



[Feriale Duranum \(PDura 54\)](#) [1]

Language Undefined

Typology: Roman edict; regulations for observance of *feriae publicae* and rites of gods, cult of the divi and emperors, and military occasions.

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): New Haven, Yale University, Beinecke Library D.P. 2

Physical Characteristics: Small papyrus roll from Dura Europos, Syria.

Date: 222 CE to 227 CE

Language: Latin

Publications: P.Dura 54

ChLA VI 309

Rom.Mil.Rec. 117

CPL 324

Commentary: Amongst a series of papyrus scrolls that were recovered from a room (W13) of the Temple of Artemis Azzanathkona in [Dura Europos](#) [2] (Syria) was one small scroll today known as the *Feriale Duranum*. Dating to the reign of Alexander Severus, the scroll contains the only surviving example of a *feriale* – a list of dates during which specific rituals and festivals were celebrated, that was drawn up for the Roman military, and which appears to have been valid for all units throughout the empire (Fishwick, “Dated Inscriptions and the *Feriale Duranum*,” p. 349). The *feriale* contains a list of festivals and anniversaries that should be observed – including the proper way to observe them, either through sacrifice or prayers – by the Roman army. Having been found in what is assumed to be the archive room of the *cohors XX Palmyrenorum* – a unit of soldiers made up of native Palmyrenes who had been stationed at Dura from 208 CE onwards – the *Feriale Duranum* is crucial evidence for the religious activity of the army, which is shown to have been exactly the same as that celebrated in Rome, indicating the unifying nature of “the adoption by foreign troops of the official religious practice of the Roman army” (Dirven, *Palmyrenes of Dura Europos*, p. 184-185).

This copy of the *feriale* was written in Latin, in neat capitals, but was certainly an ‘active’ document judging by the wear suffered by the papyrus roll; its original shape has been distorted by frequent rolling and unrolling, and it has been patched in two places, indicating that it was used with more regularity than a simple archive ‘copy’ (Beard, North and Price, *Religions of Rome*, I, p. 324). It has been suggested that this copy was in fact a Severan redaction of an Augustan regulation of religious practice, due to the traditional character of the festivals and the fact that several of them date back to the Republican period; as Duncan Fishwick noted, “the *feriale* was not compiled with Dura in mind, for it bears no particular relation to local conditions” (Fishwick, “Dated Inscriptions and the *Feriale Duranum*,” p. 350). No gods specific to Dura are mentioned in the list of celebrations, nor are there any references to religious practices specific to soldiers from Palmyra. The text of the scroll is ordered chronologically, beginning on the 1st January, with the festivals listed grouped into categories according to their type. One category is formed of traditional Roman and Italian celebrations, such as the *Vestalia* (in honour of Vesta, on the 9th June), the *Natalis Martis* (the birthday of Mars, on the 1st March) and the birthday of the city of Rome (*Natalis Urbis Romae*, on the 21st April). These festivals were so traditional that they excluded even well-established foreign cults, such as the Magna Mater (Pollard, *Soldiers, Cities and Civilians*, p. 143). As Ramsay MacMullen noted: “the gods actually honored are just what one would have expected in a Roman-citizen setting two or three hundred years earlier” (*Paganism in the Roman Empire*, p. 110). The rituals offered were the same as those practiced in Rome, with animal sacrifices – such as a bull for Mars – and *supplicationes*, or offerings of wine and incense. The origin of the *feriale* appears, then, to have been an Augustan innovation which sought to standardise the operations of the military camps across the empire whilst also regulating and reviving traditional Roman religion; as an ideological device this kind of calendar – which emphasised also the imperial household and the members of the imperial family – was well-suited to Augustus’s purposes, creating a means by which loyalty could be assured across the various and differing camps of Rome’s empire, and amongst those upon whom he depended to protect it (see Gilliam, “The Roman Military Feriale,” p. 183-196 for discussion of the Augustan origins). Duncan Fishwick has ably shown, through the evidence of inscriptions set up by military communities in honour of gods or cults, whose dates correspond with those given in the Dura *feriale*; although no evidence for the ‘original’ perhaps implemented by Augustus has survived, the number of inscribed texts that coincide with the *feriale* collectively “present[s] a composite pattern of actions taken by troops in different parts of the world on the occasion of important imperial and other anniversaries” (Fishwick, “Dated Inscriptions and the *Feriale Duranum*,” p. 353 and p. 354-360 for the epigraphic evidence).

