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# Not Gods Alone

## On the Visibility of Religion and Religious Specialists in Ancient Rome\*

JÖRG RÜPKE\*\*

The visibility of the gods is a crucial problem for religion. If religion is regarded as a personal resource, the impact of which depends as much on shared cultural acceptance as on selective individual access,<sup>1</sup> visibility is as important as it is dangerous. Gods should be plausible, but not too easily accessible, or too vulnerable to manipulation. This leaves room for an enormous degree of historical variability.<sup>2</sup> However, it is not these strategies, addressed by other contributors to this book, but a strategy of compensating for this by giving religious practices or religious roles a heightened visibility by means of placing, gestures, paraphernalia and dress. This seems to be natural, but it is not. Even the opposite might be true – or at least seems to be true. It is the awkwardly restricted visibility of public priesthoods in early imperial Rome, clearly contrasting, for instance, with the cult at the Temple in Jerusalem<sup>3</sup> that is the topic of this essay.<sup>4</sup>

It has to be stressed from the very beginning that Roman priests participated in many prominent rituals, but for many others their presence was not necessary. Their active role thus frequently extended to only a few functions, while a multitude of practical interventions, especially to do with animal sacrifice, were performed by mere ancillaries (“public slaves”, *popae*/servers at the sacrifice, *victimarii*/slaughterers, *camilli*/child helpers). Clothing and specific accesso-

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\*\* Text translated from German by David M. B. Richardson.

<sup>1</sup> Rüpke 2015a, 344–366.

<sup>2</sup> For the dialectics and historical variability see Rüpke 2007, 19–28.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. B. Gagliardi 1989; Cohn 2013 and Rajak 2013, 29–51.

<sup>4</sup> For a brief characterisation see Rüpke 1996, 241–262; for prosopographical documentation Rüpke 2008.

ries (which were not necessarily used in practice) thus had a highly significant role to play in the recognisability of the priestly function in rendering the role identifiable and visible. It is only by such means that it is possible to identify the role at all in illustrations.<sup>5</sup> It is true that the sources suffice to throw only limited light on the more specific question of performativity. We may assume that the actors involved sought *dignitas*, “distinction” and its recognition, perhaps as a central attribute of members of the elite, but scarcely anything of the sort emerges explicitly from the available evidence. The most comprehensive reflection on ritual performativity by priests is provided by Cicero’s speech “On his house”, where, seeking to have restored to him the urban villa of which he has been dispossessed, he must cast doubt on the legality of the sanctuary built in the meantime by his political opponent, Claudius. With skilful rhetoric,<sup>6</sup> Cicero exposes the manifest lack of authority behind the actions of the only recently appointed pontiff and uses another instance to demonstrate the false basis of his own admission of wrongdoing. For all that, however, the orator stresses that it is not on these arguments that his petition regarding the validity of Claudius’ action is founded, but on the law and the facts of the case.<sup>7</sup> Interaction with the gods, whether social or sacral, depends on the reliability of the forms employed: excessive piety might, if anything, imperil it.

## 1. Roman Priests

To be *sacerdos publicus*, “a public priest”, was probably an honour seen by most senators as worth striving for. Thus Pliny writes to the emperor Trajan:

As I am sensible, Sir, that the highest applause my actions can receive is to be distinguished by so excellent a prince, I beg you would be graciously pleased to add either the office of augur or *septemuir* (both which are now vacant) to the dignity I already enjoy by your indulgence; that I may have the satisfaction of publicly offering up those vows for your prosperity, from the duty of my office, which I daily prefer to the gods in private, from the affection of my heart.<sup>8</sup>

An instance of such a sentiment of personal duty is provided in the very next letter.<sup>9</sup> But another in the collection, addressed to Pliny’s friend Arrianus Maturus,

<sup>5</sup> Fless 1995 and Siebert 2015, 388–396 provide substantial pictorial material.

<sup>6</sup> For the role given here to religious speech see Beard 2012, 20–39.

<sup>7</sup> Cic. *Dom.* 106–129.

