

# The Buildings and the Images of the Imperial Cult



## I. Beginnings

What is the imperial cult?

- assimilating an emperor and deity

The beginnings:

Later unitary concept, but also:

- a) Initial phase of heterogeneity
- b) Regional differences and peculiarities

**5 points** to remember:

1. Rome and the East – great military leaders (a complex system of interrelations) but also traditional Greek cities to the Hellenistic rulers relationship
2. A ruler needs – the consent of some people, the support of the army
3. Greeks and Jewish/Christians – different concept of deity
4. „human“ and „divine“ not strictly divided

**Servius , Ad Aeneida:**

„**deos** perpetuos [dicimus], **divos** ex hominibus factos [...], unde divos etiam imperatores vocamus“ („we call **deos** those who **are eternal**, **divos** those who, **once men**, became [gods] [...], so we call divos also the emperors“).

5. Today's idea of separating cultural-religious sphere and political sphere wasn't familiar to the ancient people



-the most important change of the roman religious system – the **end of republic and beginning of the principate**

-uniformity

Phenomena:

1. Building and consecrating **altars and temples** to emperors and members of their family



The temple of Vespasian and Titus, Forum Romanum



Ara Pacis, Rome

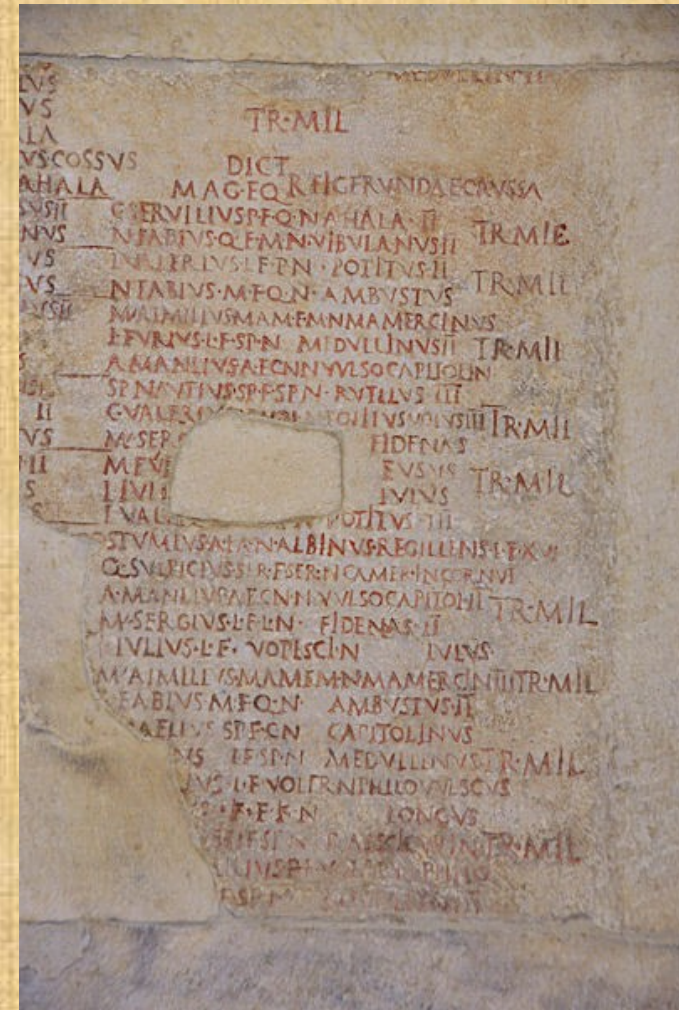


2. Establishing of **priests** – administer cultic activity, e.g. Marc Anthony – a flamen of Julius Caesar

3. **Emphasising** the characteristic features and achievements – using religious terminology, e.g. *aeternus* (*perpetuus*), *invictus*, *providus*, *operosus*, *omnipresens*, *decorus*, *divinus*, using astral connotations to Sol etc.

4. Setting **public holidays** – concerning living or dead emperors and their inclusion to the calendar, regular rituals: *fasti capitolini*, *fasti triumphales*, *fasti sacerdotales*, ...

5. **Rituals and traditions previously reserved for deities** – e.g. games on behalf of the emperor, increasing importance of imperial portraits in public life and including them to processions: *Ludi Augustales*, October 3<sup>rd</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup>, games were held in Augustus' honor starting in 11 BC. It became a ten-day event under Tiberius.



