



## [Marcus Minucius Felix, Octavius XXV](#)

Roman success is due to ferocity, not religious piety

**Name of the author:** Marcus Minucius Felix

**Date:** 3d CE

**Place:** Rome

**Language:** Latin

**Category:** Christian

**Literary genre:** Apologetic

**Title of work:** Octavius

**Reference:** XXV

**Commentary:**

For an introduction to Marcus Minucius Felix and the *Octavius* more generally, please see the opening paragraphs of the commentary on [chapter VI](#), in which it was argued that Rome's own understanding of its success is that this is for the most part due to the extreme piety of the Roman people. The expansion and continuation of the empire, in the minds of those who follow Roman religion, therefore, is the reward of the gods for their continued religious observance and devotion. Here, Octavius challenges the Roman perception of history and religious identity which Caecilius has argued for in chapter VI. Caecilius's claims that Roman dominion is owing to the extreme piety of the Romans, and their openness to incorporating the gods of conquered nations, are challenged outright, with Octavius arguing that it is ferocity and audacity in war which has afforded Rome all its possessions and expanse. Religious piety has nothing to do with it, and in fact Rome's history shows its people to be a race descended from sacrilegious criminals.

Critiquing the very origins of Rome follows a rhetorical tradition also seen in Tacitus, Sallust, and Cicero, for instance (see David Rankin, *From Clement to Origen*, p. 47). Moreover, Tertullian, in his *Apology* XXV.2 (Tertullian's text is thought to have been of great influence to Minucius Felix), also challenges the notion that the Romans are successful due to their religious observance. Octavius questions how this ideal can be upheld when Romulus, the mythical founder of Rome, committed fratricide in order to establish himself. Rather than the noble religious piety that Caecilius as a devotee of traditional Roman religion imagines underpinning the Roman state, therefore, it is built on criminality and bloodshed. Octavius describes Rome's history as one of rape, pillage, and horrific treatment of the conquered; this is a far cry from the pious ideal that Rome prides itself on. Everything that Rome possesses – land, fame, riches, reputation – is rooted in the abuse of other nations, and therefore tainted. As such, Octavius argues that Rome's triumph is essentially a prominent symbol of impiety, with sacrilege lying at the centre of the empire's success. The glory and splendour which Rome has accrued is therefore not a reward from the gods, but the sad result of a ferocious, bloodthirsty people who has sullied any claim to piety that they had. Moreover, contrary to Caecilius's claim that the Romans displayed intense religious piety by being willing to worship the gods of conquered peoples, Octavius sees this as an insult to religion. In his view, incorporating the deities of those Rome now holds captive and has plundered and murdered, does not amount to piety, and does not absolve them of their criminality.

Keywords in the original language:

- [altar](#)
- [audax](#)
- [bellum](#)
- [civitas](#)
- [consecro](#)
- [destinatus](#)
- [disciplina](#)



- [dux](#)
- [gens](#)
- [imperator](#)
- [imperium](#)
- [impune](#)
- [irreligiosus](#)
- [iustitia](#)
- [pietas](#)
- [plebs](#)
- [populus](#)
- [posterus](#)
- [religio](#)
- [rex](#)
- [Romanus](#)
- [Romulus](#)
- [sacerdos](#)
- [sacrilegium](#)
- [superstitio](#)
- [templum](#)
- [terror](#)
- [triumpho](#)
- [urbs](#)
- [victoria](#)
- [virtus](#)

Thematic keywords in English:

- [altar](#)
- [audacity](#)
- [auspice](#)
- [ferocity](#)
- [impunity](#)
- [piety](#)
- [Roman criminality](#)
- [Roman expansion](#)
- [Roman greed](#)
- [Roman religion](#)
- [Roman triumph](#)
- [Romulus](#)
- [sacrilege](#)
- [superstition](#)
- [temple](#)
- [violence](#)
- [war](#)

#### **Bibliographical references:**

### [From Clement to Origen: The Social and Historical Context of the Church Fathers](#)

Rankin, David Ivanbook*From Clement to Origen: The Social and Historical Context of the Church Fathers*AldershotAshgate2006

### [The Octavius of Marcus Minucius Felix](#)

Clarke, Graeme W.book*The Octavius of Marcus Minucius Felix*New YorkNewman Press1974



## [“The Historical Setting of the Octavius of Minucius Felix”](#)

Clarke, Graeme W. article-in-a-journal 267-286 “The Historical Setting of the *Octavius* of Minucius Felix” *Journal of Religious History* 1967

**Other sources connected with this document:** Text

## [Marcus Minucius Felix, Octavius VI](#)

Roman religious practice is specifically tailored towards its expansionist aims

- [Read more about Marcus Minucius Felix, Octavius VI](#)

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