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Author:               Rüpke, Jörg  
Title:                 "Different Colleges – Never Mind!?"  
  
Published in:        Priests and State in the Roman World  
                          Stuttgart: Steiner-Verlag  
  
Year:                 2011  
Pages:                25 - 38  
ISBN:                 978-3-515-09817-5

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# DIFFERENT COLLEGES – NEVER MIND!?

Jörg Rüpke

## 1. SACERDOTES PUBLICI

The sheer number of colleges, along with the uniformity, the differentiation and the homogenisation among Roman priesthoods are disconcerting for any approach to publicly organised religion in ancient Rome. Whereas the notion of *sacerdos* has received as much attention as the individual colleges have, the simultaneous presence of a complex structure of colleges, as well as the similarity of those colleges, have not attracted equal attention. The latter is the subject of the following analysis.

It is not necessary to start from scratch. In a small, but informative volume, J. Scheid has decoded the Roman taxonomy of ‘priest’ and ‘magistrate’, stressing the priest’s lack of political power (a priest had no *imperium*, no *auspicium* and no *potestas*) and the importance of the tasks which priests performed for the community at the same time.<sup>1</sup> Ancient texts focus on the *sacerdotes publici*, the ‘public priests’.<sup>2</sup> These were the ones, we must suppose, that were oriented towards the commonwealth, the ones who ensured the benevolence of the gods, and their favour for the city of Rome and her people – as the *sacerdotes publici* of other cities did for their own communities.<sup>3</sup> On account of their knowledge, Cicero stresses in his speech *De domo sua* (132), the public priests were consulted about problems concerning private religion too:

*... si quid tibi aut piandum aut instituendum fuisset religione domestica, tamen instituto ceterorum uetere <rem> ad pontificem detulisses; nouum delubrum cum in urbis clarissimo loco nefando quodam atque inaudito instituto inchoares, referendum ad sacerdotes publicos non putasti? at si collegium pontificum adhibendum non uidebatur, nemone horum tibi idoneus uisus est, qui aetate, honore, auctoritate antecellunt, cum quo dedicationem communicares?*

... if you had to expiate something or start a new religious practice in the realm of domestic religion, you would nevertheless have addressed yourself towards a pontiff, according to the old usage of the others; when you founded a new sanctuary at a very prominent place in the city in a ruthless and unheard of way, did not you not think that you should have related this to the public priests? And, if the college of the pontiffs did not seem to be the first choice, did not one of these seem fit for you to share in the dedication, people who precede you in terms of age, career and authority?

1 Scheid 2001, in particular 65-69; for the notion of priesthood in general see Rüpke 1996.

2 Cf. Rüpke 2007, 17-29, on the relationship between elite and public religion.

3 Cf. Livy 31.44.6 on Athenian priests.

It was not so easy for Cicero to describe religious authority. Traditions informed actions; the gods were the same for public and private use – Cicero’s *De legibus* would later deal with the same problem regarding private cults (2.19).<sup>4</sup> And just who were these public priests? By late Republican and Augustan times, the answer does not seem difficult. In his annalistic notices, Livy records the deaths of members of this group and lists *decemviri sacris faciundis*, pontiffs, augurs, and a *flamen Dialis* (26.23.7-8) as well as a *curio maximus* (41.21.8-9). Livy reports the foundation of the *tresviri epulonum* in 196 BC (33.42.1), but never lists any successors to this college in his priestly notices for the ensuing thirty years. This does not mean that *epulones* were not reckoned as public priests, but discriminations – on the part of Livy or, more probably, his sources – existed. This comes as no surprise. By the imperial period, some fifty different priests and colleges existed that might be reckoned as participating in *sacra publica*, in public cult. The different groups of subordinate personnel, as well as slaves who had different functions also increased in number.<sup>5</sup>