<sup>8</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 10.13, trans. William Melmoth [revised by F. C. T. Bosanquet]: *Cum sciam, domine, ad testimonium laudemque morum meorum pertinere tam boni principis iudicio exornari, rogo dignitati, ad quam me prouexit indulgentia tua, uel auguratum uel septemuiratum, quia uacant adicere digneris, ut iure sacerdotii precari deos pro te publice possim, quos nunc precor pietate priuata.*

<sup>9</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 10.14: ... *deosque immortales precor, ut ...*

although in essence devoted for the most part to reproducing a letter of congratulation from Arrianus, shows a further range of motives:

You congratulate me on accepting the office of augur. You are right in so doing, first, because it is a proper thing to obey the wishes of an emperor with a character like ours, and, secondly, because the priestly office is in itself an ancient and sacred one, and inspires respect and dignity from the very fact that it is held for life. (2) For other offices, though almost equal in point of dignity to this, may be bestowed one day and taken away the next, while with the augurship the element of chance only enters into the bestowal of it. (3) I think too<sup>10</sup> that I have special reasons for congratulating myself in that I have succeeded Julius Frontinus, one of the leading men of his day, who for many years running used to bring forward my name, whenever the nomination day for the priesthoods came round as though he wished to coopt me to fill his place. Now events have turned out in such a way that my election does not seem to have been the work of chance.

(4) My augurate is of particular joy for you, as you write, because Marcus Tullius had been augur. For you are happy that I step into the offices of the person whom I wish to emulate in my studies. (5) I can only hope that as I have attained to the priesthood and the consulship at a much earlier age than he did, I may, when I am old, at least in some degree acquire his serenity of mind. But all that man can give has fallen to my lot and to many another; the other thing, which can only be bestowed by the gods, is as difficult to attain to as it is presumptuous to hope for it. Farewell.<sup>11</sup>

As was already to be suspected from the letter to Trajan, with its frank alternative of the augurate or membership of the *septemviri epulonum*, the body responsible for the organization of cult banquets (*epulae*), it is not religious preference that determines the choice of priesthood, but personal connections and the construction of spiritual genealogies. The discrepancy between the meager extent of the necessary qualifications, or rather of those qualifications that are validated by election to a priesthood, and the lifelong nature of the office, suggests that, contrary to modern conceptions, it was much less difficult to be a priest than to become one!

<sup>10</sup> So this is Pliny's own interpretation; cf. *Ep.* 2.1.8 on the death of Frontinus.

<sup>11</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 4.8.1–6, trans. John B. Firth, [http://ancienthistory.about.com/library/bl/bl\\_text\\_plinyltrs4.htm#VIII](http://ancienthistory.about.com/library/bl/bl_text_plinyltrs4.htm#VIII), accessed September 29, 2015, with my supplement of 4.8.4. *Gratularis mihi quod acceperim auguratum: iure, gratularis, primum quod grauissimi principis iudicium in minoribus etiam rebus consequi pulchrum est, deinde quod sacerdotium ipsum cum priscum et religiosum tum hoc quoque sacrum plane et insigne est, quod non adimitur uiuenti. nam alia quamquam dignitate propemodum paria ut tribuuntur sic auferuntur; in hoc fortunae hactenus licet ut dari possit. mihi uero illud etiam gratulatione dignum uidetur, quod successi Iulio Frontino principi uiro, qui me nominationis die per hos continuos annos inter sacerdotes nominabat, tamquam in locum suum cooptaret; quod nunc euentus ita comprobauit, ut non fortuitum uideretur. te quidem, ut scribis, ob hoc maxime delectat auguratus meus, quod M. Tullius augur fuit. Laetaris enim quod honoribus eius insistam, quem aemulari in studiis cupio. sed utinam ut sacerdotium idem, ut consulatum multo etiam iuuenior quam ille sum consecutus, ita senex saltem ingenium eius aliqua ex parte assequi possim! sed nimirum quae sunt in manu hominum et mihi et multis contigerunt; illud uero ut adipisci arduum sic etiam sperare nimium est, quod dari non nisi a dis potest. uale.*

