

The *Virtus* of Romulus: *De re publica* 2 and Divinization in Late Republican Rome

Drawing on Denis Feeney's (1998) work on the role of literature in religious debate at Rome and Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price's (1998, 114-119) identification of Cicero as a key player in such debates at the end of the Republic, this paper explores the divinization of statesmen in Cicero's *De re publica*. It contends that Cicero's portrayal of a wise Romulus in *De re publica* 2 aims to combat the divine pretensions of Pompey and Caesar while simultaneously redirecting their energies to the service of the state. Cicero does this by showing Romulus' *virtus*, the means by which he was elevated to divinity, to be political, not martial.

The Romulus of the *De re publica* is neither of divine birth (2.4) nor, in comparison to Livy's portrait, markedly warlike. Cicero's main interlocutor, Scipio, does make several brief mentions of Romulus' military exploits, but emphasizes his wisdom and good leadership (2.5; 2.15). A key example is the Rape of the Sabines, which, although an uncouth plot (*novum...et subagreste consilium*), is an opportunity for Romulus to show off his wisdom and foresight on behalf of *regni ac populi sui* (2.12); the actual dirty details of the Rape are glossed over (2.13). The emphasis of the account is squarely placed on Romulus' pre-eminent statesmanship, showing him to be, even in warfare, one of those much-vaunted founders or preservers of states in whose work human virtue most nearly approaches divine power (*propius ad deorum numen virtus accedat humana*, 1.12).

In his account of Numa's reign, by contrast, Scipio exaggerates the bellicosity of Romulus' Romans (*hominesque Romanos instituto Romuli bellicis studiis...incensos*, 2.25; *animos...ardentis consuetudine et cupiditate bellandi*, 2.26). Through this new emphasis on early Roman militarism, Scipio is able to put Numa's accomplishments as the statesman of religion and peace in highest relief, without directly accusing Romulus of an unseemly lust for war (*quibus rebus institutis, ad humanitatem atque mansuetudinem revocavit animos hominum, studiis bellandi iam immanes ac feros*, 2.27). Thus Numa becomes yet another example of good statesmanship and a suitable counterpart for a Romulus who remains, by intellectual sleight-of-hand, both civilized and supremely wise.

Moreover, by so emphasizing Romulus' statesmanship, Cicero denies that military glory is essential to his future divinity (2.20-1). Romulus' *virtus*, after all, is what brought him up to heaven (1.25), and that *virtus* is fundamentally political, not martial. The primacy of this political *virtus*, greatly developed and emphasized by Cicero throughout his career (McDonnell 2006, 332-355), is further reinforced in the *Somnium Scipionis*, where all *hominum gloria*, however long-lasting, is shown to be short-lived and worthless, whereas statesmen, Romulus explicitly included, gain *verum decus* and eternal blessedness (*omnibus qui patriam conservaverint adiuverint auxerint, certum esse in caelo definitum locum, ubi beati aevo sempiterno fruuntur*, 6.13; *cum Romuli animus haec ipsa in templa penetravit* 6.24, 6.25). This is not mere metaphysical and religious speculation; rather, it must be interpreted in light of the war-riven politics of Cicero's own day. The most powerful men in Late Republican politics, Pompey and Caesar, had founded their political careers upon their military reputations. They, especially Caesar, sought to approximate themselves to gods through triumphs and other honors; Pompey was even honored as a god in the Greek East. Cicero's Scipio presents an alternative

model for divinization, one founded in statesmanship, by showing Romulus to have become a god not because of martial renown or honors given by men, but through tireless service on behalf of the *res publica*, of which his military career was only a part. Numa, moreover, founded many of Rome's most important institutions, yet was utterly unwarlike; there can be little doubt, however, that he is among the *beati* of the *Somnium*. Thus any attempt by Pompey or Caesar to accrue superhuman status to themselves, whether through triumphal honors or by more extreme measures, will be to no avail, unless they emulate Romulus and Numa, and look, on the field and in the forum, first to the good of the *res publica*, rather than their own fleeting fame.

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