

## Cicero on the gods and Roman religious practices

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**Abstract.** *The article analyses Cicero's attitude to gods, religion, divination, and superstition. Cicero follows tradition in acknowledging the existence of the gods, considering them immortal, blissful, animate, and anthropomorphic. He is ambivalent about the interaction between the gods and people. Cicero considers religion important for the Roman people because this was the popular belief — it was not his own viewpoint. Cicero thinks that people obtain divination from the gods. According to Cicero, there are two types of divination: artificial (auspices, haruspices, divination by lightning, stars, and other signs of nature) and natural (predictions in a dream, in a state of ecstasy, before death). In relation to divination, we see how multi-dimensional Cicero's beliefs were: as a philosopher, he can accept or deny divination; as a Roman politician, he regards divination as an important instrument of the Roman religious rituals. Cicero opposes superstition to religion in his theological works, but in his secular works, he uses superstition and religion as synonyms.*

**Rezumat.** *În articolul de față este analizată atitudinea lui Cicero față de zei, religie, divinație și superstiție. Cicero urmează tradiția recunoscând existența zeilor și considerându-i nemuritori, cu suflet și antropomorfi. El este ambivalent în ceea ce privește interacțiunea divinitate-oameni. Cicero consideră că religia este importantă pentru romani ca o consecință a unei tradiții populare — nu era propriul său punct de vedere. Divinația, în viziunea lui, se putea obține de la zei. După Cicero, există două tipuri de divinație: artificială (auspicii, haruspicii, divinație prin fulger, stele, alte semne ale naturii) și naturală (preziceri într-un vis, într-o stare de extaz, înainte de moarte). În legătură cu divinația, gândirea lui Cicero este multidimensională: ca filosof, poate accepta sau nega divinația; ca politician roman, privește divinația ca pe un instrument important al ritualurilor religioase romane. Cicero opune superstiția religiei în lucrările sale teologice, dar în cele seculare utilizează religia și superstiția drept sinonime.*

**Keywords:** Cicero, Rome, god, religion, divination, superstition.

In this article, I investigate Cicero's attitude to gods, religion, divination, and superstition. The matter of the gods and religion in Cicero's interpretation has been considered in some research.<sup>2</sup> However, it needs reconsideration because there are continuous debates about the issues of Cicero's belief or disbelief in the existence of the gods and his characterisation of the gods' relation

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<sup>2</sup> PEASE 1913, 25–37; HOOPER 1917, 88–95; HAMMOND 1966, 195; GOAR 1969, 314–316; COLISH 1990, 109–121; CHAMPION 1992, 185; BEDIAKO 1999, 21–23; TARAN 2001, 455–477; COOK 2010, 235; BLITS 2015, 64–65.

to human affairs. As Colish<sup>3</sup> has put it, “some scholars have dealt with this dilemma by considering that Cicero was simply inconsistent or even hypocritical in the sphere of religion, ignobly avoiding the responsibility of reconciling his adherence to the traditional rites with his philosophical objections to them”. In this paper, we are trying to look at the matter from different angles of view. The dialogue *De natura deorum* is the main work related to the question. The *Tusculanae disputationes*, the *De legibus* and other works are also under analysis as they contain sporadically scattered ideas about the gods and religion. We used the method of content analysis for a system information retrieval from Cicero’s sources. Besides, we exploited the comparative-historical method, which allowed us to judge about Cicero’s religious views. When working with historiography, we used systemic generalization and the method of scientific objectivity in assessing the conflicting views of researchers.

The question of Cicero’s belief or disbelief in the gods can be answered in two ways. On the one hand, Cicero realizes a possibility of nothingness of the gods. On the other hand, he understands that worshipping of the gods is important for the Roman people, therefore he does not speak out against it directly. In defence of the first thesis, Cicero mentions the opinions of Protagoras, Diagoras of Milos, Theodore of Cyrene, and Democritus, who did not believe in the gods. He also comments on Epicurus whose attitude to the gods is controversial.<sup>4</sup> There is an interesting observation: Cicero does not explain why the philosophers show disbelief in the gods. Perhaps one of the possible reasons for simply mentioning the issue is that he thinks it unwise to speak about nothingness of the gods (he was *ipse pontifex*<sup>5</sup>). As he writes in the *De natura deorum*, some philosophers paid the big price for it: for example, Protagoras was sentenced by a decree of the Athenian assembly to be banished from the city and from the country, and to have his books burnt in the marketplace.<sup>6</sup> Cicero is not so direct in his disbelief. He only allows himself some cautious remarks. He writes that for many disturbing reflections occur to his mind, which sometimes make him think there are no gods at all.<sup>7</sup> He acknowledges the existence of the gods because almost all men believe that the gods exist,<sup>8</sup> but in the same passage he doubts it because there are many nations so uncivilized and barbarous as to have no notion of any gods at all.<sup>9</sup> Some scholars have also noticed the duality of Cicero’s interpretation of the gods. Hooper proves it by analysing

