Living the Religious Experience in Ancient Rome: Virtual Learning in the Real World

Author: Dr. Steven J. Green, Department of Classics University of Leeds

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The following paper consists of three parts. In the first part, I will outline my rationale for the use of wikis in my new module on ancient Roman religion. In the second part, I will outline some of the conceptual hurdles I have had to face in using wikis for this purpose in the real world of 21st century UK Higher Education. I will conclude by detailing the successes of the project and offering some examples of good student work.

I. Introduction: the project and its rationale

When comparing ancient Roman religion with a more familiar, modern-day religion, such as Christianity, there are several conceptual differences that any modern western observer needs to overcome.[1] Some differences are well-known, such as the polytheistic nature of Roman religion, and the fact that, for the Romans, religion was a civic duty rather than a matter of personal conviction. But perhaps the most important, and certainly the most interesting difference is the emphasis Roman religion places on *doing* over *thinking*. Christianity teaches that belief is everything. However, when it comes to questions of where and how one should worship God, there is considerable freedom: though there are recognised and long-established Christian rituals in which one can participate (for example, the Eucharist), it is equally acceptable within certain branches of the Church to pray to God in one's own place, in

one's own way, and at one's own time. An ancient Roman would regard this approach as entirely the wrong way round. The Romans had incredibly complex rules governing the time, place, personnel and procedure for worshipping a deity, and deviation from these rules in any way was deemed to be a bad omen, and often resulted in the ritual's being performed again until it was done correctly. However, there was no such dogma governing what Romans *thought* about the actions they were undertaking, or the nature of the particular god they were honouring. This was because the Romans did not possess any underlying, authoritative religious text to which to refer, as is the case with the Christian Bible. Without an orthodox religious text, the meaning behind the festivals in the Roman year was in a state of flux, and it was, therefore, up to individuals to reach their own informed decision as to the most likely meaning behind a religious tradition/deity amidst the maze of variant interpretations which had been generated over the years.2

It is at this dynamic intellectual level that I personally find the study of Roman religion so stimulating. As I have been working and publishing on the interaction between Roman literature and religion for some years, I wanted to teach an advanced (Level 2/3) research-led module on Roman Religion at Leeds which would allow students the opportunity to engage with both the 'strict acting' and 'free thinking' aspects of the ancient Roman religious experience.

The module-entitled 'Living the Religious Experience at Rome'-has run for the first time in 2007-8. It is assessed entirely by three varied pieces of coursework. The first two are formal written assignments: a short commentary on source analysis and an essay (60% of the overall module mark). All quite conventional so far; but the third piece offers something novel and as yet untried in the teaching of Roman religion at University. In the third piece of coursework, students are given a specific year, A.D. 10, and a choice of two Roman festivals, the Lupercalia or the Megalensia.3 They are asked to get themselves into groups of either two or three,4 and are invited to construct a wiki in which they take on the persona of a contemporary religious participant by describing both the proceedings of a given festival as well as their own feelings and viewpoints about it (40% of the overall module mark). As such, students are taking part in a project to bring Roman religion to life by exploring the potential diversity of Roman religious life at a specific point in its history. Not just interesting in itself, this project has real academic validity, as it answers the rally call of many a scholar on the ancient world. Keith Hopkins may be taken as representative of the current keenness to engage empathetically with the ancient world:5

> We need to use empathetic imagination to help us think and feel ourselves back into how different Romans themselves experienced festivals ? We can never think like Romans. And yet if we are to understand the power of Roman rituals, their repeated capacity to secure citizens' involvement, then we have to recapture the excitement, the heightened emotions of participants ? This perspective, as I have said, has its dangers. It is based sometimes of im agination rather than on sources, and so violates the canons of careful scholarship. But it can also serve as a valuable corrective to the unselfconscious elitism of Roman historians, both ancient and modern, who place themselves effortlessly in the very top ranks of Roman society and view rituals only downward, from above.

