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Chapter 7. Sol-Luna symbolism and the *Carmen Saeculare* of Horace

Treating the [sol-luna] image as a single image type proved to be key to a better understanding of imperial imagery in which the emperor and empress are depicted jointly, the former wearing his radiate crown and the latter with a crescent moon. We have seen that such images did not depict the emperor as Sol and the empress as Luna, but transposed the symbolic meaning of the image type [sol-luna], *mutatis mutandis*, onto the imperial couple. Emperor and empress symbolize and guarantee the stability and continuity of Rome's empire, an interpretation helpfully confirmed by the coin legend of the *aureus* of AD 200 which we discussed near the end of the previous chapter.

Given the frequency with which the image type [sol-luna] occurred in Roman art, it deserves closer attention, and in this chapter we will focus in particular on attempting to establish when the image type [sol-luna] first emerged as a sign in its own right, one that became associated with the more abstract, cosmic concepts of eternity rather than with Sol and Luna directly. Of course the depiction of the sun and the moon as a pair is itself unremarkable. They are the two brightest celestial bodies, define day and night, determine our basic rhythms of life, and hence belong together to a degree that no other celestial bodies do. But this does not predicate the conventionalized meanings the pair attained in Roman art. Hence while we can expect to see the sun and moon as a pair in cultural and artistic traditions that stood at the cradle of Roman art, that does not necessarily mean that we can trace the source of the Roman Sol-Luna convention to such predecessors. Nonetheless, I believe that we can show that the image type [sol-luna] with its abstract meanings became a recognizable part of Roman culture no later than the mid first century BC and probably quite a bit earlier.

The depiction of the sun and moon as “framing” images, so typical of the way the image type [sol-luna] was deployed in Roman art, is something we already encounter in Athens on the East pediment of the Parthenon, the most important temple of the polis. In Rome too Sol and Luna adorned the most important temple as “framing” figures on the facade of the Capitoline temple of Jupiter. This was definitely the case after AD 86 (Domitian's restoration of the temple), and quite possibly long before that (cat. C1a.3; C3b1). We have no direct evidence for the earlier sculptural adornment of the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, but we do know that depicting Sol and Luna together already had a long tradition in Rome by Domitian's day, so that it would not have been remarkable if they had already been incorporated in the decoration of the temple much earlier. Some of the earliest coins minted by Rome (late third century BC) depict Sol on the obverse and Luna on the reverse and throughout the Republic that theme was repeated, albeit sporadically.¹

Of particular interest in this context, however, is a somewhat different coin type minted around 110 BC by Cn. Cornelius Sisenna with on the reverse Jupiter in a quadriga trampling an anguipede giant. Above the horses we find a crescent and a tiny radiate bust of Sol as minor symbols rather than the main figures (cat. L1.4). Sisenna's coin does not, of course, prove that Sol and Luna adorned the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in his day, but merely that the

¹ L1.1, 5-6, 9, 11.

combination was feasible. More interesting for us is the manner in which Sol (minute bust) and Luna (crescent) are depicted, seemingly not as deities but as cosmic symbols. If this coin had been minted in, say, the second century AD we would have no hesitation about its symbolic meanings, relating them to notions of *aeternitas*. But were such symbolic meanings already routinely associated with depictions of Sol and Luna in the late second century BC, when Sisenna minted this coin? Sisenna's coin is not an isolated outlier as far as apparently symbolic Sol-Luna imagery is concerned. To what degree the other Republican coins depicting Sol and Luna carried such symbolic connotations is impossible to say, but the fact that Luna is depicted a number of times as a crescent accompanied by stars gives them a decidedly cosmic flavour.² Furthermore we can point to a number of non-numismatic depictions of Sol and Luna dating the first century BC and the first century AD that also - potentially at least - can be read as symbolic image types [sol-luna]. Examples include a Greek funerary relief now in Vienna (C3c.3), two panels from Corinth (C1f.1), a terracotta roundel in Brindisi (C4.2), the Arch at Orange (C1e.1), the tympanum of a small shrine in Rome (Sol and Luna flanking Dea Caelestis; C1a.2), two early Jupiter-Giant pillars in Mainz (C2e.1-2), two early dolichenic triangles (C2d.1-2), and a securely dated votive relief to Nemesis in Zagreb (C2sbis.1). Busts of Sol and Luna also decorate the ependytes of Aphrodite of Aphrodisias in her canonical guise, which dates to the Julio-Claudian era or earlier. Examples of Sol and Luna depicted together, but without an overtly symbolic role, include a fresco from the Farnesina (E2.1), a lamp from Boscotrecase now in Berlin (G2a.1), two parts of a cingulum from Herculaneum (K2a.1), a limestone sphere in the museum at Chaeroneia (K9.8), and a number of intaglios (H7d.1-2, H11a.1,).

We cannot be sure that all these depictions are examples of the image type [sol-luna] as a sign denoting *aeternitas*, and they certainly do not prove that it was already part of the visual vocabulary of Romans as a fully-fledged sign at the time of Sisenna. There can be no doubt, however, that the sign [sol-luna] was fully developed by the mid first century AD at the very latest. For under Vespasian a coin image was introduced depicting the personification of *Aeternitas* bearing busts of Sol and Luna on her hands, and it was repeated by a number of his successors.³ This means that by Vespasian's reign the image-type [sol-luna] was already firmly established and it gives us a *terminus ante quem* for the integration of that image type into the Roman visual vocabulary as a symbol of *aeternitas*.

This *terminus ante quem* is useful, but does not help us much with regards to Sisenna's coin which was minted almost two centuries earlier. However, I believe that there is in fact another *terminus ante quem* for this type of Sol-Luna symbolism that predates Vespasian's *aeternitas*-coins by almost a century. That would bring us to within a century of the minting activity of Sisenna and increase the likelihood that cosmic Sol-Luna symbolism was an integral part of the Roman visual system by Sisenna's day. The case for this earlier *terminus ante quem* is rather more complex, however, and will occupy the bulk of this chapter.

