

Ludi Romani: holidays and holy days under the Republic

This lecture is designed to show how festival time was organised under the Republic, what kinds of events were provided for different kinds of festival days. It will also examine the expansion of festivals from the late C3rd onwards, and their physical setting in Republican Rome.

Origins, Fixed festivals and Extraordinary games.

For the Roman calendar see:

Beard, North and Price II nos. 3.1-3.3

The calendar, managed by the priests fixed feriae (58 days of festivals often to specific gods e.g. Saturnalia), days marked nefas meaning that business could not take place, and also the ludi.

The ludi magni probably had their origins in festivals vowed by generals that took place after a triumph (following a pompa leading from the Capitol to the Circus Maximus). These were presided over by the general and funded from booty.

Magistrates also vowed games to a deity (in the same way a temple might be vowed) in time of crisis, the games to be held after a fixed time if the god performed his side of the bargain. cf. the origin of ludi Apollinares in response to fear of plague in 212 BC during the Hannibalic War.

Regular games were presided over by magistrates. The ludi Plebei were run by plebeian aediles, others by curule aediles except the ludi Apollinares and the ludi Victoriae Sullae run by the urban praetor. Regular games (as opposed to those following triumphs) were funded by a tax on Latins and other allies. Throughout the second century BC aediles tried to outdo their predecessors to help their future election chances, while the senate tried to limit expense.

Different types of Games

Ludi Circenses

held in the Circuses. the Ludi Romani and the ludi Plebei were famous for this with the last 5 and 3 days respectively devoted to races.

Ludi Scaenici

on their origin cf. Livy History 7.2 (on handout) and Horace Epistles 2.1

- pantomime from mid-C4th BC
- comedy and tragedy from 240 BC and most from late C3rd/ early C2nd
 - comedies and tragedies by Livius Andronicus, Naevius
 - tragedies by Ennius, Pacuvius, Accius
 - comedies by Plautus and Terence
- also obscene dances at the Floralia.

Feasting too, and pageants were part of some games and parades, but NOT gladiatorial combats and beast hunts (during the Republic).

Games in the Middle Republic

The major regular ludi were:

- 4th -10th April **Ludi Megalenses** (a.k.a. Megalensia)
in honour of Magna Mater, whose cult was founded in
204 BC. Regular ludi instituted from 194 BC, famous
for performances of the comedies of Plautus and Terence
- 12th -19th April **Ludi Ceriales** (a.k.a. Cerialia)
at least from 202 BC
- 28th April - 3rd May **Ludi Florales** (a.k.a. Floralia)
from 173 BC
- 13th July **Ludi Apollinares**
began in 212 BC and institutionalised as an annual event
from 198 BC.
- 5th-19th September **Ludi Romani** (a.k.a. Ludi Magni)
in honour of Iuppiter Optimus Maximus (IOM).
Originated as games following triumphs.
Instituted ? 366 BC, originally a single day (13th) on the
anniversary of the founding of his temple on the Capitol
(see Dionysius' account in Beard, North, Price II 5.7a)
- 4th -17th November **Ludi Plebei**
from 216 BC or perhaps 220 BC.

For a full account of festivals throughout the year see Scullard, H. H. (1981) Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic (London), pp.51-212

Additions in the Late Republic

- 26th Oct. - 1st Nov. **Ludi Victoriae Sullae**
from 81 BC commemorating the battle of the Colline gate
- 20th -30th July **Ludi Victoriae Caesaris**
from 46 BC commemorating victory at Pharsalus
(in honour of Venus)

Proliferation

- The ludi Romani were the only games for a century and a half
- new games from late C3rd and early C2nd BC cf. Gruen E.S. (1992) Culture and National Identity at Rome
- uneven distribution throughout the year:
agricultural year? military year?....but the calendar had 355 days!
- new games & new gods: Magna Mater, Ceres, Apollo alongside IOM
- the politics of and economics of ritual proliferation

The City in Festival

- What was the city of Rome like during the festivals?
- What spaces were used and how?
- What facilities did the Republican city have for the Ludi?

Population

early C2nd c.250,000 -> Sulla c. 500,000 -> Augustus c. 1 million?

