

BECOMING GOD

DEIFICATION FROM ANTIQUITY TO THE PRESENT

LECTURE 6: THE ROMAN EMPEROR

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DIVUS / DEUS



The Past: Romulus



- Romulus: legendary founder and first king of Rome
- Establishment of many of Rome's oldest legal, political, religious, and social institutions
- Myth and legend
- Centrality to the narrative of Rome's origins and traditions

The Past as a Compass: Ennius

Quintus Ennius (c. 239–c. 169 BCE)

- Writer and poet
- Father of Roman poetry
- Fragments of his works survive
- Influence in Latin literature
- Use of Greek literary models
- *Annales*



Using the Past: Cicero



Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BCE)

- Roman politician and lawyer
- Consul in 63 BCE.
- One of Rome's greatest orators and prose stylists

Establishing Ideas & Customs: *De re Publica* (I)

As Ennius said after the death of a great king; and at the same time they speak this way to one another: “Romulus, divine Romulus, what a guardian of the country the gods brought forth in you! Oh father, oh life-giver, oh blood sprung from the gods.” They did not call those whom they justly obeyed “lords” or “masters,” and not even “kings,” but “guardians of the country,” “fathers,” “gods”—and not without reason (1.64)

We should allow this much to tradition, because it is not only ancient but wisely passed down by our ancestors that men who have deserved well of the community should be thought to be divine by birth as well as by talent (2.4).

Could anything display divine ability more than Romulus’s embrace of the benefits of the coast while avoiding its vices by placing his city on the bank of a large river that flows strongly into the sea throughout the year? (2.10)

Establishing Ideas & Customs: *De re Publica* (II)

When Romulus had ruled for thirty-seven years and had created these two excellent foundations for the common-wealth, the auspices and the senate, he was so successful that when he did not reappear after a sudden darkening of the sun, he was thought to have become a god; no mortal could ever have achieved that without an extraordinary reputation for virtue (2.17).

Let us therefore imitate men like our Bruti, Camilli, Ahalae, Decii, Curii, Fabricii, Maximi, Scipiones, Lentuli, Aemilii, and countless others, who firmly established this commonwealth, whom, indeed, I consider to be among the company and number of the immortal gods (2.143)

Why is Cicero important?

- Cicero's shaping his account of Romulus' apotheosis was crucial for legitimizing or discrediting deification as a Roman custom
- Roman custom that played an important political role
- *de Re Publica* introduces a distinct Roman past
- It is a template for apotheosis
- Ennius' authority
- Romulus as a paradigm

Imperial Cult and *Religio*

- ‘imperial cult’ had no category of its own in the ancient world
- ‘religion’ and ‘politics’, and their dichotomy, are modern inventions
- Greek nor Latin had no pre-Christian term for ‘religion’ or ‘politics’ in our sense of the word
- *Religio*: reverence, conscientiousness, diligence towards superiors (not exclusively the gods)

Julius Caesar



- Julius Caesar (Gaius Julius Caesar, c. 100–44 BCE)
- Roman general and statesman
- Conqueror of Gaul (58–50 BCE)
- Victor in the civil war of 49–45 BCE
- Dictator (46–44 BCE)
- Political and social reformer

Becoming Divine

- First divine honours accorded Caesar by the Senate after the battle of Thapsus, fought on 6 April 46.
- Several honours: Cassius Dio records only the ones actually accepted by Caesar
- Chariot to be placed on the Capitol, facing Jupiter
- A statue of Caesar placed on top of the inhabited world, accompanied by an inscription stating that he was a demigod

Divus / Deus

- Deified under the name Divus Julius in 46 BCE
- Divus = Deus
- In Dio's time (3rd c. CE) the word was so closely attached to dead emperors alone, thus translating it as "hero"
- Varro (1st c. BCE): *divi* = gods who had always been so; *Dii* = creatures at some point consecrated as gods
- A year later, new honours, after the battle of Munda fought in 45 BCE
- Main source: Dio; does not mention all the honours; only those that seemed noteworthy to him

Third Attempt: Julius as Jupiter?

- Months before his death
- Problems: Cicero = *Divus Julius*; Dio = *Jupiter Julius*
- Who's right? Cicero = contemporary; Dio = why make the mistake?
- Nowhere Dio state or imply that *Jupiter Julius* was accepted by the dictator; only that it was offered him
- Then, both the cult names mentioned in our sources would be authentic (?)

Aftermath: Was Julius deified?

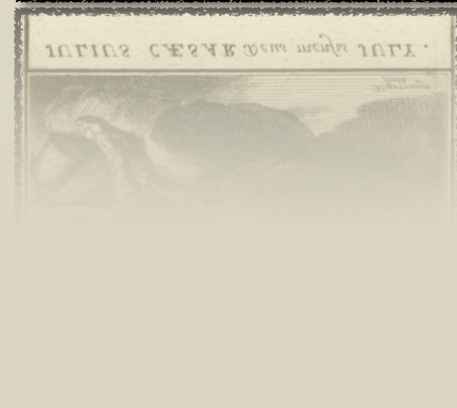
Honours:

- Dedication of a temple and a priest
- Title: Divus Julius
- Inscription to Caesar as *Deus invictus* after Munda

Meaning:

1. Expression of *relative* divinity, i.e. divine status *in relation* to all other men
2. The importance of power
3. Caesar's power was at this stage unquestioned, as was Jupiter's
4. Absolute power entailed divinity and vice versa

Julius the (living) God



Why Did the Senate Deify Julius?

- Who benefits?
- Is there a benefit?
- Political, religious, or a hybrid phenomenon?
- Similarities & differences with Alexander?
- What did the people believe?
- What did the aristocrats believe?
- What did the intelligentsia believe?

Julius' Ante Mortem Deification

- Does it matter when Julius was considered God?
- Is his opinion important?
- Internal vs. External Deification
- Self-Deification vs. Imposed Deification
- Why did the Senate deem Julius a God?
- What was at stake?
- What does his deification mean?
- To whom and why?

Interlude: Triumph



- Long procession from Campus Martius (Field of Mars) to the temple of Jupiter on the Capitolium.
- Booty and prisoners displayed; Triumphal chariot drawn by four horses.
- Marching troops; The honorand's face was coloured red as though he were a statue.
- Behind him stood a slave, holding a heavy gold wreath above his head. He repeatedly said to him: "Remember, you are but a man" (Epictetus; Pliny the Elder).
- Climax: a sacrifice of a bull to Jupiter.

What can we learn from the triumph?

- Are humans gods?
- If so, how?
- The notion of divinity pre- and post-Christian
- Humans can be deemed gods. But not 'gods'!
- The thin and blurry line
- Julius as general, Julius as dictator, Julius as god

Post Mortem Julius

- Julius, a Roman god?
- What followed with his successors?
- Imperial cult
- Emperor = divus/deus
- What's the reception?
- Why the tradition?

Next: The Japanese Emperor