The *Carmen Saeculare*

The argument for this earlier *terminus* hinges on the interpretation of Horace's *Carmen*

² L1.1, 6, 11.

³ L2.3, 6, 7, 10, 11, 14, 15.

Saeculare. the paeon-like ode he composed specifically for the *ludi saeculares* celebrated by Augustus in 17 BC. The text and translation of that hymn are as follows:

Phoebe silvarumque potens Diana,
lucidum caeli decus, o colendi
semper et culti, date quae precamur
tempore sacro,

quo Sibyllini monuere versus 5
virgines lectas puerosque castos
dis quibus septem placuere colles
dicere carmen.

alme Sol, curu nitido diem qui
promis et celas aliusque et idem 10
nascaris, possis nihil urbe Roma
visere maius.

rite maturos aperire partus
lenis, Ilithyia, tuere matres,
sive tu Lucina probas vocari 15
seu Genitalis:

diva, producas subolem patrumque
prosperes decreta super iugandis
feminis prolisque novae feraci
lege marita, 20

certus undenos deciens per annos
orbis ut cantus referatque ludos
ter die claro totiensque grata
nocte frequentis.

vosque, veraces cecinisse Parcae, 25
quod semel dictum est stabilisque rerum
terminus servet, bona iam peractis
iungite fata.

fertilis frugum pecorisque tellus
spicea donet Cererem corona; 30
nutriant fetus et aquae salubres
et Iovis aurae.

condito mitis placidusque telo
supplices audi pueros, Apollo;
siderum regina bicornis, audi, 35
Luna, puellas.

Roma si vestrum est opus Iliaeque
litus Etruscum tenuere turmae,
iussa pars mutare Lares et urbem
sospite cursu, 40

cui per ardentem sine fraude Troiam
castus Aeneas patriae superstes
liberum munivit iter, daturus
plura relictis:

di, probos mores docili iuventae, 45
di, senectuti placidae quietem,
Romulae genti date remque prolemque
et decus omne.

quaeque vos bubus veneratur albis
clarus Anchisae Venerisque sanguis 50
inpetret, bellante prior, iacentem
lenis in hostem.

iam mari terraque manus potentis
Medus Albanasque timet securis,
iam Scythae responsa petunt, superbi55
nuper, et Indi.

iam Fides et Pax et Honor Pudorque
priscus et neglecta redire Virtus
audet adparetque beata pleno
Copia cornu. 60

augur et fulgente decorus arcu
Phoebus acceptusque novem Camenis,
qui salutari levat arte fessos
corporis artus,

si Palatinas videt aequos aras 65
remque Romanam Latiumque felix
alterum in lustrum meliusque semper
prorogat aevom,

quaeque Aventinum tenet Algidumque,
quindecim Diana preces virorum 70
curat et votis puerorum amicas
adplicat auris:

haec Iovem sentire deosque cunctos
spem bonam certamque domum reporto
doctus et Phoebi chorus et Dianae 75
dicere laudes.

Phoebus and Dian, huntress fair,
Today and always magnified,
Bright lights of heaven, accord our prayer
This holy tide,
On which the Sibyl's volume wills
That youths and maidens without stain
To gods, who love the seven dear hills,
Should chant the strain!
Sun, that unchanged, yet ever new,
Lead'st out the day and bring'st it home,
May nought be present to thy view
More great than Rome!
Blest Ilithyia! be thou near
In travail to each Roman dame!
Lucina, Genitalis, hear,
Whate'er thy name!
O make our youth to live and grow!
The fathers' nuptial counsels speed,
Those laws that shall on Rome bestow
A plenteous seed!
So when a hundred years and ten
Bring round the cycle, game and song
Three days, three nights, shall charm again
The festal throng.
Ye too, ye Fates, whose righteous doom,
Declared but once, is sure as heaven,
Link on new blessings, yet to come,
To blessings given!
Let Earth, with grain and cattle rife,
Crown Ceres' brow with wreathen corn;
Soft winds, sweet waters, nurse to life
The newly born!
O lay thy shafts, Apollo, by!
Let suppliant youths obtain thine ear!

Thou Moon, fair "regent of the sky,"
Thy maidens hear!
If Rome is yours, if Troy's remains,
Safe by your conduct, sought and found
Another city, other fanes
On Tuscan ground,
For whom, 'mid fires and piles of slain,
AEneas made a broad highway,
Destined, pure heart, with greater gain.
Their loss to pay,
Grant to our sons unblemish'd ways;
Grant to our sires an age of peace;
Grant to our nation power and praise,
And large increase!
See, at your shrine, with victims white,
Prays Venus and Anchises' heir!
O prompt him still the foe to smite,
The fallen to spare!
Now Media dreads our Alban steel,
Our victories land and ocean o'er;
Scythia and Ind in suppliance kneel,
So proud before.
Faith, Honour, ancient Modesty,
And Peace, and Virtue, spite of scorn,
Come back to earth; and Plenty, see,
With teeming horn.
Augur and lord of silver bow,
Apollo, darling of the Nine,
Who heal'st our frame when languors slow
Have made it pine;
Lov'st thou thine own Palatial hill,
Prolong the glorious life of Rome
To other cycles, brightening still
Through time to come!
From Algidus and Aventine
List, goddess, to our grave Fifteen!
To praying youths thine ear incline,
Diana queen!
Thus Jove and all the gods agree!
So trusting, wend we home again,
Phoebus and Dian's singers we,
And this our strain.
(Translation J. Conington)

This ode was generally admired by Classicists until the late nineteenth century (insofar as Horace was admired at all),⁴ but after the discovery of an inscription, in September of 1890, recording in dry detail the sequence of events at the *ludi saeculares* for which it was written, scholars became more troubled by, and in some cases severely critical of, the apparent failure of the poem to deal adequately with its perceived subject matter.⁵ The tone and content of the subsequent scholarly debate is fascinating, and I shall touch on it here briefly, before turning to the *Carmen Saeculare* itself.