II. Wikis at work: competing voices in higher education

In the conclusion to my PGCLTHE, completed in 2006, I commented on how my initial impression about HE pedagogical literature-tainted by some horror stories from another university which shall remain nameless-had turned out to be a misconception. Far from being prescriptive, judgmental or completely divorced from the realities of the lecturer and the diverse student body, I found the literature to be friendly and encouraging, mindful of the various pressures exerted on lecturers. My new impression, then, was that HE pedagogy was a debate populated by a series of well-meaning but inevitably competing voices on how best to enhance teaching and learning at university. At one extreme, some of these voices are in direct conflict with each other.6 Nor is the debate static, as some voices may become louder than others at different times.7

That was my new theory. It was with a mixture of satisfaction and frustration, then, that I found out that it rang true in practice as well, when I came to thinking about the use of wikis for my Roman Religion module. Before taking you through more specific details about the project and its successes, let me first take you on the conceptual journey I had in formulating the use of wikis in my module, and in listening to and heeding the competing voices on the subject.

1. Here comes the science part ? the pedagogy on wikis

Let us start with what HE material typically says about the benefits of wikis.8 Advocates have much praise for the use of wikis in learning and teaching for various reasons:

- Wikis enable group learning activity and 'democratic participation'; in the words of Jane Knight (2005: 162), they facilitate 'building a **learning community**: that is a cohort of students that learn together, so that they build a deeper understanding of the course they are studying through interaction with their peers and their teachers';
- Wikis are the easiest web-based collaborative project to set up and operate for both teacher and student;
- Wikis allow flexibility in terms of location at which work can be done;
- Wikis can help bridge the gap of learning methods between teacher and student: in a wiki, the 'print paradigm' of lecturers, and the 'secondary-oral paradigm' of students can come together (Pixy Ferris and Wilder 2006);

The same literature does, however, note some potential disadvantages in using wikis for learning and teaching purposes:

- There may be problems caused by the fact that all users are able to modify content: this may lead to inaccuracy, inappropriate language, misrepresentation and/ or unintentional deletion;
- The finished wiki inevitably represents a work of **group** perspective and effort: it is difficult from this to extrapolate the contributions made by individuals.
- Wikis are not the most aesthetically pleasing pages you may find on the web.

Of the potential disadvantages listed above, I do not consider the second and third to be a problem in my module: the varied pieces of assessments adequately allow for the extrapolation of individual performance within the module,9 and the technical specifications for the TWiki product that we are using are more than adequate.10

The first objection is more important, but does not, I feel, go far enough. Underlying the literature consulted above is a rather 'optimistic' view of the student body, an implicit assumption that one is working with students who are all dedicated, honest, enthusiastic, hard-working and motivated primarily by a love of learning. I am certainly not suggesting that such students do not exist-indeed, several of those on the Roman Religion module fall into just this category-but I do feel that it is unwise to plan a module on such a basis, particularly when one is having to negotiate the following issues in 21st century UK universities: an increasing trend towards a strategic approach to student learning; an increasing problem of plagiarism; and an increasingly powerful voice from students themselves in the form of the National Student Survey. These three factors complicate the picture, and need to be taken into consideration when designing such a module.

2. Here come the students, part 1: a strategic approach to learning

In pedagogical theory, we are by now familiar with the polarity between a 'surface' and 'deep' approach to learning.11 In recent times, however, a third category has been constructed to complicate this sense of polarity: the 'strategic' approach to learning, whereby the student puts in as great or as little effort as is deemed appropriate for their overall

degree mark; the amount of effort inevitably relates to the amount of marks awarded for a particular assignment. I certainly do not wish to chime a note of pedagogical decline here, as I feel that a 'strategic' approach is not only understandable in this day and age, but might also even be seen as commendable to some audiences.[12] The only point I wish to make here is that it is, in my experience, a fact of undergraduate University life that one needs to take on board.

What does this mean in my case? Put simply, it means that if I want students to engage seriously with all aspects of the website project - thematic, conceptual and technical - I need to attach a significant amount of credit to the task. I therefore chose a weighting of 40%: significant enough for the students to take serious note, but not enough to overshadow the other forms of assessment or obscure the performance of the individual within the module.

Attaching a significant amount of marks to the project, then, maximises the chance of all students engaging with the exercise seriously. But in the process, another problem quickly arises.

