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Prophecies of Roman Rule in the Imperial Period (27 BCE–284 CE)

Munirah Ali Saleh ALaqeel¹

Abstract

This research examines the concept of prophecies and the art of divination in the Roman Empire from 27 BC to 284 AD, highlighting its role as a religious, cultural and political phenomenon. The research aims to analyze how emperors manipulated prophecies to enhance their political legitimacy and guide fateful decisions. In a descriptive-analytic analysis, sources of Roman literature and historiography are considered and analyzed in an attempt to understand the political and religious dimensions of prophecies. Additionally, the study employs comparative analysis to explore the cultural interactions between the Romans and other cultures, including the Greek and Egyptian cultures. The study concluded that prophecies represented not only religious beliefs, but also an effective political tool that helped emperors achieve their goals, especially in times of crises and wars. Additionally, the results revealed that the prophecies reflected the cultural interaction between the Romans and other peoples, and contributed to the formation of the Roman political system. The research recommended the need for deeper comparative studies between prophetic practices in ancient civilizations, with a focus on their role in strengthening political power. It also stressed the importance of a more comprehensive analysis of the primary texts to understand the relationship between religion and politics in the Roman Empire.

Keywords: Religion and politics, Roman culture, Ancient divination, Cultural influences - Political legitimacy.

Introduction

Ancient civilizations had a great interest in understanding the unknown and foreseeing the future, as prophecies played a prominent role in shaping religious, political, and social systems. In the Roman Empire, prophecies were an integral part of daily life, deeply connected to entrenched religious beliefs. Priests, through methods like bird observation, dream interpretation, and consultation, interpreted these prophecies. Such practices were not confined to the populace but were also utilized by emperors to bolster their political legitimacy and justify critical decisions (Al-Majdi, 2006; Sammar, 2009).

In ancient Rome, prophecies were deeply rooted in religious beliefs, as the Romans perceiving divine signs as messages sent by the gods through natural phenomena and dreams. These signs guided major political and military decisions. Interpreting the movements and sounds of birds, for example, was seen as a sign of divine will. This shows how religion had a big impact on the empire's significant decisions (Okasha et al., 1991). Prophecies also served as an effective strategic tool for achieving political stability, especially during crises and wars. For example, Emperor Augustus relied on a prophecy claiming his divine lineage, which helped him secure the support of both the populace and the political elite. These practices demonstrated the intricate interplay between religion and politics in the Roman Empire (Hafiz, 2007; Dyckhoff & Kovalev).

The cultural impact of prophecies played a strong role in defining the Roman identity. The

¹ History and Heritage Department, Faculty of Arts, Dammam, Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University, Saudi Arabia, Email: maaqael@iau.edu.sa



prophecies of the Greeks and Egyptians, specifically Apollo and Sibyl, shaped these customs and the cultural and religious interaction between ancient cultures. As an illustration, the Romans took over divination techniques learned from the Greeks, including asking priests and interpreting their dreams, and incorporated them into both the political and religious structures (Barander, 1993; Jaghloom, 1988). Historical texts confirm the use of prophecies for social control. During times of crisis, rulers would announce certain prophecies to calm the populace or legitimize their actions, such as declaring wars or levying taxes. This political manipulation of prophecies attests to their deep impact in all spheres of life in the Roman Empire (Seniobos, 2012). The transformation of Roman prophecies started with the spread of Christianity in the third century AD. Whereas pagan prophecies were used to bolster the legitimacy of rulers, Christian prophecies began to be employed to present a new religious vision that focused on spiritual salvation rather than political control. That change signifies a transformation in the role of religion in politics in the empire (Omran, 2008; Mason, 2019).

For example, Emperor Nero relied on a prophecy that his birth was “divine,” which helped him give a sacred character to his rule, despite the political challenges he faced (Khashim, 2002). This reflects how religion was used to justify political power in ancient Rome. Moreover, the practices of prophecy in other civilizations, such as Greek and Egyptian ones, have greatly influenced the Roman prophecies. For example, Apollo prophecies have been adopted by the Romans from the Greeks and prophesy techniques in Egypt, enriching cultural and religious relations between ancient nations. That cultural practice can be seen in the Romans’ use of terms and practice inspired by the neighboring countries (Jaghloom, 1988; Dyckhoff & Kovalev, 2006).

This research aims to analyze the role of prophecies in the Roman Empire as a religious, political, and cultural phenomenon, with a focus on how they were used as a tool to achieve political legitimacy and guide decisions. It also aims to provide a comparison between Roman prophetic practices and their counterparts in other civilizations for a deeper understanding of the relationship between religion and politics in ancient times (Omran, 2008; Zayed, 2019).

Reasons for Choosing the Topic

Several academic and scientific factors motivated the scholar to choose this topic, with a focus on why prophecies and divinations were important in ancient countries, and the Roman Empire in particular. Such reasons are summarized as follows:

1. Highlighting the Significance of Prophecies and Their Impact on the Roman Society

The researcher was motivated to conduct studies on prophecies in a bid to understand their profound impact on the Roman society in terms of religion, politics, and society in general. Prophecies were not only a religious issue but effective tools used to make political and strategic goals as well.

2. Identifying Types and Tools of Diviners

The researcher was interested in knowing about techniques used by diviners to predict the unseen, including bird observation, natural phenomena, and dreams. By documenting and studying such tools, this study aims to understand their role in political and social decision-making.

3. Analyzing the Role of Prophecies and How They Shaped the Political Fate of the Roman Empire

One main reason for choosing the topic was the desire to study how prophecies were used as a

means of guiding political and military decisions, and how they contributed to legitimizing the rule of emperors, such as Augustus and Nero, especially in critical periods of the history of the empire.