On the 9th of December, 1891, Theodor Mommsen, the grand old man of German Classical Studies (he had just turned 74) took the floor at the *Winckelmannsfest* of the Archaeological Society in Berlin to speak briefly about that remarkable recent discovery in Rome of an inscription that had been erected to commemorate the *Ludi Saeculares* of May 31st-June 3rd, 17 B.C. In great detail the inscription sets out the rituals of the *Ludi*, indicating which deities were honoured, with what words of prayer Augustus and Agrippa addressed them, what sacrifices they received, and when and where these ceremonies occurred.⁶ This new find thus offered a remarkable and intimate insight into the actual ritual proceedings of that major Augustan celebration to commemorate the passing of the old and the arrival of the new *Saeculum*.⁷

It is perhaps typical of Mommsen that he chose not to discuss any of this. His aim was a different and far grander one. It was nothing less than a frontal attack on the principate and the notion - wholly misguided, in Mommsen's view - that its poetry marked a golden age in Latin literature. In order to catch the flavour of the evening I quote here *in extenso* the characteristically bold strokes with which Mommsen set the scene:

Zwischen den ungezählten Jahresreihen, in welchen das Gemeinwesen der Stadt Rom zu dem mächtigen und großartigen, aber schmuck- und einigermaßen freudlosen Gebäude des römischen Imperium emporwuchs, und dem halben Jahrtausend, in dem die daraus entwickelte Monarchie in immer steigender Gedankenarmut und Hoffnungslosigkeit dem frischen Leben und dem vollen Streben allmählich abstarb, liegt das halbe Jahrhundert des Augustischen Regiments. Es soll diese kurze Epoche keineswegs als die Blütezeit der römischen Entwicklung bezeichnet werden; die Auffassung verstorbener Konrektoren, daß diese in Cicero und Livius, in Vergil und Horaz kulminiert, ist geschichtlich unhaltbar. Aber allerdings liegt jene Epoche an der Grenze der beiden großen Zeiträume, in welche die Geschichte der alten Kultur zerfällt, und wie sie mit gleichem Recht als das

⁴ Cf., e.g., Macleane 1856, 375;

⁵ The discussion of the *Carmen Saeculare* that follows is a revised version of an article I previously published in the *Festschrift* for my father (Hijmans 200x)

⁶ CIL VI, 32323; ILS II.1, 5050; cf. Beard, North & Price 1998, vol. 2, 5.7b (with references to additional fragments found more recently). I found my way to Mommsen through Fraenkel (1957, 367-369), of course, who also discusses his views at length, albeit with different emphasis.

⁷ On the *ludi saeculares* cf. Zosimus 2.5; for the Sibylline oracle prescribing the Augustan games: Phlegon *Macr.* 4 (FGH 257 F 27; cf. Hansen 1996); Zosimus 2.6. Cf. Pighi 1965; Schnegg-Köhler 2002

letztes Stadium der römischen Republik wie als das erste der römischen Monarchie gefaßt werden kann, nimmt sie auch teil an den Vorzügen beider.⁸

Thus did Mommsen dismiss the Augustan age. History (read: Mommsen) had shown that there was nothing golden about it either politically or artistically. It was merely as a pivotal period between Roman Glory and Decline that Mommsen acknowledged the Augustan age to have a degree of interest, partaking as it does of both.

The newly found *Acta* of the *Ludi Saeculares*, Mommsen proposed, could be used to further corroborate this judgement, shedding new light not just on the age, but also on one of its foremost poets.⁹ This, in particular, was his aim: to discuss the inscription as *Acta* “zu dem Säkulargedicht des Horaz”, rather than of the *Ludi* themselves. The inscription, he argued, afforded us a unique opportunity to see how well Horace had acquitted himself of the task to compose a suitable hymn for this momentous occasion. And Mommsen warned ‘daß dieses Gelingen ein bescheideneres gewesen ist, als wir vorher es uns vorgestellt haben.’ In ten short lines, he proceeded to tell his audience what a true poet facing this task would have written:

Die beiden Götterreihen, nach welchen diese Feier geordnet ist, die der überirdischen Gottheiten Jupiter, Juno und Apollon nebst der Schwester, die unterirdische der Mören, der Ilithyien und der Mutter Erde müßten für denjenigen Dichter, welcher es versteht, ‘der Gelegenheit ein Gedicht zu schaffen’, die rechten Schwingen sein, um Sinn und Folge sei es aus ihnen zu entwickeln, sei es in sie hineinzulegen, und den auf dem Boden der Erde zwischen dem Himmelsgewölbe und dem Schoße der Tiefe wandelnden Menschen den Herrlichkeit wie die Bedingtheit ihres Loses in zwiefacher Bildermacht vorzuführen.¹⁰

But, he concluded baldly: ‘Das hat Horaz nicht getan’.¹¹ Indeed, Mommsen argued that what Horace had written failed to meet even the basic requirements of the ritual for which it was composed. The *Acta* revealed the *Carmen Saeculare* to be so confused and obscure in its references to the rites actually performed that it hardly transcended the level of “naive Volkspoesie” and certainly fell far short of what one would expect of a court poet.¹²

It must surely rank as one of the great moments of positivism that Mommsen felt that he could proclaim confidently that he, Mommsen, now knew better than Horace what Horace should have written for the occasion.¹³ Let it be clear that this was not a matter of taste but of content, for

⁸ Mommsen 1905, 351-352.

⁹ Mommsen (1905, 352): “Heute und hier wird es (...) erlaubt sein auszuführen, inwiefern das neu gefundene Aktenstück ein Schlaglicht wirft, sowohl auf die Zeit, wie auf den Dichter”.

¹⁰ Mommsen 1905, 357.

¹¹ Mommsen 1905, 357.

¹² Mommsen 1905, 358

¹³ My discussion of Mommsen’s views on the *Carmen Saeculare* is inevitably one-sided as one cannot do them justice without taking into account his political convictions - he had been a delegate in the Prussian House of Representatives as well as the *Reichstag* - and in particular his pessimism about the course the German Empire was taking. His liberal views concerning the contemporary German *Kaiserreich* were both reflected in and fed by his views on Roman emperors, their rule, and imperial society in general. On Mommsen as politician cf. Demandt et al.

