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978-0-521-85158-9 — Roman Religion and the Cult of Diana at Aricia
C. M. C. Green
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ROMAN RELIGION AND THE CULT OF DIANA AT ARICIA

The sanctuary dedicated to Diana at Aricia flourished from the Bronze Age to the second century C.E. From its archaic beginnings in the wooded crater beside the lake known as the “mirror of Diana,” it grew into a grand Hellenistic-style complex that attracted crowds of pilgrims and the sick. Diana was also believed to confer power on leaders. This book examines the history of Diana’s cult and healing sanctuary, which remained a significant and wealthy religious center for more than a thousand years. It sheds new light on Diana herself, on the use of rational as well as ritual healing in the sanctuary, on the subtle distinctions between Latin religious sensibility and the more austere Roman practice, and on the interpenetration of cult and politics in Latin and Roman history.

C. M. C. Green is professor of classics at the University of Iowa. A scholar of Roman religion, she has contributed to the *American Journal of Philology*, *Arion*, *Classical Antiquity*, *Classical Philology*, *Latomus*, and *Phoenix*.

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For Peter

*Glad to have sat under
thunder and rain with you . . .*

Louis MacNeice, “Sunlight on the Garden”

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PREFACE

This book had its beginnings in the stacks of the library of the American Academy at Rome in 1992, where late on a warm summer afternoon I was working on Lucan and came across an old school text of book 1. There, in one of those spare but informative footnotes so characteristic of the genre, was an explanation of 1.446 with reference to Diana the huntress and the *rex nemorensis*. I had long ago read the abridged version of Frazer's *Golden Bough*, as well as parts of the full text, and I was, at that very moment, not more than a dozen or so miles from the sanctuary. At the time I was mulling over the idea that Lucan, in imitation of the Greek tragedians, was using ritual to shape his narrative. Here, it seemed to me, I had unearthed a small but important test case. I began the pursuit of a glimmer of an idea, arising from the initial supposition that the ritual of the hunting goddess' priest lay behind the image of Lucan's enraged Caesar pursuing the aging and failing Pompey from Brundisium to Pharsalus: Caesar the young hunter on the heels of his weakening prey, the vigorous challenger closing in on the ailing priest-king.

In the next year, as I began my first effort to analyze Lucan's use of the ghastly priest, the "slayer/who shall himself be slain," I ran into one of those academic walls that had stopped better and more experienced scholars. If I had not had a leave shortly after that, it probably would have stopped me as well. According to the best authorities on Roman religion and culture, I learned, Diana was not a hunting goddess; the Romans did not hunt; there was no hunting ritual until it was brought in from Greece. Diana represented a rather tenuous native Roman tradition that could be glimpsed vanishing under the wholesale

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importation of Greek religion around the third century B.C.E. The effect of this importation was to render a nymphlike women's deity into a huntress, who was thus given a face, graced with a myth, and provided with a complex religious tradition under which she was then worshipped, although none of it actually belonged to her.¹ The ghastly priest, always acknowledged as belonging undeniably to Diana, was left as one of those cultural oddities that persuade scholars that the Romans were wise to adopt Greek ideas as soon as possible.

This made no sense to me, in either cultural or religious terms, and, perhaps foolishly, I was determined to work out how it was that a culture that did not hunt (and, according to the same authorities, despised hunting) would change a successful local women's goddess into a huntress. I could see the nymphlike Diana in the role of, say, Syracuse's Arethusa, that is, as the beautiful symbol of a vital city. Why then was a successful nymph made over into a huntress? I wondered. Or, if she had not been successful as a watergoddess, it seemed important to ask why it was that she then became successful in a form that had no meaning for the people who were worshipping her. What I hoped to say about Lucan's reference to Diana's cult depended on some understanding of what the Romans around him thought about it. As I worked on, I discovered – again to my surprise – that very few scholars of Roman literature had any idea that the Romans did not hunt and were surprised to learn it. When I consulted anthropologists, I found – after they stopped chuckling – that I had neither diminished my discipline's reputation for fustiness nor gotten much help for my trouble. An archaic culture that did not hunt, I was told, simply had no parallel and no model. Yet historians of Roman culture and religion took it as read that Diana, in her *Ur* form, was not a huntress and thus were firmly committed to Wissowa's exposition of the cult, with Diana as a women's goddess, in his seminal 1912 study, *Religion und Kultus der Römer*.