3. Here come the students, part 2: plagiarism and the national student survey

So, I now have a set of wikis operated by groups of two or three students, accessible to all, which will count for 40% towards the final mark of the module. With work now 'counting' towards a final degree, the issue of plagiarism **between** groups raises its ugly head. The open-access feature which, in an unassessed project, might indeed be hailed as an admirable opportunity for students to learn from/ build on each other's ideas, becomes, in an assessed piece of work, a temptation for passing off the ideas of others as one's own. This might prove to be particularly tempting in this particular exercise, given that there is no secondary literature which directly provides 'the answers' for a personalised account of an ancient character. Moreover, the situation is not helped by the fact that existing wikis often set a bad example in this regard, in that they are sometimes very lax about attribution of authorship, as Lamb ((op. cit. n.8) 38) explains:

> With open editing, a page can have multiple contributors, and notions of page "authorship" and "ownership" can be radically altered. Content "cloning" across wikis-sometimes referred to in non-wiki circles as "plagiarism"-is often acceptable.

Even if I could guarantee that no students will plagiarise from each other, the very perception that it is entirely possible is also unhelpful. Student perceptions of unfairness can manifest themselves in Departmental Module Questionnaires and, more worryingly, in the National Student Survey, a voice which is becoming increasingly more influential in University decision-making.[13] In my experience, it would only take one example of plagiarism or perceived intellectual theft to affect the overall mood of the module and confidence in its assessment structure.

For this reason, helped by some very effective IT support,[14] TWiki was nominated as the most appropriate commercial wiki package, as it combines ease of use with an ability to support visual material and different secure websites within an overall project site. Now, every student group had access to their own site and no one else's; as tutor, I had access to them all. Moreover, as each student had to log in first to the outer project site, it allowed me a space to leave messages relating to the project that all participants could read.

So where has my journey from theory to practice taken me in this project? I have learned that wikis are pedagogically very beneficial, especially in their capacity to enable students to draw on each other's ideas in a shared environment. But for the students to engage with wikis properly, there must be marks attached. But once marks are attached, there is a risk that some students will steal ideas from others and that perceptions of unfairness will be created and registered in any of the feedback media for students.

In a nutshell, then, in order to get students to experience some of the benefits of wikis (group work, technical expertise), some of its other benefits (the creation of a mass shared-learning environment) have had to be sacrificed.

My answers may be different from those of the reader, but the fundamental questions raised above need to be addressed if one is to achieve a successful conversion from universalised pedagogical theory to contextualised teaching reality.

III. The Roman religion project in practice

If the last section struck a pessimistic note (or at least a note of excessive realism), I am pleased to make amends here. In reality, the project itself has turned out to be a real success. All wikis were submitted by the deadline, there were no technical hitches, and early student feedback has been very positive on the novelty of the exercise.

I will go through the general benefits first, and then back this up with specific examples of good student work:

- **Deep learning**: Opportunities for 'informed creativity'. This is by no means a 'lightweight' assignment where characters can say what they like.15 Each account is going to consist of:
  - fact/uncontested information (i.e. things that the student can get 'wrong');
  - disputed fact: the viewpoint will be dependent on the character (and there is a need for plausibility);
  - informed creative license: the mimetic nature of the project allows students to explore the realm of the plausible, unrefutable but undocumented (at a basic level, for example, we have no evidence of a slave catching a ride on a local cheese cart to get to a festival, but we have evidence of slaves, cheese sellers and carts);
- **Deep learning**: in order to enrich their character's narrative, students are invited to apply relevant knowledge they have gained from any of the modules they have taken/ are taking so far. As such, the exercise seeks to encourage students out of the mindset of 'atomising' their knowledge, which is often an unfortunate side-effect of the university modular system: instead, they are to see all their modules as different windows onto the (same) ancient world.
- **Transferable skills**: Opportunities for group work/ project management and extended IT skills not typically associated with the teaching of Classics at university;
- **Practical**: The opportunities/temptation for plagiarism from secondary sources is vastly reduced by such a creative exercise;
- **Practical**: The same books and learning materials can be/were used to very different effects;
- **Practical**: The tutor can monitor progress of the wiki at each stage (there is also a log of contributors), and can intervene in extreme cases, if it is deemed appropriate.