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<sup>3</sup> COLISH 1990, 110.

<sup>4</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 1.1.2, 1.23.63, 1.31.87, 1.44.123, 2.30.76.

<sup>5</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 1.22.61.

<sup>6</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 1.23.63: *Nam Abderites quidem Protagoras ... sophistes temporibus illis vel maximus, cum in principio libri sic posuisset 'De divis neque, ut sint neque ut non sint, habeo dicere', Atheniensium iussu urbe atque agro est exterminatus librique eius in contione combusti ...* Cf. 1.30.85. Hereinafter the work *De natura deorum* is translated by H. Rackham.

<sup>7</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 1.22.61: *Multa enim occurrunt, quae conturbent, ut interdum nulli [dei] esse videantur.*

<sup>8</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 1.22.62.

<sup>9</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 1.23.62: *Quod enim omnium gentium generumque hominibus ita videretur, id satis magnum argumentum esse dixisti, cur esse deos confiteremur. Quod cum leve per se, tum etiam falsum est. Primum enim unde tibi notae sunt opiniones nationum? Equidem arbitror multas esse gentes sic inmanitate efferatas, ut apud eas nulla suspicio deorum sit.*

Cicero's correspondence.<sup>10</sup> Pease states that "Cicero could really have felt little fear from charges of atheism or of disturbing the established religion. For, in the first place, had these fears been very serious, he would hardly have published the work at all."<sup>11</sup>

Following the traditional postulate that the gods really exist, Cicero consequently proves their existence. Firstly, he enumerates the views about the gods of the Ancient Greek philosophers – Plato, Thales, Anaximenes.<sup>12</sup> He concludes that their discourse on the gods is more like the dreams of madmen than the considered opinions of philosophers because those opinions are little less absurd than the outpourings of the poets, who have represented the gods inflamed by anger and maddened by lust, and have displayed to our gaze their wars and battles, their fights and wounds, their hatreds, enmities and quarrels.<sup>13</sup> Secondly, with reference to Epicurus Cicero connects the gods with nature: the gods exist, because nature herself has imprinted the conception of them on the minds of all mankind.<sup>14</sup> This thought echoes with another Cicero's statement: there is no wild tribe or beast-like man, who would not have the idea of gods in their consciousness.<sup>15</sup> Thirdly, Cicero tries to determine what is "higher"—nature or the gods—then assuming that nature is primary, then believing that the gods are hierarchically superior to nature. He thus writes that the nature of the gods is not superior to all else in power, inasmuch as it is subject to a necessity or nature that rules the sky, sea and land. But as a matter of fact nothing exists that is superior to god, it follows therefore that the world is ruled by him, therefore god is not obedient or subject to any form of nature, and therefore he himself rules all nature.<sup>16</sup> Somewhere later, in the same work, Cicero expresses the opinion in favour of the primacy of nature, though. He remarks that all things are under the sway of nature and are carried on by her in the most excellent manner.<sup>17</sup> The fourth thesis is connected with the image of the gods. In this question Cicero is quite consistent, considering the gods to be animate<sup>18</sup> and anthropomorphic,<sup>19</sup> providing that people *are* like the gods, not vice versa.<sup>20</sup> As for the gods' character and lifestyle, Cicero thinks they are immortal and

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<sup>10</sup> Cic. *att.* 4.10.1, 6.3, 6.4, 7.1, 16.3; *fam.* 14.5, 16.12. See also HOOPER 1917, 89.

<sup>11</sup> PEASE 1913, 29.

<sup>12</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 1.8.18–1.15.41. Cf. 3.3.7–3.7.19.

