 29.10.6). Not only was their decision to introduce the cult of the Magna Mater approved by the oracle, but the Romans were promised a much greater reward for their actions. The gods approved very strongly and favored the actions of the Romans. The oracle at Delphi was consulted a second time, by those on the way to ask King Attalus for his aid in procuring the Magna Mater from her cult in Pessinus. The ambassadors stopped and consulted the oracle about their current mission, and its chance of success, receiving a

¹⁵ Burton, “The Summoning of the Magna Mater to Rome (205 B.C.)”, 59.

positive answer (29.11.5-6). What Livy is presenting is that at each step of the process, the Romans checked with the gods for confirmation of their right action. Livy is showcasing the piety of the Romans through both their actions in consulting the gods, and also through the favorable responses received from the gods. Throughout this section Livy is proving that the actions of the Romans are sanctified by the gods, quite literally. The actions the Romans undertook are holy and right, and this was proven by the multiple oracles and a prophecy.

The Preparation for Arrival

In the middle section of the narrative, Livy changes his focus to emphasize the idea of the Roman Identity. The response of the second oracle, in addition to approval for seeking the help of King Attalus, also contained instructions for how to welcome the goddess to Rome:

cum Romam deam devexissent, tum curarent ut eam qui vir optimus Romae esset hospitio exciperet.

When they have conveyed the goddess to Rome, then they should have taken care that he who is the best man in Rome receives her with hospitality. (29.11.6)

The oracle's only criterion was that the *optimus vir* accepted the goddess from her journey, which implied that this man would in some manner present the encapsulation or exemplify the best things of Rome. Livy himself does not state what the characteristics of an *optimus vir* are or even guess, he only states: "thus I will not insert my own opinions for the purpose of conjecturing a matter having been overcome by time" (*ita meas opinionones coniectando rem vetustate obrutam non interponam* 29.11.9). The method by which the senators chose is unknown, however it is reasonable to guess that the *optimus*

vir was “best” in that he was the most excellent in Roman virtue.¹⁶ The senate debated about whom to choose for a while, because the man they chose would be the goddess’s first impression of the Roman people: “A hardly small matter of judgement held the senate; who the best man in the state was” (*haud parvae rei iudicium senatum tenebat qui vir optimus in civitate esset* 29.11.6). They eventually selected Publius Cornelius Scipio Nasica, the younger cousin of the general Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus (although he had not yet earned the cognomen Africanus).

Nasica was only twenty-four years old, and had not yet held a public office. Krishni Burns argues that he, in addition to coming from a powerful patrician family, may have been chosen because he also would be appealing to the Magna Mater, who preferred young, innocent, and unmarried men.¹⁷ This seems unlikely, however, in light of the ancient evidence. He was a representative of Rome, and as a member of the Scipio family he was closely tied to the events of both the First and Second Punic wars, where older members of the clan were important. Thus, the Romans, in seeking to recruit the help of the Magna Mater against the Carthaginians, chose their *optimus vir* from the clan that was known for opposing the Carthaginians. In addition, by having a member of the Scipio family receive the goddess as the *optimus vir*, the senate was closely connecting military success to this concept of the “best man”, and also then claiming it as a Roman virtue. By choosing the younger, lesser known member of the family who had not yet entered the world of the *cursus honorum*, the senate (and the influential Scipio family) may have been hoping that the Magna Mater would associate herself closely with the

¹⁶ Borgeaud, *Mother of the Gods*, 58.

¹⁷ Burns, “The Magna Mater Romana: A Sociocultural Study of the Cult of the Magna Mater in Republican Rome”, 71.

Scipio family and specifically Nasica afterwards, thus ensuring the future prosperity of the state against the Carthaginians (and of the continued success of the Scipio family). And in fact, Nasica was used as a symbol of virtue by later Roman authors.¹⁸ The concept of having to define a “best man” allowed the senate to define Roman identity by its virtues.

Welcoming the Magna Mater with Nasica was a group of Roman matrons, including Claudia Quinta, who provides an example of Roman identity as it relates to women. As Nasica provided the example of an ideal Roman man, a virtuous patrician preparing to begin a political career, Claudia Quinta was the example of an ideal Roman woman, a chaste matron with reverence for the gods. After Nasica and the group of matrons were selected by the state, they only had to wait for the arrival of the goddess.

