

In this paper I argue that the three instances of religiously motivated murders recorded in our evidence in military conflicts of the late Republican civil wars can offer further insight into the transformation of religious authority in this period, in-between what Jerzy Linderski identified as a priestly act of consecratio in the murder of Tiberius Gracchus by the pontifex maximus, P. Scipio Nasica in the beginning of the late Republic and Richard Gordon's model of the emperor as the prime sacrificer based on a more widely understood claim for religious power authority by the end of the Republican era.

I discuss three instances of such ritual murders that survive in our evidence from the final years of the Roman Republic. In 46 BCE, Julius Caesar likely instigated and was present, as pontifex maximus, at the sacrificial killing (*hierourgia*) of two of his soldiers on the Campus Martius (Cassius Dio 43.24.4). Cassius Dio's report underplays Caesar's agency and emphasizes the soldiers' mutinous behavior instead, but I argue that the central location of the ritual in Rome and the presence of Rome's official priests (*pontifices* and the *flamen Martialis*) suggest a highly sanctioned ritual action, which could not have taken place without Caesar's approval. Octavian's religious role is less clear in the famous incident known as "the altars of Perusia;" after capturing the long resisting city, up to three-hundred local senators and knights were sacrificed at altars dedicated to his divinized adoptive father, Julius Caesar on the anniversary of his death, the Ides of March, 41 BCE (Seneca, *De clementia* 1.11.1; Suetonius, *Augustus* 15; Cassius Dio 48.14.3-4). Finally, after a naval victory over Octavian's troops in 37 BCE, Sextus Pompey cast live men and horses into the straits off the coast of Sicily, while dressed in a dark blue robe, and, as Cassius Dio reports, believing himself to be the son of the sea-god, Neptune (Cassius Dio 48.48.5-6). What connects the sacrifice of Octavian and Sextus Pompey is that neither leader legitimates their actions as traditional Roman priests, but rather as leaders directly connected to a divinized figure or god.

I argue that these murders mark a key moment in the transformation from religious authority based on traditional priestly legitimacy to the claims of Caesar, Octavian and Sextus Pompey that were based less on priestly roles, but rather on a more widely understood religious power. In particular, Octavian and Sextus Pompey clearly tried to emphasize their rival personal connections to divine powers and their own religiously understood claim to political power in their performance of these sacrifices. I conclude by suggesting that as Octavian reached sole power in 31 BCE, the representations of sacrificial power underwent further change, leaving behind the competitive associations with divine power and the human victims characteristic of the final years of the civil wars; the end result is the well-known image of the emperor as the pious "prime sacrificer," whose religious power stood above all those attributed to individual priestly colleges in the Roman tradition, but who was also unlikely to apply this power to the murder of humans.

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