Fasti capitolini, The Capitoline Museum, Rome



6. Likening **emperors to dieties** – e.g. statues with characteristic attributes



Claudius as Jupiter, marble, Vatican Museums, Rome



Commodus as Hercules, marble, The Capitoline Museum, Rome



## Preliminary steps to the imperial cult:

- 1. Egypt** – ancient Egyptian cults: Divine cults, Royal cults, Private cults, Animal cults and Funerary cults
  - Egyptian ruler received cult both during his life and after his death
  - during coronation – deified
- 2. Hellenistic world** – cults dedicated to the rulers of the Hellenistic kingdoms
- 3. Greek cities** – divine cults of the individuals
- 4. Roman republic** – standardization of rituals, beginnings of the system and rules for deification

Some scholars (Price) suppose that the ruler cult speeded up the decline of the traditional cults.



Coronation of King Ptolemy VIII conducted by the goddess Nechet, right, and the goddess Uto or Wadjet, left, Temple of Horus, Edfu, Luxor, Nile Valley, Egypt

## 1. EGYPT

- the ruler cult is the strongest
- the „divine essence“ of the ruler spreads to the south and west coasts of Asia Minor and Aegean - conquests
  - e.g. : Telmessus (Turkey) – an altar in the middle, Ptolemaic style
- difference: divinity was a public matter for centuries
- Starting point – a close relationship between Ptolemaic monarchy and Egyptian cults
- From the cult of the deceased ancestors - to the veneration of living men: 17<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus – proclaimed his father god and made himself and his sister/wife Arsinoe II living gods



Gold octodrachm – reverse capita iugata of Ptolemy II and Arsinoe – legend “of the siblings – ἀδελφῶν”, obverse – capita iugata of Ptolemy I Soter and his wife Berenice I – “of the gods - θεῶν”

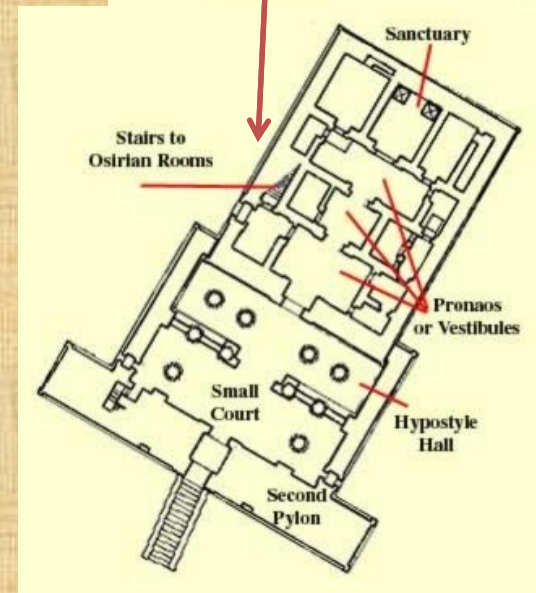
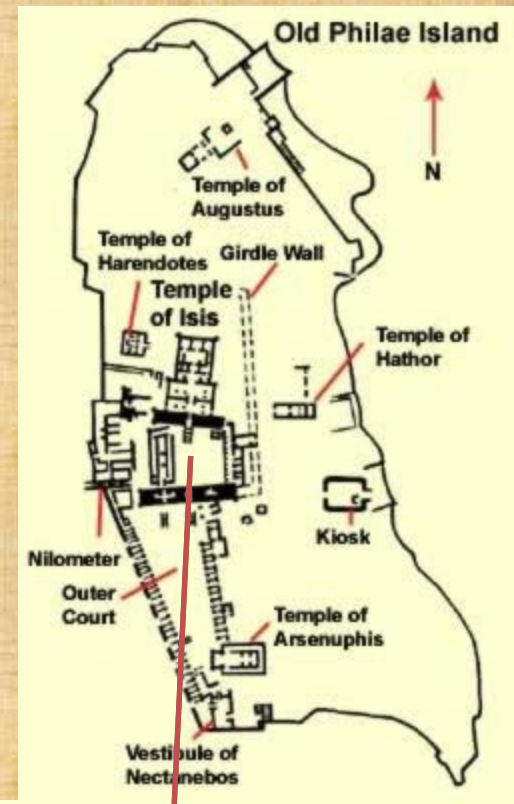


