

THE ARVAL VOWS OF AD 101 AND 105 AND TRAJAN'S DACIAN WARS*

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The paramount importance of Trajan's Dacian Wars has left traces in, among other sources, the epigraphically recorded *Commentarii¹ fratrum Arvalium* for AD 101 and (much less well preserved) AD 105. These offer an interesting, and somehow neglected, insight into the nexus of ideas that gave the tone to the politico-religious side of the *Optimus Princeps'* two Dacian expeditions². From this point of view the Brethren's *vota* – made *pro salute (itu) et reditu et victoria* of the Emperor Trajan – appear highly instructive. Through the specific choice of (A) divinities invoked, of (B) the sacrifices promised to them and of (C) the (heortologically symbolic) *dies votorum/expeditionum*, they throw light on what we might refer to as an element be called a branch of the Roman war propaganda against Decebalus' kingdom.

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The comparative material, principally numismatic, has proved especially useful for the study of the topical aspects³ of the vows of the Trajanic *fratres Arvales*. For the reader's convenience, (A-B) will be summarized and modified here as follows⁴:

(I) *Iuppiter O(ptimus) M(aximus)* and *bos auratus*; (II) *[Iu]no Regina* and *bos aurata*; (III) *Minerva* and *bos auratus*; (IV) *Iovis Victor* and *bos aur(atus)*; (V) *Salus rei publicae p(opuli) R(omani) Quiritium* and *bos aurata*; (VI) *Mars Pater* and *taurus auratus*; (VII) *Mars Victor* and *taurus auratus*; (VIII) *Victoria* and *bos aurata*; (IX) *Fortuna Redux* and *bos aur(ata)*; (X) *Vesta Mater* and *bos aur(ata)*; (XI) *Neptunus Pater* and *bos aur(atus)*; (XII) *Hercules Victor* and (pl. nom.) *tauri aur(ati)*⁵.

The essence of my comments concerning (A) bears on (IV), (V), (IX), (X), (XI) and (XII).

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¹ The term *Acta fratrum Arvalium* is more popular but less correct (Scheid 1990, 56 f.).

² Scheid 1998, 177 ff. (62 a) and 187 (64 col. II).

³ For the traditional elements of such lists cf. e.g. *CIL III 10109*. Speidel 1965, 68 ff.

⁴ Only the list for AD 101 is quoted here as that for AD 105, no doubt quite similar originally, has been almost completely lost (with the partial exception of *[I] O. M.* at its beginning); the names of the twelve divinities of the 101 list and the texts of the tablet's notes concerning the sacrifices made to them are referred to as (I-XII).

Iovis Victor (IV). He figures i.a. on Trajan's gold coins of AD 103-111 (the type has not been recognized by most numismats) and attests the Emperor's ambition to celebrate the victories against Dacia within the Jovian cult⁶. The use of the archaic form *Iovis* was certainly meaningful⁷.

Salus rei publicae populi Romani Quiritium (V). Her topicality and cultural complexity (combining Roman and Oriental goddesses such as Salus, Bellona, Cybele, and Magna Mater) are well illustrated by *ILS* 3807 (found 'ad Forum Appii'): *Gemina Myrtis et Anicia Prisca pro salute imp. Caesaris Nervae Traiani Aug. Ger. Dac. ex imperio Bellonae s. p. f.* The Arvals'/Trajan's choice of the *dies expeditionis* in 101 (the March Hilaria, see infra, on [B-C]) should be connected with the syncretical goddess of (V)⁸.

Fortuna Redux (IX) seems to betray Trajan's preference for certain Augustan symbols (cf. e.g. the *Fasti Amit.* under Oct. 12 [19 BC]) over their Domitianic parallels (Fortuna Augusti), with autocratic connotations⁹. For a piece of analogous anti-Domitian polemic see the next paragraph.