Experiencing a Roman festival: the Lupercalia

By the time students had begun work on their websites, they had received 18 lectures on various aspects of Roman religion, had participated in three seminars, and had written two assignments. However, the particular festivals for the website project-Lupercalia and Megalensia-had not been covered in class. The Module Documentation gave students practical advice on:

- Bibliography for their particular festival
- How to research the topic: it was suggested that they first build up a 'neutral' picture of what happened and why, as far as we can tell from primary and secondary source material, and that they take particular note of where the controversies lie;
- How to choose a character and convert this 'neutral' picture of the festival into a lively, personalised and opinionated account (backed up with evidence, to be contained in 'footnote' hyperlinks);

- How to convert this narrative from a Word document to the TWiki site (a two-hour session in the computer labs, backed up with instructional literature created by myself, was more than sufficient to show student the technical ropes);

For the benefit of the present readers (and as a guide for me as I was assessing the websites), I have put together (below) a short 'checklist' on what we know about the proceedings of the Lupercalia festival and the controversies surrounding it:

Proceedings in order:

- The festival takes place on February 15th (Roman date: XV Kal. Mart.);
- The priests (called Luperci and sometimes crepi) sacrificed goats and a dog in the Lupercal cave (south-west corner of Palatine Hill of Rome, a sacred place where the she-wolf is supposed to have suckled Romulus and Remus);
- Cakes of salted meal, made from the first ears of the harvest, are offered by the Vestal Virgins;
- Blood from the victims is smeared with a knife onto the foreheads of two young men, and it is then immediately wiped away with wool dipped in milk;
- The youths then laugh;
- The Luperci gird their bodies with skins of the sacrificed goats, have a feast (of the sacrificed goats?) which involved much wine, then run around the city (masked?) in companies and strike citizens with goat-skin thongs;
- The festival ends in the Comitium (the heart of the Roman Forum).

1st century B.C. Historical Impact

- Famous occurrence of the festival in 44 B.C.: Marc Antony, as one of the Luperci, tries to offer Caesar a golden diadem while he was watching the end of the festival in the Forum;
- Augustus (31 B.C. - A.D. 14) was concerned about preserving sexual morality and promoting human fertility (cf. his moral legislation of esp. 18 B.C.). He 'restored' the Lupercalia and the Lupercal, probably owing to its connection with human fertility. But he imposed restrictions for the sake of morality: boys before the age of puberty were not permitted to take part; did he also insist that the Luperci wear more substantial clothing?

Uncertainties/Differences of Opinion (Ancient and Modern)

- Were the youths themselves priests: Were they the leaders of the Luperci or just random young men?
- Where did the Luperci run: around the Palatine Hill (possibly to create a magic circle or purify boundaries)? Up and down the slope of the Sacred Way (*Sacra Via*)? Or in a haphazard fashion (i.e. is it wrong to think in terms of a specific route)?
- Did the Luperci run naked (cf. Ovid's story of naked hunters Romulus and Remus)? Or were they girded with a goat-skin like a loincloth? Or did it change through time (see Augustus above)?
- How many companies of Luperci were there: Two (Quinctiales and Fabiani)? Three (+ Iuliani, added in honour of Caesar in 45 B.C., but disbanded by 43 B.C.)?
- Was a specific god honoured: If so, which one and what gender: Faunus? Innus? Pan? Silvanus? Lupercus (invented in Augustan times)?
- Who was whipped: only women? Or any Romans who presented themselves?

- Etymology of 'Lupercalia':
  - *lupus*, 'wolf': the she-wolf that suckled Romulus and Remus?
  - *lupos arcere*, 'to ward off wolves' = an ancient festival to ward off wolves from the flocks?
  - *luere per caprum*, 'to purify by means of a goat' (a rationalising approach, given that a wolf plays no part on the festival)?
- Origin of festival: did it arrive with Evander? Or was it set up later at the time of early Rome with Romulus and Remus?
- Significance of the festival:
  - Is it concerned with burial and the spirit world (cf. closeness in date to Parentalia, and in February, traditionally the month of the dead)?
  - Is it concerned with fertility (goat as symbol of sexual strength; fertility and flagellation since 276 B.C.)?
  - Is it something to do with conferring kingship?
  - Is it about warding off wolves from sheep (see above)?

