

Tacitus, Tiberius, and Statues of the Augustus: Language of Statues and Questions about Cult

Tacitus' Tiberius encounters the developing logistical complexities of Augustus' posthumous cult, famously stating *deorum iniurias dis curae* ("crimes against the gods were the concerns of the gods," *Ann.* 1.73; Scheid 2016). His statements and decisions result in confusion about cultic practice around the image of the now-deified (Divus) Augustus. This paper argues that Tacitus' Tiberius conflates statue terminology that has greater specificity elsewhere in the author's corpus. Tacitus's language adds shades of meaning to his recorded charges of *maiestas* under Tiberius involving statues of Augustus (e.g., *Ann.* 1.73, 1.74, and 3.70). As a result of Tiberius' imprecise language, the reader finds that he is indifferent to the difficulties of practice and hazards of sycophancy inherent in his predecessor's cult.

This paper expands our understanding of Tacitus' depiction of Tiberius and his relationship with Divus Augustus using the authorial frequencies of statue terminology (*statua*, *simulacrum*) identified by Estienne (2010), and adding *effigies* to her data. Tiberius misses the mark with his language in that his terms do not follow the same patterns as that of the author. Tacitus prefers *simulacrum* for images of gods (only one *simulacrum* is an imperial image, *Ann.* 3.63), whereas *statae* are mostly imperial images (*divi* and living) and images of mortals (only one *statua* is a god, *Ann.* 4.64.12). *Effigies* accounts for half of Tacitus' statues, with the majority of those being imperial images.

When Tacitus' Tiberius hears cases of *maiestas*, the author's specificity with terms emphasizes Tiberius' misinterpretation. In these scenes, Tacitus characterizes Tiberius as resisting Augustus' cult's transition from private into public (Severy 2000). Despite the historical and literary Tiberius' use of Augustus' memory to interpret and explain his own actions (Cowan 2009), Tacitus' Tiberius convolutes his language. For example, before Tiberius wishes *deorum*

iniurias dis curae, in *Ann.* 1.73, the reader learns about two charges of *maiestas* (here, one man sold a *statua* of Augustus with his gardens):

<p><i>Falanio obiciebat accusator... quodque venditis hortis statuam Augusti simul mancipasset... Nec contra religiones fieri quod effigies eius, ut alia numinum simulacra, venditionibus hortorum et domuum accedant...</i></p>	<p>The accuser alleged that Falanius... in selling his gardens had also sold a <i>statua</i> of Augustus... [Tiberius speaking] Nor is it contrary to public religion that his [Augustus'] <i>effigies</i>, just as the <i>simulacra</i> of other <i>numina</i>, be added to the sale of gardens and houses...</p>
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The image of the emperor in the course of the passage is called a *statua*, *effigies*, and equated to *simulacra*. Tacitus as narrator presents the first term, but Tiberius does not follow his lead, choosing two other words to describe the image and its (ambiguous) status as a cult image. Tiberius misuses the term *simulacra* when he equates it to Augustus' image; *simulacrum* is applied to Divus Augustus one other time, *Ann.* 3.63.13, which concludes with a statement from Tacitus about the dangers of flattery and ambition under the façade of religion.

Tacitus does have other passages where multiple terms are used for one image of Divus Augustus (e.g., *Ann.* 3.63.9-13 and 3.64.5 describe images that use religion for ambitious aims). In these passages, separate images of Divus Augustus are termed *simulacrum* and *effigies*, but both (for Tacitus) represent the sycophancy of the age and dangers of cult (3.65, *tempora illa adeo infecta et adulatione sordida fuere* “those times were truly infected with vulgar sycophancy”). These instances provide a baseline for the author's characterization of Tiberius and his treatments of Divus Augustus' statues.

A focus on the language of Tacitus and his Tiberius adds clarity to the historian's presentation of the second emperor and of the imperial cult. We know from historical documents that Tacitus does not include and analyze every aspect of *maiestas* under Tiberius in his corpus (cf. Flower 1998, Bodet 1999). Therefore, a careful study of his terms for statues in these

contexts reflects the later author's understanding of the developing imperial cult and his characterization of Tiberius.

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