When the boat bearing the meteorite statue of the Magna Mater neared Rome, “Publius Cornelius with all the matrons was ordered to meet the goddess at Ostia” (*P. Cornelius cum omnibus matronis Ostiam obviam ire deae iussus* 29.11.10). Once there, Nasica took up the goddess from her priests and handed her off to the group of matrons, who took the stone which was the Magna Mater and passed it hand to hand and bore her to the temple of Victory on the Palatine (29.11.11-13). This section of the narrative is the climax of Livy’s story, because it showcases both the piety and identity of the Romans. Livy makes piety evident through the example of Claudia Quinta, who performed an unspecified service, described as “so devout” (*tam religioso* 29.11.12), for the goddess, and through it upheld her own chaste reputation.¹⁹ Nasica took the goddess from her

¹⁸ Roller, *In Search of God the Mother*, 267.

¹⁹ Ovid, in the *Fasti* 4.291-330 goes into more detail on the story of Claudia Quinta, where she pulled the boat carrying the Magna Mater safely into port after it had run aground.

Phrygian priests, contrasting the ideals of the Roman people with those of her barbaric priests. He is the embodiment of Roman manhood, providing a foil for the effeminate figures of the Galli, just as the matrons serve as a foil for the goddess herself.²⁰ It is both a literal and a symbolic changing of hands, wherein the goddess has also moved from a world of barbarism to that of the civilized world of Rome. When Nasica handed the Magna Mater to the matrons, the mothers, they transformed her into a Roman mother in addition to the Mother of the Gods.²¹ The Magna Mater was thus exposed to the individual piety of the Romans as they bore her away, one individual at a time, to the Palatine and also to the piety of the Roman people as a whole when they participated in the uniquely Roman form of worship: that of feasting and games.

The Roman identity was revealed more subtly, with the detail that the Magna Mater would be housed at the temple of Victory on the Palatine. The Palatine is the longest inhabited of the hills in Rome. It is where Romulus and Remus were said to have founded the city and lived, and where many of the patrician families lived. Thus it has both historical and contemporaneous importance, just as the Romans believed the Magna Mater had historical and contemporaneous importance.²² In support of this claim, scholars have noticed the significant number of times that the Magna Mater appears in the *Aeneid* and assists Aeneas during his travels, indicating that the connection between the Phrygian goddess and the famous ancestor of the Romans was explicit. The modern relevance connects back to the Second Punic War, by beginning her journey with the

²⁰ Borgeaud, *Mother of the Gods*, 70-71.

²¹ Borgeaud, *Mother of the Gods*, 59.

²² Burns, "The Magna Mater Romana: A Sociocultural Study of the Cult of the Magna Mater in Republican Rome", 73-74.

relative of a current general and housing her in the temple to Victory, the Romans seem to think that the goddess would play a role in helping them with future victories in war. She did, in fact, come to be remembered for her dedication and protection of the state in later times, reinforcing the Roman's perception of her as their mother goddess from their homeland, and to ensure their prosperity in the new land.²³

The Magna Mater and Aeneas

Around two hundred years following her importation, Livy emphasized a cultural identity for the cult, centered around the Roman identity, in order to fully incorporate the Magna Mater into the society as more than a foreign goddess, but as a true Roman.²⁴ Virgil's *Aeneid*, through extensive references to the Magna Mater, cultivates this image.²⁵ The Romans found a historical Roman identity in the Magna Mater because of her origin on Mount Ida, located near Troy.²⁶ In the Roman mindset, this qualified her as one of their ancestral goddesses, who was lost when Aeneas and his men fled Troy. This harkening back to their origins is made explicit through her title as the "*mater Idaea*", only used in the Roman cult of the Magna Mater.²⁷ This location of the Magna Mater within the sphere of Roman history legitimizes the Romans' adoption of her cult as piety to the gods and filial piety. Thus in addition to the story of the Magna Mater's

²³ Wilhelm, "Cybele: The Great Mother of the Augustan Order", 82.