Public Buildings

temples, fora and other open spaces including the circus Maximus

Processions

the triumph

pompa of the ludi magni (see Dionysius 7.70-3, excerpted on handout)

Places of entertainment

CIRCUSES

Circus Maximus beneath the Palatine at least since the C4th BC
Circus Flaminius in the Campus Martius for the Ludi Plebei

THEATRES

S. Goldberg (1998) 'Plautus on the Palatine,' JRS 88, 1-20.

- no permanent theatre in Rome until Pompey's of 55 BC
- attempts to build stone ones in 179, 174 and 154 BC (begun but demolished) and perhaps 107/6 frustrated by the senate on ?moral or ?religious grounds.
- dramas were performed to just a few thousand spectators at a time in front of temples. E.g. some of Plautus' plays were performed in front of the temple of Mater Magna on the Palatine as part of the Ludi Megalenses. Spectators may have sat on the step. Elsewhere temporary seating was erected e.g. for plays at Ludi Apollinares in the Circus Maximus.

GLADIATORIAL GAMES

Welch, K. (1994) 'The Roman arena in late Republican Italy : a new interpretation', Journal of Roman Archaeology 7, 59-64

gladiatorial (funerary) games in forum, forum Boarium, circus Maximus etc. until the construction in 29 BC of the stone amphitheatre of T. Statilius Taurus, probably in the Campus Martius, and burnt down in AD 64.

>>>>>>>>> the capacity of all locales (except for the circus Maximus with a capacity of over 200,000) was small, and tickets were scarce. Great men distributed tickets to their clients. Women and men sat together in circus, but in theatre where senators had reserved seats.

Festivals and the City in the Republic

- signs of community
- signs of hierarchy
- signs of empire

Livy 7.2 (an account of **the origins of Roman drama** composed in the triumviral period but set in the year 366 BC) compare Horace Epistles II.1.139-214.

The pestilence lasted into the following year. The new consuls were C. Sulpicius Peticus and C. Licinius Stolo. Nothing worth mentioning took place, except that in order to secure the peace of the gods a lectisternium was instituted, the third since the foundation of the City. But the violence of the epidemic was not alleviated by any aid from either men or gods, and it is asserted that as men's minds were completely overcome by superstitious terrors they introduced, amongst other attempts to placate the wrath of heaven, scenic representations, a novelty to a nation of warriors who had hitherto only had the games of the Circus. They began, however, in a small way, as nearly everything does, and small as they were, they were borrowed from abroad. The players were sent for from Etruria; there were no words, no mimetic action; they danced to the measures of the flute and practised graceful movements in Tuscan fashion. Afterwards the young men began to imitate them, exercising their wit on each other in burlesque verses, and suiting their action to their words. This became an established diversion, and was kept up by frequent practice. The Tuscan word for an actor is istrion, and so the native performers were called histriones. These did not, as in former times, throw out rough extempore effusions like the Fescennine verse, but they chanted satirical verses quite metrically arranged and adapted to the notes of the flute, and these they accompanied with appropriate movements. Several years later Livius for the first time abandoned the loose satirical verses and ventured to compose a play with a coherent plot. Like all his contemporaries, he acted in his own plays, and it is said that when he had worn out his voice by repeated recalls he begged leave to place a second player in front of the flutist to sing the monologue while he did the acting, with all the more energy because his voice no longer embarrassed him. Then the practice commenced of the chanter following the movements of the actors, the dialogue alone being left to their voices. When, by adopting this method in the presentation of pieces, the old farce and loose jesting was given up and the play became a work of art, the young people left the regular acting to the professional players and began to improvise comic verses. These were subsequently known as exodia (after-pieces), and were mostly worked up into the "Atellane Plays." These farces were of Oscan origin, and were kept by the young men in their own hands; they would not allow them to be polluted by the regular actors. Hence it is a standing rule that those who take part in the Atellanae are not deprived of their civic standing, and serve in the army as being in no way connected with the regular acting. Amongst the things which have arisen from small beginnings, the origin of the stage ought to be put foremost, seeing that what was at first healthy and innocent has grown into a mad extravagance that even wealthy kingdoms can hardly support.