4. Highlighting the Cultural and Religious Interaction between the Romans and the Other Nations

The researcher paid an attention to understanding how Roman prophecies were influenced by the religious beliefs of other civilizations, such as the Greek and Egyptian, and studying how the Romans adapted these beliefs to suit their political and religious needs.

5. Filling a Gap in Research in Prophecy Analysis

The researcher saw a lack of in-depth studies regarding prophecies and divinations in the Rome Empire. In an effort to bridge this, this work will conduct an in-depth analysis and shed new and particular analysis in academic literature towards shedding light on this significant aspect of Roman history.

Research Problem

Prophecies and foretelling beliefs represent one of the most striking cultural and religious factors in ancient cultures, particularly in the case of the Roman state. In order to understand the unknown and make important political, military, and social decisions, the Romans relied on prophecies. Prophecies represented not only individualistic religious ceremonies but also tools for political powers legitimation, particularly in times of transition and crises (Al-Majdi, 2006; Omran, 2008).

Prophecies, despite their important role, did not necessarily represent representations of divine will and real popular beliefs in most instances. Studies suggest that Roman rulers exploited prophecies to support their personal and political interests, using them to justify controversial decisions, such as declaring wars or imposing taxes. The Apollonian and Sibylline prophecies are prominent examples which were directed to support imperial policies directly. (Hafiz, 2007; Dyckhoff & Kovalev, 2006).

Moreover, prophecies were a means of manipulating and controlling the people. In times of crisis, certain prophecies were announced with the aim of calming the public or justifying the decisions of rulers. These political manipulations of prophecies raise questions about their credibility and the extent of their real impact on Roman society, which requires a deeper study to understand the social dimensions of this phenomenon (Seniobos, 2012; Zayed, 2019).

In addition to their social and political role, prophecies exhibit important cultural and religious exchanges between the neighboring civilizations and the Roman Empire, including the Greeks and Egyptians. Such belief evidently drew upon and enriched Roman prophetic practice, thereby opening up a rich diversity of techniques and tools for prediction. The cultural exchange informs the necessity of studying prophecies as a trans-cultural practice, including how religion played a role in shaping political and social identities (Jaghlool, 1988; Barander, 1993).

Hence, the research problem stems from the need for a comprehensive analysis of the role of prophecies in the Roman Empire, not only as religious beliefs, but also as a political, social and cultural tool. This work aims at providing answers regarding the use of prophecies by emperors for their interests, their impact in society, the tools and techniques utilized for prophecies, and to what level such prophecies were manipulated by powers (Okasha et al., 1991; Mason, 2019).

Research Objectives

The research aims to:

1. analyze the role of prophecies in strengthening the political legitimacy of the Roman Emperors.
2. study the forms of prophecies and methods of divinations in the Roman Empire.
3. explore the mutual cultural impact between the Romans and other cultures.
4. assess the social influence of prophecies in Roman society.
5. give recommendations of comparative studies for a deeper understanding of the relationship between religion and politics in ancient cultures.

Research Methodology

This study employs the descriptive-analytical approach, using it to analyze and explain literary and historical sources about prophecies and divination during the Roman Empire era. This method lets us look at and describe events using first-hand sources, like Cicero's *De Divinatione* and other Latin works. These sources reveal important details about prophecy and how it was used in Roman religious and political life. Analysis allows one to have a complete view of the role of prophecies in shaping the Roman society.

The study also employs a comparative historical approach in researching the transference of the concept of prophecy between such past cultures, such as between the Greek and the Egyptian cultures, and its transference to the Roman Empire. This approach allows one to follow comparisons and contrasts between such cultures and comprehend their influence, such as comparing the Roman prophecies about Apollo with their counterparts in Greece to comprehend how the Romans adopted and developed such a faith to integrate into political and religious life.

The study also involves qualitative analysis of prediction tools such as observation of birds, observation of natural phenomena, dream consultation, and other types of practice. This is done by studying descriptions in historical sources such as the writings of Herodotus and Dion Cassius. The analysis explains how emperors used these tools to gain prophecies and influence their political and military endeavors.

Finally, the study critically evaluates secondary sources, such as modern articles and academic works concerning prophecies during the Roman Empire period. These studies are used to explain and analyze information from primary sources, taking into account the challenges related to the reliability of early historical documents. By such critical approach, the investigation aims to propose a balanced and comprehensive view of the subject, clarifying the political and religious dimensions of the prophecies

Research Significance

The study is significant as it delves into the role prophecies played in the Roman Empire, transforming them from a mere religious practice to an essential component of political and social life within the state. The study contributes to understanding how such prophecies influenced political and military actions of the Roman emperors, enhancing our analysis of state and religion relationships in ancient cultures. Notably, the Romans utilized this practice to legitimize regimes and sanction actions before the people (Hafiz, 2007; Al-Majdi, 2006).

Moreover, the study discloses the social and cultural dimensions of prophecies, an expression of the religious worldview of the Romans and its relation to gods and oracles. In an examination of predictive tools such as dreams, birds, and nature, the study reveals how such practices shaped the cultural identity of the Roman Empire. Besides, the study aims to raise awareness about the role played by oracles in life of the Romans, whether they belong to the elite or the common (Okasha et al., 1991; Dyckhoff & Kovalev, 2006).

Additionally, the study reveals how prophecies shaped political transformation in the empire, particularly during times of transformation or crises. Emperors used prophecies as a tool to influence citizens' actions and strengthen their positions during periods of internal and external conflict. This section of the study addresses the actions of rulers and their use of religion in a quest for political calm (Zayed, 2019; Omran, 2008).