From other testimonies, it can easily be discerned how high a value was set on being recorded as having been adopted into membership of one of the *collegia sacerdotum publica*, and what status was attached to it. Dietrich Boschung<sup>12</sup> has shown how an outstanding proportion of the priests on the Ara Pacis relief are senators; cult accessories on the coins of the year following Augustus's secular games of 16 BCE announce membership in the prestigious priesthoods of the city of Rome: the *augures*, *pontifices*, *quindecimviri sacris faciundis*, and *epulones*.<sup>13</sup> Later coins announce the appointment of a successor to the imperial throne with the device *cooptatio in omnia collegia*.<sup>14</sup> Lictors were provided for the *uirgines Vestae*, the six virgins who maintained the fire in the Temple of Vesta, and for the flamens assigned to individual gods, as was the custom for magistrates.<sup>15</sup>

## 2. Evidence from the Everyday

The instances portrayed so far, representative of the Principate of the first centuries BCE and CE, the early part of that period in the case of the reliefs, would lead us to believe that senatorial *sacerdotes* displayed their priestly role clearly in public and could be identified as priests. This is not the case, and it is to this paradoxical circumstance that the following analysis is devoted. The many testimonies that identify senators as priests may also be read otherwise, and throw a different light both on the system of signs peculiar to Roman religion and on its performativity.

Clothing offers the possibility of easily recognizable differentiation on the basis of status. It appears that Roman *sacerdotes* wore the *toga praetexta*. This may not necessarily have applied to all priesthoods; but the *tresviri epulonum*, the college established to relieve the burden on the pontiffs, received at its foundation in 196 BCE the *togae praetextatae habendae ius*, the “right to wear the *toga praetexta*”.<sup>16</sup> Other passages, however, show that this right applied only to actual ritual activities, the performance of *sacra publica*.<sup>17</sup> An exception to this

<sup>12</sup> Boschung 2005, here 99–103.

<sup>13</sup> *RRC* 2.56 = *RIC* 1, Augustus 350.

<sup>14</sup> For a full treatment of the material Schumacher 1978, 655–819. Also id. 2006, 181–188 and Stepper 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Vestals: Dio Cass. 47.19.4; *flamen Dialis*: Paul. Fest. 82.27–28 Lindsay: *Flaminius lictor est, qui flamini Diali sacrorum causa praesto est*. But cf. Val. Max. 1.1.9 (taken from Lactant. *Div. inst.* 1.21.45) on the contrary case of magisterial dignity indicated for lictors, and the strenuous dances performed with shields (*ancilia*) by the *salii*.

<sup>16</sup> Livy 33.42.1.

<sup>17</sup> Wissowa 1912, 498 with n. 8. Livy 27.37.13 sees the *togae praetextatae* of the *decemviri sacris faciundis* as a ritual costume along with the laurel wreath; the *lex Ursonensis* regulates this situation-related right for the pontiffs and augurs of the Colonia Iulia.

rule, as in many other respects, was the *flamen Dialis*, who was constantly on duty (*cottidie feriatu*s).<sup>18</sup> Also relevant here is the isolated account by the imperial-age lexicographer Festus, of lictors, bearers of bundles of rods, preceding the pontiffs on their way to sacrifice; this was itself a mark of public distinction and normally an attribute of the highest magistrates. Even the *uicomagistri*, the colleges of four, mostly freedmen, who performed their duty on a few occasions during the year, each in one of the 265 districts (*uici*) of Augustus's 14 regions, were accorded the right to wear the *toga praetexta* when engaged upon their (rare) sacral functions.<sup>19</sup>