There is a widely held view that seems to instil order into this multitude of functions. According to this, the four colleges of the pontiffs, the augurs, the *decemviri* (later, the *quindecimviri*) and finally the *septemviri epulonum* came, by the Augustan period, to be viewed as the ‘four major colleges’; the *sodales Augustales*, a priesthood founded for the cult of Divus Augustus, came very close to these other four in status.<sup>6</sup> There is some truth to this view, but only some. The term *sacerdotum quattuor amplissima collegia* is a hapax, found only in Augustus’ *Res gestae*, in the report on the establishment of the *ludi Augustales*, the games of Augustus (*RG* 9, *Mon. anc. lat.* 2.18). The exact reference is given by Dio (53.1.5); Suetonius speaks only of ‘priests of the highest colleges’ (*Aug.* 100). *Amplissimus* is an impressive term, but it is not technical. The grouping was – like the term – only applicable in certain situations, even if it was of exemplary value for the Julio-Claudian dynasty: Latin inscriptions from different parts of the empire refer to Augustus, Tiberius and Nero as holding these four priesthoods.<sup>7</sup> However, Augustus refers in his *Res gestae* to his membership of other colleges; Tiberius was *sodalis Augustalis* and *magister* of the *fratres Aruales* by the year AD 15;<sup>8</sup> Claudius was a member of the *sodales Titii* and the *Augustales*, and Nero of the *Aruales*.

Differentiation is necessary for earlier periods too. The famous *lex Ogulnia* of 300 BC, which opened priestly colleges to the plebeians, dealt only with the augurs and the pontiffs.<sup>9</sup> The *lex Domitia* of 104 BC, which regulated the election of priests from amongst candidates nominated by the colleges, might have dealt with the *decemviri sacris faciundis*, but for the *epulones* there is no evidence whatso-

4 See Dyck 2004, 5-7 and 22-23 on the date of composition (around 51 BC, but published posthumously).

5 Rüpke 2007, 215-235 and 2008, 7-17.

6 E.g. Wissowa 1912, 483-484.

7 *CIL* 5.6416; 6.903, 10.8088 and 2.2062; 6.921.

8 Rüpke 2008, no. 1215.

9 Livy 10.6.3-8; see Rüpke 2005a, 1621-1623.

ever.<sup>10</sup> Sulla enlarged the colleges of augurs and pontiffs, and probably of the *decemviri* too. The latter must have been renamed the *quindecimviri* sometime between 98 and 76 BC.<sup>11</sup> The *terminus ante quem* for the enlargement of the *tresviri epulonum* to the *septemviri* is Caesar's dictatorship.

I do not claim that the decision to involve the four colleges in the games of Augustus came out of the blue. Yet Tiberius and the Senate involved the *sodales Augustales* instead of the *epulones* in the supplications and games for the sick Julia Augusta (Tac. *Ann.* 3.64). The choice of colleges was as fluid as the number of colleges involved. We do not know what the *cooptatio in omnia collegia*, the election into all the colleges of the princes of the Flavian and Trajanic-Antonine periods actually meant. It was neither restricted to the four great colleges, nor to the priesthoods held by Augustus, nor need it have even comprised all of the latter.<sup>12</sup> Inscriptional evidence gives proof of membership of the Arval Brethren as well as of the *sodales Augustales* – *collegium* is no clear term either.<sup>13</sup> Nor is *omnia* – can we really take this to mean *all*? And would a college with an emperor as a member not be an *amplissimum* one anyway? Cicero seems to have thought of the term as one that was loose as well as honorific in his praise of the public qualities of his addressee, the augur Ap. Claudius Pulcher in 50 BC.<sup>14</sup>

## 2. DIFFERENTIATION AND UNIFORMITY

The main interest in *hoi tessaroi hierois* (as the Greek text of the *Res gestae* phrases it) does not lie in the exact limits of prestige, but in the equalising of different colleges. What difference is there in the religious competence of priests who in turn perform the same sacral duties? The priesthoods must have been characterised by clear differences at the time of their inception. The standing committee for the Sibylline books originally consisted of two men, but it was enlarged to ten in around 367 BC, the traditional date for the passing of the *leges Sextiae Liciniae*.<sup>15</sup> The *lex Ogulnia* saw the size of the augural and pontifical colleges increased to nine; previously there had been four augurs and five or six pontiffs. Stories like those told about the augur Attus Navius<sup>16</sup> were not told about the

10 Rüpke 2005a, 1636.

11 *Ibid.*, 1640.

12 See Rüpke 2008, 58-59; less critically, Schumacher 1978.

13 Cf. Cicero's definition of the *Luperci* as a *sodalitas* in *Cael.* 26 with *CIL* 14.2105 (= *ILS* 2676): *A(ulus) Castricius Myrio / Talenti filius tr(ibunus) mil(itum) praef(ectus) eq(uitum) / et classis mag(ister) colleg(ii) / Lupercor(um) et Capitolinor(um) / et Mercurial(orum) et paga/nor(um) Auentin(i) XXVluir / [--7--]moni per plures / [--9--]i sortitionibus / [--8--]dis redemptis*, and 11.3205, where *Luperci* are associated with a *collegium*.

