

AMONG GODS, MYTHS, AND THE CULT OF THE EMPEROR

In Roman times, religion was an intrinsic part of daily life, unlike today. It was polytheistic, headed by the Capitoline Triad (Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva).

Rome's pantheon was gradually enriched as a result of conquests and the religious influences of other territories. Hercules was possibly the most important divinity in Gades.

Assimilated by the Romans from the Phoenician and Greek pantheons (Melqart–Heracles), this son of Jupiter was renowned for his great strength, and was the most famous and popular hero of Antiquity, often represented with the club and the lion skin upon his head, fastened with the famous Herculean knot.

We know of iconographic representations of *Hercules Gaditanus* on every medium, from the famous bronze sculpture of Sancti Petri to his omnipresence on the obverse of local coinage.

The most important oracular temple of the Strait of Gibraltar was the long-lived Heracleion, located at the eastern end of the island of Ctinusa (today's islet of Sancti Petri), founded in Phoenician times and clearly maintained until the 4th century AD, since rituals were still carried out then. Its importance was such that even Emperor Hadrian minted gold coins (*aurei*) with the image of the temple and the divinity.



Temples and Sanctuaries in Gades

The known archaeological remains do not do justice to the many religious buildings that must have existed in Antiquity, with only six attested.

The temple of Saturn (around today's Castillo de San Sebastián) and that of Venus Marina (opposite, in Erytheia), according to the sources (Strabo and Avienus).

The already mentioned Heracleion on the islet of Sancti Petri, cited in Greco-Roman literature and supported by indirect archaeological finds. A temple to Minerva, known indirectly thanks to a monumental inscription published in the 18th century, now lost.

The remains of a religious complex perhaps dedicated to Aesculapius and Hygieia, gods of medicine, health, and healing, in the *Casa del Obispo*.

And the recent discoveries of a possible temple of Isis (on Calle Juan Ramón Jiménez).

In addition, there must have been multiple domestic chapels (*lararia*) in houses, where the Lares and Penates were worshiped. There are hundreds of funerary inscriptions consecrated to the Manes (*Diis Manibus Sacrum*).



The Cult of the Emperor: New Gods in the Roman

Pantheon

Alongside the traditional Roman deities, Augustus decided to deify himself during his lifetime, thus instituting the so-called Imperial Cult. From then on, public institutions and private individuals dedicated thousands of statues and inscriptions to the emperors and members of their families in the fora and temples of the main cities of the Empire.

In Gades, the best example is found in the statues recovered around the Heracleion: an effigy of Trajan, heroized or deified, produced in Hadrian's time in white marble from the quarries of Mijas (Málaga), depicting a mature man, slightly larger than life size, nude and wearing a mantle or *chlamys*, clearly identified as an emperor by the ribbons (*infulae*) that tied his imperial diadem, now lost.

And the so-called bronze *thoracatus*, representing a possible emperor in military attire—Augustus for some, Trajan for others—of which the general's cuirass remains, decorated with the mask of Oceanus, although it might also have been a military trophy.

Another *thoracata* statue, today lost, perhaps also Hadrianic, known from drawings since the 16th century, illustrates that such representations must have been frequent in the forum or other public buildings of Gades.

Traditional worship and veneration of the Imperial House led to the proliferation of priests and priestesses in Rome and in the *coloniae* and *municipia* (*pontifices*, *sacerdotes*, *flamines*, *flaminicae*), as also occurred in Cádiz: Balbus himself is cited as *pontifex* in local coinage.



Roman Rituals: The Relief of the Haruspex Fulvius

Salvus from Ostia

No one in Rome moved a finger without the gods' approval. A good example is illustrated by this travertine plaque of the *haruspex* or priest who interpreted omens, Gaius Fulvius Salvus (1st c. BC), from the famous sanctuary of Hercules at the *Area Sacra della Via della Foce*, whose marble original is preserved in the Ostia Museum.

From right to left, one can see a "miraculous" fishing scene with a seine net, through which a statue of Hercules was recovered. He then appears delivering to a young man in a toga some tablets freshly taken from a chest resting on a prismatic pedestal.

These are the famous *sortes*, a ritual of drawing messages which the augur interpreted, explaining the omen of the activity in question, embodied by an adult figure framed by a winged Victory.

This piece presents multiple analogies with Gades. It is the only known *almadraba* (tuna-fishing) scene in an artifact of this kind, an activity characteristic of our region. It illustrates the recovery of a statue of Hercules, possibly very ancient, given his threatening posture (*Smiting God type*), similar to the pre-Roman bronzes from Sancti Petri or the Hadrianic statue of *Hercules Gaditanus*, all of them underwater finds.

And it reflects the importance of the cult of Hercules, which must have been continuous in our city: it is evoked in the net, in the offerer, and in the sanctuary where this frieze was once installed. In Gades, ships, before departing on their Atlantic-Mediterranean voyages, must often have resorted to this kind of ritual.



VRBS IVLIA GADITANA

Desempolvando su pasado

Do You Know Who the Muses Were?

Considered goddesses and inspirers of the Arts, there were nine Muses: Calliope (poetry and song), Clio (History and rhetoric), Erato (lyric and erotic poetry), Euterpe (sung poetry), Melpomene (tragedy), Polyhymnia (pantomime), Thalia (comedy), Terpsichore (dance and chorus), and Urania (astronomy).

Two of them were depicted in a richly decorated room from the mid-1st century, painted in the Third Pompeian Style in the *Casa del Obispo*. Melpomene with a tragic mask and a club, Clio with a diptych containing some lines of writing, resting on a pedestal ; and possibly Apollo as the protagonist of a mythological scene, of which only his face is preserved.

These paintings find numerous parallels in Pompeii and other major Mediterranean sites.