From an academic perspective, the study enriches academic studies of the Roman Empire through analysis of unconventional subjects such as prophecies and divination. This enables researchers to gain a deeper level of understanding regarding the Roman history, not only in terms of political and military events but also through analysis of religious beliefs that played a role in shaping such events. The study is an enriching contribution to studies relating to religion and politics in ancient times (Aurelius, 2019; Eliade, 1995).

Furthermore, the study could open up new pathways for investigating how religious beliefs shaped political structures in various civilizations. By comparing Roman customs to those of other ancient civilizations, like the Greeks and Egyptians, we might learn more about how religion affected the growth of society. Thus, the research makes a broad contribution to the humanities and social sciences (Barinder, 1993; Jaghloom, 1988).

Research Themes

The study talks about the idea and role of prophecies and divination in the Roman Empire in terms of cultural exchange and political legitimacy. It also looks at the tools and methods that were used for prophecy and the relationship between religion and politics at that time. The study concludes by analyzing its findings and proposing recommendations for further, in-depth examination of the role prophecies played in ancient civilizations.

Previous Studies

Cicero's Study (1922):

The study aimed to analyze the concept of divination and prediction as mentioned in the book *De Divinatione*, and explore its role in shaping politics and religion in the Roman Empire. It adopted the descriptive-analytic method in researching Latin literary and historical documents. Divination, in terms of findings, played both political and religious functions for ruling legitimacy and decision-guiding. The study recommended the need to document literary texts and analyze the influence of divination in other fields, such as arts and culture.

Herodotus' Study:

This study analyzed the concept of prophecy in Greek society and its influence on the Romans, tracing the transfer of prophetic practices between the two civilizations. The comparative historical method was used to analyze literary and historical texts. The findings highlighted the central role of prophecies in Greek religious and political life, significantly

influencing the Roman practices. The study recommended broader comparative research involving the Egyptian and the Roman civilizations.

Ruth's Study (1916):

This study investigated the role of prophecies in establishing legitimacy during Emperor Claudius' reign. It adopted the descriptive-analytical method through a review of political occurrences and documents in the past. Analysis revealed that prophecies facilitated granting divine character to Claudius' rule. It recommended researching the role of prophecies and myths in shaping leaders' policies during past times in history.

Abdulaziz Imam Mahmoud's Study (2021):

This study analyzed the types and methods of divination in the Roman society and their role in political and religious life. The analytical-textual method was used to study Cicero's writings. The findings indicated that divination served as a means of communication with divine forces and guided political decisions. The study recommended comparative research on Roman divination and its counterparts in other cultures to understand its political impact.

Hafiz's Study (2007):

This study considered the function played by prophecies in shaping political actions of the Roman Empire, specifically with regard to the role played by emperors in using them in a bid to legitimize and consolidate power. It adopted a historical-analytic strategy in its analysis of literary works in an attempt to comprehend them. By analysis, it showed that prophecies helped stabilize governments of leaders and grant legitimacy to powers with a divine entity's blessings. It suggested field studies to understand how prophecies shaped the empire's internal and external affairs.

Dyckhoff and Kovalev's Study (2006):

This study aimed to analyze the role of Apollo's prophecies in legitimizing Roman rulers and to explore the relationship between religion and politics. It adopted the historical-analytical method by examining texts and artifacts related to Apollo's prophecies. The results demonstrated that these prophecies were an effective tool in solidifying political authority and supporting rulers. The study recommended comparative research on the influence of prophecies in other civilizations to understand strategies for employing religion in politics.

Al-Najm and Azzouz's Study (2017):

The study focused on researching the intersection between myth and prophecy in both Greco and Romano cultures and its significance to political and religious frameworks. It employed the historical-analytic method in the analysis of literary and historical works. According to the study, prophecies and myths effectively mobilized people and supported the Roman policies. The study recommended conducting comparative studies on the impact of myths and prophecies on the construction of political systems in various civilizations.

Sammar's Study (2009):

This study contrasted pre-Islamic Arabs and Roman society's practice of divination in a quest to explore its contribution to political decision-making. We conducted a comparative analysis

of texts from both society and literature, using the comparative method. In accordance with the analysis, both societies shared the practice of reading the future via divination. The study recommended fieldwork in a quest to try and understand its contribution to daily life in traditional society.

Mar'i's Study (2015):

The study analyzed the role of prophecies in mosaics and works of art and culture, both in Byzantine and Ptolemaic times. It applied the comparative-analytic approach in studying artwork and documents. It revealed that prophecies appeared in artwork as political and religious expression. It suggested studying the role of prophecies in other artwork, such as painting and sculpture.

Zayed's Study (2019):

This study analyzed the role of prophecies in the legitimation of Emperor Septimius Severus in addition to his political and military reforms. It adopted a descriptive-analytical method in investigating historical documents and monuments. In its conclusion, it revealed that prophecies ranked amongst the ruling strategies used in a move towards political stability achievement. It recommended field studies in an attempt to understand whether prophecies effectively played a role in influencing public thinking in the empire or not.

Theoretical Framework

First: The Concept of "Prophecy" and "Divination" among the Romans

"Prophecy" is a perception of the invisible, and "invisible" is a term applicable to whatever cannot be seen, whether in the mind or not, and in any case, is not appreciable (Sammar, 2009, pp. 243–304). Perceiving the invisible involves intuition, guesswork, or supposition (Sammar, 2009). As the Latin phrase *praesensionem rerum futurarum* says, prophecy is the anticipation and prediction of future events. It is also a science that gives people access to divine powers (*quaque proxime ad deorum vim*; Long, A. A., 1995; Cicero, 1922).

