



*Latin Cults through Roman Eyes. Myth, Memory and Cult Practice in the Alban Hills*

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## Summary

This thesis has studied the role of the Latin past in the Roman present, by investigating three large sanctuaries in the Alban hills: that of Diana Nemorensis, Juno Sospita and Jupiter Latiaris. The Alban hills are volcanic highlands southeast of Rome, which are located in the heart of Latium Vetus ('old Latium'). The sanctuaries on and below these hills had long histories as religious meeting places for Latins, both in times of war and in times of peace. In contrast to many recent studies on ancient Latium, my study has not focused on reconstructing these earliest beginnings of worship in the area, nor have I attempted to establish the original spheres of influence of the deities involved. Instead, I have analysed the ways in which later Romans – including the inhabitants of the towns administrating the cults – engaged with the Latin past that surrounded them. Relying substantially on insights from the field of memory studies, my study started from the premise that the Latin character of the cults of the Alban hills was not a static relic of the distant past, but was actively perceived, communicated and remembered by the worshippers visiting the sites. In this way, worshipping a Latin deity could be part of performing a Latin identity. The narratives surrounding the history of Diana Nemorensis, Juno Sospita and Jupiter Latiaris were an integral part of everyday cult practice for the Latin deities and, as such, could change shape and meaning under different circumstances.

In chapter I, the introduction of this thesis, it was acknowledged that in recent decades, the academic concept of memory has increasingly become more stretched, resulting in a terminological vagueness that is often far from helpful in analysing specific historical circumstances. Furthermore, many of the key conditions for establishing a memory culture – as defined by modern theorists – turned out to be hardly applicable to the complex and competitive society of the Roman Republic, in which most of the narratives on our Latin deities took shape. Memory in Republican Rome was intrinsically linked to the *gentes*, who actively produced, promoted and manipulated perceptions of the past. These claims to the past stood in direct contact with other, often competing claims, and there was – at least until the early empire – no central authority to decide which memories could be made into 'collective' or even 'national' memories. In order to do justice to the dynamic and essentially pluralistic nature of the Roman perceptions of the Latin past, the analysis in my case studies was strongly focused on the communicative aspect of memory: on the activity of remembering itself instead of on fixed memories as the results of that process. Only when the analysis is strongly concentrated on specific cases and memory is conceived as the product of acting and communicating individuals, I have argued, can its role in the formation of identity be recognized and understood. The research in the case studies has thus focused on the active

communication of group specific memories, and in order to trace these in the worship of Diana Nemorensis, Juno Sospita and Jupiter Latiaris, I have undertaken a detailed and systematic analysis of their cult practices, by studying literary and visual representations, ritual practices and archaeological remains.

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In chapter II, 'Diana Nemorensis and her worshippers', I have investigated the cult practice of Diana Nemorensis on the shores of lake Nemi. In my analysis of the literary sources surrounding this cult, it was demonstrated that Diana was perceived and presented as an essentially multidimensional goddess. As a hunting goddess in the lush surroundings of the shores of lake Nemi, she could exhibit a traditional role and appearance that was perhaps comparable to other Diana cults, but it was the epithet Trivia that most distinguished the cult in Nemi. Poets associated the threefold nature of Diana with the crossroads between day and night, the cultivated and the wild, and even life and the afterlife. Numismatic and sculptural evidence suggests that this character was also reflected in oldest cult statue of the deity, which consisted of three female figures. While it is not clear if the archaic features displayed by the image are a relic of the past or a later archaistic invention, the fact that the image was actively promoted by Aricians in the late Republic, shows that the threefold representation was recognized as Diana Nemorensis by larger groups of people. As a specific Arician deity, Diana was also ascribed with archaic characteristics that suited the supposed long continuity of worship at the cult site on the shores of lake Nemi.

In the descriptions of the cult practice for Diana Nemorensis, the discourse on the *rex Nemorensis* seems an abnormality. The priest king of Nemi – who was both the murderer of his predecessor and the victim of his successor – would have received its bloody character from Artemis Tauropolis, the bloodthirsty goddess in Euripedes' *Iphigenia in Tauris*. My analysis has shown that the narrative presents clear signs of a literary *topos*, but was also interwoven with the cult practice for Diana Nemorensis, for example through the involvement of the emperor Caligula, who brought a Partian prince to the sanctuary grounds that proclaimed himself king. As such, the discourse of the murderous priest was part of the ritual landscape of lake Nemi.