²⁴ Latham, "'Fabulous Clap-Trap': Roman Masculinity, the Cult of the Magna Mater, and Literary Constructions of the Galli at Rome from the Late Republic to Late Antiquity", 104.

²⁵ For a more detailed list and discussion, see Wilhelm, "Cybele: The Great Mother of the Augustan Order", 77-101.

²⁶ Roller, *In Search of God the Mother*, 270.

²⁷ Alvar, *Romanising Oriental Gods: Myth, Salvation and Ethics in the Cults of Cybele, Isis, and Mithras*, 282-284.

importation, the goddess is incorporated into Roman history through Aeneas. This is an interesting complement to Livy's arrival myth; the aid of the Magna Mater allows Aeneas to reach Latium and to found his city, and his descendants later reciprocate, bringing the Magna Mater to Rome and founding her temple. The goddess herself is present, intervening at important moments in the plot to protect Aeneas and ensure the completion of his journey. She offers hope following the sack of Troy, is responsible for Creusa's death, and intercedes with Jupiter to provide Aeneas with divine ships made from her sacred pines.²⁸ The latter scene, which involves the near burning of Aeneas' divine ships, emphasizes the Magna Mater's role as mother of both Aeneas and of Jupiter, implicitly comparing the two. It also emphasizes her power through her ability to request a favor of Jupiter. She also is present in the imagery, even when not acting as a character. An image of the Magna Mater and her lions decorates the prow of Aeneas' ship, symbolizing how she leads him onward in his journey: "the ship of Aeneas holds the front, Phrygian lions having been affixed to the prow, and Ida hangs above" (*Aeneia puppis / prima tenet, rostro Phrygios subjuncta leones; / imminet Ida super* 10.156-58).

Ovid narrates both stories in the *Fasti*, providing the reasoning for the long time which elapsed before the Romans brought over their ancestral goddess:

cum Troiam Aeneas Italos portaret in agros,
 est dea sacriferas paene secuta rates,
 sed nondum fatis Latio sua numina posci
 senserat, adsuetis substiteratque locis.
 post, ut Roma potens opibus iam saecula quinque
 vidit et edomito sustulit orbe caput...
 consulitur Paeon, 'divum' qui 'arcessite Matrem,'
 inquit 'in Idaeo est invenienda iugo.'
 (Ov. Fas. 4.251-256, 263-264)

²⁸ Virgil, *Aeneid*, 2.693-697; 2.788; 9.77-83, 9.107-122.

When Aeneas carried Troy to the Italian fields, the goddess almost followed the ships that bore the sacred things; but she felt that fate did not yet call for the intervention of her divinity in Latium, and she remained behind in her accustomed place. Afterwards, when mighty Rome had already seen five centuries, and had lifted up her label above the conquered world... Paean was consulted and said, 'Fetch the Mother of the Gods; she is to be found on Mount Ida.'²⁹

In this way he connects the two myths, also including the detail that the ship which bore the Magna Mater to Rome was made from the same sacred pines as Aeneas' ships, further reinforcing the importation of the Magna Mater as the fulfillment of Aeneas' foundation of Rome.³⁰ Ovid casts the Magna Mater as a constant presence in the history of Rome, with her importation planned since before the foundation of the city. The larger effort to emphasize the Magna Mater's Phrygian roots coincides with Rome's actions to become a world power. Thus the Romans use the myth of the Magna Mater's involvement in the foundation of Rome to connect themselves to the larger Mediterranean context.