Vesta Mater (X). In the context, she probably represents the patroness of Rome. That is why the Trajanic coinage (with the exception of the earliest issues) depicts her holding the Palladium¹⁰. It is worthy of note that the late Flavian (Domitian) – early Antonine (Nerva) coin reverses omit her; she does not appear in the Arval vows other than Trajanic, either. The contrast between Domitian and Trajan as to the propaganda role of Vesta deserves special emphasis¹¹.

Neptunus Pater (XI). It is generally believed now that No. XI should be taken to reflect nothing more than Trajan's itinerary in 101: „le voeu r Neptune montre qu'une partie du déplacement se fait par mer”¹². But the word *Pater* already shows that Neptune's role in 101 was much more important than that of the patron of sea passages; if the Brethren/the redactor of the *Commentarii* had had *Neptunus Redux* in mind (which they/he did not, and perhaps need not, considering the presence of *Fortuna Redux*, [IX]), they/he would have used the attribute *Redux*¹³. Now, *Neptunus Pater* had to help with the *classici*'s building works, logistics, and transport – all of which efforts were connected with water and are

⁵ On the plural form see below, text and nn. 24 ff. – *Auratus/aurata* means here „with gilded horns”. In the case of aggressive deities (Mars, Hercules) the list of sacrifices promises „bulls” (*taurus/tauri*); in other cases, „cows” (*bos aurata*) or „oxen” (*bos auratus*) are cited.

⁶ Gold coins: *BMC* III 69 no. 264. Jovian cult: Beaujeu 1955, 78 f. Jove's eagle decorates the relief of the Tabula Traiana (*ILug* 63, AD 100) among other monuments. Two Victories and dolphins are also sculptured there.

⁷ Cf. e.g. Vespasian's *Iovis Custos* (*BMC* II 49 nos. 276-278; 53 nos. 305-309).

⁸ Dušanić 2003, 90 ff.

⁹ Beaujeu 1955, 68 with n. 5.

¹⁰ *BMC* III p. 596 (Index III s. Vesta). Cf. Carl Koch, „Vesta”, *RE* VIII A (1958) 1717 ff. (esp. 1731 f. 1757 f. 1769 f.).

¹¹ Beaujeu 1955, 92 f.

¹² Cf. Scheid 1998, 183.

¹³ *Neptunus Redux* on the coins of Vespasian and Hadrian: *BMC* II 9 no. 54, 12 no. 68 f. 14 no. 80, 105 no. 502, 107 no. 506-8, and III 434 no. 1317 f.

well evidenced along the Danube, Save and even Rhine in the documentation of AD 101 and 105¹⁴. He perhaps assisted with the actual fighting as well. His fatherhood to which No. XI refers may have derived, precisely, from his connection with these large rivers during and because of the Dacian war(s)¹⁵, rivers of which one, the Danube, prominently figures on the imperial coins and reliefs (the Columna Traiana)¹⁶. A series of neglected data seems probative here, e.g. the remains of Neptune's early temple in the fort of Diana (the Iron Gates) and the dolphin reliefs of the Tabula Traiana itself¹⁷.

Hercules Victor (XII). In AD 101, Hercules appears for the first and last time in the extant *vota* of the Brethren, a notable fact. „Conformément á son rang de demi-dieu”, he holds the last place among the twelve divinities to whom the *vota* are addressed¹⁸. Though only a demi-god, he is, nonetheless, included in the list. He is even privileged in certain aspects of the Arval cult in 101 [and 105] respectively; this will be explained infra, under B (sacrifices) and C (the symbolic *dies expeditionis*). The relatively privileged status of Hercules in the ritual performed by Trajan's Arval collegium can be explained as a consequence of the Emperor's personal worship of that god, in peace and war alike. With good reason, some historians of our age speak of Trajan as a „Herculian” ruler and an impressive *imitator Herculis*¹⁹. For our purpose, it is to be stressed that Trajan celebrated his victories in the Dacian wars by i.a. instituting the *Ludi Herculei triumphales*²⁰; the word *Victor* in (XII) announced, in a way, Roman successes leading to those *ludi*. Additional evidence, literary, numismatic, epigraphic and archaeological, points in the same direction²¹.