<sup>13</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 1.16.42: *Eui fere non philosophorum iudicia, sed delirantium somnia ... qui et ira inflammatos et libidine furentis induxerunt deos feceruntque, ut eorum bella, proelia, pugnas, vulnera videremus, odia, praeterea discidia, discordias.*

<sup>14</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 1.16.43: *Solus enim vidit primum esse deos, quod in omnium animis eorum notionem impressisset ipsa natura.* Cf. 2.4.12, 2.23.60.

<sup>15</sup> Cic. *tusc. disp.* 1.13.30: *... nulla gens tam fera, nemo omnium tam sit inmanis, cuius mentem non imbuerit deorum opinio.* Cf. 1.27.65–66, 1.28.70. The translation is mine.

<sup>16</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 2.32.81: *... non est igitur natura deorum praepotens neque excellens, si quidem ea subiecta est ei vel necessitati vel naturae, qua caelum maria terrae regantur, nihil est autem praestantius deo; ab eo igitur mundum necesse est regi; nulli igitur est naturae oboediens aut subiectus deus; omnem ergo regit ipse naturam.*

<sup>17</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 2.32.81: *Sequitur, ut doceam omnia subiecta esse naturae, eaque ab ea pulcherrime geri.* Cf. 2.33.85, 3.11.28.

<sup>18</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 2.17.45, 2.31.78–79, 3.8.20.

<sup>19</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 1.18.46, 1.27.76–1.30.84, 1.37.103, 2.23.60, 3.8.20–3.25.64.

<sup>20</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 1.35.90.

blissful.<sup>21</sup> In the end, he does not make any definite conclusions about immortality or blissfulness, though. Fifthly, Cicero clarifies the question about whether the gods rule the world; if yes, do they help or harm people? We can read in the *De natura deorum* that the world is governed by divine providence.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, the gods have cared for none.<sup>23</sup> If the gods gave man reason, they gave him malice.<sup>24</sup> Indeed the gods ought to have made all men good, if they really cared for the human race, or failing that, they certainly ought at all events to have cared about the good.<sup>25</sup> There is no such thing at all as the divine governance of the world if that governance makes no distinction between the good and the wicked.<sup>26</sup> The sixth and the last thesis is the most important: in connection with the ambiguous gods' management of the world Cicero offers the idea of importance of the human conscience, saying that you would be justified in so thinking, were not an innocent or guilty conscience so powerful a force in itself, without the assumption of any divine reason.<sup>27</sup> One more evidence to support the above idea can be found in the following passage: virtue no one ever imputed to a god's bounty.<sup>28</sup> These two last statements show that Cicero actually denies the existence of the gods and their concern for the human race.

The last question, which is significant in connection with Cicero's attitude to the gods, is the question of piously worshipping the gods, i.e. religion.<sup>29</sup> Cicero repeatedly points out that the Roman people are religious. He writes that in our nation reverence for the gods and respect for religion grow continually stronger and more profound.<sup>30</sup> In all other respects we are only the equals or even the inferiors of others, yet in the sense of religion, that is, in reverence for the gods, we are far superior.<sup>31</sup> Cicero remarks that people have a duty most solemnly to maintain the rights and doctrines of the established religion.<sup>32</sup> He connects the power of the state with the grace of the immortal gods.<sup>33</sup> We can agree with Bediako that "religion, therefore, was a matter not of personal belief and devotion, but of social duty and ancestral practice."<sup>34</sup> Colish states that Cicero "believes

<sup>21</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 1.17.44, 1.19.50–51, 1.37.105–1.41.114.

<sup>22</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 2.30.77: ... *deorum providentia mundum administrari*... Cf. *nat. deor.* 1.2.4, 2.30.76, 2.31.80, 2.64.162–2.66.166, 3.27.70–3.39.93; *leg.* 1.21.

<sup>23</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 3.27.70.

<sup>24</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 3.30.75: *Si enim rationem hominibus di dederunt, malitiam dederunt.*

<sup>25</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 3.32.79–80: *Debebant illi quidem omnis bonos efficere, siquidem hominum generi consulebant; sin id minus, bonis quidem certe consulere debebant.*

<sup>26</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 3.35.85: *sic mundi divina in homines moderatio profecto nulla est, si in ea discrimen nullum est bonorum et malorum.*

<sup>27</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 3.35.85: ... *recte videretur, nisi et virtutis et vitiorum sine ulla divina ratione grave ipsius conscientiae pondus esset ...*

<sup>28</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 3.36.86: ... *virtutem autem nemo umquam acceptam deo rettulit ...*

<sup>29</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 1.42.117: ... *religionem, quae deorum cultu pio continetur.*

<sup>30</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 2.2.5: *Itaque et in nostro populo ... deorum cultus religionumque sanctitates existunt in dies maiores atque meliores ...*

<sup>31</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 2.3.8: ... *ceteris rebus aut pares aut etiam inferiores reperiemur, religione, id est cultu deorum, multo superiores.* Cf. 2.3.10–2.4.11, 3.2.5, 3.40.94.