Another category of festival is characterised by offerings to the imperial cult, the birthdays of deified members of the imperial family and the *dies imperii* of others, which had evolved from the Augustan precedent to include more



recently deceased members of the imperial family (Pollard, *Soldiers, Cities and Civilians*, p. 143). The calendar begins on the 3rd January, in fact, with a sacrifice for the emperor, “to Marcus Aurelius Severus Alexander Augustus and for the eternity of the empire of the Roman people” (*Marci Aureli Severi Alexandri Augusti et ob aeternitatem / imperii populi Romani*), and a sacrifice of a bull is instructed for the *genius* of the emperor, with oxen ordered for the celebrations of the *divi* (Beard, North and Price, *Religions of Rome I*, p. 325). Just as the traditional cult celebrations of the first category, the dates listed for celebration of the members of the imperial household are exactly the same as those listed in the inscribed record of the Arval Brothers in Rome, in a further indication that the calendar of the Palmyrene soldiers at Dura was perfectly in sync with that of the imperial capital (*ibid*). A third category appeared to be more targeted at the soldiers themselves; on the 31st May a *supplicatio* should be offered for the *rosalie signorum*, a festival associated with the military standards, which is also attested in an inscription and relief carving from the camp at Corbridge, in the province of Britannia, again underlining the apparent standardisation of religious practice (Fishwick, “Dated Inscriptions and the *Feriale Duranum*,” p. 351-352).

However, some scholars have cautioned against interpreting the *Feriale Duranum* as evidence for the regulation of private religion; although it certainly appears to have formed the basis of an official, or institutional series of offerings, the evidence from Dura as a whole attests to the wide range of religious devotions that were experienced by private citizens in the town, and which included dedications made by individual military personnel. A wall-painting in the so-called Temple of Bel depicts an individual, who is labelled as Iulius Terentius, tribune of the *cohors XX Palmyrenorum*, offering incense to three figures wearing military costume. These figures have been variously interpreted as statues of three co-ruling emperors, perhaps Pupienus, Balbinus and Gordian III, or as three Palmyrene gods (see [Fresco of Julius Terentius Performing a Sacrifice](#) [3]), with the latter interpretation suggesting some kind of “solidarity between soldiers and civilians” (Pollard, *Soldiers, Cities and Civilians*, p. 144). The cults of Mithras and Jupiter Dolichenus are also well attested amongst the military in private dedications and graffiti in Dura, suggesting that the soldiers of the cohort participated equally in their own religious traditions (see Pollard, *Soldiers, Cities and Civilians*, p. 144-149).

Whatever its origin, the *Feriale Duranum* is excellent evidence for how religious practice could be utilised to unite the various military communities of the Empire and to connect them symbolically to the empire that they were engaged to serve and defend; while the private dedications to local cults and deities demonstrate the “private solidarity” of the soldiers, the *Feriale Duranum* is suggestive of what Nigel Pollard has termed as a “corporate solidarity,” which could be employed to link the Roman troops in a canonical programme across the empire, regardless of their individual and private religious preferences (*Soldiers, Cities and Civilians*, p. 146).

Keywords in the original language:

- [kalend](#) [4]
- [nonus](#) [5]
- [supplicatio](#) [6]
- [votum](#) [7]
- [salus](#) [8]
- [Severus Alexander](#) [9]
- [Iuno](#) [10]
- [Mars](#) [11]
- [Iuppiter](#) [12]
- [bos](#) [13]
- [miles](#) [14]
- [Minerva](#) [15]
- [divus](#) [16]
- [natalis](#) [17]
- [imperium](#) [18]

Thematic keywords in English:

- [Dura Europos](#) [19]
- [Roman army](#) [20]
- [Palmyra](#) [21]
- [Syria](#) [22]
- [sacrifice](#) [23]



- [vow](#) [24]
- [Feast](#) [25]
- [festival](#) [26]
- [Roman gods](#) [27]
- [Roman religion](#) [28]
- [Augustus](#) [29]
- [eternity of Rome](#) [30]
- [eternity of the Roman empire](#) [31]
- [Roman people](#) [32]

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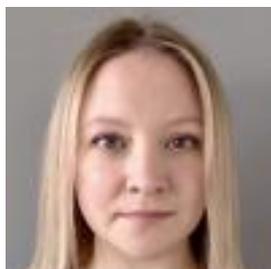
Other sources connected with this document: Fresco / Wall Painting

[Fresco of Julius Terentius Performing a Sacrifice, Dura Europos](#) [3]

- [Read more about Fresco of Julius Terentius Performing a Sacrifice, Dura Europos](#) [3]

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[3] <http://www.judaism-and-rome.org/fresco-julius-terentius-performing-sacrifice-dura-europos>



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