

Similar to Gods: Some Words in the Imperial Cult in the Roman Empire

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I. Introduction

When writing the imperial cults, two mayor proposals can be observed about this matter, which have been divulged for almost a century. The first one is a negative appreciation. This considers those manifestations as a manipulation from the central power and superficially religious manifestations.¹ If this is true, then how and where do we begin to consider the literature of the period and epigraphical evidences? The other appreciation considers the imperial cults as part of the religious system in the Roman World, and the epigraphical records as diverse ways of manifestation to the emperors and the imperial family.²

II. Some Epigraphical Statements

It is known by the epigraphical records that some emperors refused to be considered as godlike in life or manipulate the imperial cults, trying to avoid a direct link with the honors presented. This illustrates that the imperial cults did not always depend of the princeps. Some examples are: Tiberius refusing divine honors in a letter to the ephors and the city of Gytheum, rejecting any connection with Augustus or the gods and stating ‘[...] I myself am content with more moderate honors, as befit men’.³ This example enlightens that the religious change was not always in the hands of the princeps, but there were others involved in the process, like local elites, politicians in the provinces, and even the underprivileged.⁴ Cassius Dio reminds in his words when Tiberius says in one occasion: ‘I am master of the slaves, imperator of the soldiers, and chief of the rest’ and Suetonius explained that the new emperor refused some titles like *Imperator*, *Pater Patriae* and *Augustus*.⁵ S. Mazzarino explains the reason of this rejection: “dalla costante ripugnanza del nuovo imperatore ad ereditare alcune forme decisamente monarchiche dell'ideologia augustea”.⁶

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¹ Taylor 1931, 237-238; Nock 1935, 481-503; Nilsson 1948, 177-178; Bowersock 1965, 112-121; Fishwick 1978, 1251-1253; Veyne 1990, 307; Fishwick 2002, 219.

² Deissmann 1910; Cerfaux – Tondriau 1957; Millar 1977; Hopkins 1978, 197-242; Liebeschuetz 1979; Price 1984a; Price 1984b, 79-95; Friesen 1993; Harland 1996, 319-34; Peppel 2003, 71; Witulski 2007; Lozano 2010, 36-37; De Jong 2016, 22-55.

³ SEG 11, 922 = EJ² 102b = Sherk 1988, 31.

⁴ Lozano 2011, 480.

⁵ Dio 57.8.2; Suet. Tib. 26.

⁶ Mazzarino 2002, 135.

Claudius tried to keep the traditions by taking two determinations: a) accepting political dedications without direct insinuation of divine attributes, like the statues from the Dionysus' performers in AD 43,⁷ and one inscription exemplifies the municipal tendencies in the establishment of the cult without any divine insinuation: Τιβερίωι Κλαυδίωι Καίσαρι Γερμανικῶι Σεβαστῶι Αὐτοκράτορι τὸν ναὸν ὁ δᾶμος ὁ Ἰσθμιοιτᾶν καθειέρωσε;⁸ b) the rejection of public divinity like his decision against the construction of temples to his person by the people of Alexandria in AD 41: [...] But a priest for me and erection of temples I reject [...] and judging that temples and such things to the gods alone should be reserved and granted by every age,⁹ against the temple from the people of Thasos in AD 42: [...] but I decline the temple because I consider that to be the privilege of the gods alone.¹⁰ Nero also refused the divine attributes at the beginning of his reign in AD 55: [...] [- - -] of the remaining two honors your temple I decline because to gods alone is this honor to be granted rightly by men, and the gold crown I released to be sent back to you, not wishing at the beginning of my principate to burden you;¹¹ a dying Vespasian exclaimed against the divine condition: *Vae, inquit, puto deus fio*.¹² Some members of the imperial family such as Germanicus also reject divine honors: your goodwill [...], I accept, but odious to me are your shouts [...]. They are fitting for the true savior only and the benefactor of the entire race of men, my father and his mother (who is) my grandmother.¹³