<sup>32</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 1.22.61: ... *caerimoniae religionesque publicas sanctissime tuendas arbitror...*

<sup>33</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 3.2.5: ... *nostrae civitatis, quae nunquam profecto sine summa placatione deorum immortalium tanta esse potuisset ...* Cf. *leg.* 2.15–16.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. COOK 2010, 235.

in the traditional religion of Rome and that the foundation of his belief, which he finds perfectly satisfactory, is the authority of the ancients.”<sup>35</sup>

The question of Cicero’s attitude to divination is close to that to the gods and religion. The ambiguities in relation to the question of divination have inspired debate on the part of scholars.<sup>36</sup> We will shortly outline the essence of his views about *divinatio*, which are mainly represented in the work *De divinazione*. Analysing the context, in which Cicero uses the term in the mentioned and other works, we can conclude that *divinatio* means prediction, foresight, the ability to foresee and know the future.<sup>37</sup> Another idea is that divination is associated with the divine, not the human mind.<sup>38</sup> Cicero is convinced that all nations believe in the possibility of foreshadowing the future.<sup>39</sup> To explain the term, he gives examples of the possibility or impossibility of divination, selected by such Greek philosophers as Xenophanes of Colophon, Socrates, Zeno, Pythagoras, Democritus, Dicaearchus, Cratippus, and others.<sup>40</sup> Providing that divination is possible, Cicero identifies two of its types: artificial and natural.<sup>41</sup> The artificial type is associated with the art of a soothsayer, while the natural with nature. The latter is perceived by Cicero as darker and therefore incomprehensible.<sup>42</sup> The artificial divinations are auspices (divination by the flight of birds),<sup>43</sup> haruspices (divination by the insides of sacrificial animals),<sup>44</sup> astrology (divination by lightning and stars),<sup>45</sup> divination by other phenomena or signs of nature<sup>46</sup> and spells.<sup>47</sup> The natural divinations are divinations in a dream,<sup>48</sup> in a state of frenzy or mental excitement,<sup>49</sup> or before death.<sup>50</sup> Cicero derives the concept of *divinatio* from the thesis of the existence of the gods, namely: since the gods exist, they care about people, and if they care about people, then they send them signals in the form of divinations that help people in their lives.<sup>51</sup> For this reason, signs cannot be neglected —

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<sup>35</sup> COLISH 1990, 117–118.

<sup>36</sup> HAMMOND 1966, 195; GOAR 1969, 316; SCHÄUBLIN 1985, 157–167; BEARD 1986, 33–46; SCHOFIELD 1986, 47–65; SCHÄUBLIN 1989, 42–51; COLISH 1990, 121; FERGUSON 2003, 220–221; RASMUSSEN 2003, 122–123, 149–150, 161, 184–185, 189–197; SANTANGELO 2013, 12–13, 22–23, 32–33, 68–69.

<sup>37</sup> Cic. *div.* 1.1.1: ... *id est praesensionem et scientiam rerum futurarum ...*

<sup>38</sup> Cic. *div.* 1.49.111–1.50.112, 1.52.118–1.55.125.

<sup>39</sup> Cic. *div.* 1.1.2–1.2.4.

<sup>40</sup> Cic. *div.* 1.3.5–6. See also SCHÄUBLIN 1985, 157.

<sup>41</sup> Cic. *div.* 1.6.11. Cf. 1.18.34, 1.32.72, 1.44.100, 1.44.109. See also FERGUSON 2003, 220–221; SCHÄUBLIN 1989, 42.

<sup>42</sup> Cic. *div.* 1.44.109.

<sup>43</sup> Cic. *div.* 1.15.25–1.17.33, 1.18.36, 1.33.72–1.34.74, 1.35.77, 1.39.87–1.41.90, 1.41.92, 1.42.94, 1.43.95–1.47.105, 1.48.108.