## Temple of Isis on the isle of Philae

- the **cult centre of Isis** during the Ptolemaic Period
- dedicated to Isis and Osiris
- a court, vestibule, several antechambers and the inner sanctum, where the sacred image of Isis was kept
- **reliefs and inscriptions:** various Ptolemies (Philadelphus, Euergetes II) and Roman Emperors (Augustus, Tiberius, Antonius Pius) – making offerings and rituals



Temple of Isis, the island of Philae







Ptolemy II in Pharaonic costume offering to Isis (also Augustus depicted in the Pharaonic costume in front of Isis and Harpocrates).

No difference between the ways in which Octavian-Augustus and Ptolemaic predecessors are named and depicted:

“Welcome! Welcome, **son of Ra**, Caesar, who **lives forever**. Until the sky lasts, your kingdom will last. Your mother Isis is pleased with that you have done and directs you the hearts of the inhabitants of the Earth.”

Augustus is named:

“Ra of Upper and Lower Egypt, lord of the two kingdoms, **emperor son of Ra**, lord of the crowns, Caesar, who lives forever, the beloved of Ptah and Isis.”

## 2. HELLENISTIC WORLD

- hellenistic cults - considered preliminary to the imperial cult
- **religion**: belief in cults, a set of rules of rituals
- **politics**: about actions, diplomacy and wars
- **ruler cult**: honours granted in gratitude for political benefactions

Hellenistic rulers – cults - mostly meant as cults of benefactors, saviours from dangers and founders of cities

Such devotion is explained with the increasing number of people depending on the will of a single man, the greater merits, the deeper devotion towards him

first – heroic honours

then – switch to divine honours

Imperial cult – continuation

Crucial conditions: AUTOCRATIC RULE

EXTERNAL TO THE POLIS

AT LEAST A BIT GREEK

**Why not earlier?** Tyrants – didn't fit, no monarchical institutions, not external to the polis

-Pindar – no special language praising tyrants – the same as other aristocrats

-Persian kings – monarchy highly developed, but Persian rule was rejected, not at least a bit Greek



## Examples of cult:

**Macedonia** – cults of Macedonians before and after Alexander – rare

Macedonian towns – less important role in the organization of kingdom than the Old Greek cities

**Philip** – cult in Philippi (particular case, because the city was founded by him)

**Alexander the Great** – divine cult was offered to him in his lifetime

Absence of the cult in Macedonia – lack of independent civic traditions, unproblematic nature of the traditional monarchy



Alexander the Great, Alexandria, Egypt, 2<sup>nd</sup> / 1<sup>st</sup> century BC

## **Antigonus I Monophtalmus (Antigonus the One-eyed) and his son Demetrius Poliorcetes (the Besieger)**

The end of the 4th century BC , by Athens – the democracy was restored

- celebrated as „saviours“ and „benefactors“
- the hymn sung in honour of Demetrius:

„For the other gods are far apart, or have no ears, or no existence and they do not care of us. But you are present, not made of wood or stone, a real god, we pray to you.“

*(Athenaeus of Naucratis, The Banquet of the Learned VI 253e)*

-what makes him divine:

- a) power to offer protection to Athens
- b) vengeance against those who had attacked them

**Essential feature of divinity for Greeks** – not immortality but the willingness to hear the prayers of men and offer them help in need (Asklepios, Herakles – once men, helping, then entered the sphere of gods)

The hellenistic ruler **never declared himself divine**, but the recipients of benefactions did

Marble bust of Demetrius I Poliorcetes. Roman copy from 1st century AD of a Greek original from 3rd century BC





## Antiochus III, Syria

- liberation of **Iasos** 197 BC – altar, later further honours
- Laodice III – wife, shelters for the daughters of poor citizens, new cult – priestess, procession, sacrifice

**Teos** – Antiochus III and Laodice received cult  
– feast (marked in the civic calendar), sacrifices, cult statues next to the statue of Dionysus in his temple