Divination, in contrast, is a foretelling of events in the future, present, or past. However, most prevalent among the Romans was a form of divination for the purpose of predicting future events (Al-Majdi, 2006). Divination, in terms of Plato, is "touch of madness" or "temporary folly" (*a furore duxerunt*; Soukah, 2020; Ahmed, 2021; Cicero, 1922).

The Romans had known the "science of prophecy" since 127 BC. This science evolved significantly as the Roman Empire expanded, adopting and integrating the prophecies they encountered, which became a key factor in their success. This process was referred to in religious contexts as "Roman interpretation" or "Roman understanding" of the gods, particularly foreign deities in the regions and kingdoms they conquered. These deities were then considered part of the Roman pantheon. It is also important to note the concept of synchronism, which involved provinces assimilating the Roman gods and making them their own (Barander, 1993, p. 81; Jones, A., 1898, pp. 212–215).

Second: Terms of "Prophecies" or "Divination"

Literary and historiographic works have described a number of terms of prophecy, divination, or foretelling invisible items amongst the Romans. Most of these terms were learned from their

Chaldean(*), Assyrian, Greek, and Etruscan (*) ancestors. Others have discussed terms taken from Hellenistic regions of North African nations, predominantly Egypt and Carthage, when these nations were conquered in full (146–30 BC) (Jaghlool, 1988; Greve, 2014).

The Romans had a single word, *augur*, for a group of individuals who predicted the future with observation of a bird's flight, chirp, or cry (Soukah, 2020). The Romans have even taken a word, *Verticordia*, a Latin compound consisting of a verb, *vertĕre* (change, turn, modify, convert, and transform), and *cor* (heart).

In addition, the Romans used some Greek terms, as Cicero (*)pointed out, to express prediction and the art of divination, and they called it “*Madiki μαντική*,” which in his opinion means “the ability to predict the consequences of things” (Cicero,1922; Johnston, S.I, 2005).

Third: Terms Denoting Divination, Fortune-Tellers, or Soothsayer

The term "prophet" originates from the verb "to speak" or "to declare," thus signifying someone who speaks publicly (J.H.S., 1995, p. 70). The Romans used two terms, *auguria* and *auspicia*, to denote soothsayers or prophets who predicted the future through bird observation. Initially, people used the former term for unintentional bird observations, and the latter for deliberate ones.

Another term, *Haruspicy*, described divination through the observation of slaughtered or dead birds (Soukah, 2020). People referred to female soothsayers by two names: *mantis* and *pythia*. These terms were of Greek origin and were associated with the *Pythia*, the priestess of *Apollo* who prophesied divine revelations at *Delphi* (Δελφοί). The title *mantis* derives from the Greek word for "man," indicating a person with unique mental abilities who spoke based on altered states of consciousness. Meanwhile, *pythia* refers to the ancient name of *Apollo's* temple in *Delphi*, as well as the intermediary prophet of *Apollo* (Evgeni, C., 2015; J.H.S., 1995). The term "mago" also referred to female seers or witches during the Roman era (Davies, 2012).

Forth: Types of Fortune Tellers and their Tools used to Fulfill Prophecies

In all civilizations, fortune tellers occupied a prestigious position due to the tendency of rulers and people to know hidden destinies and fates. They played an important role in Roman temples and constituted a special, distinct class of social classes. Their job did not require special preparation or training and practice; although religious positions in that period were held by people who showed distinction as statesmen or army leaders, which is strong evidence of the extent of the connection between religion and the state (Okasha, Al-Nattour, Baydoun, 1991; Hogeterp, vol. 4, 2018).

Their work involved discerning the will of the gods regarding any action the state intended to undertake. They accomplished this through omens and by observing the movements and sounds

(*)Chaldees were a community dwelling in Asia Minor, and their name comes from their residence, "Chaldae." The Chaldees were known for their knowledge of astrology and were influenced by the Assyrians, Greeks, and Etruscans, among others (Kaptan, D., 2013, Vol. 363, pp. 1–3; Salim, 2005, p. 483).

(*)The Etruscans, according to Herodotus, were Asian and took many Italian Peninsula traditions and games, adopted later, in turn, by the Romans (Hérodote,I,P.94) .

(*)Cicero: He is a Roman historian and philosopher. He was born in Tusculum, which is located miles away from Rome. He lived during the period of the emperors “Caesar and Augustus.” He has many books, including “The Nature of the Gods - The Book of Divination”. (Soukah, 2020).

of birds, following fixed and well-known rules. A group closely related to the soothsayers was known as the "Etruscan diviners," who examined the entrails of sacrificial offerings made to the gods and interpreted the meaning of lightning (Akasha, Al-Nattour, Baydoun, 1991, p. 23). In Rome, two types of soothsayers became widespread:

1. **Natural soothsayers:** These individuals derived their predictions either from divine revelation, nature, or dreams and were divided into:
 - a. **Soothsayers of Divine Revelation:** The Romans attributed this form of prophecy to the oracular predictions at Delphi. The priestess "Pythia" would expose herself to terrestrial vapors and utter prophetic words in a trance. Similarly, the Sibyl, the renowned Phrygian goddess of prophecy, was also associated with this type of divination.
 - b. **B- Dream Soothsayers (Interpreters of Dreams):** Their origins trace back to the Greeks, and they emerged in Rome as early as the beginning of the monarchical era.
 - c. **C- Nature Soothsayers:** These individuals observed the movements of animals and birds or natural phenomena such as lightning (Al-Majdi, 2006).
 - d. **D- Augurs:** They were the most renowned type of soothsayers in Rome, observing the movements and entrails of animals and birds.
 - e. **E- Lightning Soothsayers:** The Tuscan soothsayers were particularly known for this practice. They divided the sky into sixteen sections and assigned specific interpretations to the appearance of lightning in each section, as well as to the locations where the lightning struck (Al-Majdi, 2006).
2. **Artificial Soothsayers:** These were soothsayers who used tools to perform their divinations, including weapons and sacred stones, which were widely used among the Romans. Some also employed magical figurines made of clay or wax, many of which have been discovered in Italy (Al-Majdi, 2006; Collins, 2008).