<sup>44</sup> Cic. *div.* 1.12.19, 1.14.24, 1.17.33, 1.36.79, 1.41.91, 1.42.93, 1.43.95, 1.43.97–98, 1.44.99.

<sup>45</sup> Cic. *div.* 1.10.16, 1.34.75, 1.41.92, 1.42.93.

<sup>46</sup> Cic. *div.* 1.8.14, 1.9.15–16.

<sup>47</sup> Cic. *div.* 1.45.102–1.46.104.

<sup>48</sup> Cic. *div.* 1.20.39–1.23.46, 1.24.48–1.30.63, 1.43.96, 1.44.99, 1.51.115.

<sup>49</sup> Cic. *div.* 1.18.34, 1.19.37, 1.31.66–1.32.69, 1.37.80–1.37.81, 1.50.114–115.

<sup>50</sup> Cic. *div.* 1.30.63–1.31.65.

<sup>51</sup> Cic. *div.* 1.49.110, 1.52.118–1.55.125. Cf. Cic. *leg.* 2.32. The translation is mine.

such negligence is dangerous for life.<sup>52</sup> Cicero does not call divinations those predictions, which are related to the human (not divine) mind,<sup>53</sup> or signs, which are connected with fate or with nature, not with gods.<sup>54</sup>

In the second book of the work *De divinatione* Cicero follows the example of the academics and expresses the directly opposite viewpoint of the one that is set forth in the first book. In our opinion, he does it in order to better and deeper examine the subject matter.<sup>55</sup> Cicero points out that divination is not applicable in any case where knowledge is gained through the senses. Nor is there any need of divination even in matters within the domain of science and of art.<sup>56</sup> Thus, the author refuses to recognize the existence of both natural and artificial divinations. Further, he generally denies the existence of divination, writing that if there is no place for divination in things perceived by the senses, or in those included among the arts, or in those discussed by philosophers, or in those which have to do with government, I see absolutely no need for it anywhere.<sup>57</sup> If in the first book Cicero denies the connection between divination and randomness,<sup>58</sup> in the second one he expresses quite an opposite opinion: divination of things that happen by chance is possible only of things which cannot be foreseen by means of skill or wisdom; divination is the foreknowledge of such things as depending upon chance.<sup>59</sup> Further, Cicero consistently “unmasks” the artificial divinations (haruspices,<sup>60</sup> divination by lightning,<sup>61</sup> miracles,<sup>62</sup> signs,<sup>63</sup> auspices, and lots<sup>64</sup>) and the natural ones (prophesies in a state of frenzy and in a dream<sup>65</sup>). Interestingly, putting divination in dependence on the existence of the gods, in the second book Cicero should deny the existence of the gods, since he denies divination, but he does not, noting that yet we must hold on to the gods.<sup>66</sup> At the end of the work it remains unclear whether Cicero himself believes in divination or not.

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<sup>52</sup> Cic. div. 1.35.77, 1.45.101. The translation is mine.

<sup>53</sup> Cic. div. 1.49.111–1.50.112. The translation is mine.

<sup>54</sup> Cic. div. 1.55.125–1.58.132.

<sup>55</sup> SCHOFIELD 1986, 47; SANTANGELO 2013, 12.

<sup>56</sup> Cic. div. 2.3.9: *Ad nullam igitur earum rerum quae sensu accipiuntur divinatio adhibetur. Atqui ne in iis quidem rebus quae arte tractantur divinatione opus est.* Hereinafter the work *De divinatione* is translated by W. A. Falconer.

<sup>57</sup> Cic. div. 2.4.12: *Quodsi nec earum rerum, quae subiectae sensibus sunt, una divinatio est nec earum quae artibus continentur, nec earum, quae in philosophia disseruntur, nec earum, quae in re publica versantur, quarum rerum sit nihil prorsus intellego ... Vide igitur, ne nulla sit divinatio.* Cf. 2.10.25, 2.17.41; Cic. nat. deor. 1.20.55.

<sup>58</sup> Cic. div. 1.12.23.

<sup>59</sup> Cic. div. 2.5.14: *Ita relinquitur ut ea fortuita divinari possint quae nulla nec arte nec sapientia provideri possunt ... Talium ergo rerum, quae in fortuna positae sunt, praesens divinatio est.*

<sup>60</sup> Cic. div. 2.12.28–2.17.39, 2.18.42.

<sup>61</sup> Cic. div. 2.18.42–2.21.49.