## Kings are gods not heroes

Distinction: funeral – depends on sacrifices

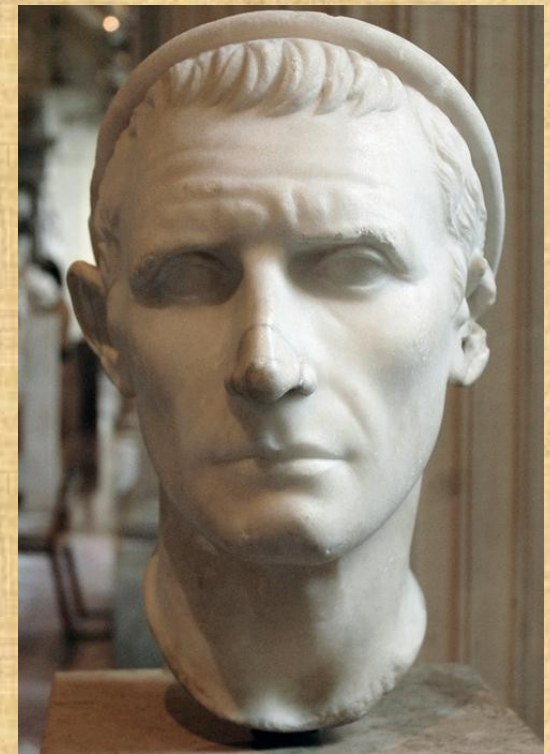
*thysia* – in the cult of gods – a part was eaten

*enhagisma* – heroic sacrifice – non-consumable, didn't deify the deceased, were not directed to them either

„heroic honours“ – Alexander the Great

Heroes – limited space and couldn't intimate relations with the power of heaven

Ruler cult – the universal power of a god lying outside the city and that of the king



Antiochus III, Louvre

### 3. GREEK CITIES

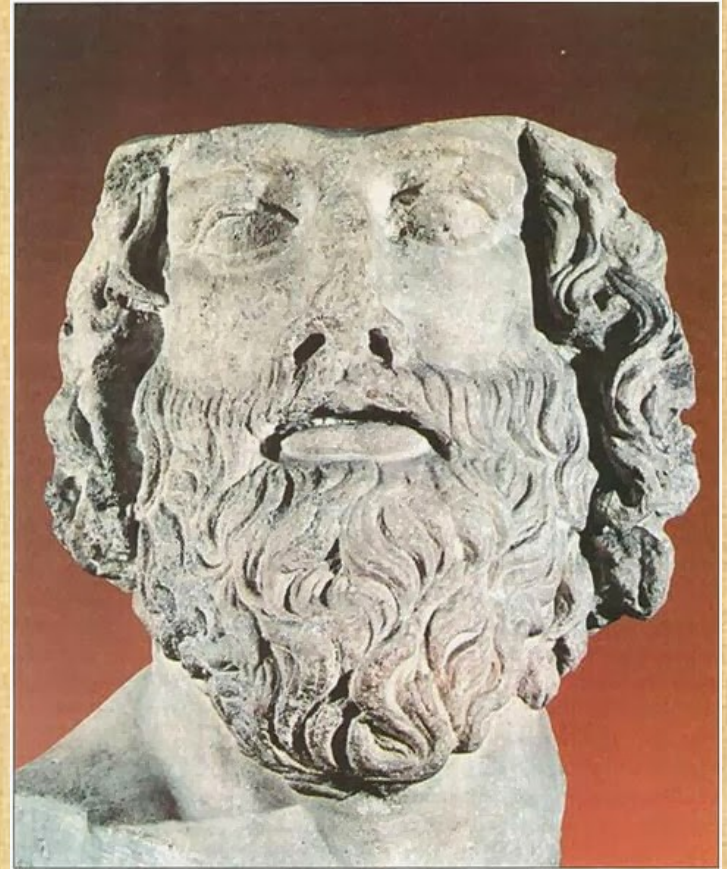
**Lysander** – Spartan general, 5<sup>th</sup> /4<sup>th</sup> century BC

-not of a noble origin

- recieved a cult on Samos as the first mortal during his lifetime

- a) Samians erected an altar
- b) Offered him sacrifices
- c) Sang cultic songs
- d) Renamed the festival of Hera the Lysandreaia

Still a substantial difference between worship of the gods and the honours for the mortal: no reference to a cult statue or to a shrine.