Fifth: Deities and Gods Responsible for Fulfilling Prophecies

The Romans associated specific deities and gods with prophecies. They held the belief that these deities possessed knowledge of the future and frequently sent signs to people without requiring their permission. Any unexpected phenomenon was considered an omen of an unforeseen event (Snybos, 2012). Among the most notable deities associated with prophecies were:

1. **Sabazios (Σαβάζιοσ):** This Eastern deity was known in Phrygia (northwest Asia Minor) and Thrace and was worshipped in the northern Balkans and central Anatolia (Isik, F., 1986/87; Hashem, 2017). His reputation spread in Rome and Italy, especially during the late Roman Empire. Zeus, the chief Olympian god, was considered the supreme ruler, controlling the sky, lightning, thunder, storms, and rain. As part of his worship, people often brought a soothsayer with them to read omens and tell the future by presenting a votive hand (usually the right hand) with different symbols on it, such as a snake with a rooster's crest on top of it to represent earth and sky (Hashem, 2017).
2. **Venus Verticordia:** Worship of this goddess spread in North Africa, particularly in

Carthage, and reached Rome during the Second Punic War^(*) (264–146 BC). By 220 BC, Venus Verticordia, the goddess of beauty and love, similar to the Greek goddess Aphrodite, became associated with the Sibylline prophecies, aiding in changing destinies and hearts (Porte, 1978).

3. **Apollo (The Prophet):** Apollo, the Olympian god of the Greeks and the son of Zeus, symbolized the radiant sun and growing crops. Known as "The Prophet," Apollo was believed to fulfill prophecies. Classical sources state, "Apollo was considered the savior god who cleansed all evil and impurity through his prophecies." The Romans continued to worship him, inheriting the tradition from their Greek predecessors (Dyckhoff and Kovalev, 2006, p. 277).
4. Additionally, Jupiter (or Jove) was associated with natural phenomena such as lightning, believed to shower treasures from the sky. People also revered the goddess Cybele, another prophetic deity (Al-Majdi, 2006).

Sixth: Types of Prophecies

Numerous types of prophecies emerged in ancient Rome, especially after the deification of rulers and emperors. These practices seem to have been influenced by the ancient Egyptian civilization, particularly after Augustus's conquest of Egypt in 30 BC (Durant, W., 2001). Key types of prophecies utilized by the Romans from the royal era until the end of Diocletian's reign in 284 AD include:

1. Divine Revelation Prophecies:

These relied on divine inspiration communicated by priests and soothsayers, who acted as intermediaries between gods and humans.

- a. Apollo's Prophecies:
 - b. These typically addressed public life and justice, with sources noting, "The people could not dispense with these prophecies, which became intertwined with all aspects of their lives" (Dyckhoff & Kovalev, 2006, p. 277).
- c. Pythian Prophecies:
 - d. Linked to Apollo's prophecies, these were often sought by leaders and rulers for military and administrative decisions. Pythian prophecies were delivered by the priestess Pythia. Classical authors like Plutarch describe her process: "The priestess Pythia sat on a tripod that extended into a fissure within the rocks in the temple of Apollo, where sudden gusts (wind, breath, and vapor) would emerge from the inner sanctum (Adyton), inducing a state of ecstasy and intoxication, during which she recited the prophecies." These prophecies persisted throughout the Greek and Roman periods (Henry, A. Spiller, 2002, p.198).
- e. Sibylline Oracles:
 - f. These "Sibylline Oracles" were associated with the goddess "Cybele" and were believed

^(*)The Second Punic War^(*) (264–146 BCE) arose from political and economic conflicts between Rome and Carthage, culminating in Rome's occupation of Carthage and the destruction of its landmarks. For more details, see Mar'i (2015, p. 9) and Abi Fadel (2005, p. 15).

to play a role in altering destinies, particularly during times of war (Porte, D., 1978, p.867).

2. Prophecies of Dreams and Nature:

The Romans were familiar with this type of prophecy, which relied on dreams, since the beginning of the "Royal Era" in Rome. Sources mention that "Tarquinius Superbus," the Etruscan King of Rome, had a dream in which he saw himself holding two twin lambs. He slaughtered one, but the second lamb attacked him with its horns. While lying on the ground, he saw the sun changing its course. Dream interpreters explained this dream by warning the king about a seemingly insignificant person whom the king underestimated, comparing him to a lamb, yet this person might bring down the king from his high position. The change in the sun's course foretold a change in governance, which would have favorable outcomes as the sun moved from left to right (Al-Majdi, 2006).

As for the prophecies of nature, they relied mainly on lightning and sometimes on omens such as rainfalls (Al-Majdi, 2006).