As can be seen from even a cursory glance at the material above, the Lupercalia, even though it is probably the most frequently documented of Roman religious festivals, raises more questions than answers. This is the conceptual minefield into which students were invited to step.

Examples of good student work

I will conclude by presenting selected parts of the narrative from some of the best websites to give a flavour of the creativity and dynamic approach adopted by students on the module.[16]

i) Narrative of a 50 year old Roman male from the equestrian order

One group of students decided to step into the shoes of a middle-aged, upper-class Roman as he watches his son, Titus, participating for the first time as a priest in the festivities of the Lupercalia. The students correctly identified the proceedings of the festival in order, and their character put forward plausible interpretations of what was occurring, choosing sensibly from the variety of interpretations accessible in the sources.

What impressed me in particular was the ways in which they had situated their narrative very closely into the geographical setting of Rome in A.D. 10. Our equestrian gentleman narrates:[17]

> 'The route of the priests between the Lupercal and the Comitium takes them past the eastern edge of the giant Horrea Agrippiana, across the **Nova Via** then up and down the **Sacra Via** before they enter the Forum. They always end up in the Forum because that's where the **Ficus Ruminalis** is and that's where the old **sepulcretum** was; not to mention the fact that it's the heart of our city and a focal point for community activity... Eventually the two groups came into view as they ran about on the slope of the **Sacra Via**, each of them led by one of the youths who had been wiped with blood earlier. I was glad to have a restful and well shaded position in the ceremony (if somewhat obscured by some modern building work) and didn't envy Titus for what was clearly tiring and sweaty work in the heat of the sun.'

First, the students have given a plausible route for the priests, and they have backed up their choices in this regard with additional information in the hyperlinks. For example, the link from Horrea Agrippiana ('Granary of Agrippa')

reads: 'A massive warehouse built by Agrippa (some time before 12 B.C.) on the north west slope of the Palatine (Haselberger et. al. p.140)'. Here the students have taken the opportunity to explore what I termed above as 'the plausible, unrefutable but undocumented'. We have no evidence to suggest that the route incorporated the Agrippan Granary, partly because there is real ambiguity in the sources about the route in general; that said, our sources suggest that at least some of the festivities occurred on the Palatine Hill, and the Agrippan Granary was a prominent landmark on the hill from at least 12 B.C., so why not bring these ideas together into a narrative about the Lupercalia in A.D. 10? More impressively, the students have considered the changing landscape for the onlooker at the festival from 44 B.C. (the famous occurrence of the festival involving Julius Caesar and Marc Antony) to A.D. 10. Augustus in particular is renowned for changing the physical landscape of Rome with his building work and renovations, and the students have incorporated this into their narrative in an inspired manner. In the last line of the extract above, the link obscured by some modern building work takes the reader to the following text and image:

'This image taken from Archivo fotografico Lozzi Roma s.a.s. has been edited to show that Augustus' view of the running from the rostra in A.D. 10 was far more obstructed than Julius Caesar's was in 44 B.C., due to the erection of new buildings on the East of the Forum in the intervening period. This shows that the Luperci must have run quite far from the Lupercal before Augustus could have seen anything.'