Lysander



Divine cult of individual citizens – the end of the 2nd century BC

### **Diodorus Paspáros at Pergamum**

-city lost its freedom – Mithridatic War against Rome (88-85 BC)

-Diodorus – went to Rome – reduced the rate of tribute to Rome

-series of divine honours:

1st: a tribe was named after him  
recieved a priest  
the day of his return – commemorated by a festival  
a sanctuary containing his cult statue was built

2nd: in the gymnasium – a cult statue in a separate room sharing the throne with the gods of the palaestra

This kind of honours – *isotheoi timai* (god-like honours)



Diodoros Paspáros – the cult statue from his sanctuary





Heroon of Diadoros Paspáros – the cult room and odeon, Pergamon





Heroon of Diadoros Paspalos – the cult room and odeon, Pergamon – marble panels



## 4. ROME

### I Public sphere

*The regal period* – kings put to the position much closer to the gods than other people

e.g. **Romulus** – after his death (or disappearance) – worshipped as Quirinus

**Servius Tullius** – a friendly relationship with goddess Fortuna, chosen to reign by a prophecy in his early childhood

**Army leaders** – on the day of their triumph – more or less worshipped as a deity  
(Tertullian (160 AD – 225 AD): *Respice post te, hominem memento te*)



A triumph – in the regal period awarded to: Romulus (?), Ancus Marcius, Tarquinius Priscus, Servius Tullius, Tarquinius Superbus and some generals (*Fasti triumphales*)



## *The republican period* – several historical moments – inspiration to the imperial cult

the cult of important individuals (imperatores):

### a) **Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus**

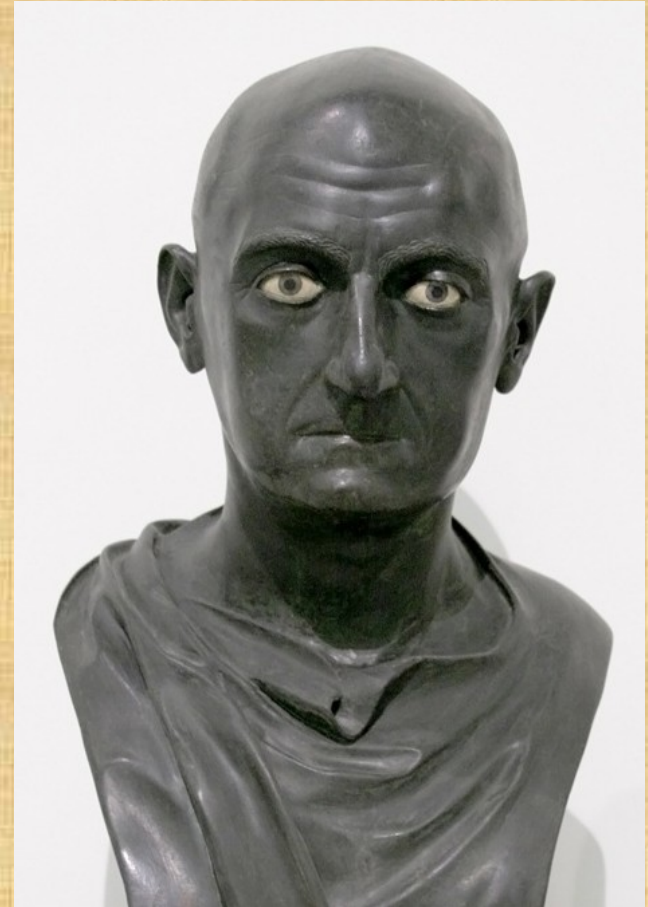
- the first member of aristocracy, who during the battle with Hannibal, gained the status highly exceeding the other aristocrats
- close relationship with Jupiter Capitoline
- in favour of gods
- legends about his divine origin – similar to those of Alexander the Great
- divine origin – will appear in unchanged form with the birth of Augustus
- Apotheosis – 50 BC – Cicero – describing Scipio Africanus – became a star – a symbol of apotheosis

### b) **Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus**

- statues placed in public places –compita,
- sacrifices of the first crops in all seasons, worship

### c) **Marius Gratidianus**

- for a currency reform, 85 BC, statues displayed in compita



Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus, bronze, Naples, National Archaeological Museum