The Temple of the Magna Mater

The Romanization of the Magna Mater is a large cultural phenomenon, spread across literature, art, legislation, and ritual. In order to maintain control over the cult and their culture, the Romans created a series of balanced restrictions for the cult. This is evident regarding the temple of the Magna Mater on the Palatine. While housed initially in the Temple of Victory, in 191 BC, coincidentally the same year when Scipio Nasica was consul, the Magna Mater received her own temple on the west side of the Palatine, in close proximity to not only the hut of Romulus and the Lupercal, but also the houses of

²⁹ All the following translations are from the Loeb Classical Library

³⁰ Ovid, *Fasti*, 4.271-276.

many prominent patricians.³¹ It was rebuilt in 111 BC and AD 3 following fires, but always generally followed the plan of the original temple.³² The temple was also located inside the Pomerium, whereas foreign cults were generally established outside that boundary, further emphasizing the Romans' claim that the Magna Mater was an important aspect of Roman heritage, and properly a Roman goddess.³³ The temple complex was built in the standard Roman hexastyle style, however with a less standard series of subterranean rooms, accessible by a narrow opening near the cult statue. An unusual aspect of the architecture was the use of the space in front of the temple. The steps on the porch led down to an open piazza with a large basin fountain, possibly used for cult activity.³⁴ Thus the building itself reflected the dichotomy between the cult's unconventional and standard characteristics. This sanctuary area was divided from the general populace by a wall. The Galli were confined to this area year-round, with the exception of the Megalensia, and Roman citizens were not allowed to enter, although those walking nearby reported hearing loud voices, singing, and crashing cymbals.³⁵ In addition, it was illegal for Roman citizens to castrate themselves, wear the garments of the Galli, or participate in rituals, thus ensuring a limit to the amount of participation they could have in the cult.³⁶ Instead, many elites organized banquets in honor of the

³¹ Roller, *In Search of God the Mother*, 271-273.

³² Roller, *In Search of God the Mother*, 274; Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire*, 37.

³³ Orlin, *Foreign Cults in Rome*, 82.

³⁴ Roller, *In Search of God the Mother*, 274.

³⁵ Varro, *Eumenidies*, 16. 614ff.

³⁶ See Valerius Maximus 7.7.6 for an example of the punishment incurred for such an offence.

goddess.³⁷ By controlling the interactions between the people and the Galli, the Senate was able to control how the cult was viewed. The Galli and their rites could then be viewed as commodities, not to be imitated by any respectable Roman citizens. The sense of strangeness as regards the cult was preserved because the Romans only interacted with it directly once a year, not allowing it to become familiar or normal. While the Romans are never allowed to participate directly in the cult, once a year the rules separating the cult from the rest of Rome were removed for the festival of the Magna Mater, the Megalensia.

The Megalensia

On the occasion of the Magna Mater's importation and installation into the Roman pantheon, a festival was established in 194 BC. It lasted from the fourth through the tenth of April, and was financed by the State. Only Roman citizens were allowed to participate, ironically foreigners and slaves were excluded.³⁸ This festival, known as the *ludi megalenses*, included markets, circus competitions, stage plays, and a procession of the cult statue.³⁹ Plays by Plautus⁴⁰ and Terrence were performed at the festival in the piazza at the base of the temple, incorporating the sacred space into the play and intimately connecting the theater to the religious nature of the festival. The performance of these plays with the temple as the backdrop is an interesting acknowledgment of the Magna Mater's Phrygian identity within a Roman element of the festival, in part

³⁷ Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire*, 37-38.

³⁸ Borgeaud, *Mother of the Gods*, 65.

³⁹ Orlin, *Foreign Cults in Rome*, 151.

⁴⁰ Plautus' *Pseudolus* was performed at the first Megalensia.

revealing the cooperation between her two origins, Rome and Phrygia, especially during the Megalensia.⁴¹ In the procession towards either the theater or the circus, the cult statue of the Magna Mater was carried upon the shoulders of the Galli, while still more of her priests danced in front of it in the procession.⁴² The dance of the Galli signaled the beginning of the festival, and was often cited as the quintessential example of the Magna Mater's foreign rites.⁴³ During the procession, the Galli, wearing bright, effeminate clothing with jewelry, begged for alms from the crowd.⁴⁴ Playing horns, pipes, cymbals, and tambourines, they danced wildly, whipping themselves. These rituals were all ostentatiously not in keeping with Roman culture and understandings of decorum. Yet another non-Roman aspect of the Megalensia was the language of the rituals and the cult: Greek, rather than Latin.⁴⁵

