

*Dominus et Divus: Distortions and Corruption in the Ritual of Apotheosis during the Reign of the Julio-Claudians*

This paper will argue that the ritual and ritual elements of apotheosis were distorted into a celebration of the living, not dead, emperor during the Julio-Claudian dynasty. The focus of the ritual shifted from the deceased emperor's transition into a posthumous divinity to the successor's transition into a living god. Despite the threat of *damnatio memoriae*, the emperor expected the senate to grant him the greatest honor, apotheosis, in order to express his increasing power over the Roman senate and people. By examining reports and images of apotheosis, I will demonstrate that the ritual of apotheosis at Rome was corrupted by later emperors with the intention of promoting their superiority.

One important source of this analysis will be the descriptions of Augustus' imperial funeral and the numismatic symbols used before and after his death. These use of these symbols by emperors succeeding Augustus will demonstrate that the ritual elements of the apotheosis were applied to imperial funerals for the purpose of honoring the living rather than dead emperor. I will also examine the description of Claudius' reception of a public funeral and divine honors in Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* as well as his authorization of Livia's deification, in order to argue that Claudius turned the ritual into a grandiose charade of his own assumed authority.

As the Julio-Claudian dynasty progressed, the ritual of apotheosis changed from a rite of passage for the dead into one for the living emperor. Deification became, for later emperors, an automatic and expected response rather than the highest reward; "it came to entail only the not necessarily positive verdict of 'not guilty'" (Gradel 2002, 288). For the emperors who were considered 'guilty', an antithesis to apotheosis was necessary; Caligula and Nero were the only Julio-Claudian emperors to receive a *damnatio memoriae* (Gradel 2002, 287-8; Varner 2001,

45). For these 'bad emperors' a witness to their divinity was not necessary when all of Rome could attest to their crimes.

The ritual of apotheosis was distorted by later Julio-Claudian emperors because its original elements no longer corresponded with the increasing authority of the living emperor. The ritual of apotheosis became an expected part of the imperial funeral, not to prove that the emperor had divine qualities but to confirm that he had always walked with the gods.

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