There is a formally-epigraphic detail which sustains the conclusion that the last two items of (A) – *Neptunus Pater* (XI) and *Hercules Victor* (XII) – address the gods who played a specific political role in the Arval rituals of 101 and 105; in other words, they refer to gods who did not engage exclusively in those forms of the Arval cult that might be termed standard or timeless. Namely, the earlier and later lists of Arval *vota* that are structurally similar to ours clearly show that the names of divinities with special political tasks tend to be cited *at the end* of the lists, in a sort of topical as well as allusive *addenda*²². Such are e.g. *Providentia* in AD 66, [*Genius po*]puli Romani in AD 89, *Salus imp. Antonini*, [*Lar*] *Vialis*, *Genius Antonini Aug.*, *Iun(o) Iuliae* [*Aug.*] in AD 214²³.

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¹⁴ St. Weinstock, „Neptunus”, *RE* XVI (1935) 2514-2535; Strobel 1984, 105 f.; S. Dušanić, *Roman Navy and the Iron Gates* (in preparation).

¹⁵ Neptune as the father of the Danube: *ILS* 9268 (Vienna).

¹⁶ *BMC* III 84 f. nos. 395-399 (AD 103-111); Rossi 1971; *ILLug* 63 (A. and J. Šasel identify the „figura humana” with the Danuvius) etc.

¹⁷ Temple: the communication by Mrs. J. Kondić; dolphins: *ILLug* 63.

¹⁸ Scheid 1998, 183.

¹⁹ Beaujeu 1955, 86 f. (with refs. to narrative sources); 87 n. 2.

²⁰ Beaujeu 1955, 85, on *IGRR* I 446.

²¹ Beaujeu 1955, 84 ff. 432.

²² Cf. Scheid 1990, 346 ff.

²³ Scheid 1990, 347.

The sacrifices (B), whose promises accompany the list of theonyms (A), are more or less typical in the context. There is one line only on the tablet which requires comment on (B), textual as well as factual: the pl. abl.²⁴ *tauris aur(at)is* in the rubric of *Hercules Victor*, (XII). It contrasts the singular of all other (B) items. For that reason, the students of the document have tended to correct the *tauris aur(at)is* into a *taur<o> aur(ato)* and thus normalise the text²⁵. A minority of scholars are willing to retain the plural form, without citing their arguments²⁶. Actually, Hercules was likely to receive a more expensive sacrifice than the other gods during the Dacian Wars, thanks to his nature as the general leading armies in the service of mankind²⁷ and, especially, thanks to the strength of his connections with Trajan personally. Religious and political reasons alike suggested discrimination in the field of sacrificial rites. It was expected of the Emperor to offer very rich hostiae, in order to satisfy the people of Rome, always desirous of a distribution of meat²⁸. The sumptuous celebration of Trajan's triumph after the Second Dacian War provides an eloquent parallel, though of course we are ignorant of the exact number of animals promised through the vows of AD 101. But we should not doubt the fact itself that Trajan's Arvals treated Hercules in privileged ways. This circumstance touches upon another feature of the epigraphic record of the vows of AD 101 and 105 – the choice of the day-dates uniting the *votorum nuncupatio* and the opening of the Dacian expeditions themselves.

It was a widespread habit among ancient and medieval generals to synchronise the starting-dates of their wars with days which had symbolic meanings²⁹. Trajan was no exception in this, but the fact has not attracted much attention from modern scholars. To begin with an obvious example, „as a Greek source³⁰ explicitly tells us, the Emperor left Rome to go to the Parthian War on a day (October 27, 113) that was distinguished by clear dynastic and theological associations. It commemorated Trajan's adoption by Cocceius Nerva in AD 97, an adoption which the ideologists of the Principate saw as an expression of the divine will to make Trajan Jupiter's warrior vice-regent on earth, among other tasks. For, in AD 97, Nerva was thought of as nothing more and nothing less than an instrument in Jove's hands"³¹.