In the discussion of the material remains of the sanctuary, I have identified a long continuity of religious activity, with votive offers and elaborate terracotta temple decorations dating back to at least the sixth century BC. Several building phases in the middle Republic, as well as the large monumentalization in the late Republic, testify to the active involvement of local elites from Aricia. Wealthy worshippers, such as the freedman Fundilius Doctus, acted as donors to the sanctuary, and the epigraphic evidence demonstrates that Aricians – as individuals and as a community – paid homage to the goddess of their hometown. Through a systematic analysis of individual traces of

worship, I have challenged the assumptions of earlier scholars that the cult practice for Diana Nemorensis was specifically aimed at women or (former) slaves. Inscriptions inform us that the sanctuary was visited by men and women alike, and through the donations, we can observe connections with the local community, the city of Rome and the bigger world around Nemi.

An important part of my analysis was based on the connection between Diana Nemorensis and the early relations between Latins and Romans. This was illustrated by an early fragment of Roman historiography that testified to the presence of a Latin dictator at the grove of Diana. The episode gains significance in the light of the active syncretism that we have observed between the worship in Nemi and the cult of Diana on the Aventine in Rome, which according to literary tradition was instituted by Servius Tullius to celebrate the bonds between Rome and its Latin neighbours. So, Diana seems to have been perceived as a vehicle for (or guardian of) the negotiation of religious bonds with new allies (who had formerly been enemies). This memory was preserved not only in the literary record, but also because Latin *dictatores* were still performing (religious) duties on the cult site in Nemi in the first and second centuries AD, as we have seen in the discussion of the epigraphic evidence. It is hard to determine whether this was an antiquarian reinvention of a half-forgotten office or a direct remnant of the earlier dictatorship, but either way, it gives us an idea as to how worshippers and cult officials memorialized the religious heritage of Diana Nemorensis' worship and how these perceptions of a real or imagined past penetrated everyday cult practice.

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In chapter III, 'Juno Sospita: guardian of Lanuvium and Rome', I have studied the cult of Juno Sospita on the Colle San Lorenzo in Lanuvium. After the end of the Latin war in 338 BC, the Romans took over control in the area and a special stipulation was made to ensure that the cult of Juno Sospita was administered by Romans and Lanuvians together. However, as my analysis of the literary sources in the first part of the chapter has shown, Juno Sospita remained firmly attached to the town and the people of Lanuvium, even though she eventually received a temple in Rome as well. She is regularly presented by Roman authors as a specific Lanuvian deity, who was worshipped and promoted by the Lanuvian magistrates who had made political careers in Rome. From her hilltop sanctuary, Juno Sospita watched over the affairs of the town of Lanuvium and the protective role seems clear in the characteristic iconography of the goddess as well: on images from the Middle Republic onwards, she wears armour and a goatskin, and sometimes strides forward with raised spear and shield, clearly adopting a battle pose. The iconography is most clearly visible on coins issued by Lanuvian *monetarii*. Her clothing and weaponry on the coins seem archaizing rather than archaic, because we cannot establish a direct connection between these images and images from the

sixth and fifth centuries BC that have been identified as Juno Sospita by other scholars. What we mainly identify, I have argued, is an attempt of the *monetarii* to promote their *origo* and affiliate themselves with the authority of the Latin past.

The analysis of the literary sources also showed how Juno Sospita's protection eventually extended to Rome. Each year, the consuls performed a sacrifice in Juno's sanctuary and Lanuvium's most important magistrate, the *dictator*, was often a Roman senator. Very significant is the long list of *prodigia* that were reported in Lanuvium. By recognizing these divine warnings and responding to them, the Roman Senate secured the support of the goddess and at the same time underlined its own religious authority, that now extended to cults that were once distinctively non-Roman. Through an analysis of the archaeological remains of the sanctuary, I have argued that the continuous involvement of local elites in the construction and restoration of the sanctuary must be interpreted as a deliberate reference to and promotion of a local Lanuvian identity. The contribution of local officer Licinius Murena to the large monumentalization of the sanctuary in the first century BC is our best illustration of this phenomenon. At the same time, these donations were only made possible by the wealth streaming in from the Roman wars of conquest; as thus they fitted within the trend of similar religious structures in the region. In other words, the local Lanuvian identity of Juno Sospita took shape in a larger regional and Roman context.

This interpretation is strengthened if we take into account the cult practice on the sanctuary grounds, in which we can trace the involvement of local worshippers and priests, larger groups of Latins and also people from far afield, such as Quintus Cornuficius, proconsul of the province of Africa. For the earlier phases of worship, the evidence of votive offers is very suggestive. In the area of the temple building, votives dated as early as the eighth century BC suggest that the Colle San Lorenzo was a centre of religious activity from archaic times onwards, although it is uncertain if the deity addressed in these early rites was related to the later Juno Sospita. Furthermore, the recent discovery of the Pantanaccio votive deposit (located at about 1,5 kilometre from the sanctuary) adds an extra layer to our understanding of the ritual landscape of Lanuvium. Large quantities of votives from the fourth and third centuries BC were excavated and although further research is needed to investigate the exact link with Juno Sospita's cult, the discovery has provided an exciting opportunity to study a fully functioning religious *lucus*.