#### d) Pompey

- honours rendered to him by the Greek cities in Asia Minor
- Miletopolis (Pompey defeated Mithriades, 63/62 BC) – σωτήρ (soter/saviour), εὐεργέτης (euergetes/benefactor), and ἐπόπτης γῆς καὶ θαλάσσης (epoptes ges kai thalasses/an overseer on the sea)
- his dominion is „universal“ – control over land and sea is a warranty of a universal peace
- Ilion (inscription) – Pompey „has freed men from the wars against Barbarians and from the dangers of the pirates, giving peace and safety on land and sea“
- in the East – Pompey regarded as the heir of Alexander the Great and taken as Neos Dionysos (evidence: coins from Amisos, Nicea, Nicomedia, Prusa ad Olympium)



Pompey the Great, marble bust, Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen



## e) Julius Caesar

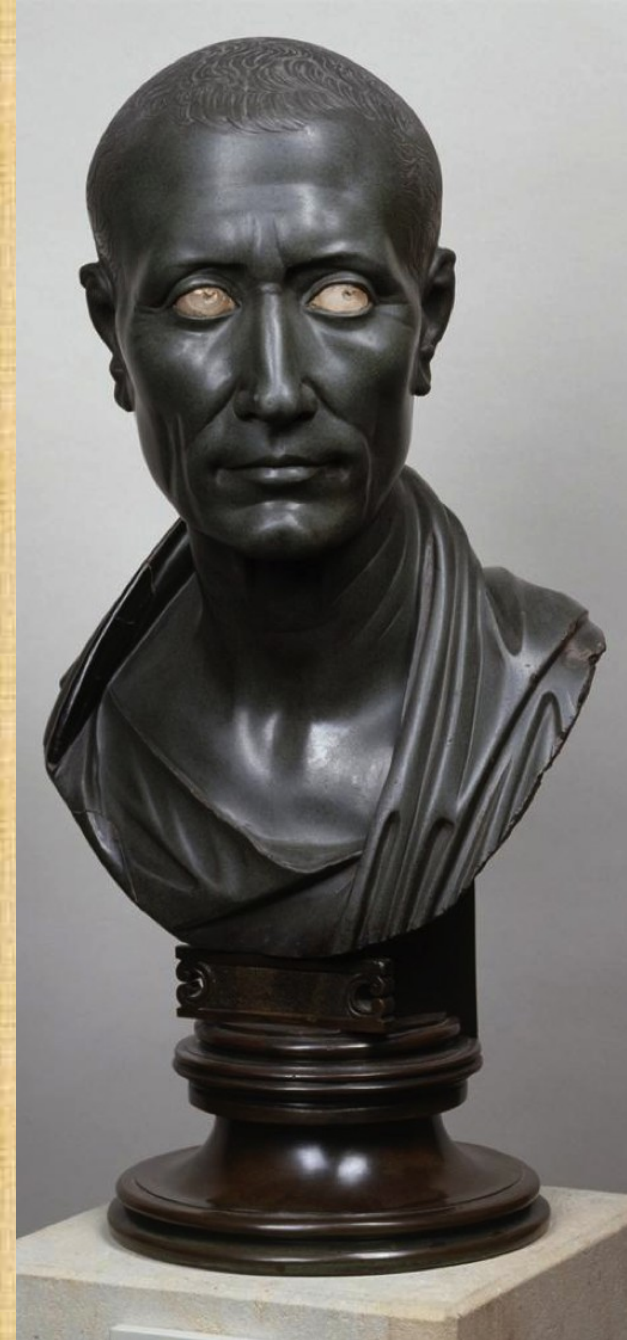
-the only living man in Rome receiving divine honours

### three main phases of the Senate's honours:

1. after the battle of Thapsus – April 6th, 46 BC – senators decreed him a chariot (facing Jupiter temple or another statue?), a statue (his foot on the globe) to be placed on the Capitol – inscription *hemitheos* (the first time the term applied to a ruler in Rome)

2. the battle of Munda – March 17th, 45 BC – a statue in the temple of Quirinus with an inscription „unconquered god“ „*deus invictus*“  
- the news about the victory got to Rome on April 20th – the Senate announced the *Parilia* (anniversary of the foundation of Rome) to be dedicated to celebrations of the victory  
- a procession – Caesar's image carried in the company of gods, Cicero says „*next to Quirinus*“

3. the last months of Caesar's life – decreed a divinity with a cult name *Divus Iulius*, a state flamen, a state temple, a *pulvinar* for his image