A closer look at the labels to the Temple of Divus Julius and the Porticus Gai et Luci on the upper section of the map (enlarged below) reveals that the students have thought very carefully about the new buildings, constructed between 44 B.C. and A.D. 10, which would now be obstructing the view of the Sacra Via from an Emperor standing in the heart of the Forum:
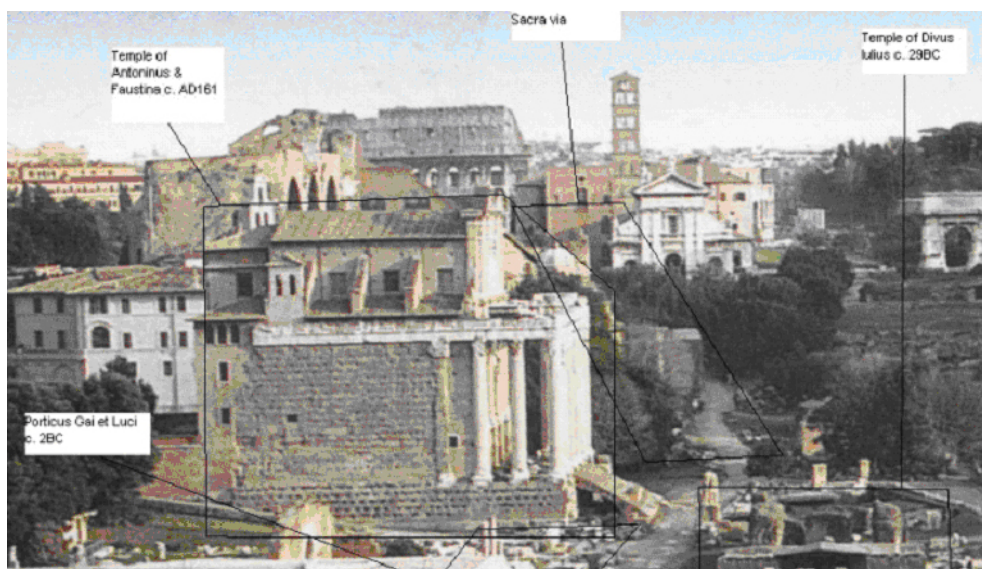
This is very creative and lateral thinking which provides excellent 'value-added' realism to their character's religious experience.

ii) Narrative of a childless Roman wife

And now for something completely different: the same festival, but a very different character. As mentioned above in the overview of the festival, the whipping involved in the Lupercalia was apparently interpreted as a means of promoting human fertility. Another group of students have seized on this idea and transferred it to the sphere of a young Roman wife desperate to have her first child. What impressed me here was the ways in which the students had situated their narrative within the social and medical context of Rome in A.D. 10. The narrative starts as follows:

> 'The third morning after the Ides dawned bright and clear. This was the day I had been waiting for all year. I have been married for eight years and still no sign of a child. My husband and I are worried and I am desperate to please him so I am attending the Lupercalia in an attempt to rid myself of the evil spirits causing my infertility. I have found negative spirits are definitely more prominent in February, so I am pleased the Lupercalia is taking place today. Aside from the medical reasons for my attendance, it is a public holiday and so I have excused myself from household duties.'

This section packs in so many commendable points, especially: the expectation of children within a Roman marriage, and the subsequent pressure on women; the perceived connection between infertility and evil spirits, and the connection between February and spirits in general. The students also duly note an imperial law of A.D. 9 (the **Lex Papia Poppaea**) which continued the incentives given to married couples with many children: the social stigma surrounding infertility is, therefore, particularly pertinent in A.D. 10. From our modern perspective, we might find it surprising that this woman places so much hope on the festival to help her fertility, but the students fully justify this perspective. The link from child reads as follows:

> 'Although we have sources telling us that the ancients knew some ways of inducing a miscarriage, such as lifting heavy loads and taking certain plants and herbs, they do not seem to have had much knowledge on how to boost fertility. J.M. Riddle's book **Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance** deals only with the ancients' knowledge of how to prevent conception and full-term pregnancy, not on how to promote it.'

In the medical climate of A.D. 10, then, which appears to have had few answers to infertility, the hope of salvation from religion becomes much more plausible: our poor wife might well have viewed this annual festival as her best chance of a baby.

iii) Narrative of a Roman philosopher

Finally, we come to an intellectual at the festival. Another group of students chose to make their character a Roman man with a taste for Epicurean philosophy. Epicureanism, founded in Athens by Epicurus in 4th century B.C. and popular among certain Romans, maintains that the senses are the source of all knowledge and are infallible: we should obey the senses and treat pleasure as the ultimate goal. In terms of the divine sphere, Epicureans do believe in the existence of the gods, but they maintain that the gods live in a world of tranquillity far removed from mortals and take no part in the creation and maintenance of the human world. Our philosopher, then, has a potential problem, in that his views about the gods risk clashing with the traditional view of Roman state religion, whereby gods are indeed involved in all aspects of human lives and need to be honoured and bargained with accordingly. The students duly open up our philosophical friend to reveal his inner struggle between the need to be a good Roman (**doing** religion) and his beliefs which are contrary to the traditional picture of the heavenly gods (**thinking** religion). He deliberates as

follows:

> Once again havoc has pervaded the streets of Rome! Why do the plebeians call for such inane and barbaric worship of the gods? Do they seriously believe the gods care for such raucous behaviour in the cause of their worship? If the gods do exist they would surely live the Epicurean ideal and not waste their time on human banalities. It is good to respect them, and I suppose one stands nothing to lose by hedging one's bets, but this is surely a tad excessive. Our society encourages dutiful religious observance for the good of the State and all its residents and anything that unites us must be beneficial. Rome is now so diverse that religion is a unifying aspect of city life, and if Epicurus himself thought it worth while I too shall participate, although my thoughts are my own.