From the middle Republic onwards, inscriptions seem to become the medium of choice for worshipping Juno Sospita. As in Chapter II, these sources provided valuable information on the daily routine of the cult practice: they testify to worshippers from all layers of Roman society and to an intricate priestly organization that was a dominant factor in the civic life of Lanuvium. The archaizing character of many of the functions – especially the *dictatores* and *reges sacrorum* – had a

distinct appeal for members of the equestrian class. For them, the priesthoods were a way of distinguishing themselves in the religious domain and affiliating themselves with shared socio-political history of Latium, of which the offices – however reconstructed or reinvented – were a living memory.

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For my third and final case study (chapter IV), I have examined the cult of Jupiter Latiaris on the Alban Mount and its main festival, the *feriae Latinae*. As was shown through a detailed analysis of the literary discourse surrounding this cult, Jupiter Latiaris was presented in the Roman sources as the quintessential example of a Latin god. The celebrations of the *feriae Latinae* are portrayed as a direct heritage of the Latin past: in the sacrificial feast, the ancient bond between Rome and the Latin cities was relived and renewed. Although there is little consensus between Roman authors on the origins of the celebrations – that were either presented as a Roman initiative or as a pre-existing Latin celebration – the festival is considered as an important moment in the Roman ritual year. Not only did representatives of the Latin villages come to the hilltop to worship, but all of Rome's magistrates were also obliged to participate in the proceedings. For the consuls, it was an important confirmation of their power, as they established a date at the beginning of their office and could only leave for their troops in the provinces after the rites had been performed correctly. In this way, the Roman wars of conquest – in which enemies turned into allies – were always preceded by the symbolic celebration of Rome's first religious and political bonds with the Latins.

However, the significance that the cult of Jupiter Latiaris holds in the literary domain is not matched by the material traces it left on the *mons Albanus*. There are several signs of religious activity on top of the hill, of which the well-constructed road leading up and fragments of the ritual calendar known as the *Fasti feriarum Latinarum* are perhaps most significant. Furthermore, the archives of the monks that inhabited the hill in the 19<sup>th</sup> century suggest that quite some material was removed. Even with this taken into consideration, however, the archaeological evidence for the cult of Jupiter Latiaris can be considered meagre. The few structural remains have no apparent religious function and there is a remarkable lack of decorative and votive material. Without the literary sources explaining its ritual significance, I have argued, we would probably not have identified the *mons Albanus* as a place of worship.

In my analysis, I have suggested that we can explain this relative lack of visible votive activity by looking at the specific ritual context for the worship of Jupiter Latiaris. Not connected to a particular *municipium* in Latium Vetus and without a (detectable) visual representation, the god perhaps attracted fewer individual worshippers throughout the year than other cults in the region and primarily became manifest during the days of the *feriae Latinae*. Shifting the focus of my analysis

to the ritual proceedings at the site and to the actions that invoked the Latin past, I have systematically investigated the epigraphic evidence, which has allowed me to distinguish an elaborate cultic organization. Perhaps even more so than in chapters II and III, there was a strong connection to the past of the area observable in this material. In the ranks of archaizing priesthoods surrounding the cults – like the *sacerdotes Cabenses* and the Vestal virgins of Alba – I have again encountered many *equites*. Most inscriptions are from the second and third centuries AD and the late proliferation of ancient titles may thus be an attempt of new elites to connect themselves to the core of Roman religion, thereby reinventing rather than recovering the ancient offices. In any case, the epigraphic material shows the appeal of the distant Latin past – be it imagined or not – for the participants in the rites of the *feriae Latinae*. As my research has shown, the authority of this past was particularly relevant for Caesar, Augustus and later Julian emperors, whose attachment to the cult of Jupiter Latiaris is especially well documented and who could boast an ancestral link to the mythical landscape of Alba Longa. Vice-versa, the traditions surrounding the *feriae Latinae* may have taken on a new significance by the attention of the Iulii.

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Finally, when bringing together my findings in the conclusion of my work (chapter V), I have emphasized how the Latin past of the cults in the Alban hills could take on a foreign, local or Roman dimension – depending on the context it was perceived, presented and remembered in. I have demonstrated that the Latin past remained an important point of reference throughout Roman history, because new groups of people found new ways of associating themselves with the narratives of that past and recognized its strong symbolic value.