There are reasons to believe that the two Dacian Wars presented analogous occasions, when major religious festivals were selected for the *dies expeditionis*; these coincided

²⁴ The construction of the votive phrase demanded the ablative case; here and elsewhere in the summary of the list (B), I have replaced the original ablative by the nominative, for the sake of the reader's convenience.

²⁵ Scheid 1990, 183.

²⁶ W. Henzen, *CIL VI* 2074, line 70. Scheid refers to Krause, „Hostia”, *RE Supplb.V*(1931) 271.

²⁷ Dio Chrys. I 49 ff. 60 ff. 84; cf. Plin. *Paneg.* 14, 5. Lepper 1948, 196 with n. 2, 198; Rufus Fears 1977, 224 with n. 65.

²⁸ See e.g. *HA, Max. et Balb.* XI. 4-7; *Amm. Marc.* XXII. 12, 6.

²⁹ Dušanić 2003, 89 ff.

³⁰ *FGrHist* 156 F 36-7 comm., p. 575 (fr. Arrian's *Parthika*, fr. 55 Roos).

³¹ Dušanić 2003, 90 with n. 9.

with the *dies votorum* – i.e., in the case discussed here, the Arval Brethren's *dies*. The choice of such day-dates is variously instructive for the students of the Arval *commentarii*. In AD 101, it was March 25, the crucial point (the *Hilaria*) of the spring festival of Cybele – Magna Mater – Bellona³². We have already seen that *ILS* 3807 attests to the topicality of Bellona in the aftermath of the first Dacian War. From the point of view of Trajan's contemporaries, she was not solely a Roman deity of war. Her competences and nature tended to identify her with an aspect of Salus³³, who also figures in the list (A), under (IV), and recalls of course the *pro salute* formula repeated many times in the tablet. On the other hand, Salus connoted the idea of triumphal resurrection typical of the religion of Cybele – Magna Mater³⁴. It hardly needs to be stressed that such an idea of *triumphal resurrection (salvation)* was most appropriate to Trajan's war propaganda.

The problem of the day-date of the *vota/expeditio* of AD 105 is, first, a textual one. I have not seen the (damaged) stone but believe it possible to restore the dating formula³⁵. Two different proposals have usually been envisaged for the incompletely preserved numeral in the *Commentarii*: [(a.d.) III no]n(as) Iun(ias) (= June 3) and [pr(idie) no]n(as) Iun(ias) (= June 4)³⁶; W. Henzen³⁷ even thought of a third possibility, [(a.d.) IIII no]n(as) Iun(ias), i.e. June 2, or [no]n(is) Iun(iis), i.e. June 5³⁸. Other dates – earlier than June 2 and later than June 5 – are ruled out in view of the indications which are provided by the words [no]n. Iun., securely read. Now, the requirements of space – the length of the lacuna is four letter-places approximately – make the reader prefer June 4 to June 3. The date of the 4th June well accords with both the space considerations noted here and the testimony of another authoritative source, the *Fasti Ostienses*, which has been preserved complete: *pr. non. Iun. imp. Nerva Traianus Aug. in Moesia profectus*³⁹. It is obvious that the beginning of Trajan's *profectio* to the Moesian Danube occasioned the Arval vow, in the early June of AD 105, that ran [pro it]u et reditu [imp. C]aesa[ri]s Nervae Trai[ani]. This parallelism of the two documents supports the tentative restoration [pr(idie) no]n(as) Iun(ias) just quoted from the *Commentarii* of AD 105.

Indeed, the chronological data in the *Commentarii* and the *Fasti*, locc.citt., will have mutually corresponded; this may be postulated on the basis of (fragmentary) epigraphic

³² Herz 1975, 166 f. (note *CIL* II 5521 [Baetica]: *pro salute imperii*).