In interpreting these conventions, it is important not to forget that the sacral obligations of most priesthoods – with the exception of the *flamen Dialis*, the priest of Jupiter, together with his wife the *flaminica*, and the *rex* and *regina sacrorum* (“king and queen of the sacrifice”) – were confined to a few days in the year. The *praetexta* thus merely emphasizes roles that may already have been apparent in the choreography of the particular occasion. The *praetextae* of priests, moreover, frequently competed with those of magistrates, so long as the latter were not surrounded by lictors.<sup>20</sup> The situation is more problematic again in the case of the augurs: we have no unambiguous, positive testimony for Rome for their wearing the *praetexta*.<sup>21</sup> The account by Servius, that the augurs wore the short, purple-striped *trabea* – the reference by this Late Antique Virgil commentator to the figure-of-eight shield (*ancilia*)<sup>22</sup> suggests that his comment concerned rather the Salian priesthood – perhaps reflects the lack of any other testimony for this special form of dress. It is particularly hard to separate the augurs' ritual function as protagonists in a sequence of ritual actions from their function as legal experts with advisory or decision-making authority.

When examined critically, the portrayal on the Ara Pacis appears in a different light. Apart from the flamens, distinguished by their headgear the *galerus*, and perhaps the *rex sacrorum*, marked out by his axe, the remaining priests can be identified at best by the symbols borne by their youthful cult servants, the *camilli*. It is not only among the flamens that precedence contradicts the expected hierarchy: the priesthoods themselves are not ranged in order of length of

<sup>18</sup> Briefly Scheid 2001, 55–61, who enlarges upon Plutarch's expression “living statues” (*Quaest. Rom.* 111) as a metaphor, but cf. Rüpke 2015b, 79–92. Constant wearing of the *praetexta*: Serv. *Aen.* 8.552.

<sup>19</sup> *Praetexta*: Livy 34.7.2; Asc. *Pis.* 6–7; Rüpke 2005a, 1501–1507.

<sup>20</sup> For a Roman view of the history of the *praetexta* see e.g. Plin. *HN* 8.195 (Etruscan royal robe).

<sup>21</sup> But see the late interpretation in the *Scholia Bobensia* p. 143 s. Stangl: *Cui superior annus idem et uirilem patris et praetextam populi togam dederit: ἐμπαδέστερον τὸν ἐπιλογὸν facit, uehementius adfectum miserationis apud iudicum animos commoturus omnium commemoratione quos dignitatis suae dicit fuisse auctores. uerum hic de P. Lentuli filio loquitur, qui eodem anno, quo togam uirilem a patre sumpserit, etiam auguratus praetextam iudicio populi adeptus, duplicauerit uotum [a] familiare maturato sacerdotio.*

<sup>22</sup> Serv. *Aen.* 7.190 with Wissowa 1912, 499, n. 1.

service, so important in other circumstances; membership of the imperial family is the critical factor here.<sup>23</sup> This critical examination may be extended to coins. Even in illustrations on coins of the last years of the Republic, often it can not absolutely be determined whether a *lituus*, the crooked staff, announces that the moneyer (or one of his ancestors) was an augur, or indicates political legitimation by possession of the auspices, expressing the political binomial *imperium auspiciumque*.<sup>24</sup> A caption was often thought desirable.

There remain the inscriptions. Honorific and funerary inscriptions are among the most important sources for reconstructing membership of the colleges of the *sacerdotes publici*. Where we have a complete account of an administrative career, priesthoods are normally also mentioned. They either appear together with the date of co-optation in the chronology of offices held, or – and this applies especially to the most prestigious among them, typically achieved only in the later phase of a career – at the head of the list along with consulates and proconsulates. Initially, this circumstance appears unsurprising: the problem of depicting annual and longer-term posts together is solved pragmatically by giving them equal treatment. The status of ex-magistrate, achieved in stages, and normally inalienable, is given the same treatment as the active office of membership of a priestly college. It should be added that chronological lists in inscriptions often fail to clarify whether the last- or first-named office is or is not current; this also applies to magisterial and military positions.