Mommsen took issue with *what* Horace said, not how he had said it. It clearly afforded him great delight to use a key inscription recording the very rites that, in effect, marked the close of the Republican age and inaugurated the Imperial one in order to “demonstrate” that even in poetry this was not the dawn of Virgilian *aurea saecula*, but a period in which even the most vaunted court poet was incapable of executing correctly the straightforward composition of a festive hymn.¹⁴

Mommsen’s criticism is all the more striking because Horace himself repeatedly displays significant pride in the *carmen* he had written and its role in the *ludi saeculares*:

spiritum Phoebus mihi, Phoebus artem
 carminis nomenque dedit poetae.
 virginum primae puerique claris
 patribus orti,

Deliae tutela deae, fugacis
 lyncas et cervos cohibentis arcu,
 Lesbium servate pedem meique
 pollicis ictum,

rite Latonae puerum canentes,
 rite crescentem face Noctilucam
 prosperam frugum celeremque pronos
 volvere mensis.

nupta iam dices, “ego dis amicum,
 saeculo festas referente luces,
 reddidi carmen docilis modorum
 vatis Horati”.
 (Hor., *c.* 4,6,29-44)¹⁵

2005.

¹⁴ Mommsen (1905, 357) is quite scathing in his criticism: ‘Die Gottheiten werden wohl alle genannt und gefeiert, aber in aufgelöster Folge, was der rechte Dichter sicher nicht getan hätte, und ohne die so naheliegende ideale Verknüpfung. (...) Geradezu fehlerhaft ist das Verhalten des Festgedichtes zu seiner unmittelbaren Aufgabe’.

¹⁵ 'Tis Phoebus, Phoebus gifts my tongue
 With minstrel art and minstrel fires:
 Come, noble youths and maidens sprung
 From noble sires,
 Blest in your Dian's guardian smile,
 Whose shafts the flying silvans stay,
 Come, foot the Lesbian measure, while
 The lyre I play:
 Sing of Latona's glorious boy,
 Sing of night's queen with crescent horn,

In fact, Horace never alludes directly to his own poetry with the exception of the *Carmen Saeculare*, and there can be no doubt that in his mind at least, it was one of his most important and successful compositions. That Horace's own estimation of his success was shared by his contemporaries appears to be confirmed by the inscription under discussion. For strikingly, of all those who actively contributed to the *ludi*, the only ones mentioned by name are the *XVviri sacris faciundis* (headed by Augustus and Agrippa), and Horace as the composer of the *carmen*.¹⁶ One assumes that if the poem had not met with approval from Augustus, it would not have figured so prominently in the *Acta*. Nor, one imagines, would Horace later have claimed that even the gods above and the shades below were pleased with it.¹⁷

Nonetheless, although Horace, Augustus, and the gods may have liked the poem, Theodor Mommsen did not, and it was Mommsen's opinion that held more sway with the next few generations of Classicists.¹⁸ This is not to say that Mommsen was solely responsible for what can only be described as Classicists' discomfort with the poem, but it is remarkable to note how marginal the interest in the *Carmen Saeculare* has been. Barchiesi comments on this "uneasiness" that has characterized modern studies of the hymn, attributing it to the fact that this is the only hymn to come down to us of which it is certain that it was publicly performed.¹⁹ This is certainly one aspect of the unease, but without attempting a detailed analysis of the *Forschungsgeschichte* of the *Carmen Saeculare*, I do wish to focus on one other element that strikes me as having been central to the debates around the *carmen*, namely its apparently skewed religious focus.

To many scholars, the problem has been that the poem appears to be dedicated to the wrong deities. Mommsen felt that the poem is utterly confused and obscure in its references to the rites performed and the deities revered at the *ludi*, and it is true that Apollo and Diana dominate it to an extent that was certainly not mirrored in the actual rites of the festival. To make matters worse, Horace obviously equates them with Sol and Luna. We have already seen that for

Who wings the fleeting months with joy,
And swells the corn.
And happy brides shall say, "'Twas mine,
When years the cyclic season brought,
To chant the festal hymn divine
By HORACE taught."
(Transl. J. Conington)

¹⁶ Line 149, CARMEN COMPOSUIT Q(uintus) HOR[AT]IVS FLACCVS, followed (lines 150-152) by the names of the *XVviri*. The inscription is fragmentary, of course, and others may have been mentioned in sections now lost.

¹⁷ Hor. *epist.* 2,1,138.

¹⁸ J. Vahlen countered Mommsen's views within the year, and garners high praise from Fraenkel (1957, 369-70), who closely follows him. However, the reception of Vahlen's study, or rather the lack thereof - as summarized by Fraenkel (1957, 369 n. 2) - is telling. To his examples I could add Gag  (1931), who mentions Vahlen in his first footnote but otherwise ignores him.

¹⁹ Barchiesi 2002, 107-108.

scholarship in the latter part of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century this was a real problem. Classicists did not like Sol, and minimized his importance to early (that is code for “genuine”) Roman religion. Syncretism likewise was frowned upon, for it adulterated that “genuine” religion. Approaching the *carmen* from these perspective, it was difficult enough for scholars to deal with the presence of Sol in the hymn. Wholly unacceptable was the apparent identification of Apollo with Sol. Such syncretism had no place in their perception of the Augustan age, as it was deemed to be characteristic of the late 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D.²⁰

It is against this background that we should understand such studies as that of Fontenrose (1939), in which he attempts to prove that in Latin literature of the 1st c. B.C. Apollo was never identified with Sol. Fontenrose naturally spends much time on the *Carmen Saeculare*, a “real problem” for this project, and for a range of different reasons manages to dismiss every apparent equation of Apollo with Sol in the hymn as misinterpretations, insisting that the two are treated as wholly separate deities by Horace throughout his oeuvre.²¹ Even then he is still left with the Sibylline oracle linked to the *ludi*, as reported by Phlegon, for it explicitly identifies Apollo with Helios in lines 16-18:

...καὶ Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων
ὄστε καὶ ἥλιος κικλήσκειται, ἴσα δεδέχθω
θύματα Λητοῖδης.