<sup>62</sup> Cic. div. 2.22.49–2.24.53, 2.28.61–62.

<sup>63</sup> Cic. div. 2.25.54–2.28.60.

<sup>64</sup> Cic. div. 2.33.70–2.47.99.

<sup>65</sup> Cic. div. 2.48.100–2.72.150.

<sup>66</sup> Cic. div. 2.17.41.

The ambiguity of Cicero's interpretation of divination has given rise to some assumptions of researchers, regarding his concept of *divinatio*. As Schofield puts it, "Cicero found himself freshly attracted to the sceptical philosophy of the new Academy at the time he composed his philosophical encyclopedia precisely because it gave him as encyclopedist the great rhetorical and expository advantage of *argumentum in utramque partem*."<sup>67</sup> Beard claims that "the Roman elite in the last century BC were sceptical about divination, augury, prodigies, and haruspicy; or, at least, that has been the view of most modern scholars."<sup>68</sup> The same scholar remarks that "other works of Cicero appear to contradict their author's scepticism on the validity of divination"<sup>69</sup>, while Schofield<sup>70</sup> explains the absence of skepticism in his own way: "... when Cicero wrote *de Republica* and *de Legibus* a little less than ten years before, there was no sign of allegiance to the sceptical Academy".<sup>71</sup> Santangelo draws a conclusion about Cicero's negative attitude to divinations.<sup>72</sup> Colish, on the contrary, believes that Cicero's "defense of divination is based on an argument from *consensus omnium*, an argument from historical experience, and an argument from reason."<sup>73</sup> Rasmussen analyses Cicero's views about religion and divination in the same vein, writing about "the most crucial religio-political aspect, which is the public nature of the Senate's and the priesthoods' treatment of portents as collective religious matters, subject to firmly established procedures and ritual expiations."<sup>74</sup> The scholar also argues about the ambiguity of Cicero's attitude to divination, mentioning some researchers (W. Süß and E. Rawson), who perceived the change of Cicero's attitude to divination from the positive one in the first book of the *De divinatione* to the negative one in the second book as the evolution of his views – from the traditional (primitive) views to the more complex Greek philosophical approach.<sup>75</sup> Rasmussen herself believes that the reason for writing this work was not Cicero's desire to express his ideas, but the need to present various ideas of the Greek philosophers, so that the Roman reader can read about them in Latin.<sup>76</sup> Thus, it is not the duplicity of Cicero or the evolution of his views. "The point is that he treats portents from two different angles: one a religio-political view rooted in *mos maiorum*, and the other a philosophical view that springs from the Graeco-Roman acculturation process and Cicero's wish to make Greek philosophical ideas accessible to Latin readers".<sup>77</sup> This opinion seems to us scientifically sound and quite acceptable.

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<sup>67</sup> SCHOFIELD 19876, 47.

<sup>68</sup> BEARD 1986, 33.

<sup>69</sup> BEARD 1986, 33.

<sup>70</sup> SCHOLFIELD 1986, 47.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. RAMUSSEN 2003, 191.

<sup>72</sup> SANTANGELO 2013, 23.

<sup>73</sup> Cic. *div.* 1.6.12–1.48.132. See COLISH 1990, 121.

<sup>74</sup> RASMUSSEN 2003, 185.

<sup>75</sup> RASMUSSEN 2003, 185.

<sup>76</sup> RASMUSSEN 2003, 193–197.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. SANTANGELO 2013, 12.

The issues of Cicero's interpretation of the gods, religion and divination are adjoined by the question of his reasoning about *superstitio*. There is some research about it.<sup>78</sup> We will try to analyse Cicero's views ourselves, bearing in mind the ideas suggested by the scholars.