A different aspect of the above state of affairs is revealed when we turn our attention to dedicatory and honorific inscriptions that do not provide a complete account of the individual's career.<sup>25</sup> In the case of dedicatory inscriptions, priesthoods almost never appear; in the case of honorific inscriptions, an overall view again escapes me. However, my impression from a survey of the epigraphical coverage of known *sacerdotes* is that the office is frequently not mentioned. But we are speaking here of an office that is both prestigious and in fact held, and, even in many cases of value in anticipating offices of still higher status, that have not yet been achieved.<sup>26</sup> To sharpen our focus: from Augustus onwards, and certainly into the Severan Age, perhaps until Aurelian, it was the rule for Augusti to be members of multiple colleges; from Nero<sup>27</sup> onwards, co-optation “into all colleges” – whatever that might mean here – was an element of the designation of an imperial successor. Our lack of a clear picture of the extent and regularity of this practice is due to the fact that, with very few exceptions, imperial inscriptions do not mention priesthoods apart from the supreme pontificate, even in

<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of attempts at identification see Boschung 2005.

<sup>24</sup> On the discussion see Linderski 1996, 145–186; Williams 2007, 151–154.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Rüpke 2009, 31–42.

<sup>26</sup> On this, see investigations of careers as given by Scheid 1975; id. 1990.

<sup>27</sup> *CIL* VI 921 = *ILS* 222 and *RIC* 1, Claudius 76 s. 107 = *RIC* 1.176.84; 1.397.242 (*cooptatio*, 50/54 CE); *CIL* VI 1984.1.3 = *ILS* 5025 (*sod. Aug.*, 51 CE).

the most complete titulatures. In almost all cases where we have more detailed information, this relies on texts deriving from the college in question: the honorific images of the Augusti as Arval brethren, although even these lack the other priesthoods with the exception of the pontificate, or the college's succession lists or notices of co-option.<sup>28</sup> In view of the large number of imperial inscriptions available to us, the extremely infrequent rate at which priestly offices are mentioned allows us to conclude only that the absence of such a mention in other cases was not due to a prohibition on listing such honours.

### 3. Alternatives

The weak public presence of senatorial *sacerdotes* was by no means due to a general lack of differentiation of religion and specialist religious roles. I have already spoken of the most important exceptions on the same social level: flamens were always distinguishable thanks to their unusual headgear, and it is not only on the side reliefs of the Ara Pacis that they are singled out by the helmet-like *galerus*, with its pointed *apex*. The foursome depicted in the relief shows that this type of head-covering was not restricted to the *flamen Dialis*. We also learn this from Varro, in his treatise *Antiquities of Things Divine* (*Antiquitates rerum diuinarum*), where he tells us that a colour code served to differentiate the flamens further. The only one to be assigned a white *galerus* was the priest of Jupiter, the *flamen Dialis*,<sup>29</sup> of whom the tradition also relates that he had to wear this item constantly; in the years preceding the Second Punic War, its loss was made grounds for resignation, probably against the background of strong competition for priestly posts.<sup>30</sup>

We should remind ourselves briefly of other peculiarities attached to the Roman flaminiate.<sup>31</sup> The *flamen Dialis* must neither ride on a horse nor see the army under arms;<sup>32</sup> he must always be present in Rome. The validity of these rules is contested: Livy assumes a rule specifying not one night's absence from Rome; Plutarch mentions a maximum of three nights' absence.<sup>33</sup> The sense of these rules lay in a concern to register the irreconcilability of priestly office and the higher magisterial functions, and it is precisely here that conflicts and attempts to find pragmatic solutions arose: the flaminates must not become impasses in

<sup>28</sup> See for example the survey in Stepper 2003, 47–104. Arvals: e.g. Antoninus Pius: *CIL* VI 1000.

<sup>29</sup> Varro, *Ant. rer. div.* 2, fr. 51 Cardauns = Gell. *NA* 10.15.32.

<sup>30</sup> Rüpke 2010, 11–22.

<sup>31</sup> General information: Simón 1996.

<sup>32</sup> Plin. *HN* 28.146 (see 147 on the justification); Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 40; Paul. Fest. 71.23–24 L; cf. Gell. *NA* 10.15.3. Cf. Rüpke 1990, 65 on the linen ban, probably pointing in the same direction.