Fontenrose resolves this dilemma by rejecting an Augustan date for this oracle and suggesting that it was likely invented in the 2nd c. AD, “the time of Alexander of Abonuteichos, and many another charlatan.”²² He even goes so far as to propose that the oracle may have been linked to the *Ludi Saeculares* celebrated by Septimius Severus. Fontenrose admits that as Phlegon was a freedman of Hadrian, there can be little doubt that the Severan *ludi* of A.D. 204 took place well after his lifetime (his interest in longevity notwithstanding - the oracle is quoted in Phlegon’s *Περὶ Μακροβίων*), but suggests that the oracle is likely a later insertion into the text of Phlegon. After all, he reasons, the Severan age would be “precisely the period ... when an identification of Apollo with Helios is to be expected.”²³

It is not my intention to refute Fontenrose point by point - the general circularity of his argumentation is clear enough - but rather to draw attention to the fact that such an attempt to redefine the evidence was undertaken at all. By his whole approach Fontenrose illustrates the lengths to which some scholars would go to deny the seemingly self-evident: the identification of Apollo with Sol in the *Carmen Saeculare*. The metatext of his article is that such an identification was somehow wrong and unroman, characteristic of the syncretistic decadence of the Severan age perhaps, but out-of-place in the age of Augustus. This was a widespread sentiment. In 1943, Wili felt it necessary to open his discussion of Sol in Roman religion with the statement:

²⁰ Cf. e.g. Galinsky 1967, 621-622.

²¹ Fontenrose 1939, 443-449.

²² Fontenrose 1939, 445.

²³ Fontenrose 1939, 447-449; Galinsky (1967, 622) accepts that the oracle is a later insertion.

Dem Kenner römischer Religion muss es wie ein Frevel vorkommen, wenn jemand über römischen Sonnengottheiten zu sprechen wagt. Denn er wird gleich den Einwand erheben, dass das römische wie das italische Wesen überhaupt dem Sonnengott abgewandt und ihm gegensätzlich sei.²⁴

Note that it is actually *römisches Wesen* that was at stake here. This was not an abstract debate about which deities the Romans did or did not happen to revere. At issue was the very core of Romanness (or lack thereof), and the conviction, already discussed in chapter one, that the veneration of the sun was fundamentally incompatible with the character of all who were of true Roman stock.²⁵

This then is the context for one important aspect of scholarly unease with the *Carmen Saeculare*. That Sol is mentioned in it at all was bad enough, but could still be explained with reference to the minor, Republican Sol.²⁶ To have Apollo equated with Sol was far worse, as this would be an example of the “decadent” (and oriental) practice of syncretizing deities. What is more, it would make the sun the prime deity addressed in the hymn.²⁷ Indeed the very dominance of Apollo himself in the hymn was deemed wrong. Mommsen noted that the *acta* revealed that the *ludi* themselves were dedicated to the gods of day and night, the heavens and the underworld and all that was between. A true poet, he felt, would have seized the opportunity to compose a hymn reflecting that balance, but Horace’s *carmen* sings primarily of Apollo/Sol and Diana/Luna, with some emphasis on the latter’s role at childbirth as Ilithyia, Lucina and Genitalis.²⁸ Jupiter is mentioned but once, as are the Parcae and Tellus, although they all received sacrifice during the first two days and nights of the *ludi*. Also named in the poem, but not on the inscription, are the personifications Fides, Pax, Honor and Pudor, yet Juno is not named at all, or so it would appear, though she too received prayer and sacrifice at the *ludi*, as well as *sellisternia* two nights running with Diana

That Horace should all but ignore the major deities of days one and two (Jupiter and Juno, the Parcae, and Tellus) and focus all attention on the divine twins venerated on day three (Apollo and Diana) has greatly puzzled scholars, and this has led many to follow Mommsen in concluding that the *Acta* of the *ludi* “prove” that the poem did not actually ignore Jupiter and

²⁴ Wili 1944, 123.

²⁵ Such an intimate connection between race or ethnicity and religion was of course long a commonplace in scholarship; cf. Halsberghe 1972, 26.

²⁶ Galinsky 1967.

²⁷ For scholarly traditions obsessed with precision and purity, religious syncretism smacked of decadence, because it implied a breakdown of the postulated links between religious practice and ethnic characteristics. For a typical sneer against syncretism, cf. Réville, quoted in chapter 1. On the term, cf. Martin 2001.

²⁸ Ilithyia (Ἐιλειθυία) of Crete, goddess of childbirth, is often assimilated with Artemis in Greece, particularly in connection with the assistance Artemis rendered her mother with the birth of her twin brother, Apollo (Apollonius Rhodius 3,877); Lucina, the Roman goddess of childbirth, is associated primarily with Juno; Genitalis is first used here in Latin. In the *ludi saeculares* Ilithyia received separate sacrifice on the night of June 1st, but being a sacrifice of nine *popana*, nine *liba*, and nine *phthoes*, the offering itself was identical to the one received by Diana on day three. Cf. Putnam 2000, 61-2.

Juno to the extent that the unwary reader might assume, but actually alludes to them in a rather obscure manner in the heart of the ode. At issue are the central lines of the poem, from line 37 onwards (*Roma si vestrum est opus...*), and the unnamed *di*, invoked twice (lines 45-6). Before the discovery of the *Acta* it had been assumed that *vestrum* in line 37 referred back to Apollo (34) and Diana/Luna (36), but Mommsen took the text of the *Acta* to show that this was in fact not the case, and that the unnamed *di* in lines 45-6 must actually be Jupiter and Juno. The key is line 49, where reference is made to a sacrifice of white oxen by Augustus (*quaeque vos bubus veneratur albis sqq.*). The *Acta* indicate that Apollo and Diana did not receive such a sacrifice at the *ludi*. A white bull and cow respectively had been sacrificed only to Jupiter and Juno, on days one and two of the *ludi*, while on day three Apollo and Diana had to make do with twenty-seven cakes each, in three kinds (nine *popana*, nine *liba*, and nine *phthoes*). The audience would have known this and would hence have inferred from the specific reference to the white sacrificial bulls that the unnamed *di* of the previous lines could not be Apollo and Diana but must be those other protagonists of the *ludi*, Jupiter and Juno.²⁹