Religion und Kultus remains a central text for the study of Roman religion and will not be replaced any time soon. It is essential that I state at the outset the enormous debt that I, like all other scholars of Roman

¹ A summary of Wissowa's discussion of Diana 1912, 247–50, and Orth's article in *RE* on hunting (cf. Green 1996a).

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religion, owe to this great polymath, whose like we will not see again. Wissowa's stature is such that Bernard of Chartres' famous apothegm comes to mind: we are dwarves standing on the shoulders of giants. It is useful, though, to remember the conclusion of the maxim: we stand on the shoulders of giants to see better and farther than they.² Wissowa is a giant of classical scholarship and I am looking toward the horizon from my perch on his right shoulder, trying not to fall off. The range and the depth of his knowledge of the ancient world, of ancient literature and culture, are matched only by the astonishing orderliness and clarity of his exposition. Only those things that have been discovered since he wrote will not be found in his work: everything else is there.

That is, however, a limitation of increasing importance. In the last century, and particularly during the last thirty years, archaeology has produced a radically different picture of early Rome and Latium from that available to an early-twentieth-century scholar. Because Wissowa is justly authoritative and will continue to be so, it is imperative that we should be prepared to rethink his arguments in the light of new evidence of material culture and in response to new theoretical analyses of Roman culture, history, and religion.

On the other hand, there is Frazer and the *Golden Bough*. It is now almost a reflex to disparage Frazer's work. Recently there have appeared a few brave souls prepared to argue that this disparagement has been both unfair and unscholarly (cf. Ackerman, 2–3; Dyson, 18–19). In Frazer we once more meet the extraordinary range and command of the evidence that are characteristic of the great nineteenth-century scholars, but Frazer applied his mastery of the material in a quite different way. He was distinctly original (always an unsettling quality in a classical scholar), developing the field of anthropology as he wrote and encouraging the first generation of field anthropologists in their work. But even as he was still writing the last volume of the *Golden Bough*, the unfavorable academic view of him was hardening (Ackerman, 1–2, 266–70). Frazer became “a kind of evil spirit, whose influence must be kept away by constant ritual utterances: in fact by what is sometimes

² Robert K. Merton, *On the Shoulders of Giants: A Shandean Postscript: The Post-Italianate Edition*, Chicago 1993, holds a jester's mirror to the image of academic solemnity and reveals much more than the extended genealogy of this favored quotation.

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called apotropaic magic” (Griffin 1998, 44). Nevertheless, like Wissowa, Frazer had a command of ancient literature and culture that we can only envy. Here is another giant of scholarship, and I am again keeping my precarious foothold on his left shoulder. As will be clear, especially in Chapters 7–9, I am no more persuaded by Frazer’s interpretations of the cult than I was by Wissowa’s; yet this does not in any way vitiate Frazer’s great virtues, which, it seems to me, were these: he thought the Latin writers might know more about their religion than we do, and he had an overriding sense that religion – even Roman religion – had its own internal logic, and that trying to understand that logic was a necessary part of the study of ancient religion as a cultural phenomenon.

Between them, Frazer and Wissowa brought the study of Diana to a halt, Frazer because he inspired too many doubts, Wissowa because he inspired none. Diana was severed from the principal function recognized by those who worshipped her. The pieces of her cult that were left – the *rex*, Virbius/Hippolytus, Orestes, Egeria – were rendered down into a clutch of stray religious footnotes. The idea that the Romans had no real religion, just bits of cult practice and job lots of deities borrowed from here and there, was thus validated, and the strangeness of it all was regarded as “normal” for Roman religion. The notion that the Romans did not hunt was a projection onto the Romans of mid-nineteenth-century social prejudice and the result of misdefinition. “Hunting” was taken as referring not to the general pursuit of animals with the intent of capturing them but rather to the aristocratic pursuit of specific animals on the back of a horse. Furthermore, because the Romans had expelled their kings and established a republic, they were not aristocrats, and because they pursued animals on foot, they did not “hunt” (Johannes, 49, 52, and especially 61; Green 1996a, 223–30). The prejudice of the argument was easy to establish; to demonstrate that the conclusion was false was more difficult. I was pitched, willy-nilly, into a field I then knew little about, that of Roman and Latin archaeology (Green 1996a, 228–35).