<sup>33</sup> Livy 5.52.13; Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 40.

the careers of those patrician flamens who were appointed at an early age, and to whom that typically early election ought itself, by analogy with other priest-hoods, give the prospect of a glittering career. The same interests also characterize the compromises found: exceptional concessions, posts within Italy, enabling a magisterial career without flouting the rules in principle. This applied in the case of a *flamen Dialis* who was made city prefect, noted by Livy for 183 BCE. C. Valerius Flaccus had established the right for the *flamen Dialis* to receive a seat in the Senate and assume municipal office, and had himself filled the post of curule aedile in 199 BCE. For this election as aedile, the problem that, as *flamen Dialis*, he could not swear an oath<sup>34</sup> was eventually resolved by his brother's taking the oath for him.<sup>35</sup> It applied no less to the case of the flamen in 22 CE, of whom Tacitus gives an exhaustive account; here, the *flamen Dialis* Servius Cornelius Lentulus Maluginensis attempted in vain to receive the proconsulate of Asia after his suffect consulate of 10 CE.<sup>36</sup>

In the dispute recounted by Tacitus, Maluginensis refers to the fact that, in the event not only of illness but also of a vacancy, the flamen could be represented in his ritual activities by the pontiffs;<sup>37</sup> this must not, however, belie the fact that, constantly clad in the *toga praetexta*, he remained the prototypical *sacerdos publicus*. By the historical conception that already prevailed in the Republican age, the flamens and the vestal virgins belonged to Rome's oldest religious epoch, ruled over by Numa.<sup>38</sup> When Cicero talks about patrician privileges in his speech *De domo sua*, he begins with the flamens and the *rex sacrorum*, who in many detailed respects were treated in the same way as the flamens.<sup>39</sup> Such disputes often also feature the *salii*, a group restricted to the patrician class that was also distinguished by its unambiguous cult costume and conspicuous rites.

The latter point is important: visibility, not patrician recruitment, determined the prominent position of the flamens;<sup>40</sup> as well as the right to travel by conveyance in the city, of which we are aware from the Tabula Heracleensis,<sup>41</sup> they shared this visibility with the *rex sacrorum* and the vestal virgins; the former, like the flamens, were accompanied on feast days (*feriae*) by a herald (*praeco* or *praclamator*?) who saw to it that no work was done under the eyes of these priests.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 44; Paul. Fest. 92.25 L.

<sup>35</sup> Rüpke 2005a, no. 3393.

<sup>36</sup> Livy 39.45.4: *praetores ita sortiri iussi, uti flamini Diali utique altera iuris dicendi Romae provincia esset ...* Tac. *Ann.* 3.58–59. 71; see Rüpke 2005a, no. 1349.

<sup>37</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 3.58.

<sup>38</sup> Cic. *Rep.* 2.26; Livy 1.20; Ps.-Aur. Vict. *De vir. ill.* 3.1, p. 27 Pichlmayr.

<sup>39</sup> Cic. *Dom.* 38; similarly Livy 4.54.7.

<sup>40</sup> On the importance of patrician status see Rüpke 2012, 183–194.

<sup>41</sup> CIL I<sup>2</sup> 483.62: *Quibus diebus Virgines Vestales, regem sacrorum, flamines plostreis in urbe sacrorum publicorum p(opuli) R(omani) causa vebi oportebit.*

<sup>42</sup> Macrobian. *Sat.* 1.16.9: *Adfirmabant autem sacerdotes pollui ferias si indictis conceptisque opus aliquod fieret. praeterea regem sacrorum flaminesque non licebat uidere feris opus fieri et ideo*

In Christian representations, these figures dominate the image of public religion; in Isidore of Seville, the flamen can stand *pars pro toto* for Roman priesthoods.<sup>43</sup>