A glance at the text reveals this to be a prime example of the subordination of apparent poetic meanings to perceived historical fact. For it seems to me beyond doubt that *vestrum*, in line 37, cannot but refer back to Apollo/Sol and Luna/Diana (lines 34 and 36 respectively), and that there is nothing in the subsequent lines to suggest that the song has moved to other specific deities. If anything, the repeatedly invoked *di* are purposefully vague, as Putnam (2000, 78) has argued, thus expanding the scope perhaps, but certainly not excluding Apollo and Diana. Nor do I believe that the reference to white oxen in line 49 is either specific or emphatic enough to force the audience to backtrack and redefine the eleven preceding lines as dedicated to Jupiter and Juno alone. This is true even if one accepts the - to my mind unlikely - postulate that the hymn was composed solely with the actual audience of the *ludi* in mind and hence assumes insider knowledge of participants in or witnesses to the rituals. The expansive *quaeque vos bubus veneratur albis* can suggest many prayers at many sacrifices and certainly does not focus attention exclusively onto the two specific sacrifices of a white bull and cow respectively to Jupiter and Juno on the preceding days of the *ludi*. After all, such sacrifices were hardly remarkable. It was common to sacrifice bulls and cows - not just to Jupiter and Juno, but to many other *di* as well, including Apollo and Diana - and white was the conventional colour for all animals sacrificed to the *di superi*.³⁰ I see no reason to assume that a reference to *boves albi* would so startle the audience that they would take it as a cue that they must backtrack in their minds to the lines they had just heard and revise their initial understanding of them to exclude Apollo/Sol and Diana/Luna and focus on the hitherto unmentioned Jupiter and Juno instead.

What this brief and selective review of previous scholarship has revealed, I believe, are

²⁹ Cf. Fraenkel (1957, 370), who emphasizes that this was the one point on which Vahlen was in complete agreement with Mommsen; Slaughter (1895, 74-5), Gagé (1931, 16), Wagenvoort (1936, 144), Feeney (1998, 33-4), Barchiesi (2002, 123), and Farrell (2005, 94) - to name but a few - also echo this position, but Putnam (2000, 78) is more cautious. While he feels that scholars have concluded "with reason" that the repeated *di* of lines 45-6 include Jupiter and Juno, he emphasizes the anonymity of *di* as not only absorbing all divine power, but also giving particular force to Apollo and Diana.

³⁰ *PW* 35 s.v. Opfer, sp. 594; *Neue Pauly* 8 s.v. Opfer, sp. 1249.

some of ideological subtexts that have shaped and directed the interpretative strategies of a number of generations of scholars dealing with the *Carmen Saeculare*. It is true that scholars have begun to follow Fraenkel's lead to rehabilitate this remarkable hymn, but even so we find many of the older concepts and conclusions muddying the debate. This is notably true of the contention that line 49 "proves" that the unnamed *di* in the preceding lines cannot be Apollo and Diana, but must be Jupiter and Juno, and that hence the poem strikes a "better" balance between the various deities venerated at the *ludi* than may appear at first glance.³¹ This is simply not the way to read poetry. Rather than deploy inscriptions and other secondary texts to impose an unpoetic and frankly illogical reading of the *carmen*, we must return to the poem itself and seek its meanings from within.

This brings us back full circle to the problem formulated by Mommsen. The poem is dedicated to Apollo and Diana and all but ignores the many other deities who were, the *Acta* reveal, of at least equal, if not greater importance to the *Ludi* than Leto's twin children. If we accept Horace's own estimation of his poetic success rather than Mommsen's, and reject the suggested inept, "hidden" inclusion of Jupiter and Juno at the centre of the poem, the conclusion must be that Horace and his audience felt it appropriate to have Apollo and Diana dominate in this manner. Why?

We can reject a political explanation as the main reason. That it was expedient to emphasize Apollo - patron deity of Augustus - is more than likely, but the *princeps* is not a more dominating presence in the poem than he was at the *ludi*, nor is the patron role of Apollo its central theme. The poem is dedicated equally to Apollo *and* Diana, but Diana did not share to an equal degree in the cults either at Actium or at the temple of Apollo on the Palatine. If the sole or main reason for the *carmen*'s dedication to Apollo is indeed the bond between Apollo and Augustus, then that reason is either strangely disguised or the *carmen* poorly contrived.³²

Barchiesi emphasizes that Horace was modeling his *carmen* on the Greek *paeon*, traditionally linked to Apollo. This is an important point, and is further supported by the specific art and architecture of the temple of Apollo on the Palatine that formed the backdrop of the hymn.³³ That temple, rich in references to archaic Greek art, would form the perfect complement to the hymn's references to an archaic Greek poetic form. But while I have no doubt that Barchiesi is right, and that Horace is consciously referring to paeans half a millennium old - just as the anonymous artists decorating the temple were quoting archaic styles and schemes in their reliefs and sculptures - this speaks only to the form Horace chose. I do not think (nor does Barchiesi suggest) that the poem was dedicated to Apollo because Horace chose to write a paeon. The choice of form was surely subordinated to the choice of theme.

What we have seen is that Apollo and Diana are established in line 1 as the main deities of the *carmen* and that their astral natures are revealed to be of particular importance in line 2 (*lucidum decus caeli*) and reconfirmed in lines 9 (*alme sol*) and 36 (*luna*). In fact, Apollo/Sol and

³¹ Cf. Farrell 2005, 94-5.

³² Barchiesi 2002, 121, quoting White.

³³ Zanker 1990, 240-263; Kellum 1985; Lefèvre 1989; Tomei 2000.