Our poor gentleman contemplates the strange rituals of the Lupercalia against his own view of the gods. In the end, like a good Roman, he participates for the good of the Roman state and, by association, the good of himself (thus concurring also with the ultimate Epicurean ideal to do what brings pleasure to the individual).

One final point about this narrative is worth making. Later on in his deliberations, the philosopher recalls the story, told to him by his father, of the famous occurrence of the festival in 44 B.C. when Julius Caesar made a huge public gesture of refusing a golden diadem offered to him by Marc Antony in his role as one of a Lupercal priest. Our character recalls:

> 'My father used to tell a story of when he attended the festival of the Lupercalia many years ago when he was a younger man and Marcus Antonius, one of the consuls, presented the now deified Julius Caesar, his co-consul, with a diadem, implying his kingly status ? I cannot im agine that these gods that we are expected to worship would be pleased with their festival being turned into the platform for a political stunt ? It was so farcical it could have been one of th ose plays they put on for the people.'

Click on the link to plays and it reveals the following image: the front cover of an edition of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*:
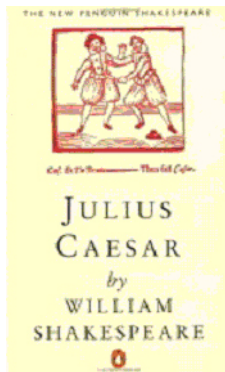
The students have, therefore, included a piece of dramatic irony here, as the philosopher's comments on the theatrical nature of Caesar's gesture will indeed provide the basis of a scene in Shakespeare's famous play written over 1600 years later.

This is another feature of the project that I was keen to encourage: though students were told to pay particular attention to the setting of the festival in A.D. 10, I did allow them a bit of 'anachronistic humour' (in the form of, for example, modern images) as a way of enlivening their accounts overall. The current example provides a particularly

effective illustration of this 'value-added' quality.

Conclusion

I offer finally a very brief summary. Once I had negotiated the pedagogical and technical intricacies of my proposed project-as part of the general challenge of mapping theory onto contextualised, 21st century UK Higher Education reality-I was able to proceed with some confidence. In the few examples I have highlighted above (and I could have included many more), I hope to have shown that the students, working together on a project which requires them to think like an ancient, have produced some excellent and original perspectives on the ancient world. The module will run again in future years, and I look forward to more innovative explorations into the minds of the ancients as they live their religious experience.

Endnotes

- For useful overviews, see M. Beard, J. North and S. Price (1998), **Religions of Rome Volume I: A History**, Cambridge, 42-54; J. Scheid (2003), **An Introduction to Roman Religion**, Indiana, 5-38.

- The most important contributions to this issue are: M. Beard (1987), 'A Complex of Times: No more Sheep on Romulus' Birthday', PCPS 33, 1-15; J. Scheid (1992), 'Myth, Cult and Reality in Ovid's Fasti', PCPS 38, 118-31; D. Feeney (1998), **Literature and Religion at Rome**, Cambridge, 1-11.

- I chose these two festivals as they are two of the most frequently documented in our ancient sources, thus offering the students a range of primary and secondary source material with which to grapple. By giving the students a particular date to work with, the project encourages students away from a monolithic approach to 'ancient' evidence, a label which can often encompass material across a period of almost 1000 years: students now have to think hard about ideas and themes which are likely to be current/ in vogue in A.D. 10. The choice of date is by no means arbitrary: A.D. 10 comes towards the end of the reign of Rome's first Emperor, Augustus, who made substantial changes to the physical and organisational aspects of Roman religion.

