

A Study of Deified Roman Emperors' Titles in Latin Literature and Inscriptions

This talk gives an overview of the methodologies of an ongoing research project into the honorific title *divus*, meaning 'deified' or 'divine,' in Roman literature and epigraphy, and a consideration of some preliminary findings. One of the changes in Roman religion as the Republic became the Empire was the posthumous deification of emperors through emperor cult. However, we see instances in literature where Emperors are referred to by their divine title for their mortal deeds. For example, in Tacitus, Tiberius, despite talking about Augustus posthumously, gives the emperor his divine title, *divus Augustus*, when describing Augustus' dispatching him to Germany (*Ann. 2.26 se novies a divo Augusto in Germaniam missum*). Augustus was not a god within his lifetime, so this usage of his divine title for mortal deeds is in seeming contradiction to the orthopraxy of posthumous deification. Despite no emperor being officially worshipped as a god in his lifetime, this calls into question how Romans, despite the Senate's decree, saw their Emperors' divine nature.

Passages from authors of both the late Republican and Imperial ages offer mixed insights into what Romans thought constituted a *divus*, and who was worthy of becoming one. The grammarian Varro (quoted at *Serv. Aen. 5.45*) drew meaningful contrasts between the terms *deus* and *divus* for gods, suggesting that the former indicated an 'eternal' god, whereas the latter meant a formerly mortal being which had been deified. Furthermore, examining Cicero's corpus has shown that even a single author can express varying opinions: the orator affirms that men can become gods (*De Natura Deorum 3.53*), but elsewhere decries the worship of Caesar as deifying a 'dead man,' not a god (*Phil. 2.110*).

Examining only these notable instances of *divus* gives us little to conclude about Roman

attitudes towards deification. In order to assemble broader information on the patterns of deification, our study intends to collect every usage of the word *divus* in Roman literature and epigraphy, especially instances where an Emperor is given divine titlature after his death. Literature gives us a personal insight into the beliefs of the Roman literate class, making the usage of *divus* in this realm inherently desirable for analysis. Epigraphy, on the other hand, conveys public-facing, and often more formulaic or official, assertions of Roman thought, being used in funerary, honorary, and legal contexts; searching for *divus* in this field gives us equally unique insights into what the Romans were willing to convey in a public, material context.

To these ends, we use a metadata spreadsheet to record each the details in each instance of *divus*. For literary instances, we recorded a set of objective data, such as the author and his lifespan, the work and its composition date, and then a set of subjective data, such as the status of the being referred to as *divus* at the time of writing, whether the instance is relevant to our research, and additional notes. These all were drawn from the Packard Humanities Institute Latin Texts Repository and the Brepolis Library of Latin Texts, two comprehensive databases. For instances of *divus* in inscriptions, which are being queried using online databases (e.g. the Epigraphic Database Clauss-Slaby (EDCS), Epigraphic Database Heidelberg (EDH), and Epigraphic Database Rome (EDR), we recorded the inscription's location, its provenance, and the material aspects of the inscription. We also analyzed the text itself, recording the relevant phraseology in each inscription, the figure referred to as *divus*, and his or her status at the time of the inscribing (alive, dead, and/or deified).

Research has been ongoing since Fall 2018. We have finished our survey of Roman literature and are currently engaged in the epigraphic survey. Preliminary results already provide insights into posthumous uses of *divus*. Our findings in the period before Julius Caesar's

deification determined that, before the advent of emperor cult, the word *divus* is mostly used a synonym for *deus*, the more common word for a god; these still help inform the meaning of later usages of the word. From the Empire onwards, we see numerous authors utilize *divus* in a similar way to Tacitus; in one example, Valerius Maximus specifically uses *divus Iulius* as Caesar oversees a trial during his dictatorship (*Facta et Dicta* 6.2.11.2). Meanwhile, many inscriptions, such as one from Tarraco, give emperors their divine title for mortal deeds (CIL II.04249 = II¹⁴.01169). These findings in literature and epigraphy have already shown us that Romans did not always adhere to the specific usages of divine titles prescribed by the Senate and often referred to an emperor's mortal deeds as if he were already a god.

Bibliography

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