It was a harbinger of what was to come. In completing this work I have been forced to give (to borrow Ackerman’s phrase, 3) more hostages to fortune than is comfortable. That the Romans hunted (as did the Latins) I finally demonstrated – at least to my own

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satisfaction – and the justification for doubting that Diana was a hunting goddess seemed to be removed. Despite that, it was going to prove a great deal more difficult than I ever imagined to reestablish her as the goddess the Latin writers actually described: a moon goddess, a huntress, a goddess of kings and leaders. Archaeology, art history, anthropology, ancient medicine, law, and Roman religion itself are only the most important disciplines into whose territory I, a stranger and exile from my native field of Roman literature, was compelled to travel. Can Strife, I ask myself, be far away?

As I taught myself as much as I could in each of these areas (and knowing it would never be enough), I found, to the immeasurable benefit of this work, that scholars in every one of the fields could be amazingly generous with their time and help and wonderfully encouraging of what must sometimes have seemed annoying if mild lunacy on my part. Specialists will no doubt quickly recognize where my argument is insufficient, unnuanced, unfamiliar with certain material, or unaware of new trends. It is my hope that any failings of mine will stimulate them to consider the study of Diana themselves and to respond by developing what I have only been able to begin; to fill out what I have been able only to sketch. The study of Roman religion is an intensely interdisciplinary field, and it cannot advance without the work of experts in all these areas of scholarship. I have only been able to point the way, and even that only with their welcome assistance.

Although I originally intended to write a general study of Diana as an Italic goddess and to include her cults on the Aventine and at Tifata, this work ended by being necessarily focused on Diana Nemorensis, the goddess of the grove sanctuary just outside Aricia. The other Dianas have not been neglected entirely, particularly Diana Aventinensis (Chapter 5), but the preponderance of archaeological and artifactual material comes from the sanctuary in the crater, and a substantial portion of our literary references, and certainly those that have most to tell us about cult and religion, belong to Diana Nemorensis. Linguistic evidence indicates that Diana was a very old Italic goddess, and historical evidence shows that she had a cult there certainly as far back as the sixth century B.C.E. The *rex nemorensis*, everyone agrees, indicates the cult is in fact far older than that. The archaeological evidence,

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although not as generous as one would have liked, certainly in no way contradicts these conclusions, and they are generally accepted. And then there is the site. This presents every characteristic of sacred space in Etrusco-Italic cultures. It soon became apparent to me that it was essential to begin with the place and the cult that could tell us the most about Diana, and that meant the sanctuary of Aricia.

Here a word must be said about terminology. The ancient Greek and Latin writers were not any more interested than Thoreau in the consistency that is the hobgoblin of little minds. The sanctuary is often called “Arician,” although generally *nemus*, “the grove” (to give it its most familiar translation) was enough to identify it. There is a question among scholars as to what *nemus* originally meant, and then as to what it meant in the later centuries of the sanctuary’s existence. Diana herself is Aricina or Nemorensis, but more often she is distinguished from other Dianas (when this is important) by some reference again to the *nemus*, or to one of the several figures – Virbius/Hippolytus, Egeria, Orestes, or the *rex* – that belonged to this cult and to no other. To be more rigorous or less inclusive than the ancients seemed to me to offer no advantage. My subject is Diana Nemorensis, and I have made every effort to identify the other Dianas – Aventinensis, Tifatina – clearly when they enter the discussion.

I generally use “grove” as a translation of *nemus*, not because “grove” (which, to me, means a cultivated area of trees) is more correct than, say “forest” or “wood,” but because through use it has become the English word that most readily calls up the idea of a sacred, wooded place particularly associated with Diana. In relation to the sanctuary, Latin authors used *nemus* evocatively, rather than descriptively. “Grove,” it seems to me, does the same in English.

Like the Romans, also, I sometimes use “Aricia” as a shorthand for the sanctuary that the Aricians controlled. I have found that I do this most often when the discussion has become distanced from the sanctuary (usually because it has become centered on Rome), and this was a way of reestablishing the location of the sanctuary on my mental map. Technically, it is incorrect – the sanctuary was outside the Arician *pomerium* – but it avoids unnecessary periphrasis. I ask my readers’ indulgence. Again, when other Diana sanctuaries enter the discussion, they are clearly identified.