14 Cic. *Fam.* 3.10.9: *amplissimi sacerdoti collegium*; Rüpke 2008, no. 1227.

15 See Rüpke 2005a, 1620.

16 Cic. *Att.* 10.8.6, *Diu.* 1.31-32; Livy 1.36.3-6; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 3.70-72.3; Fest. 168.29-170.20L; see Beard 1989, 52-53, who contrasts the stories with augural routine.

pontiffs; the latter were given a famous ancestry by Numa,<sup>17</sup> who was more of an organiser than a sorcerer. The fetials, the dancing *Salii*, the Vestal Virgins, the *Luperci* and the *sodales Titii* performed very different ritual tasks. The foundation of the *epulones* in 196 BC followed this trend by creating a further priesthood for a very specific task.<sup>18</sup> Amongst such a multitude, the specific attention given to the permanent jurisdiction of the augurs and the pontiffs is understandable.

Differentiation according to ritual function was a fundamental trait. Alongside the groups so far mentioned, priests and priestesses of specific gods also existed; these were the so-called *flamines*. The traditional number of fifteen *flamines* cannot be verified prosopographically, but need not be doubted. From Caesar's deification onwards the number was enlarged by *flamines* and *flaminicae* of individual deified emperors or members of the *domus diuina*, the family of the emperor.<sup>19</sup> Further priesthoods are occasionally attested during the empire, the *sacerdotes bidentales* for example, or the priest of the deity of Rome, who also happened to be the well-known historiographer Appian.<sup>20</sup> Individual priests of Bona Dea, of Ceres or of Fortuna muliebris are already known from the Republic. For the moment, I leave aside all the priesthoods for Magna Mater, Isis and other publicly recognised cults. They were all classified and saw themselves as priests, *sacerdotes*, a term already used for the specialists in the cult of Bacchus in the famous *senatusconsultum de Bacchanalibus* of 186 BC.<sup>21</sup>

Differentiation according to function and the accumulation of priestly prestige is best demonstrated by the minor pontiffs and the trumpeters, obviously classified as priests by the second century BC and by the end of the first century respectively. By the end of the third and the beginning of the second century, the pontifical college employed a number of scribes (*scribae*) to whom even ritual tasks, for example those connected with the rites of the calendar, were entrusted. By the late Republic this group had gained the title and status of *pontifices minores*. These positions might usually have been filled by *equites*, but it must be noted that the personnel attached to them, the *kalatores*, shared the status of the *kalatores* of real pontiffs as well as of high *flamines*.<sup>22</sup> The *tubicines*, too, attained the status of public priests by the early empire at the latest. They were organised as a college and set up large dedications in the early empire.<sup>23</sup> Whole colleges were divided or multiplied. The differentiation between *Luperci Fabiani* and *Quinctiales* and *Iuliani* might have been short-lived, but from the time of Augustus on-

17 Only in a late source is Numa, the standard founder of the college, made a pontiff himself: Zosimus 4.36.

18 See Rüpke 1995, 323-8 on the political context of the foundation of the *tresviri epulonum*. They are not mentioned in Varro's list of priesthoods (*Ling.* 5.83-86).

19 For the development in republican and imperial times, see Vanggaard 1988.

20 Rüpke 2008, no. 683.

21 *CIL* 1<sup>2</sup>.581; see Pailler 1988 for a detailed study of the text and the event.

22 Rüpke 2008, 39-50.

23 Fest. 482.27-29L; see the clearly sacerdotal career of Q. Decius Saturninus (*CIL* 10.5393-4 = *ILS* 6286), Rüpke 2008, no. 1440.

wards, the two colleges of *Salii Palatini* and *Salii Collini* existed side by side, and both are still attested at the end of the Severan period.<sup>24</sup>

Functional differentiation might have built on the idea of specialised knowledge. Cicero's lamentation of the loss of knowledge among late republican augurs seems to support this hypothesis.<sup>25</sup> Facts speak against it however. Priestly records, from the Republic onwards, followed the form of protocols, ordered by date. They did not aim at a systematisation of their knowledge, at manuals for new (and old) members. The idea of the *libri sacerdotum* has been haunting the modern imagination since G. Wissowa's attempt to reconstruct what he believed to be the structure of the ancient literary tradition. This structure, however, was nothing more than the principles Varro used to order his 'Divine antiquities'.<sup>26</sup> Roman priests were not recruited on the basis of knowledge or intellectual qualities. An analysis of the prosopographical data, collected for all the priests of ancient Rome,<sup>27</sup> shows their intellectual propensities (as attested by any literary activity).