Seventh: The Origins of the Romans' Belief in Prophecies before the Imperial Era

The Roman Empire began, like other ancient civilizations, as small huts for fishermen. Over time, as its inhabitants advanced in civilization, it gradually grew until it reached its peak, becoming the great empire that poets proudly extolled and writers competed to describe its public buildings, scientific advancements, and commercial activities. As the empire expanded, people began to question the origins of the nation that had built such a magnificent empire. Consequently, the Romans created a fictional history for themselves (Farid, 2012), based on myths and prophecies, or as their imagination embellished them. Some of these stories traced their origins to mighty warriors known for their strength and valor, while others claimed divine ancestry, attributing their origins to angels, stars, or mythical gods, elevating them above the common nations and enhancing their influence over their people. These myths and prophecies were closely intertwined with the spiritual life of the Roman people, both within the empire and beyond. As Mircea Eliade states, "They tell of a sacred history, recounting an event that took place in the first age, the time of marvelous beginnings" (Al-Deeb, 2009, p. 17; Eliade, 1995).

Cicero mentions that the Romans had unique methods for prophecies, relying on superstition and the power of gods. These prophecies began with Rome foundation in 752 BC by Romulus, who was an expert augur. He interpreted the omen of a bird to choose the location for founding the city (Cicero, 1922). They built huts on a hill called the "Palatine" and surrounded them with a wall to protect their territory. This was the humble beginning of a city that would become the greatest in the world. It is said that "the wall was so low that Remus, Romulus's brother, leaped over it and said, 'Do you call this the wall of a city?' Romulus was enraged by this and struck his brother, killing him. He was the first to die, and his blood stained the walls of Rome" (Zidan, 2012, p. 35). The researcher believes that this prophecy embedded certain concepts in the Roman psyche: first, that the ruler has the final say in the governance of the city, and second, that anyone who interferes with the city's politics without justification deserves death, a notion that later manifested in the imperial rule, particularly during the reign of Nero.

Thus, the Romans believed in prophecies from the very founding of Rome, convinced that the gods sent signs without question. Any unexpected event was interpreted as an omen of unforeseen something. For example, a comet star appeared before Caesar's death, and people

took it as a sign of his impending demise (Seniobos, 2012). The prophecy of Caesar's assassination recounts how the goddess Venus desperately tried to alter Caesar's fate, but Jupiter convinced her that it was written in the tablets of destiny, made of bronze and iron, and could not be changed. However, he promised to make him immortal among the gods, and with this prophecy, the idea of deifying Roman emperors spread throughout the ages (Al-Majdi, 2006). Additionally, the Romans interpreted certain natural events as signs. For instance, if thunder rumbled when the nation gathered to negotiate an issue, they believed it meant that the planet Jupiter was unwilling to allow any decision to be made that day. They took even the slightest occurrence as a sign of something significant, whether it was a flash of lightning, a word from a speaker, a rat crossing the road, or any sign from an oracle. All of these were interpreted as omens (Seniobos, 2012).

Eighth: Prophecies of Rulers and Emperors

Belief in prophecies was not limited to the common people; even the Roman Republic had six omens to foretell its future. It maintained a prophetic book, "Sibylline Books," which was highly revered and meticulously preserved. Additionally, sacred chickens were raised by priests, and no public action, assembly, or election was undertaken without consulting these omens. This practice involved observing signs in various phenomena, such as the movement of birds.

In 195 AC, for instance, it was rumored that lightning struck a temple of Jupiter and that a hair grew on the head of a statue of Hercules. A governor reported the birth of a three-legged chicken, prompting the Senate to convene to deliberate on these omens (Seniobos, 2012).

As for rulers and commanders, it was customary for a commander planning an attack to examine the entrails of the dead, while governors consulted bird movements before convening councils. This practice, referred to as "taking the auspices," signified divine approval or disapproval of their plans (Seniobos, 2012, p. 147).

For emperors, however, prophecies were instrumental in achieving personal ambitions and legitimizing their rule. Most emperors ascended the throne through questionable means, often with blood on their hands (Al-Najm & Azzouz). To legitimize their authority, they relied on "divine revelations," especially as the concept of emperor deification. This practice began with the deification of Augustus and Caligula. Emperors claimed divine descent and believed they would join the gods after death, drawing from the rich spiritual traditions of the East (Hafiz, 2007; Beurlier, 1890).

After the assassination of Julius Caesar, the Roman Senate acted on a prophecy predicting that the kingdom would be divided between Octavius (later Augustus) and Mark Antony, who allied with Cleopatra VII. The Senate convened again following another prophecy that Octavius was a descendant of the god Julius Caesar. This decision proved wise, as Augustus implemented significant political, military, and economic reforms (Hafiz, 2007; Seniobos, 2012).

Prophecies during the Julio-Claudian Dynasty (14–68 CE)

The emperors of this dynasty hailed from either the Julian family, to which Augustus belonged, or the descendants of Empress Livia from her first husband, Tiberius Claudius Nero (Bourne, 1964). Historical sources document prophetic events during this era. For instance, Emperor Tiberius (14–37 AD) had a teacher, Theodorus of Gadara, who predicted that he was "clay mixed with blood," foreshadowing the conflicts and wars of his reign (Mason, 1985, p. 34).

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Similarly, Emperor Claudius (41–54 AD) was afflicted with severe illness and mental retardation, yet he ascended the throne based on a prophecy that he was a descendant of the divine Augustus (Ruth, 1916).

During Emperor Nero's reign (54–68 AD), he propagated a rumor that his birth was divinely ordained and linked to Augustus. This claim helped solidify his rule, initially marked by humility, kindness, and a love for arts and literature. His followers even declared that Apollo, the god of arts, had incarnated in him. However, his reign soon turned tyrannical, plunging Rome into chaos (Khshaim, 2002).

Prophecies during the Reign of the Good Emperors (96–180 CE)

Historians regard the period between 96 and 180 AD as the golden age of the Roman Empire, characterized by effective governance, territorial expansion, and enlightened reform (Omran, 2008). Prophecies also influenced the reigns of the "Good Emperors." Emperor Hadrian (117–138 AD) is noted for consulting gods and seers before his military campaigns and travels (Cassius, 2003).