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Then there is the question of “Roman religion.” Here I show myself inconsistent even in inconsistency. The cult of Diana Nemorensis belonged to Aricia, a Latin community just over the crater’s edge on the west. Originally, I thought, as most seem to, that I was studying what can, for convenience’s sake, be called “Roman religion.” Rome was Latin and Aricia was Latin, and eventually Aricians became Roman citizens. Insisting on a separate “Latin” terminology would be a quibble, it seemed – at the time. I have by now come emphatically to the opposite conclusion, and indeed regard the casual lumping of Latin cults together with Roman as if they were indistinguishable as one of the more significant ways we have misled ourselves in our attempts to understand what Roman religion *is*. The Latin cities were not just little Romes; Rome was not what any Latin city would have become if it could. They had and maintained their own particular identities, especially through religion. I came to this conclusion slowly. The argument for it is built chapter by chapter. The discussion of the sixth-century competition between Rome and Aricia over Diana required me to make a distinction very early, however, and I therefore identify Diana Nemorensis as a Latin deity, and a representative of Latin religion, throughout. When I speak of Roman religion, I mean the religious practices specific to the city of Rome. My primary focus is on the development of the cult in the Republican and Augustan period. As I make clear, a very particular relationship to Augustus inadvertently fixed the character of the cult in its late Republican form. Although it continued to flourish for two centuries after Augustus, and Diana’s popularity increased in that time, changes in the essential character and organization of the cult of Diana at Aricia no longer occurred. As a result, although imperial religion to some extent makes the entire Mediterranean part of “Roman” religion, this does not really impinge on the cult of Diana Nemorensis.

All translations are my own, throughout, unless otherwise noted.

This book, like Gaul, is divided into three parts. The first part, comprising six chapters, is about Diana herself and treats the evidence of her sanctuary and her representation in art and literature. I review the archaeological evidence for the sanctuary in Chapters 1–3 and place it in the cultural and historical context of Latium, the Latin cities, Rome of the kings and Republic, and the empire. Chapter 4 discusses

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how Diana of Aricia was seen, presenting the linguistic evidence for her identity as a moon goddess and the evidence of her statues and votives – which show her primarily as a huntress – from the earliest period through the empire. Because the sixth-century rivalry between Rome and Aricia over Diana constitutes critical evidence for what the Latins saw in her as a goddess before the archaeological evidence can become really helpful, Chapter 5 is devoted entirely to the examination of that historical rivalry. I then turn in Chapter 6 to a discussion of the ways in which Latin writers described Diana, first addressing the (supposed) problem of how to reconcile the moon goddess with the hunting goddess and then using the evidence for her other aspects – Trivia, Hecate, (Juno) Lucina, – as well as her epithets – Victrix, Opifer – to construct a complete portrait of this goddess.

The second part focuses on the priest and subordinate *numina* personal to this cult and examines the religious qualities they represented. Chapter 7 is devoted to explicating the ritual of the *rex nemorensis* and his significance vis-à-vis Diana. Orestes and the functions performed by fugitives and slaves in the cult are examined in Chapter 8. Virbius and Egeria are the subject of Chapter 9; they are the elusive, hidden *numina*, closely linked to Diana Nemorensis, but both with external *comparanda* that were widely accepted – there was a famous Egeria at Rome, and Virbius was identified with Hippolytus.

The third part seeks to establish Diana's relationship with her worshippers. Healing was practiced in the sanctuary, and Diana's healing function offers the best insight into the ways in which the cult interacted with individuals. It also demonstrates how the cult responded to developments in the external world on behalf of the people it served. In Chapter 10, I show that techniques used in the cult included rationalist, empirical medicine, and I examine how this accords with ancient ideas of religious healing. Chapter 11 focuses on the use of the *maniae* – pastry figures of deformed people – in healing, in circumstances in which rationalist medicine would not work. It also traces the connections between the *maniae*, humoral theories of rationalist medicine, and the cosmogonies of the south Italian philosopher-mystics, which lay behind so much medical thought.

Finally, I turn in Chapter 12 to a question that sanctuary healing particularly raises but which should be asked much more often about

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ancient cults in general. People came to the sanctuary, made vows, and asked for help. They asked, and hoped, to be healed. Setting aside the possibility that miracles were, or were thought to be, a regular occurrence there, I consider what it was that such petitioners found in the worship of Diana that brought them back, that persuaded so many of them to make dedications, offerings, and sacrifices that this became and remained one of the richest sanctuaries in Italy (App. *B.C.* 5.24). What did they expect from Diana, and how did she deliver it? How Diana fulfilled her suppliants' expectations leads to a review of the cult and an opportunity to look at the differences in the development and practice of religion between Aricia and Rome. Both came out of a common cultural and religious background, but the way they developed in fact reveals that the Aricians and Romans made distinct and independent choices, and points to a differing religious sensibility that each cultivated. In the end, it leads us to a more nuanced understanding of the nature of religion in Rome and Latium in the historical period.