Table 1: Literary activities of Roman priests  
(as attested by activities such as the publication of books or speeches)

Bishops	58 %
Augurs	25 %
<i>pontifices maximi</i>	20 %
Pontiffs	20 %
<i>sodales Augustales</i>	15 %
<i>Aruales</i>	14 %
<i>epulones</i>	13 %
<i>quindecimviri s. f.</i>	10 %
<i>Luperci</i>	4 %
<i>Salii</i>	3 %
<i>Laurentes Lauinales</i>	0 %

The list shows a remarkable concentration amongst the senatorial priesthoods, with the percentage engaged in literary activity ranging between 10% and 25%. We are not surprised by the high percentage of the bishops, which is clearly distinct even from the figure for the supreme pontiffs. Nor are the low percentages for the equestrian priesthoods of the *Laurentes Lauinales* and the *Luperci* or of the *Salii* (a priesthood which was usually held from a young age) surprising. However, the specialists who consulted the Sibylline books could be expected to have

24 Until around AD 225 L. Virius Lupus Iulianus is attested as the last *Salius Collinus* (Rüpke 2008, no. 3542); *Palatini* are attested as late as the beginning of the fourth century (C. Vettius Cossinius Rufinus, no. 3470).

25 Cic. *Diu.* 1.89-90, 95.

26 Rüpke 2003.

27 Rüpke 2008.

had greater literary interests. When the great number of augurs is taken in account, the percentage of those fewer *quindecimviri* who engaged in such literary activity is statistically significant.

Augurs and pontiffs met monthly by the end of the Republic (if it is possible to generalise from the little evidence that there is).<sup>28</sup> But they did so probably with large numbers absent, given the administrative and military positions usually held by the members of these two colleges.<sup>29</sup> The frequency of such meetings would not have facilitated the accumulation of a larger body of knowledge. In combination with the lack of specialised literature, this would account rather well for the intense fluidity of what T. Mommsen, G. Wissowa and E. Pernice tried to fix as ‘sacral law’.

What were the criteria for differentiation among the members, and what were the principles of recruitment? I have already referred to the distinction between equestrian and senatorial priesthoods. Recruitment to the priesthoods, usually by cooptation, reflected the structure of Roman society, its mobility and the limits of the latter. According to our records, out of 93 *Laurentes Lauinales* (of different kinds) only one had held a senatorial priesthood (he was an *epulo*) by the beginning of the 190s AD. This was Ti. Claudius Claudianus, who was suffect consul around 199.<sup>30</sup> Within these classes prestige clearly differed, as the membership of the emperors and public performances show. Sometimes the data are surprising. Whereas fetial priests do not seem to have belonged to the highest echelons of the senatorial class, in the period between Tiberius and Antoninus Pius nine fetials are known to have gained more prestigious priesthoods in addition, and not one of these nine fetials was an emperor. In Flavian times, and for some time afterwards, some *epulones* were recruited from amongst people who already held another priesthood.

Analysis of the combinations of priesthoods held offers another glimpse into the processes of differentiation and recruitment. Around 26% of all priestly positions attested for ancient Rome were held in combination with other priestly positions. This is accounted for in some cases by the individual’s career, deacons becoming bishops for example, or *Laurentes Lauinales* taking up more specialised roles in the organisation of this fictitious polity. Normally a *pontifex maximus* had been a *pontifex* before – if we were to make an exception and classify this as a separate priesthood. Generally the rule that a person held only one priesthood at a time applied. It is almost certain that, to illustrate this rule with a hypothetical example, an anonymous augur and *pontifex*, attested on some mutilated inscription, would be an emperor. However, other combinations were more frequent. If we were to map the chances of a priesthood being held along with another, the list – restricted to a select group – would look like this:

28 See Cic. *Diu.* 1.90 (augurs on Nones); Val. Max. 8.11.2 (pontiffs on Ides?, but cf. Rüpke 1995, 225 n. 146 on Macrob. *Sat.* 3.13.10).