In the Antonine era, named after Emperor Antoninus Pius (138–161 AD), religious and philosophical beliefs played a significant role. Marcus Aurelius, in his *Meditations*, highlighted these influences (Aurelius, 2019). However, his reign was marked by misfortune, including a devastating plague that ravaged the empire during his campaigns against the Parthians (Omran, 2008).

Prophecy during the Severan Dynasty (192–235 CE):

During the reign of the Severan dynasty, the Roman Empire reached its greatest territorial extent, serving as a bridge between the East and the West, forming a unique point of convergence. This dynasty implemented numerous administrative, military, and economic reforms (Zayed, 2019). The Severan rulers relied heavily on divine oracles and prophecies, particularly because their founder, Septimius Severus, was of African origin and deeply influenced by the religious beliefs of the African region. These prophecies were instrumental in legitimizing the rule of the dynasty (Masrou, 2019).

In his work *Roman History*, particularly in the tenth volume, Dio Cassius recounts that Septimius Severus, a member of the Senate at the time, aspired to ascend to the throne of the Roman Empire. To legitimize his claim to power, Severus began displaying signs before the Senate. One such sign was a dream in which he saw himself suckling from a she-wolf, reminiscent of Romulus, the legendary founder of Rome. On another occasion, he dreamt of water gushing from his hands, resembling a spring (Cassius, 2003).

The second omen, also documented by Cassius, described how Severus was taken to an observatory where he perceived the lands and seas from above. He touched them as if they were a harmonious musical instrument, and melodious sounds emanated from these elements. In another instance, Severus imagined a horse in the Roman Forum unseating Pertinax, the reigning emperor, and then easily allowing Severus himself to mount it (Cassius, 2003). After eliminating his rivals, Septimius Severus consolidated his power, attributing his success to these dreams and prophecies.

Severus passed away in 211 AD, leaving the throne to his sons, Marcus Aurelius Antoninus

(commonly known as Caracalla) and Geta. However, within a year of their joint rule, Caracalla orchestrated his brother's assassination, claiming that Geta was plotting against him (Omran, 2008). Subsequently, Caracalla sought to strengthen his ties with the gods through priests and seers, who advised him to increase the empire's loyal followers. In response, he issued a decree granting Roman citizenship to all free inhabitants of the empire. This decree is mentioned in the *Historia Augusta*, written during the 4th century AD: during Caracalla's reign, Roman citizenship was granted to all (López García, 2024). This measure allowed the empire to enjoy the favor of the gods.

Historians also highlight events illustrating the Severan dynasty's fascination with divination and prophecy. For instance, Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Elagabalus (218–222 AD), a priest of the Syrian Phoenician sun god Elagabal, prioritized his deity and its prophecies above all else (Al-Naseri, 1991).

The fifty years between the assassination of Alexander Severus (222–235 AD) and the ascension of Diocletian witnessed a period of rampant chaos and political decline. Nearly fifty emperors successively occupied the imperial throne during this era (Omran, 2008). This instability led to widespread disorder across the empire, the degradation of temples, and the diminished roles of priests and seers. During this time, prophetic traditions derived from monotheistic religions, particularly Christianity and Judaism, gained prominence (Mason, 2019).

When Diocletian assumed power in 284 AD, he sought to restore order following the empire's collapse. Pagan prophecies began to decline, particularly with the spread of Christianity and the emergence of missionary activities. Diocletian focused on reorganizing the political and military spheres, addressing the internal conflicts caused by the rise of Christianity (Omran, 2008).

Results

1. **First Objective: Analyzing the Role of Prophecies in Strengthening the Political Legitimacy of the Roman Emperors**

The findings reveal that prophecies were not merely religious beliefs but an effective political tool that helped emperors legitimize their rule, especially during critical periods such as crises and wars. The study confirms that the emperors relied on divine prophecies to justify their political and military decisions, thereby gaining the support of the populace and the political elites.

2. **Second Objective: Examining the Types of Prophecies and Divination Practices Used in the Roman Empire**

The results indicate that the Romans employed various types of prophecies, including divine revelations, dream-based prophecies, and natural signs. Tools such as bird observation, dream interpretation, and consultations with priests were used to achieve these prophecies, reflecting the diversity of religious practices during this period.

3. **Third Objective: Exploring the Cultural Interactions Between the Romans and Other Civilizations**

The findings show that the Roman prophecies were significantly influenced by the divinatory practices of other civilizations, such as the Greeks and Egyptians. The Romans adopted many predictive methods from those cultures, enhancing the cultural

4. Fourth Objective: Evaluating the Social Impact of Prophecies on the Roman Society

The study reveals that prophecies played a vital role in calming the people during crises and guiding their behavior in alignment with the political vision of the rulers. Prophecies became an integral part of the cultural and religious identity of the Roman society, influencing various aspects of daily life.

5. Fifth Objective: Providing Recommendations for Comparative Studies on the Relationship Between Religion and Politics in Ancient Civilizations

The results underscore the need for comparative studies between Roman prophecies and divination practices in other civilizations to deepen understanding of their role in shaping political systems.

Conclusion

This research highlights the Roman society from 30 BC to 284 AD and earlier, emphasizing their belief in prophecies and divination and their impact on daily life. The study also sheds light on the relationship between religion and state within the Roman Empire and the role of prophecies in legitimizing emperors and guiding their crucial decisions.

Prophecies influenced all aspects of Roman daily life. The Romans relied on foretelling the future through bird observation, dreams, and sacred texts. These practices were shaped by the cultural and religious heritage of other civilizations, such as Greece and Egypt, demonstrating the reciprocal cultural interaction during that era.