Diana/Luna provide an elegant framework dividing the poem between them.³⁴ They certainly form the core theme of the *Carmen Saeculare*, and it is tempting to define that core theme through their symbolic meaning in art as *Aeternitas*. We have already seen that they formed a significant pair in ancient religion and more generally in ancient consciousness, and their role as cosmic symbols of eternity was certainly well-established shortly after Augustus, as the *Aeternitas*-coinage of Vespasian shows. There is no reason why it could not have arisen earlier. And those coins also allow us to refine our understanding of the Sol-Luna imagery in a manner that would make it even more apt for the occasion. For they show that Sol and Luna do not just stand metaphorically for eternity - it is actually the female figure of *Aeternitas* who fulfills that role - but elaborate on eternity's nature: her cosmic dimension, of course, but also her mutability. The sun and the moon are not unchanging - they appear and disappear, wax and wane, and can even be eclipsed - and yet are infinitely reliable because their changes are themselves unchanging and follow fixed patterns. Thus the busts of Sol and Luna indicate that *Aeternitas* is ultimately stable, but that within its stability it can support many changes and fluctuations. This interpretation is further borne out by the other possible attribute of *Aeternitas*, viz., the Phoenix, with which she is also often depicted on Vespasianic coins.³⁵ Here too eternity is not equated with lack of change, but as characterized by the complex yet continuous cycle of life, death, and inevitable rebirth as represented by the Phoenix.³⁶ Like the Phoenix, Sol and Luna can represent eternity itself, but more specifically refer to the inherently fluctuating nature of eternal stability.

The choice of *Aeternitas* as one of the themes on Vespasian's coins is a poignant one, of course, as his ascent to power was through revolution and represented a clean break with the preceding Julio-Claudian dynasty. By the choice of attributes, however, *Aeternitas* can be read as emphasizing that in the overall scheme of the eternal stability of Rome and the world, this upheaval was but a ripple, not a rift. This was a common theme in Vespasianic propaganda, which was often at pains to emphasize links and parallels to the Augustan past and stress continuity of imperial stability and peace.

If, then, we accept what I have tried to show at the beginning of this chapter, that there is sufficient evidence to make it plausible that as early as the Augustan era Sol and Luna could be invoked as joint symbols of eternity, this gives us a key to the overarching theme of the *Carmen Saeculare*. A number of things stand out. The first is that this is not a hymn to Apollo and Luna as clearly defined, separate deities. Their astral side is emphasized in line 2 and the symbolic meaning of the astral pair - eternity - is referred to explicitly immediately after (*o colendi semper et culti*)³⁷ and again in the most celebrated lines of the poem (*alme Sol, curru nitido diem qui promis et celas aliusque et idem nasceris*).³⁸ Indeed, in general, the nature of any of the gods

³⁴ Wagenvoort 1936, 148-50.

³⁵ LIMC *Aeternitas* 11-15.

³⁶ On the Phoenix, cf. van den Broek 1972.

³⁷ Today and ever magnified (literally: Oh you who must always be and have always been revered.)

³⁸ Sun, that unchanged, yet ever new, Lead'st out the day and bring'st it home,

mentioned in the hymn, including Apollo/Sol and Diana/Luna is left purposefully vague and broad. This is especially true at the core of the poem (lines 37-49), where, as we have seen, there is not a shift to Jupiter and Juno as Mommsen had suggested. Rather, as Putnam has rightly argued, Apollo and Diana still dominate, but subsumed into anonymous *di* representing the full scale of numinous power. Elsewhere too, differences between deities are erased or at the very least borders are blurred.

In the second place, it is clear that we must reject Mommsen's assumption that this hymn is about the *ludi saeculares*. It is not, and with that realization the whole "problem" of the "confused" references to the major deities and events of the *ludi* collapses. No doubt the poem that Mommsen would have written had he stood in Horace's shoes is attractive enough, echoing the balance struck between the *di superi* and the *di inferi* and reflecting on the role and place of humans between the two. But while it may have appealed more to Mommsen, Horace did not want that. The route he chose was a different one, writing a hymn to counterbalance the *ludi* rather than to reflect them. For where the *ludi* celebrate the ending of one *saeculum* and the beginning of another, Horace's hymn celebrates the eternal continuity of *saecula*. As metaphor of eternity in their astral guise, Apollo and Luna, the deities venerated on the third day of the *ludi*, form the subtle link between the rituals themselves and the overarching theme of Horace's paean.

Many other aspects of the hymn now also fall neatly into place: the importance of children and child-bearing, for example, and the lines referring to the senate's decrees concerning procreation (lines 17-20) that numerous scholars have deemed so "unfortunate",³⁹ as well as the three main themes - Rome's past, present, and future - of the second portion of the hymn, celebrating Rome's and Augustus's long lineage, vaunting her wide dominion, and praying for Apollo and Diana to prolong the life of Rome to many other, yet more prosperous *saecula* to come (37-72), followed by the last lines stressing that eternal Rome has the support of Jupiter and all the gods in consort. The fact that the *carmen* was clearly and consciously a paean gains added relief, especially in view of the archaizing artistic and architectural setting where it was sung - not to mention the traditional Greek cakes that had supplanted the normal sacrifice for Apollo and Diana.

In short, the recognition that Apollo/Sol and Diana/Luna impart to the hymn its unifying theme of *Aeternitas* gives the *Carmen Saeculare* the inner logic and coherence that Mommsen and others have felt it lacked, and makes it possible to analyze it as the apt and powerful ode Horace knew it to be. But this is not the place, nor am I the philologist, to offer a detailed commentary on the poem as a whole, against the background of the Sol-Luna symbolism discussed here. Nor is it really necessary. Establishing *aeternitas* as the fundamental theme of the hymn does not in any way disqualify the sensitive commentaries of previous scholarship. My sole aim has been to shed some light on why Apollo and Diana are "the recipients of the poem (...) whose naming, at beginning, center, and finale, give it its principal structure".⁴⁰ For a full appreciation of the poetic complexities of this hymn, I gladly defer to the rich comments and commentaries of Feeney (1998), Barchiesi (2002), and in particular Putnam (2000).

³⁹ Fraenkel (1957, 373-4) comments on this disparagement, with references in n.1; Putnam (2000, 160 n. 24) notes that this stanza is the "most denigrated" in the poem.