29 Rüpke 2005a, 1425.

30 Rüpke 2008. no. 1177.

Table 2: Chances of a priesthood being held alongside another

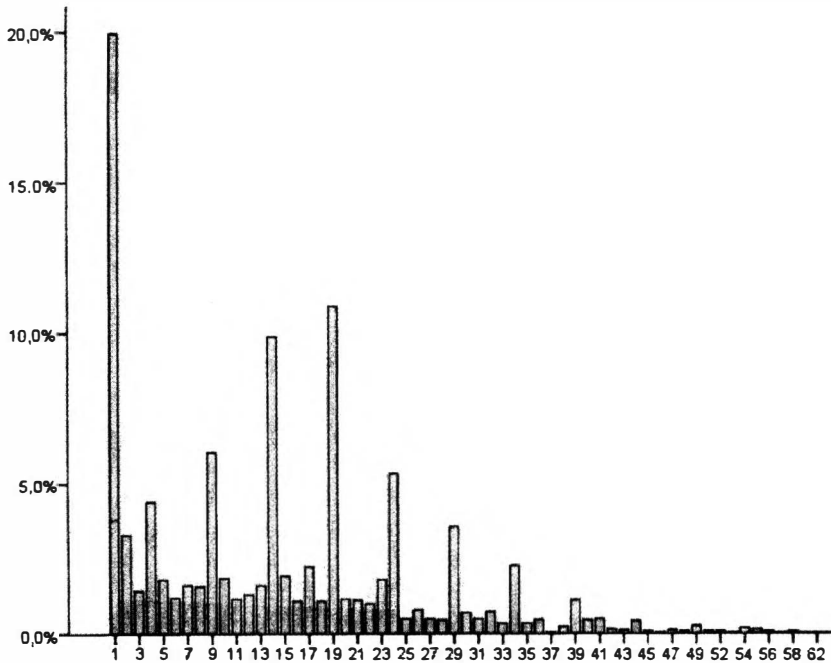
1st <i>flamen Augustalis</i> or <i>flamen diui Augusti</i>	(3.75)
2nd <i>sodales Augustales</i>	(1.83)
3rd <i>epulones</i> and <i>Aruales</i>	(1.55)
4th <i>XVviri</i>	(1.0)
5th Augurs	(0.89)
6th Pontiffs	(0.77)
7th <i>fetiales</i>	(0.48)
8th <i>Luperci</i>	(0.32)
9th <i>Laurentes Lauinales</i>	(0.28)

The absolute size of the values is without significance, as they only indicate a magnitude of difference. Clearly priests in those cults that were concerned with the imperial cult were recruited from a group already honoured by (and burdened with) earlier priesthoods. The rather inverse order of prestige seen in Table 2 of the four colleges (the pontiffs, the augurs, the *decemviri* and the *epulones*) may be partly accounted for by the proportional impact that the emperors' membership of these colleges had (they always held several), for the college of the *epulones* was smaller. As for the rest, this could reflect a tendency to try to compensate for the lesser prestige of certain priesthoods through the accumulation of offices.

The tiny differences in the chances of a priesthood being held alongside another shown so far attest to the basic unity of the senatorial priesthoods in terms of social status. This is corroborated by an analysis of the length of time an office was held. The basis for this is the reconstruction of the length of office-holding in my *Fasti sacerdotum*, which was based on the available evidence and on survival rates according to demographics usually employed for the ancient world. The analysis shows, leaving out some extremes and the large number of annual offices (many of them *uicomagistri*), a sort of Gaussian distribution, with a mean between 15 and 20 years (Table 3).<sup>31</sup>

31 The peaks for 4, 9, 14, 19, 24 and so on years are due to my practice of standardising hypothetical periods of office by having them start or end in years like AD 5, 10, 15 etc., thus clarifying the structure of the *fasti* for heuristic purposes.