- Groups of two need to construct a narrative of one character's experience in no more than 2500 words; groups of three need to construct a narrative of two characters' experiences in no more than 3000 words. Students are allowed to choose their own groups. While it might be more beneficial pedagogically for me to have organised the groups myself (so that people with different experiences/ from different departments might learn from each other), the practical advantage of allowing students to organise their own groups is that I can more readily disengage myself from the responsibility over the inner workings of the groups: it is made clear to the students that, as an important transferable skill, they need to share out the work amongst themselves and deal with any 'internal disputes' for themselves (at least in the first instance).

- See K. Hopkins (1991), 'From Blessing to Violence', in A. Molho et al. (edd.), **City States in Classical Antiquity and Medieval Italy**, Stuttgart, 484.

- For example, the use of multimedia in a lecture scenario, often praised for its ability to retain student attention levels, can be viewed negatively when one takes into account the presence of dyslexic students in the audience, for whom the processing of different forms of media at once can be a particular challenge.

- I am thinking here in particular about the National Student Survey, on which more below.

- As a representative sample of the available literature on wikis, I have used the resources from Jane Knight's, Guide to e-learning in FE and HE Education, The University of British Columbia, e-learning Centre (2005). Online articles accessed through this site include: B. Lamb, "Wide Open Spaces: Wikis, Ready or Not", **Educause Review** 39 (2004), 36-48; "7 Things you should know about Wikis", **Educause Learning Initiative**, July 2005; S. Pixy Ferris and H. Wilder, "Uses and Potential of Wikis in the Classroom", **Journal of Online Education 2** (2006).

- As mentioned above, 60% of the marks are determined by the work of the individual (source analysis and

essay); 40% by group work in twos or three. Overall, I feel that the module's design strikes the right balance between assessing the individual and allowing opportunities for meaningful group activity and learning.

- Students are not being marked on their technical expertise per se; it is only important insofar as it facilitates the narrative they are constructing. TWiki allows for text of different size, font and colour; it also allows hyperlinks, which can lead a viewer to more text (as in a footnote) or to pictures, photos and maps. This is more than sufficient for our present purposes. With the introduction of the new VLE at Leeds in 2008, it is likely that its wiki function will be suitable for future occurrences of the module.

- See e.g. J. Moon (2002), **The Module and Programme Handbook: A Practical Resource for Linking Levels, Learning Outcomes and Assessment**, London, 91; J. Biggs (2003), Teaching for Quality Learning at University, Buckingham, 3-4; H. Fry, S. Ketteridge and S. Marshall (2004), "Understanding Student Learning", in H. Fry, S. Ketteridge and S. Marshall (eds.), **A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education**, London, 17-19.

- It is understandable in the sense that students, when faced with increased fees and debt, often need to juggle academic and part-time work commitments to make ends meet. More positively, a 'strategic' approach to learning might be particularly commended by employers, who would be impressed by an ability to reach an acceptable/ required academic level whilst amassing an impressive range of transferable skills/ experiences from extracurricular activities.

- There is little space here to register my general scepticism towards the NSS in its present form. Besides the inevitable discrepancy between, on the one hand, good teaching and learning practices in HE and, on the other, student perceptions of what is good for them, the general anonymity of the surveys (who is making the comment - are they reliable? which module(s) are they referring to?) makes it difficult to assess what the reliable feedback is and, where it is well-meaning and constructive, to where it should be directed.

- I would like to offer here my sincere thanks to Simon Davis from the University of Leeds for setting up and administering my wiki requirements. I have had very good technical assistance and money (from a Faculty of Arts Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund award) to help in the setting up of the project. Money and technical know-how are obviously other factors to consider before embarking upon such a module.

- Whilst students were allowed to pick any character they wanted for their assignment (subject to my approval), I did stipulate that he/she should be over twenty years old, suitably informed and sane, just in case they were tempted to write anything down and pass it off as the persona of a mad, ignorant individual or a child!

- Obviously, as the project was marked as an online exercise, a certain amount of the visual effect of the narratives is lost by reproducing the students' words in print. Nevertheless, the selections of narrative given below do serve the purpose of drawing attention to the creative ways in which the students were thinking.

- The sections from the students' narrative have been adapted only in terms of correcting grammar/ spelling where appropriate. Underlined words indicate places where students had, in their wikis, provided hyperlinks to additional material.

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