

## Heaven on Earth: The Pre-Apotheosis of Augustus in Suetonius

At the opening of the ninety-seventh chapter of his biography of Augustus, Suetonius informs his reader that he has reached the topic of the emperor's death and subsequent deification (Wardle, 2008b). What follows is an account of the lustrum of 14 CE and Augustus' final journey which includes stops at Astura, Capreae, Naples, and Beneventum, before the emperor reaches his terminal destination of Nola. Scholars have generally treated this journey as a relatively straightforward historical account. Only in the discussion of the death scene has the literary aspects of Suetonius' account of Augustus' final days received any serious treatment (Beagon, 2005; Wardle, 2007, 2008).

This paper will argue that the depiction of Augustus' final journey is, in a sense, satirical. The passage recounting Augustus' final journey exhibits a number of characteristics of Menippean satire in the tradition of Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*, including its mixture of prose and verse, references to bodily functions, and theme of apotheosis (Eden, 1984; Relihan, 1993). Both works also contain numerous Saturnalian elements. On Capreae, Augustus has Greeks and Romans exchange styles of dress and speech in a form of Saturnalian role reversal. He offers *sparsiones* to his fellow banqueters (cf. *Stat. Silv.* 1.6), who are also granted the freedom to jest. Reclining like Zeus at a banquet of the gods, he jokes in Greek verse about the memorial celebration for his departed favorite Masgaba being a kind of founder cult.

Unlike Seneca's scathing 'send-up' of Claudius, Suetonius' pre-apotheosis of Augustus is a gently jocose and learned diversion written partly with the intent of assimilating Augustus to the emperor for whom Suetonius penned the biography—Hadrian. Suetonius' aged Augustus playfully banqueting and bantering with ephebes and scholars evokes the image of the court society of the philhellenic Hadrian, who relished such activities. This paper aims to illuminate

aspects of the reception of Augustus in Hadrianic Rome and broaden our understanding of Suetonian biography.

#### Select Bibliography

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