Table 3



As a result, the mean value for lengths of office of augurs is 19.7 years for all cases, but 16.7 for those epochs safely attested as being violent, epochs in which premature death was more likely to have been recorded in the literary record. Thus, for heuristic reasons, my values tend to be slightly higher than real values,<sup>32</sup> but the principles of distortion would be the same for all the colleges. The mean lengths of office-holding for the relevant priesthoods are:

Table 4: Mean lengths of office-holding

<i>Vestales</i>	26.6 years
augurs	19.7
pontiffs	19.6
<i>presbyteroi</i>	19.2
<i>XVviri</i>	19.0
<i>Laurentes Lauinates</i>	18.7

32 Some mean values of the sure cases: pontiffs 14.3, *presbyteroi* 15, *epulones* 8.3, *XVviri* 11.3, *sodales Augustales* 12.7, *Vestales* 56 – the latter value is statistically unreliable given the small number of cases.

<i>aruales</i>	17.6
<i>epulones</i>	17
<i>sodales Augustales</i>	16.5
All priesthoods	14.3
<i>Salii</i>	9.5

What do we learn from these figures? First of all, the length of time an office was held directly reflects the age of cooptation, as there is no reason or evidence for postulating different life expectancies for different priesthoods (although I did not check the statistics for *haruspices* attached to the military). Generally, family status and a young age at the time of the first cooptation correlate judging from those cases that offer precise dates for entry into office. Thus more prestigious offices were held for longer; hence, as a first office, *epulones* were recruited later in life, and from less brilliant families. Priesthoods typically held second – *sodales* and *Aruales* – were conferred later in life, but only slightly so. Again, against these minor differences in age of cooptation, it must be stated that non-senatorial and non-public priesthoods followed the same pattern, as is shown by the values for the equestrian *Laurentes Lauinates* and the Christian *presbyteroi*. Vestals, said to have been recruited between the ages of six and ten, and the *Salii*, co-opted while their parents were still alive, have to be excluded from these calculations.

Any reflection on the diversity and homogeneity of priests must take into account the problem of public visibility. Some priests were indeed immediately recognisable. The *flamines* and, in particular, the *flamen Dialis* always wore their peculiar headwear, the *galerus* and the *apex*, while the Vestal Virgins lived in the Forum Romanum. Others, such as the nude *Luperci* or the dancing *Salii* with their short dress, could only be recognised on occasion. The majority of public priests, however, was not distinguishable from other magistrates or from one another. They all shared the purple-bordered *toga praetexta*. In order to distinguish between the priests of the major colleges on the reliefs on the *Ara Pacis* one has to refer to the different objects that are carried by their servants, the *camilli*.<sup>33</sup> You need to know your Varro very well in order to sort out priestly actors and magistrates in public rituals. As for the general populace, the members of a uniformly clad elite performed roles which were hardly distinguishable for the common man and woman. We have to wait for the fourth century AD to see crowns or specific garments as the distinguishing marks of public Roman priests. The *corona spicea* of the Arvals was visible on some portrait busts, but only those, so far as we know, that were displayed in the grove of those priests. In the commentaries, for example the very extensive formulations of AD 87 (*AA* 85 Scheid), it is quite clear that these crowns were only worn in the grove outside Rome. Literary texts, too, were not always interested in naming specific priesthoods, but refer to *sacerdotia* only, and thus cause difficult prosopographical problems.<sup>34</sup> In contrast to

33 Rüpke 2005b.

34 E.g. Suet. *Vesp.* 4.2.

this, the members themselves were always explicit in the formulas which they employed in honorific or tomb inscriptions when it came to specifying the college of which they were a member. Internal *commentarii* and publicly displayed succession lists recorded individual membership. Pliny the Younger, who campaigned for a long time for a position among the *epulones*, immediately drew attention to the earlier members and intellectual bonds of the college of the augurs when he was co-opted to it.

### 3. PRIESTS, STATE AND SOCIETY

The findings presented so far show a complex mix of contingent developments and sometimes discrepant tendencies. In a final attempt at generalisation and explanation of the Roman mixture of homogenisation and differentiation, I shall try to restrict myself to just five factors.