Many of the erected inscriptions were unauthorized records, hence the notion must be removed from common sense that the emperor or the imperial family had direct responsibility on those, because the *imperatores* only tried to put a limit over the private and collective initiatives, but not always achieving that goal.¹⁴ A considered number of individuals put inscriptions across the cities of the Roman World, and even when the emperors did not consent about the erection, there were limited for what they could do. Hadrian on his second visit to the Ephesians was acclaimed as Ζεὺς Ὀλύμπιος,¹⁵ knowing that he never accepted a direct link between himself and the gods (officially). Vespasian suffered the same destiny: the people from the cities openly created religious manifestations to the princeps, dedicating statue bases with the category of sacred on his honor.¹⁶ But the cities and the people who honor the emperors and the imperial house go further than that: Caligula was openly declared a big and eminent god by the Cyzicans: μέγιστος καὶ [ἐ]πιφενέσ(τα)τος θεὸς [[Γάϊος]] Καῖσαρ.¹⁷ Maybe this last inscription finds the correct connection with the words of Philo of Alexandria, who wrote that the emperor represented

⁷ BGU 1074 = SB 5225 = Smallwood 1967, 373.

⁸ I.Cos Segre EV 346b; cf. with few variations in IG 12.4.2: 642.

⁹ PLond. 1912 = Sel. Pap. 212 = Smallwood 1967, 370.

¹⁰ Smallwood 1967, 371.

¹¹ P. Med.inv. 70.01 verso.

¹² Suet. Vesp. 23.4.

¹³ Sel. Pap. 211 = EJ² 320b = Sherk 1988, 34b.

¹⁴ Millar 1977, 387; Beard – North – Price 1998, 352-353; Osgood 2011, 71.

¹⁵ I.Ephesos 4.785.

¹⁶ MAMA 6.177.

¹⁷ IGR 4.146.

himself superior even to the roman gods.¹⁸ However, was it the mistake of Caligula or the provincials? Clearly the provinces fed the ego of the emperor.

It is important to recall that the formulas used on the imperial cults do not differ much from honors paid to the gods,¹⁹ and there were two models for this: one is without cult or divinization and the other attached the divine potentia of the princeps with the gods.²⁰ J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz recognized the imperial cult as secular, but also considers that men believed in the survival of the empire “[...] from being sincerely and emotionally involved in it”.²¹ This emotion can only be understood if we realize that politics and religion were deeply connected in the ancient world. They cannot be understood as separate processes.²² To think that the imperial cults were only political reduces all the academic interpretations and even the religiosity of the ancient world.²³ Saturninus was very clear in a discussion about the genius of the *princeps* and the imperial cults when he said: *Et nos religiosi sumus, et simplex est religio nostra, et iuramus per genium domini nostri imperatoris, et pro salute eius supplicamus, quod et vos quoque facere debetis*.²⁴ It is obvious that Saturninus was defending the religious expressions of the Romans, and the public rejection of the Christians was a problem for the continuity and safety of the empire.²⁵ The ancients could not understand the politics separate from the religious manifestations. Even A. D. Nock could not reject the idea of religion-imperial cults (= emotions-actions) when he wrote: “There were no doubt moments of intense emotion”.²⁶ A response letter from Caligula expresses the link between politics and religion, considering both as important and emphasizing the religious character of the Greek fashion in direct actions towards the emperor: “I have read the decree given to me [...] and have noted that you have spared no extravagance in your zeal and piety towards me, in that you have each personally offered sacrifice for my welfare and have joined in a common festival and have decreed the greatest honors you could [...]”.²⁷ This was a moment of intense emotion.

Undoubtedly, the founder of this tradition was Julius Caesar, and Augustus exploited the formulas. Just after the battle of Pharsalus in 48 BC, Caesar was called a living god by the Demetrians, just as Γάιος Ἰούλιος Καῖσαρ αὐτοκράτωρ θεός,²⁸ but some scholars believed that the inscriptions were set up after that date.²⁹ He was also called savior and benefactor of the mankind by the Cartheians also considered as godlike: Ὁ δῆμος ὁ Καρθαιέων τὸν θεὸν καὶ αὐτοκράτορα καὶ σωτῆρα

¹⁸ Philo Leg. 13.93 .

¹⁹ Peppel 2003, 71.