Because the practice of ritual was the way in which the cult was experienced as a religious institution, I have regarded it as important to consider the nature of ritual in the cult and, where there is any evidence, to suggest or outline what it might have involved. Chapter 7 is particularly devoted to the ritual by which the *rex nemorensis* achieved his position. My arguments for considering Vergil an extremely reliable guide to that ritual are found in Chapters 2 and 7, but I must emphasize that, although the evidence is good, my reconstruction remains an informed speculation. The outline of a possible ritual using the *maniae*, the pastry figures of deformed people, in Chapter 11 is also speculative, although it, too, is based on good evidence, the ancient testimony for what the *maniae* were, and on the extensive work done by scholars in the anthropology of medicine on religious healing in premodern and modern societies. In dealing with ancient religion we must continually direct our course between the Scylla of projection and overinterpretation and the Charybdis of excluding the people and their expectations from our study. Diana and the sacred grove did not exist as entities independent of the people who came there and who came because they acknowledged it as a sacred place and wished to approach Diana as the goddess of that place. There is an old children's

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hand game with a rhyme, “here’s the church and here’s the steeple; open the doors and see all the people.” Unless we use every available scrap of evidence to understand the people whom the sanctuary served, we cannot begin to understand the religion practiced there. Informed speculation will always risk error, but it is no less an error to forget the living human beings whose religious experience made the sanctuary what it was.

A few years after I returned from Rome and was well into my pursuit of Diana the huntress, I mentioned to a colleague that I was proposing to teach a course on Roman religion. “I didn’t know they had any,” he said, not entirely in jest. If I have made that position, even as the basis for a joke, a little less tenable, if now it is possible to see a little better the nature and character of Roman and Latin religion, I will be satisfied.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In a work that has extended more than a decade, and into areas of scholarship at which I am a tyro, I have incurred numerous debts. I have been the recipient of much scholarly kindness; many people occupied with a multitude of projects of their own have taken time to read parts of this book at various stages; scholars who began as perfect strangers have answered queries with amazing generosity and have become friends in the process; and colleagues and friends alike have endured many hours of my sometimes obsessive concerns regarding Diana. It has been an experience that has taught me how fortunate I am to be in a profession so marked by high scholarly standards and warm personal concern. It is my pleasure here to express my gratitude to the people and institutions that have made this work possible.

First to be mentioned must be Beatrice Rehl, whose brisk and unflagging confidence has been such an important catalyst for the book from its earliest days. I am truly fortunate to have had her as my editor.

The University of Iowa Arts and Humanities Initiative funded my first trip to Nemi and the Dean's Scholarship, awarded to me by Dean Linda Maxson, funded further travel to examine that site and others, to visit museums in Rome, London and most particularly Nottingham where the Savile collection is kept at the Brewhouse Museum. This generous assistance from the university made everything else possible.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Standard abbreviations (from *LSJ* or the *OLD*, sometimes expanded) are used for ancient authors and works cited in the notes. Journal titles are written out in full in the bibliography.

- ANRW* *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, H. Temporini and W. Haase, eds. (1972–), Berlin and New York.
- BMC* *Coins of the Roman Republic in the British Museum*, London, 1910.
- CAH* *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd ed., various editors, Cambridge, 1961–.
- CIL* *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, various editors, Berlin, 1863–.
- KRS*² *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 2nd ed., G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, and M. Schofield, eds., Cambridge, 1983.
- IGRR* *Inscriptiones graecae ad res romanas pertinentes*, 3 vols., R. Cagnat et al., eds., Paris, 1906–27.
- ILLRP* *Inscriptiones latinae liberae rei publicae*, A. Degraffi, ed., 2 vols., Florence, 1963–5.
- ILS* *Inscriptiones latinae selectae*, H. Dessau, ed., 3 vols., Berlin, 1892–1916.
- LSJ* *A Greek-English Lexicon*, H. G. Liddell et al., eds., Oxford, 1996.
- LTUR* *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae*, 5 vols., E. M. Steinby, ed., Rome, 1992.
- Neue Pauly* *Der Neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike*, H. Cancik and H. Schneider, eds., Stuttgart, 1996–.