1) The development of the Roman priesthoods followed a specific *economy of prestige*. On the one hand, a considerable number of priesthoods was dominated by men from senatorial families and from the highly mobile equestrian elite. For the year AD 101 we can name around seventy-five different senators who had priestly roles; the actual numbers would have been about double that. Many politically important figures could be met during priestly banquets.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, many members of the political elite could not be found amongst the priests. Priestly positions were scarce, and limits on numbers – though not always known – were carefully observed. Only very occasionally were new positions created: for three *epulones* in 196 BC, for sixteen instead of fifteen pontiffs in 47 BC, and for twenty-one new *sodales Augustales* – many of whom were drawn from the ranks of existing priests – in AD 15. The college of the Arvals, which even possessed its own bath in the third century AD, never expanded beyond twelve *ordinary* members, although occasionally dynastic developments had to be comforted by super-numerary – and hence temporary – positions in the *sodalitates*. For the large group of free citizens, a thousand positions for *uicomagistri* – which was an annual office, so this amounted to, say, some 20,000 positions within a single generation – were created sometime around 7 BC.<sup>36</sup>

2) Since priesthoods were subject to a common classification and the powerful institutional model of the college (*collegium*), a process of *institutional isomorphism* is clearly recognisable. Annually changing *magistri* and *promagistri*, who were usually recruited from the younger members, internal ordering by seniority in office, that is the date of entrance into the college,<sup>37</sup> cooptation (whatever the actual procedure involved), regular meetings in private rather than public space for the purposes of dining and discussion indicated that many priesthoods

35 Rüpke 1998b.

36 See Rüpke 2005a, 1501-1516.

37 This holds true even for Christian clerics by the end of the fifth century AD: Glock 2002.

conformed in appearance and in function to the clubs of ordinary people.<sup>38</sup> Organisational features were similar. We can prove the existence of *kalatores* for pontiffs, augurs, *quindecimviri*, *epulones*, several *sodalitates* for the cults of divine emperors and for the *fratres Aruales*. *Viatores*, that is heralds, are attested for the augurs, *epulones*, *quindecimviri* and the *sodales Augustales*.<sup>39</sup> Public slaves (*serui publici*) who were charged with the keeping of the books are probably attested for the augurs, *quindecimviri* and the Arval Brethren. *Fictores*, literally ‘bakers’ – but they were drawn nonetheless from the higher ranks of society –, are known for the Vestal Virgins as well as for the pontiffs.<sup>40</sup> If any pragmatic function can be envisaged for their service to the Vestals in their *atrium Vestae*, could this function have been the same for the pontiffs in their urban and suburban villas? It is precisely the similarity of the colleges’ organisation that makes it impossible to identify the priesthoods referred to in some of the major inscriptions. Which college, for instance, met in the temple of Iuppiter Propugnator?<sup>41</sup> Institutional isomorphism was not confined, however, to the *sacerdotes publici*. The characteristics of collegial organisation rather quickly changed the priestly apparatus of the cult of Iuppiter Dolichenus, as can be seen from the series of inscriptions from the Aventine which date to around the turn of the second to the third century AD. Specific priestly roles were replaced by a club organisation.<sup>42</sup> Similar developments can be supposed for Jewish and Christian priestly organisations.<sup>43</sup>

3) Organisational structures aside, the priestly colleges were *social clubs*, Rotary *avant la lettre*. With members drawn from the same social ranks, homogenised by the process of cooptation and by the avoidance of the simultaneous presence of close relatives – a rule not strictly, but in general adhered to –, the internal hierarchy was extremely flat and frequently conflicted with other principles of seniority. Priestly seniority might fly in the face of a consulship held a *decennium* earlier. Priestly colleges indulged in lavish meals. The documentation of their details – which, as it happens, makes up the longest fragment from the *commentarii pontificum* (Macrob. *Sat.* 3.13.10-12) – in the priestly records, and the exorbitant costs of inaugural meals as indicated by Seneca, point to serious internal competition, but one should not underrate the bond-building effect of such events and their outcome (if I may draw attention to Cicero’s diarrhoea of several days). The limited size of the colleges facilitated close interaction and created a private setting for such events; only the minor Salian priests dined in public locations. The iconography of the meal of the *septem sacerdotes* found in fourth century catacombs attests to the enduring popularity of these practices. It is undeniable that the lifelong financing of certain ritual activities – as usual, public funding in the form of plots of land that were to be rented out, if it existed at all, would have only provided for the basics – was not made easier by the internal obligations

38 See Rüpke 2005a, 1419-1440.

39 *Ibid.*, 1523.

40 *CIL* 6.1074, 2134-2137, 32413-32419; *pontificum*: 5.3352; 6.2125, 10247.

41 *CIL* 6.2009; cf. Rüpke 2008, 9.