³³ For the sestertii of Faustina II „with the reverse legend *Matri Deum Salutari* and the corresponding type”, Dušanić 2003, 91 n.17.

³⁴ Dušanić 2003, 90 f. I should modify now my observations concerning the „high place (V) on the list” of AD 101 given to Salus; though the place of Salus may vary somewhat in comparable catalogues, it reflects, in principle, traditional hierarchy of divinities rather than the war propaganda of a moment.

³⁵ Note that the parallels of those chronological data in the *Commentarii* which are well preserved show that the stone-cutter(s) of the tablet(s) omitted the abbreviations *a.d.* and cited the words *pridie* and *nonas (nonis) Iunias (Iuniis)* in the form *pr. non. Iun.*

³⁶ See e.g. Scheid 1998, 187.

³⁷ *CIL* VI 2075, line 40 („June 2-5”).

³⁸ Cf. Smallwood 1966, 18 no.3 (reproducing Henzen's approximate date).

³⁹ *I.I.* XIII. 1, p.197 (XIX. 5-6); Vidman 1957, 18.

evidence – its material aspects, to be precise. To add a more eloquent fact, the correspondence is to be assumed with regard to the historical, political and religious considerations of wider relevance, too. For, the intimate connection of June 4 with Hercules is the most instructive trait of the vow, though one overlooked by modern readers of the *Commentarii*⁴⁰. That day was celebrated long into the imperial epoch as a *dies festus* of Hercules Magnus Custos⁴¹. Obviously, neither the Emperor nor the Arvals synchronised the *terminus a quo* of their anti-Dacian activities of 105 – the commencement of the expedition and the *nuncupatio* of the war *vota* respectively – with June 4 for so-called practical reasons. They chose June 4 because it had a symbolic meaning that evoked the complex figure of Hercules, Trajan's exemplum. Another notable feature of (A-B) implicating Hercules – the (relative) importance of the sacrifice promised to him through (XII) – implicitly attests to the same specific relationship between the Emperor, the most popular of his divine patrons, and the crises of the *Bella Dacica*. And, of course, the circumstance itself that Hercules figures in (A) – unlike all other lists of Arval vows that have come to us – clearly illustrates the extraordinary status he had in the happenings of AD 101 and, no doubt, of AD 105.

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A concluding remark. Owing to its complex nature and extraordinary length, the list of the Arval vows of AD 101 (coupled with that, now lost, of AD 105) has a unique place in the development of the genre. As noted in the introduction to the present paper, the original characteristics of the list reflect, in principle, the importance attributed by Roman official religion and Trajanic imperial propaganda to the phenomena of Dacian Wars. On the other hand, the message of the list was not restricted to the generalities of politico-religious themes. Its conscious choice of certain deities and divine attributes enabled the Brethren to allude to a variety of concrete political issues. The cases of Neptunus Pater (XI) and Hercules Victor (XII)⁴² are especially interesting from that point of view. Future research of (I-XII) – with focus on (IV-XII) – and, also, of the lists of vows of the other Emperors' Arvals, let us hope, will throw more light on the problems of that order. To end on a note concerning Hercules Magnus Custos in 105. His attribute *Custos* may have been meaningful in the context – a reference to the divine protector⁴³ of the Emperor who was going to war or else of the warring Roman people itself. This latter possibility might be connected with the (apparently) defensive character of Trajan's decision to wage the second *Bellum Dacicum*. Not without some justification, Trajan's propaganda blamed Decebalus' aggressive activities of 104-105 for the beginning of that far-reaching event⁴⁴.

⁴⁰ With the exception of Dušanić 2003, 92.

⁴¹ Dušanić 2003, 92, n. 26.

⁴² Cf. the role of Hercules' day-date in AD 105.

⁴³ Dušanić 2003, 92, n. 27.

⁴⁴ See e.g. Cass. Dio LXVIII. 10,3.

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