Despite the strangeness of the cult and rituals, the Megalensia was popular and well attended. The potentially unsavory aspects are here shown within a familiar context, allowing those present to participate in an event both in keeping with the Magna Mater's Phrygian and Greek origins, but also not undermining Roman values.⁴⁶ Thus the Romans themselves do not participate in the rituals, and the Galli are limited to one excursion a

⁴¹ This is in contrast to Latham, "‘Fabulous Clap-Trap’: Roman Masculinity, the Cult of the Magna Mater, and Literary Constructions of the Galli at Rome from the Late Republic to Late Antiquity", who argues that rather than an example of the joining of the Magna Mater's two identities, the location of the theatrical shows at the temple is an attempt to segregate even the Roman elements away from the eyes of the public.

⁴² Orlin, *Foreign Cults in Rome*, 151; Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire*, 38.

⁴³ Borgeaud, *Mother of the Gods*, 65.

⁴⁴ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 2.598-643.

⁴⁵ Roller, *In Search of God the Mother*, 295-296.

⁴⁶ Latham, "‘Fabulous Clap-Trap’: Roman Masculinity, the Cult of the Magna Mater, and Literary Constructions of the Galli at Rome from the Late Republic to Late Antiquity", 101.

year. This specific occasion and time limit for their public actions moderates the extreme actions of the Galli during the festival, because it only occurs once a year. The festival itself serves as a reminder of the importation of the Magna Mater, as the first day (April 4) is the day of the Magna Mater's installation in the Temple of Victory and the last is the anniversary of the dedication of her Palatine temple (April 10).⁴⁷ Thus even while watching the exotic rituals of the Magna Mater, one is reminded of the story of her arrival in Rome, and the virtues of Scipio Nasica and Claudia Quinta. During festivals, most normal business was postponed, including the law courts. Marcus Tullius Cicero begins his speech in the *Pro Caelio* by commenting on the atrocity of having the trial during the Megalensia:

miretur profecto quae sit tanta atrocitas huiusce causae, quod diebus festis ludisque publicis, omnibus forensibus negotiis intermissis, unum hoc iudicium exerceatur. (Cic. Cael. 1)

[One] would, in my opinion, wonder what special gravity there is in this case, in that this trial alone is being held amid festivities and public games, at a time when all legal business is suspended.

Even if one removes the rhetorically exaggerated aspect of the speech, the assumption still remains that most of the jurors would have been at the festival if not for the trial, indicating the popularity of the event for the elite in addition to the greater populace. The By not allowing Romans to participate themselves but only allowing them to watch the procession, the people further experience the cult's "otherness."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Borgeaud, *Mother of the Gods*, 65.

⁴⁸ Latham, "'Fabulous Clap-Trap': Roman Masculinity, the Cult of the Magna Mater, and Literary Constructions of the Galli at Rome from the Late Republic to Late Antiquity", 95.

The priesthood of the Magna Mater especially added to the tension between the Roman and Phrygian elements.⁴⁹ The Magna Mater had all male priests, known as the Galli, who were brought over with the Magna Mater's cult in 204 BC. They were foreigners, and even in successive years native-born Romans were disallowed from joining the Galli. Dionysius of Halicarnassus records this law, and refers to the begging, flute-playing, and colored clothing of the priests specifically, indicating those aspects as the most recognizable and also problematic.⁵⁰ During the procession they played horns, pipes, cymbals, and tambourines and they danced wildly, whipping themselves. These rituals were all ostentatiously not in keeping with Roman culture and understandings of decorum.⁵¹ Roman priests were often also magistrates from prominent patrician families, and thus the Galli, with their lifelong commitment and not only wild, but public actions, were the antithesis of the usual Roman priesthood. In order to discourage the deviant behavior of the members of the Magna Mater's cult amongst the populace but still participate in the cult's Phrygian heritage, the Romans condemn the behavior of the Galli.⁵² Yet they have a fascination with them as well, describing the bizarre procession of the Magna Mater and her priests with vivid imagery,⁵³ such as this passage from Lucretius:

⁴⁹ Latham, "“Fabulous Clap-Trap”: Roman Masculinity, the Cult of the Magna Mater, and Literary Constructions of the Galli at Rome from the Late Republic to Late Antiquity", 87-88.