This attitude of Christian authors, finding the colourful and the noteworthy in religions and religious specialists of others or regarding the colourful among these as characteristic, is mirrored already in the internal perspective of the Roman Republic. For example, in the case of the priests of Cybele, the *galli*, to whom Cicero bestows a special place in *De legibus*;<sup>44</sup> from imperial-age sources, I would refer particularly to accounts of the shaven-headed priests of Isis and their appearance, dressed in white, in processions and rituals.<sup>45</sup>

In Rome, too, religious specialists could be conceived of as habitual bearers of a religious role, distinguished by a particular lifestyle and recognizable by their clothing. In the sphere of the elite priesthoods, however, these distinguishing features were concentrated in very few positions: the *rex sacrorum*, the *flamen Dialis*, and the *uirgines Vestales*. In the first-named instances, rules governing their highly restricted opportunities to pursue the *cursus honorum*, the magisterial career that constituted the normal senatorial way of life, make it clear to what extent this type of religious authority was irreconcilable with the changeable and always temporary assumption of political authority. In the case of the Vestals, it is gender-specificity that defines the boundary: these positions were filled exclusively by women. But what role, then, did the remaining *sacerdotes publici* play?

#### 4. Conclusion

As regards the priesthoods monopolized by the senatorial class (*ordo*), members of these colleges were scarcely to be recognized as such by the uninitiated. This comprised the great republican colleges of the *augures*, *pontifices*, *quindecimviri sacris faciundis*, *epulones*, the reconstructed *fratres Aruales*, and the slowly growing number of *sodales* in the cult of deified rulers. This applied not only to everyday situations, but even to the cult: in the great public rituals of the games, priests appeared within the ranks of the senators; if they wore the *praetexta*, they shared this distinction with other magistrates. Even where they took active roles in the cult, they may have been recognizable only at particular moments. This situation was subject to historical variability. The situation changed profoundly in the late third century CE,<sup>46</sup> together with a profound shift in the shape as well as societal

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*per praeconem denuntiabant nequid tale ageretur, et praecepti neglegens multabatur.* Similarly Fest. 292.3–7 L.

<sup>43</sup> Isid. *Orig.* 7.12.18 s.; Arn. *Adv. nat.* 4.35; Prudent. *Perist.* 2.517–520; August. *De civ. D.* 2.15.

<sup>44</sup> Cic. *Leg.* 2.22.

<sup>45</sup> Juv. 6.533; Mart. *Epigr.* 12.29.19; for further references see Wissowa 1912, 356 with notes.

<sup>46</sup> See Rüpke 2005a, 1601 ss.

place of religious practices.<sup>47</sup> Priestly roles gained a significance of their own and were marked by specific dresses or even crowns.

Speaking in 300 BCE in favour of the opening of the pontiffs and augurs to plebeians, in Livy's narrative of the controversy surrounding the *Lex Ogulnia*, the well-respected consul P. Decius Mus argues against just this lack of visibility of the religious role: why should someone who is allowed to be conveyed through the streets as *triumphator* not be seen at the sacrifice with his sacrificial implements, or at the *augurium* with his augur's staff? Why should someone called *consul*, *ensor*, or *triumphator* on his statue not also be described as *augur* or *pontifex*? Would that irritate readers?<sup>48</sup> The *sacerdos* appeared in the eyes of the public – and usually exclusively – as a magistrate or ex-magistrate, in other words, a senator. This even applied where the latter identification was obviously wrong: the right of the regional city priest as *curio*, or of the *vicomagister*, to wear the *praetexta* on ritual occasions represents him at those moments as a member of the elite. Social or socio-political status and the prestige of religious roles reinforced each other.

But there was more to it. The *toga praetexta* was also worn by the *flamen Dialis*. Here, a *pars-pro-toto* logic operated. His special religious role, rendered highly visible by his head-dress, provided a chance to transfer prestige also to colleagues who were otherwise inconspicuous, and so afforded them a possible gain in religious authority. Once more, however, this is to presuppose the visibility of the religious role; and that is problematic.