In all Cicero's works, the concept of *superstitio* is used 36 times, while its derivatives, *superstitiosus* and *superstitiose*, are written 13 times and twice, respectively. The *De divinatione* is the main work dedicated to *superstitio* (the term is used 21 times there). In the dialogue *De natura deorum* Cicero defines *superstitio* as piously worshipping the gods.<sup>79</sup> He opposes *superstitio* to *religio*.<sup>80</sup> However, in a number of cases (in secular works) he uses these concepts synonymously.<sup>81</sup> Thus, Cicero mentions superstition and religion synonymously in his discourse on some ethical categories in the *De inventione*.<sup>82</sup> In his religious discourse the terms are opposed: Cicero declares superstition "out of the law", considering it a prejudice, whereas he treats religion with respect: the destruction of superstition does not mean the destruction of religion.<sup>83</sup> About delimiting the concepts, Champion remarks that although both were forms of religious worship, "*superstitio* was the formalistic worship premised upon the 'vain fear of the Gods', *religio* was devotion which resulted from a pious adoration of God."<sup>84</sup> Goar thinks that the question of opposing *religio* and *superstitio* is the main idea of the *De divinatione*.<sup>85</sup> The aim of the work is "to destroy superstition without discarding belief." To support Goar's idea, we can cite Cicero who writes that just as it is a duty to extend the influence of true religion, which is closely associated with the knowledge of nature, so it is a duty to weed out every root of superstition.<sup>86</sup> In regard to these words of Cicero about superstition, which must be torn from the roots, Fott ironically notes that "Cicero attacks superstition at its 'roots', but he preserves its branches, that is, the practices of divination, for their political advantage."<sup>87</sup> The same author is surprised with "Cicero's amazing ability to pull off this simultaneous defense of religion and attack on superstition".<sup>88</sup> Fishwick notices Cicero's ambivalence toward *superstitio*, since the ancient thinker connects the Stoics' views about religious predictions with the notion of *superstitio*.<sup>89</sup> The same author observes the interchangeability of these concepts in Cicero's works: for example, in the speech *Pro Cluentio* (194)

<sup>78</sup> MAYOR 1881, 189, 229–230; RIESS 1895, 41; SOLMSEN 1944, 159–160; GOAR 1968, 246–248; GOAR 1969, 314–316; SCHOFIELD 1986, 47; WOOD 1988, 61; CHAMPION 1992, 185; FOTT 2012, 172–173; FISHWICK 2013, 27, 28, 30, 128; SANTANGELO 2013, 12–13, 23.

<sup>79</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 1.42.117: *timor inanis deorum*.

<sup>80</sup> Cic. *div.* 2.72.148–149; *nat. deor.* 1.42.117, 2.28.71–72; *part. orat.* 81; *Cluent.* 194.

<sup>81</sup> Cic. *invent.* 2.165; *Verr.* 2.4.113.

<sup>82</sup> Cic. *invent.* 2.165: *superstitio, quae religioni propinqua est*.

<sup>83</sup> Cic. *div.* 2.72.148.

<sup>84</sup> CHAMPION 1992, 185.

<sup>85</sup> GOAR 1968, 248.

<sup>86</sup> Cic. *div.* 2.72.149: *... ut religio propaganda etiam est quae est iuncta cum cognitione naturae, sic superstitionis stirpes omnes eligendae*.

<sup>87</sup> FOTT 2012, 173.

<sup>88</sup> FOTT 2012, 173. Cf. FISHWICK 2013, 30.

<sup>89</sup> FISHWICK 2013, 128.

Cicero uses *superstitio* in relation to ordinary religious rites, such as sacrifices and prayers.<sup>90</sup> Wood writes about the blurring of the border between superstition and religion, remarking that “Cicero seemingly is not making the sharp distinction between religion and superstition to which we have been accustomed in the Christian era.”<sup>91</sup> We cannot agree with the last statement because Cicero writes in the *De natura deorum* that religion has been distinguished from superstition not only by philosophers but by our ancestors.<sup>92</sup> Thus, the Romans knew the difference between reverent worship of the gods and superstitious fears.

In connection with the consideration of the dichotomy *superstitio-religio* it is important to clarify one more point: in the first book of the dialogue *De divinatione*, Cicero praises religion and religious rites (auspices, haruspices, the interpretation of various signs, dreams, etc.), considering them part of religion,<sup>93</sup> while in the second book he puts blame on them, considering them superstitions.<sup>94</sup> This discrepancy can be explained by the fact that Cicero here follows the tradition of the Academics, offering a multidirectional interpretation of religion and religious rites, and proceeds from the tradition of the Academics to consider the subject from different sides.<sup>95</sup> There is one more opinion on the matter: Goar writes that in the second book of the *De divinatione*, “Cicero exposes augury, haruspices, and Sibylline Oracles as a politically useful fraud”; “Cicero’s ‘religion’ was a moral, political, philosophical, and intellectual position, and was not based on deeply held, emotive beliefs. Cicero had religious convictions, but not a religious mentality.”<sup>96</sup> We can side with Goar’s assertion, since Cicero, being an augur, respected the Roman religious institutions; at the same time, being an erudite philosopher, he was aware of other points of view on religion, even of the idea of the non-existence of the gods and disbelief in them.