Julius Caesar, bronze, Altes Museum, Berlin

## Cassius Dio, Roman History, book XLIV (the list of honours granted to Julius Caesar by the Senate)

The privileges that were granted him, in addition to all those mentioned, were as follows in number and nature; for I shall name them all together, even if they were not all proposed or passed at one time. 2 First, then, they voted that he should **always ride**, even in the city itself, **wearing the triumphal dress**, and should **sit in his chair** of state everywhere except at the games; for at those he received the privilege of watching the contests from the tribunes' benches in company with those who were tribunes at the time. 3 And they gave him the **right to offer spolia opima**, as they are called, at the temple of Jupiter Feretrius, as if he had slain some hostile general with his own hand, and **to have lictors** who always carried laurel, and **after the Feriae Latinae to ride from the Alban Mount into the city on horseback**. 4 In addition to these remarkable privileges they named him **father of his country**, stamped **this title on the coinage**, voted to **celebrate his birthday by public sacrifice**, ordered that he should have a **statue in the cities** and in **all the temples of Rome**, 5 and they set up **two also on the rostra**, one representing him as the saviour of the citizens and the other as the deliverer of the city from siege, and wearing the crowns customary for such achievements. They also resolved **to build a temple of Concordia Nova**, on the ground that it was through his efforts that they enjoyed peace, and to celebrate an annual festival in her honour. 5 When he had accepted these, they assigned to him the charge **of filling the Pontine marshes, cutting a canal** through the Peloponnesian isthmus, **and constructing a new senate-house**, since that of Hostilius, although repaired, had been demolished. 2 The reason assigned for its destruction was that a temple of Felicitas was to be built there, which Lepidus, indeed, brought to completion while master of the horse; but their real purpose was that the name of Sulla should not be preserved on it, and that another **senate-house**, newly constructed, might be **named the Julian**, even as they had called the **month in which he was born July**, and **one of the tribes**, selected by lot, **the Julian**. 3 And they voted that Caesar should be **sole censor for life** and should enjoy **the immunities granted to the tribunes**, so that if any one insulted him by deed or word, that man should be an outlaw and accursed, and further **that Caesar's son**, should he beget or even adopt one, should be **appointed high priest**. 61 As he seemed to like all this, a gilded chair was granted him, and a garb that the kings had once used, and **body-guard of knights and senators**; furthermore they decided that **prayers** should be offered for him **publicly every year**, that they should swear by Caesar's Fortune, and should regard as valid all his future acts. 2 Next they bestowed upon him a quadrennial festival, as to a hero, and a third priestly college, which they called the Julian, as overseers of the Lupercalia, and one special day of his own each time in connection with all gladiatorial combats both in Rome and the rest of Italy. 3 When he showed himself pleased with these honours also, they accordingly voted that his **golden chair and his crown** set with precious gems and overlaid with gold should **be carried into the theatres in the same manner as those of the gods**, and that on the occasion of the games in the Circus his chariot should be brought in. And finally they **addressed him outright as Jupiter Julius** and ordered a **temple to be consecrated to him** and to his Clemency, electing **Antony as their priest like some flamen Dialis**.



## The death of Julius Caesar and the process of his deification:

March 44 BC – a grand public funeral on the traditional lines, but some extraordinary features:

a) The corpse – hidden by an image of wax which lay inside a gilded shrine modelled on the temple of Venus Genetrix.

b) Marc Anthony – funeral speech (reciting earlier decrees which passed divine honours and praising him as a god)

c) Caesar's wounds displayed – perhaps by rotating the wax image

d) Cremated – also the wax image





## The Temple of Divus Iulius

- Caesar's body was cremated in this area – a marble column with the inscription: *parenti patriae (to the father of the fatherland)* – later removed
- dedicated: August 18<sup>th</sup>, 29 BC - erected by Augustus
- podium (opus cementicum) has survived, the front part – hemicycle (altar)
- later: hemicycle with the altar closed off by a straight wall
- ionic, composite (coin representations) or corinthian style (archeological evidence)
- destroyed during the reign of Septimius Severus and then restored





## The events after Caesar's death:

July 44 BC – the games held in memory of Caesar – comet appeared (believed to be Caesar's soul in heaven)

September 44 BC - Antonius forced the Senate to add a day to the of each official supplication of the gods, on which prayers made to Caesar

Beginning 42 BC – the Senate passed the official consecration of Caesar, including building the temple to Divus Julius.