⁵⁰ Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 2.19.

⁵¹ Latham, "“Fabulous Clap-Trap”: Roman Masculinity, the Cult of the Magna Mater, and Literary Constructions of the Galli at Rome from the Late Republic to Late Antiquity", 101-102.

⁵² Latham, "“Fabulous Clap-Trap”: Roman Masculinity, the Cult of the Magna Mater, and Literary Constructions of the Galli at Rome from the Late Republic to Late Antiquity", 89, 91.

⁵³ Latham, "“Fabulous Clap-Trap”: Roman Masculinity, the Cult of the Magna Mater, and Literary Constructions of the Galli at Rome from the Late Republic to Late Antiquity", 98.

tympana tenta tonant palmis et cymbala circum
concava raucisonoque minantur cornua cantu
et Phrygio stimulat numero cava tibia mentis (2.618-620)

The taut, tomtoms thunder under the open palm, the hollow cymbals sound
around, horns with hoarse-echoing blare affright, hollow pipes prick up the spirits
with their Phrygian cadences.

This is an emotional description, which communicates the frenzy and disorder of the scene. Because the Romans confined the Galli to the temple precinct except for the Megalensia, this one scene represented the entirety of the Romans' interactions with the Galli, and it is found in the works of several authors. Ovid in the *Fasti* describes the same scene:

ibunt semimares et inania tympana tudent,
aeraque tinnitus aere repulsa dabunt (Fas. 4.189-190)

Eunuchs will march and thump their hollow drums, and cymbals clashed on
cymbals will give out their tinkling notes.

He references the other famous characteristic of the Galli by calling them "half men"; the Galli were eunuchs, reportedly self-castrated. Under Roman law, they were not able to become Roman citizens, and were not even allowed to inherit, because they were viewed as neither men nor women.⁵⁴ The self-castration of the Galli, although condemned by the Romans, was also intriguing to them because of its foreign nature, the very reason it was condemned. The Galli thus emphasized the difference between Roman and non-Roman, however the procession of the Galli occurred during a State-funded festival, which was

⁵⁴ Latham, "'Fabulous Clap-Trap': Roman Masculinity, the Cult of the Magna Mater, and Literary Constructions of the Galli at Rome from the Late Republic to Late Antiquity", 84; Orlin, *Foreign Cults in Rome*, 101.

widely attended. In addition, while Phrygians acted as priests, a Roman praetor also made sacrifices and organized the games, which were a hallmark of Roman cult.⁵⁵

Conclusion

The Romans intentionally maintain some of the foreign aspects of the cult of the Magna Mater, while still changing the manner in which the public interacted with the cult. This allows the Romans to emphasize their openness and tolerance, while still ensuring that the general population does not seek to imitate the less than acceptable customs of the cult. In addition, the Romans emphasize the foreignness of the cult in order to define the Roman identity. By condemning certain aspects of the cult but also modifying certain rituals, the Romans create a uniquely Roman version of the larger Mediterranean cult. They create cultural ties between themselves and other nations to strengthen their alliances, but also rely upon the Magna Mater for her protection, as their ancestral and civic goddess.

⁵⁵ Orlin, *Foreign Cults in Rome*, 102.

CONCLUSION

The Roman state had a complex relation to its gods. This is exemplified in Rome's attitude towards her foreign deities, which are both exotic and non-Roman, and also members of the pantheon and protectors of the state. This tension between the foreign and Roman aspects is exhibited in all three cults of Juno Sospita, Aesculapius, and the Magna Mater. The Lanuvian origin of Juno Sospita was emphasized alongside her loyalty and responsibilities to the Roman people. Aesculapius retained much from his Greek cult in his iconography, though his cult practice was a blend of Hellenistic and Roman elements. The Magna Mater, however, most clearly reveals this tension. Her cult maintained sharp distinctions between Roman and Phrygian rituals, with severe restrictions placed on the exotic cult elements. At the same time, however, these same elements were paraded through Rome yearly at the state's expense. The different approaches of the Romans to each situation are telling, because there is a noticeable effort at "Romanization" of the newly imported deity, especially through the construction of narrative histories and the adaptation of iconography. All utilize the story of the importation, and possibly other later stories, such as that of Caecilia Metella and her vision of Juno Sospita or the developed connection between Aeneas and the Magna Mater, to characterize the deities as Roman. Their cults retain exotic elements because of their origins, but all of the stories relate how the deities embrace their newfound roles as members of the Roman pantheon.