42 Rüpke 2008, 51-56.

43 See Rüpke 2007, 242-243.

which fell upon the members to fund their own dining. Financially as well as socially, this private space – which the emperor hardly ever entered, even if he was a member – should not be underrated.

Taking up the conclusion of A. Cameron, namely that by the end of the fourth century pagan activities lay with the traditional rather than ‘oriental’ priesthoods,<sup>44</sup> I should claim that it was the social coherence of these circles of traditional priesthoods that might account for their survival until the end of the fourth century. The stance taken by the pontiffs vis-à-vis the emperors, indicated by the usage of ‘PM’, abbreviating *pontifex maximus* rather than *promagister*, in inscriptions to refer to the internal head of the college,<sup>45</sup> provides additional evidence for this.

4) The *large diffusion of religious authority* within the Roman political elite was one of the hallmarks of the Republican political system. Religious engagement was part of a general, pervading orientation of the aristocracy towards the commonwealth which did not entail the establishment of alternative centres of power. Such a structure would, however, have been difficult to control. Consequently several attempts were undertaken to create more centralised structures. The strengthening of the supreme pontiff by the introduction of elements of popular election during the third century BC was one of the measures taken. The emperor’s membership of multiple colleges rather than the possession of any heightened executive powers as *pontifex maximus* was the path chosen by the *Augusti*.

Other attempts proved abortive. The idea of reducing complexity by having the same people in both the *sodales Hadrianales* (some of whom were already *sodales Augustales*) and the *sodales Antoniniani* – an initiative taken by Marcus Aurelius<sup>46</sup> – just created another college which was soon independent. The creation of a complex *ordo sacerdotum domus Augustae* ensued, but left no permanent traces.<sup>47</sup> Aurelianus’ foundation of the *pontifices Solis* should be seen in the same context, but again this measure also just resulted in the creation of another college. Again, institutional isomorphism transcended the traditional priesthoods. If attempts to establish an overall hierarchy were made among the Roman synagogues, in the cult of Isis and among the priests of Mithras (*pater partum, ordo sacerdotum*),<sup>48</sup> they left no decisive marks on the history of these groups. Christianity was much more successful in creating a unified hierarchy for the city of Rome, as the Episcopalian system and the participation lists of fifth century urban synodes demonstrate.<sup>49</sup> They established a system of seniority that encompassed all the different *tituli* of the city. The price to be paid for this was permanent schisms and the opting out of monastic communities, which were ultimately just clubs on a new level.

44 Cameron 2011, 132-172.

45 *CIL* 6.32422 = *ILS* 4938.

46 Rüpke 2005a, 1589-1591.

47 *Ibid.*, 1591-1593. See e.g. *CIL* 6.2010 and 37163, perhaps later 6.86 and 2137.

48 For the *ordo* see e.g. *CIL* 6.47 and 2151.

49 Glock 2002.

5) The specific form of Roman religion as organised by priesthood is a result of the factors mentioned so far. Even so, *religion* itself must also be regarded as one of these factors. The Roman authorities fought religious organisations which were defined as foreign and criminal – starting so far as we know with the *Bacchantes* and later including diviners, sacrificers and heretics. And while the Roman authorities founded new colleges, they did not abolish old ones. Legislation concerned with priesthoods was extremely reluctant to try to regulate the area of the divine. Priesthoods could die out, in name or entirely – I am thinking of the disappearance of those *flamines* who were not dedicated to the cult of the emperors in the third century, as well as of the minor colleges in the fourth.<sup>50</sup> Religious orientations and the size of the aristocracy could change, bringing competition for prestige to the fore.<sup>51</sup> The organisational differentiation of priests and magistrates, religion and the State was the prerequisite for the use of religion for the purposes of the State. At the same time, this was the basis for a growing differentiation amongst the priesthoods. It was the independence of religion that led to the growth of the priesthoods during the empire, and to life-styles and organisations built solely on religion.<sup>52</sup> For a society for which religion became ever more important, religious differences grew more important. In the end, the different colleges mattered greatly.

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50 For details, see Rüpke 2008, 46-68.

51 Thus Cameron 2011, 135.

52 Thus argued by Rüpke 2009.

- Rüpke 2005a: id., *Fasti sacerdotum. Prosopographie der stadtrömischen Priesterschaften römischer, griechischer, orientalischer und jüdisch-christlicher Kulte bis 499 n. Chr.*, three volumes, Stuttgart 2005.
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