⁴⁰ Putnam 2000, 78.

Divine symbols and symbolic deities

The *Carmen Saeculare*, then, is rooted in, and plays on, the symbolic meanings of the sun-moon pair that are visually articulated by the image type [sol-luna]. Clearly the basic meanings of this image type were well established by the last quarter of the first century BC, which makes it much more likely that the Republican coinage discussed at the beginning of this chapter may also be read along similar lines. Further research into Hellenistic antecedents may shed further light on this, but even if we can establish symbolism of this type in the Hellenistic world there still remains the question when it was adopted in Rome. Beyond the evidence already presented here I am not aware of any clear indication at what point in the (late?) Republic these symbolic meanings of the Sol-Luna pair became common currency in Roman culture.

Before we leave this topic there is, however, one other important issue that our reading of the *Carmen Saeculare* raises. It concerns the nature of Roman deities. We have seen that from the opening line - *Phoebe silvarumque potens Diana* - the ode establishes that it is dedicated equally to Apollo and Diana, and it proceeds to immediately highlight their astral characteristics as Sol and Luna. Identifying this pair in its astral guise is in fact a central theme of the *Carmen Saeculare* and key to the overarching interpretation of the hymn.⁴¹ Yet the nature of these heavenly twins and their role in the hymn have been misjudged, I believe, because of untenable assumptions concerning the nature of pagan deities and their roles and significance within Roman ritual. Implicit in all modern discussions of the deities present and absent in the hymn is a sense of a clearly defined and distinct character of each individual goddess and god. Not only are Jupiter and Juno deemed distinct and different from Apollo and Diana, and hence conspicuous in their virtual absence from the poem, but Apollo and Diana themselves are referred to more often than not as two individual deities rather than as a pair - indeed, scholars have even frequently stressed differences between Apollo and Sol, and between Diana and Luna.⁴²

Such differentiation between deities imposes upon Roman religion a conception of divinities that is inherently Christianizing. The underlying assumption seems to be that individual Roman deities were theologically defined, discrete numinous powers. It would appear, however, that Roman tradition, not theology, identified the differing deities and did little, if anything, to define them as discrete and separate entities of godhead.⁴³ There was no “pagan” theology that formed a coherent counterpart to Christianity, far less were there divinely authorized texts that established the parameters of pagan “faith” and the nature of its gods. This is not to say that there was nothing specific about a Roman deity and its scope, far less that any deity could have any function.⁴⁴ Diana was definitely a distinct goddess, with particular centres of worship (e.g. Nemi) and specific competencies (notably childbirth), and Apollo certainly had the four major roles to

⁴¹ For a full discussion of the many ways Horace emphasizes the celestial radiance of Apollo and Diana in the *Carmen Saeculare*, cf. Putnam 2000, 52-3.

⁴² Cf., e.g., Galinsky 1967; Fontenrose 1939.

⁴³ Rothaus 2000, 1-9.

⁴⁴ Cf. Scheid 1998, 128-131.

which Horace alludes towards the end of the *carmen* (lines 61-64).⁴⁵ The point is rather that the scope of Roman religion, and hence of its protagonists, the Roman deities, went well beyond such clearly defined tasks and roles. Diana Nemorensis may have been goddess of childbirth, but Diana was also Luna, and as such a cosmic deity of night and (light in) darkness, the counterpart to Sol, who could also be Apollo. But Luna had no more to do with childbirth than Sol with the Muses or hunting. In other words, while Diana's role in childbirth is clearly defined, that role does not define her. Nor, indeed, is it limited to her. In the *Carmen Saeculare* Ilithyia would appear to be equated with Diana - in Greece this goddess of childbirth is indeed often identified with Artemis - but also with Lucina, a Roman goddess of childbirth normally identified with Juno. To further complicate matters, we have seen that at the *ludi* Ilithyia received sacrifice at a separate time but identical in content to that offered to Diana, while Juno at the *ludi* was *Regina*, and received a different sacrifice at which no reference was made to her role in childbirth.

This lack of clear definition in the *carmen* is purposeful - Horace invokes Ilithyia "sive tu Lucina probas vocari / seu Genitalis" - and any attempt to reduce it to clarity and consistency is bound to fail. It is this very lack of specificity that allows the deities invoked to play different roles and evoke a range of associations at different levels of meaning and it is on one such role or concept that we focused our attention in this chapter. But what this shows is that the seeming contradiction between Sol as cosmic metaphor and Sol as fully fledged divinity, at which I hinted in the opening paragraph of chapter five, is a mirage. In the *Carmen Saeculare* Apollo and Diana - recipients of prayer and offerings at the *ludi saeculares* and protagonists of the hymn - are the "cosmic metaphor".

This is an important conclusion because it reinforces the validity of the notion of the image types [sol] and [sol-luna] as visual signs with symbolic meanings. Any concerns that there would have been a degree of incompatibility between an "image of Sol" (the god) and a symbolically deployed "image type [sol]" can be laid to rest in the light of the *Carmen Saeculare*. Horace has no more trouble integrating these diverse aspects of divinity than he is concerned by the diverse and mutually incompatible competencies that deities could combine. Diana is not only huntress, moon, and midwife, but she is also both goddess and symbol, recipient of prayer and cult. What the hymn shows is that, for Horace at least, the dichotomy we tend to perceive between god and symbol has no meaning. It simply creates anachronistic categories that we try to impose because of our own pre-understandings of the nature of divinity.

The issue of Roman concepts of divinity is not our topic, and it is far too thorny a problem to discuss it fully here. What makes the *Carmen Saeculare* important for our project however, is that it shows that as early as the late first century BC the Romans were comfortable with that full range of meanings - from symbolic to divine - for a single deity that we have been postulating for Sol. Their notion of *Sol* was all-encompassing enough to cope with any of the meanings that we have come up with for the image types [sol]. This does not, of course, offer support for any of the specific proposals we have made, but it does legitimize our premiss that such a range of meanings was possible at all.

⁴⁵ In this stanza, Horace refers to Apollo as augur, archer, lord of Muses, and healer; Putnam 2000, 87-90).