The research outlined the religious roles of soothsayers and their types, each with specific functions. It also examined the tools used in divination, such as steles, combat instruments, and magical figurines. Prophecies included the Sibylline oracles and Apollo's prophecies, with priests and diviners acting as intermediaries to communicate these prophecies to the people. Prophecies were not merely superstitions for the commoners but were documented in books like the "Sibylline Books," which the Roman Republic held in high regard.

The Roman emperors significantly relied on divine prophecies to solidify their status as rulers supported by divine powers. For instance, emperors Augustus and Claudius used dreams to validate their legitimacy. Nero spread rumors of his divine birth and sacred lineage to Augustus. Some emperors, like Hadrian, consulted prophecies before making crucial decisions, particularly during wars. The Severan dynasty leveraged prophecies to legitimize their rule, with Septimius Severus drawing inspiration from African religious beliefs.

The Roman Empire experienced significant transformations with the spread of Christianity between 222 AD and 284 AD. This led to a decline in the pagan prophecies and the emergence of new religious visions centered on spiritual salvation, profoundly affecting the relationship between religion and politics.

In conclusion, the study recommends conducting comparative research on prophecies across various ancient civilizations to gain deeper insights into the interplay between religion and politics. It also calls for a more detailed analysis of original texts to understand these practices dimensions and their impact on ancient societies.

Recommendations

1. Conduct Comparative Studies of Prophecies in Ancient Civilizations (Roman, Greek, Egyptian).

Implementation Mechanism: Collect primary texts from different civilizations and translate them accurately. Organize joint workshops between historians and religious studies specialists to exchange knowledge. Develop a digital database of ancient prophetic texts to facilitate comparisons.

2. Analyze the Political Impact of Prophecies on Ancient Societies Using Interdisciplinary Methodologies.

Implementation Mechanism: Combine historical research methods with political and social sciences. Utilize digital textual analysis techniques to identify political patterns associated with prophecies. Host academic seminars that bring together historians and political scientists to examine the historical impact of prophecies on governance.

3. Reevaluate the Role of Prophecies in Shaping the Roman Cultural Identity and Document This in Academic Studies.

Implementation Mechanism: Conduct field campaigns to study artifacts and inscriptions related to prophecies at archaeological sites. Develop joint research projects among universities to investigate the influence of prophecies on arts and culture. Publish the study results in specialized academic journals to broaden scholarly knowledge.

4. Promote the Use of Technology in Studying Ancient Texts Related to Prophecies.

Implementation Mechanism: Develop AI-powered text analysis software to study Latin and Greek texts. Create open-source digital libraries that provide access to historical documents on prophecies. Offer training courses for researchers in utilizing technological tools to study ancient texts.

5. Raise Public Awareness About the Role of Prophecies in Ancient History Through Educational and Cultural Programs.

Implementation Mechanism: Organize interactive exhibitions featuring artifacts and prophetic texts with simplified explanations. Produce documentaries and television programs highlighting the role of prophecies in ancient civilizations. Develop digital educational content targeting schools and universities to introduce students to this aspect of history.

Research Challenges

1. Scarcity of Primary Sources

The lack of primary sources presents a significant challenge in studying prophecies and divination in the Roman Empire. Many texts on these topics are either lost or incomplete. Additionally, available texts, such as those by Cicero and Herodotus, require detailed study to understand the historical and cultural context in which they were written. This scarcity necessitates reliance on secondary sources, which may be biased or contain inaccuracies.

2. Ambiguity in Historical Texts

Ancient texts, particularly those concerning prophecies and divination, are often ambiguous and lack clarity. This is due to the symbolic and complex literary style common in antiquity. Deciphering and analyzing these texts require profound knowledge of ancient Latin and Greek, as well as an in-depth understanding of the historical and cultural context.

3. Overlap Between Greek and Roman Beliefs

The significant similarities between Greek and Roman religious' beliefs pose a challenge in distinguishing them. The Roman prophecies were heavily influenced by the Greek practices, requiring meticulous analysis to separate original Roman elements from those borrowed from other civilizations. This cultural overlap complicates the research.

4. Contradictions Among Different Sources

Clear contradictions appear between various sources, whether literary or historical. This is because many ancient writers were influenced by political or religious biases, which affected the accuracy of their accounts. Addressing these contradictions demands a rigorous critical methodology to evaluate the credibility of sources and identify narratives most consistent with the historical context.

5. Lack of Specialized Recent Studies

Despite the importance of the topic of prophecies in the Roman Empire, recent studies that address it comprehensively are scarce. This lack of academic research makes it challenging to build a robust theoretical framework. Researchers must exert additional effort to develop innovative methodologies and independently analyze sources.

6. Challenges in Translating and Analyzing Ancient Terminology

Accurately translating Latin and Greek texts is a significant challenge, as ancient terms often have multiple meanings depending on the context. Furthermore, modern translations may contain errors or inaccurate interpretations. Researchers must revisit original texts and conduct precise linguistic analyses to understand the true meanings of terms.

7. Influence of Diverse Cultural and Religious Traditions

Roman prophecies were influenced by several cultures, such as Greek, Egyptian, and Etruscan. This cultural interplay makes it difficult to determine the origins of certain practices and traditions related to prophecies. Analyzing the mutual influences between these cultures requires a comprehensive comparative study, which is time- and effort-intensive.

8. Bias in Previous Studies

Some previous studies suffer from evident biases, as they are influenced by ideological or political tendencies that affected their interpretation of historical events. This creates a challenge when relying on such studies as references, necessitating the application of strict critical methodologies when using them.

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