

Religion: public display & private worship

Multiculturalism and religious practice



Roma est, civitas ex nationum conventu constituta.

This is Rome, a state formed by the gathering of nations.

Q. Cic. Pet. 14

At the height of power Rome was a melting pot of cultures and nationalities. Whether you came by choice, attracted by the prosperous markets and business potentials, or were brought as a slave you would not be the only one far from home.

The Romans were in general very tolerant of foreign cultures and religions. If you came into the Roman empire you were allowed to continue practising your own religion and customs as long as you also acknowledged the Roman gods and joined in with the public ceremonies.

From our evidence we rarely see conflict between a religion or culture and the Roman way. More commonly we find a mutual acceptance and merging of the two.



This bronze head of Sulis Minerva was found in a temple near the Roman baths at modern day Bath (Roman *Aquae Sulis*).

The local Celts worshipped a local goddess called *Sulis*, but did not depict their deities in human form. With the arrivals of the Romans a temple was consecrated to a new goddess; Sulis Minerva, depicted as Roman Minerva. This process of religious merging is referred to as **syncretism**.

How do you think the local Celts felt about the merging of Sulis and Minerva?

Why do you think it benefited the Roman empire to practise religious tolerance?

Do you think the Romans' willingness to add new deities and adapt existing ones undermines the sincerity of their worship?