There are a vast number of similarities between the legends of Aesculapius and the Magna Mater. Both were summoned to Rome by the command of the Sibylline oracles, had their coming confirmed by the Delphic oracle, and were received at Rome with a large ceremony. Both deities arrived in the form of a non-anthropomorphic representation of the god—a snake and a meteorite—and were received by prominent men in the state and by virtuous, chaste women. In addition, the successful installation of Aesculapius in Rome was acknowledged as a precedent for the importation of the Magna Mater, even at the time of her adoption. Despite the similarities between their importation stories, however, the manner in which the Romans handled each of the cults was very different. For example, Valerius Maximus states that sacrifices to Aesculapius were performed according the Greek rite (*Graeco ritu*), with the exception that prayers were offered with the head covered, as in the Roman rite (*Romano ritu*). Later, his supplicatory rites were also modeled after the Greek form. Roman citizens participated in both sets of rites, and there is no indication that Romans imported Greek priests along with the cult. This is in contrast to the cult of the Magna Mater, whose public sacrifices were conducted according to the Roman rite, while her Phrygian priests, the Galli, performed most native rites in secret, confined to the temple precinct, with the single exception of the first day of the *ludi Megalenses*. Another interesting contrast is that the cult of Aesculapius was later practiced mainly by individuals and collegia, while the cult of the Magna Mater grew in public stature and importance during the Republican period and throughout the Empire. Thus although there does seem to be a system by which the Romans incorporate deities into their culture, it does not indicate a similarity in every aspect of how they treat each cult.

This is not to say that the cult of Juno Sospita does not also fit into the greater pattern the Romans had for foreign cults. The importation of Juno Sospita, significantly earlier than the others, shows the beginnings of a process that will later be fully developed with the importation of the Magna Mater and others during the mid to late third century BC. Juno Sospita's adoption is achieved without the use of force, such as an *evocatio*, but through a treaty with her native Lanuvium. The peaceful acquisition of Aesculapius and the Magna Mater through the (at least presented) compliance of her native priests parallels this. The treaty by which the Romans acquire Juno Sospita also shows the initial stages of Rome's later system wherein they used shared gods to form alliances and to influence foreign policy, but also still clearly reveals a respect for and a belief in the power of the goddess.

These cults and others, although they share similarities in the methodology of their importation, mythology, or circumstance, are not identical. Thus it would be a mistake to attempt to discern a single pattern, line of reasoning, or motivation behind the decision of the Romans to adopt even one of their numerous foreign gods. All three cults examined in this thesis demonstrate that the Romans could conceive of their gods on multiple planes of assistance, and that these did not have to be mutually exclusive. This is most evident in the cult of Aesculapius, who was brought to heal Rome both physically from the plague and metaphorically in her relationship with the gods, although it is also present in the others. Surely the importation of a new deity addressed manifold pressures present in a society in which the religious and political spheres had the same concerns and the prosperity of the city and its inhabitants was dependent upon giving the proper respect due to the gods. Due to the Romans' openness to new deities, "foreign" cults

came to occupy a large part of the Roman pantheon. These cults were an important part of the religious experience of the Roman people because they were thoroughly integrated into the state. The iconography and mythology of these deities permeates literature and art, and state-sponsored festivals and temple restorations further indicate the approval of the cult. Any exotic elements in the cults were intentionally left by the Romans, or even changed slightly, for the addition of Roman elements into the cult, such as the Megalensia into the cult of the Magna Mater, prove that such exotic elements were not unchangeable. Rather, the distinction of these cults as foreign allowed the Romans to emphasize the “Roman-ness” of their own culture through the contrast and tension with the foreign. Therefore, if these cults are to be called foreign, it is only because the Romans themselves did so first.

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