We would like now to dwell on one more opposition that Cicero offers us: distinction of *superstitio* from reason and rational cognition of nature.<sup>97</sup> Cicero asks the question, “Which is more consonant with philosophy: to explain these apparitions by the superstitious theories of fortune-telling hags, or by an explanation based on natural causes?”<sup>98</sup> In another passage, he objects to the Stoics: the gods’ power can mould and move and alter all things. Nor do you say this as some superstitious fable or old wives’ tale, but you give a scientific and systematic account of it.<sup>99</sup> This opposition can be interpreted in the following vein: some philosophers believe in the gods and

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<sup>90</sup> FISHWICK 2013, 128.

<sup>91</sup> WOOD 1969, 61.

<sup>92</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 2.28.71: ... *non enim philosophi solum verum etiam maiores nostri superstitionem a religione separaverunt.*

<sup>93</sup> Cic. *div.* 1.2.3–4, 1.6.12, 1.14.25, 1.15.27, 1.36.79, 1.38.82–83, 1.47.105, 1.55.125.

<sup>94</sup> Cic. *div.* 2.36.76, 2.39.83, 2.40.83, 2.41.85, 2.60.125, 2.72.148.

<sup>95</sup> SCHOFIELD 1986, 47; SANTANGELO 2013, 12.

<sup>96</sup> GOAR 1969, 316.

<sup>97</sup> Cic. *div.* 1.55.126; 2.40.83, 2.63.129, 2.67.136, 2.72.149; *fin.* 1.63; *nat. deor.* 2.28.70, 3.39.92.

<sup>98</sup> Cic. *div.* 2.63.129. Cf. 2.67.136.

<sup>99</sup> Cic. *nat. deor.* 3.39.92: ... *numine deorum omnia fingi, moveri mutarique posse. Neque id dicitis superstitiose atque aniliter, sed physica constantique ratione ...*

therefore it makes sense to talk about such concepts as religion and superstition. For those who do not believe in the existence of the gods, there are no such concepts, so they should look for the reasons for being in a rational cognition of nature. In connection with the specified opposition, we want to recall Frazer's idea that the humanity, in its development, passes through three stages: magic, religion and science. The stages are consistently characterised by the belief in the existence of spirits as the root causes of all earthly troubles, then comes the belief in the gods as masters of all things, and finally takes hold the scientific knowledge that transforms the world. Each new stage does not destroy the previous one, but only pushes it into the background.<sup>100</sup> In our opinion, Cicero, being a man of his time, realizes that magic, of which superstition is a part, has already given way to religion. At the same time, thanks to the ancient Greek philosophers, Cicero knows about the idea of a rational cognition of nature beyond the postulate that the gods exist: such knowledge can be considered as the beginnings of science. Thus, Cicero negatively views superstition as a manifestation of magic, but he respects the Roman official religion and makes attempts to view nature from the standpoint of reason and science.

To sum up, Cicero recognizes the existence of the gods due to the tradition adopted in the Roman society, not due to his own convictions. He considers the gods immortal, blissful, animate, and anthropomorphic. He also examines in detail the question of the interaction between the gods and the Roman people, accepting such, but not claiming that it always happens in a positive way. He is undoubtedly convinced of the importance of religion for the Roman people. He does not base the discourse on his convictions, but on the prevailing opinion adopted in the Roman society. Regarding divination as a part of the religious practices, one can speak of Cicero's dual interpretation of it. It happens due to the multifaceted nature of his views: as a philosopher, he can recognize or deny the truth of the interpretations of various signs; as a Roman citizen and politician, he advocates divination as an important tool of the Roman religious rites. Cicero opposes religion, i.e. reverent worship of the gods, to superstition, i.e. senseless fear of the gods. He claims that superstition should be suppressed, while religion, which is combined with knowledge of nature, should be maintained. In the second book of the work *De divinatione* Cicero equates the Roman religious rites with superstitions, which can be perceived as his attempt to consider the question of religion from the opposite side. In his secular works, Cicero sometimes uses superstition and religion as synonyms: such use can be perceived as an exception rather than a rule.

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<sup>100</sup> FRAZER 1998, 26–59.

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