40 BC Marcus Antonius inaugurated a flamen of Divus Iulius



Marcus Antonius, marble, Vatican Museums, Rome

## II Private sphere

Divine honours – before Caesar – confirmed in the private sphere (more cases than a public sphere) – the master of the house – „paterfamilias“

„paterfamilias“ – unlimited power

- house cult – slaves, freedmen – in the individual household for its welfare
- monarchic position – permanent, institutionalized, hereditary

*Sources:* comedies, inscriptions, archaeological sources (few, damaged, only poor had benefactors) – mainly Pompeii



Lararium, Pompeii



The object of worship: Genius (*paterfamilias*), Juno (the life force of women)

*Genius* – the life force of a man – external to a man – spiritual companion under whose protection he lived

**earliest sources:** Genius worshipped along with other gods such as Lares, Penates, Manes, Olympian Gods.

**rituals:** prays, offerings – on birthdays

not only humans had Genius, also places (*Genius loci*), buildings, towns, groups of men (*Genius collegii*) or things

**representation:** Genius of a man - corporeal form, a Roman youth in toga with the rim drawn over his head, with a cornucopia and sacrificial vessel, often in the act of sacrificing – pouring a libation

the facial features of Genii are irrespective of the physical appearance of their owners

Genius of a place - snake



House of the Vetii: decoration

*Lararium* – the place where Genius was worshipped

-In the house – a modest niche in the wall, in Pompeii usually embellished with the main gods of the cult – Lares – and Genius

*Lares* – unclear origin

intepartation – collective personifications of dead ancestors of the *paterfamilias*, dancing youths in short tunics, pouring wine from drinking vessels

All these gods had their public equivalents with state temples in Rome, reflecting a view of the Roman state as a large *domus*. The one clear difference is revealing: during the republic, the Genius worshipped in state cult was not of a man, but of the *populus Romanus*.

Only in 14-12 BC was the worship of the Genius formally declared a state cult and the emperor's Genius was officially honoured along with the *Lares Augusti*, set up at the crossroads of Rome and eventually in many towns and country districts throughout Italy







Lararia, Pompeii







Lararium of the House of Menander, Pompeii





Lararium from Pompeii, National Archaeological Museum, Naples  
Above: *The Genius* is flanked by the *Lares*. The Genius is pouring a libation to himself. The sacrifice is attended by a flute player and a small boy carrying the tray with *mola salsa*. Another attendant, a *victimarius*, leads a pig to be sacrificed to the *Lares*.  
Below: two snakes (for symmetry if to be meant as a doubled *Genius loci*, or perhaps representing the Genius and Juno of the master and mistress respectively) partake of eggs placed on an altar.



The emperor cult is the practice of assimilating emperor and deity

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graph TD; A[The emperor cult is the practice of assimilating emperor and deity] --> B[In the Hellenistic world in 307 BC the hymn sung in honour of Demetrius Poliroctes is the earliest attestation of the ruler as a "present god".]; A --> C[The great leap from the cult of the deceased ancestors to the veneration of living men takes place in Egypt, where the ruler cult is the strongest in the 14th year of the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, when the living siblings Ptolemy II and his sister/wife Arsinoe II were deified.]; A --> D[In the Greek cities the divine cult of individual citizens can be found towards the end of the 2nd century BC, one of the earliest cases is the cult of Diodorus Paspasros at Pergamon.]; D --> E[Also in the Roman world, in private/public relations, it had been usual for a long time to address a man with emphatic epithets and to honour him: this is the case of the relation patronus/clients, the patron is the benefactor of his clients]; E --> F[The object of worship in the household was the Genius of the paterfamilias. The worshippers were freedmen and slaves.]; E --> G[The development of intersections between the ideology of patronage and of Hellenistic kingship.];
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Also in the Roman world, in private/public relations, it had been usual for a long time to address a man with emphatic epithets and to honour him: this is the case of the relation patronus/clients, the patron is the benefactor of his clients

The object of worship in the household was the Genius of the paterfamilias. The worshippers were freedmen and slaves.

The development of intersections between the ideology of patronage and of Hellenistic kingship.