Can this lack of visibility be quantified? It was perhaps surprisingly insignificant, owing to the close degree of correlation and standardization between the *cursus honorum* and co-option into the priestly colleges. Recruitment of *sacerdotes* and *sodales* occurred relatively late in a career and as a rule presupposed a praetorship; when recruitment occurred earlier, the praetorship and higher positions usually followed rapidly. The number of priests in the above-named groups may have exceeded one hundred at any randomly chosen moment in the early imperial age.<sup>49</sup> Opportunities for making a public appearance were limited in number and it is in fact during the games that we can observe coordinated activity on the part of the colleges, in the varying orientation of the proceedings and the priests' shared attendance. Where rituals were of an unusual nature, the most striking instance being the circuit of the city performed by the *luperci*, ritual actors tended not to belong to the senatorial class, or there was an age-related bar, as in the case of the normally youthful *salii*. Religious specialists with particular

<sup>47</sup> See Rüpke 2016, 303–334.

<sup>48</sup> Livy 10.7.10–11: ... *sustinebunt legentium oculi*.

<sup>49</sup> At least 15 members in each of the four *quattuor amplissima collegia*, twelve each of Arvales, *Salii Palatini*, and *Collini*, 15 in each of the two or three coexisting *sodalitates* for deified emperors; to be subtracted from the total are cumulations, especially in the circle of the imperial family.

skills, most importantly the *haruspices*, active in public ritual and concerned with the construal of political events of great import, were commonly not senators.

Renunciation of external means of differentiation went along with possibilities of a higher degree of internal differentiation in the restricted context of the college, so to speak *in priuato*. Precedence in a procession, age at co-option, membership of the inner circle or circles: all offered opportunities of distinction. The major role given to luxury eating, and alternating invitations to members' private houses – the priests' celebrated inaugural banquets<sup>50</sup> – opened up a fruitful field of social and culinary competition. It must be said that the hierarchies that arose in this way were of a very temporary character. Whether the pontiffs or the augurs had precedence appears never to have been clarified definitively; their order of precedence in processions – and this is mere supposition – may have varied as much as the precedence of their names on inscriptions and – here judging by the example of the Ara Pacis-reliefs. Where definite criteria of rank existed, they remained largely without consequence. It was not seniority in office that determined who was *pontifex maximus*. The authority of the *augur maximus*, in fact the longest-serving member of his college, was not formalized, and annually alternating *magistri* and *promagistri* reigned in the remaining colleges, the latter functions, at least in the case of the *fratres Arvales*, being also assigned to newcomers.

The paradox with which I began leads me to some further observations. The visibility of priestly distinction was inversely proportional to the probability of simultaneously holding high magisterial posts. This applied not only to flamens, but also to the *salii*, who, normally at least, left the priesthood upon reaching high magisterial rank.<sup>51</sup> Differentiation by the *toga praetexta* was thus overlaid by a “meta-differentiation” of visibility and non-visibility that leads to new paradoxes: use of the magisterial *toga praetexta* as an identifier for priestly roles bore no significance as to whether an individual held or did not hold a magisterial position. In fact, for the *uicomagistri*, the most numerous group among the wearers of priestly *praetextae* in Rome, a magisterial position was out of the question. Conversely, for a non-priestly magistrate the shared costume represented a gain in authority by the association of religious competence.

To sum up: religion also had a presence within the leading political class; it was an irremovable element of strategy of its members to create a public, a commonwealth. Within that *political* elite, however, religious communication was not allowed autonomous authority vis-à-vis politically or socially based power; in the words of the younger Pliny, religion concerned “less important things”.

<sup>50</sup> See Rüpke 2017.

<sup>51</sup> The latter point is at least suggested by the succession lists of the end of the second century CE (*CIL* VI 1978–83). The contrary case, of a member of this priesthood remaining in position, is already remarked upon as out of the ordinary in Late Republican tradition (see Val. Max. 1.1.9; see above, n. 12).

Seen in this light, the Roman senatorial class was the very opposite of a theocracy. This was not to continue forever. As indicated before, by the fourth century, a splendid garment for the supreme pontiff had become a matter of course, and would eventually turn into a symbol of rejection.

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