

Linking Realms: The Apotheosis of Augustus Within Suetonius' *Divus Augustus*

Constructing his *Lives* from the court of the emperor Hadrian around 119 CE, Suetonius would have been no stranger to the subject of imperial deification. Over the course of the preceding one and a half centuries, the Roman people had witnessed firsthand the posthumous deifications of Gaius Julius Caesar and six emperors; Suetonius himself had witnessed the deifications of four of these. Yet while documenting the life events of Roman *Divi* from both the Julio-Claudian and Flavian dynasties, Suetonius faced the challenge of portraying the divinity of these *Divi* in retrospect; while there was no need necessarily for a divine emperor himself to demonstrate his divinity during his lifetime, I contend that there was such a need for Suetonius, as a biographer, to validate the posthumous deifications of Roman *Divi* by constructing his *Lives* in such a fashion that the divine qualities a deified emperor manifested throughout his lifetime would be perceived clearly by his readers in retrospect. Such validation allowed Suetonius to convince his reader that a posthumous senatorial decree had served only to acknowledge the divinity of a divine emperor, rather than actually transform him into a god. For instance, the reader of Suetonius in the second century would have been well aware that Augustus had been posthumously deified, but would he also have been aware of the signs that occurred throughout the life of Augustus that made his deification inevitable? While alive, these deified rulers seemed to have had the ability to “reach”, or “access”, the realm of the divine, as if they were able to exist simultaneously both upon the earth and within the heavens. Fully demonstrating the divine nature of such deified Roman emperors to his reader, however, required Suetonius to describe the connection that a divine emperor was able to facilitate between the earthly and heavenly realms. In this paper, I argue that within the *Divus Augustus*, Suetonius precludes the impending posthumous deification and apotheosis of Augustus by describing the beginning of

the actual transformation of Augustus into a god prior to his death, eventually culminating with the observance of the soul of Augustus ascending into heaven. According to Suetonius' account, as Augustus entered the final one hundred days of his life, divine occurrences seemed to no longer happen around him, but through him. I contend that chapters 97 through 99 of the *Divus Augustus* serve as a transition point for Suetonius' depiction of Augustus' character, in which it is suggested that Augustus already had begun to exhibit divine characteristics, even before the senate had confirmed his divine status. Within this selection of chapters, Suetonius' reader is surprised to discover Augustus free from cares and full of good cheer near the end of his life, even while he suffered from a debilitating illness. We also now find Augustus decisively abandoning his imperial duties at Rome and beginning to exhibit abilities that are usually in accordance with those exhibited by a deified ruler (Rocca-Serra, 1974: 676). Moreover, we are able to recognize that the character of Augustus, as presented within chapters 97 through 99 of the *Divus Augustus*, is at odds with the character of Augustus as presented elsewhere within the *Divus Augustus*: Augustus' actions and decrees at this juncture appear to directly contradict those made by him earlier in the *Divus Augustus*; Augustus is now able to demonstrate divine glossolalia; Augustus is newly concerned with the state of his physical appearance; and Augustus now has the ability to foretell the future. I argue that by the time the *effigiem* of Augustus ascended into heaven, Suetonius' reader feels as if a prophecy has finally been fulfilled: Augustus was now, effectively, the divine being he always was from before his birth.

Bibliography

Rocca-Serra, G. "Une formule cultuelle chez Suétone (*Divus Augustus*, 98, 2)," in P. Gros and J.-P. Morel (eds.), *Mélanges de philosophie, de littérature et d'histoire ancienne offerts à Pierre Boyancé*. École Française de Rome, 1974: 671-80