²⁰ Harland 1996, 320-321; Lozano 2010, 36-37; cf. Ho 2015, 154; also Amm. 14.6.5-6.

²¹ Liebeschuetz 1979, 78.

²² Hopkins 1978, 200; Price 1984a, 15-16; Beard 1992, 730, 732-734; Friesen 2001, 5-22; Cid Zurita 2012, 2; Winter 2015, 7, 42; Cid Zurita 2018, 71.

²³ Peppard 2011, 33-34.

²⁴ ASC 3.

²⁵ Musurillo 1972, 6; in context with the problem: Millar 1973, 145-175.

²⁶ Nock 1957, 121.

²⁷ IG 7, 2711 = Smallwood 1967, 361.

²⁸ SEG 14, 474.

²⁹ Accame 1946, 174-175.

τῆς οἰκουμένης Γάϊον Ἰούλιον Καίσαρα.³⁰ This inscription and the plausible date of 48 BC are quite curious because at the same time there was another one from Ephesus and the community of Asia,³¹ calling him god manifested and savior of all mankind: Γαῖο[υ] Ἰούλιον [...] Καίσαρα [...] τὸν ἀπὸ Ἄρεως καὶ Ἀφροδείτης θεὸν ἐπιφανῆ καὶ κοινὸν τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου βίου σωτῆρα.³² Considering this last epigraphical record, it provides information about Caesar's benefactions because the usage of εὐεργέτα is so significant, not only for the conceptualization but also for the hermeneutical meaning of the dedicators and the readers.³³ Pergamum expressed their gratitude upon Caesar recording Ὁ δῆμος ἐτίμησε τὸν ἑαυτοῦ σωτῆρα καὶ εὐεργέτην Γάϊον Ἰούλιον [...] Καίσαρα;³⁴ Athens did the same and recognized the saving and benefactor character of Caesar: [Γ]άϊον Ἰούλιον Καί[σαρα] ... σωτῆρα κα[ὶ] εὐεργέτην].³⁵ The Latin part of the empire was quite moderate, and for this key aspect there are two inscriptions: the first one was settled by legal permission (now is preserved on the Vatican Museums) and they did not call him a god in the Greek style, but divine: *Divo Iulio iussu populi Romani statutum est lege Rufrena*.³⁶ The other inscription talked about the genius of Caesar that was accepted by the Senate and People of Rome and now is held among the Roman gods: *Genio deivi Iuli parentis patriae quem senatus populusque Romanus in deorum numerum rettulit*.³⁷

Julius Caesar's son-in-law was also called god, but his divine relation was officially considered by his birthday and the beginning of good things for the world, just as the Priene inscription records: [...] ἤρξεν δὲ τῷ κόσμῳ τῶν δι' αὐτὸν εὐαγγελί[ων ἢ γενέθλιος ἡμέ]ρα τοῦ θεοῦ.³⁸ Augustus was called god, son of god and god of god. These three titles are very important for the statement of this research, because they enclose a significant part of the discussion about the divinity of the Roman emperors. There is no need to believe that these titles were only official because several inscriptions were found of spontaneous initiative.³⁹ Someone can be divine yet not necessarily a god in the strict sense of the word, and this is a problem that still arises when the studies of ancient pagan religion try to explore and explain the subject, since the line between man and god on ancient epigraphs is blurry. A useful tool for this problem is the language-game, a world of constructing meanings.⁴⁰ Clearer is the sentence of the academic J. Smith: "what we study when we study religion is one mode of constructing worlds of meaning, world within which men find themselves and in which they choose to dwell".⁴¹

³⁰ IG XII⁵, 557.

³¹ Meyer 1922, 509; Magie 1950, 407; Weinstock 1971, 296.

³² CIG 2, 2957 = Syll³ 760.

³³ Danker 1982, 26-29.

³⁴ IGR 4, 1677.

³⁵ Syll³ 759.

³⁶ CIL 6, 872.

³⁷ ILLRP 410 = ILS 72 = CIL 9, 2628.

³⁸ OGIS 458 = I.Pergamon 105 = EJ² 82.

³⁹ Lozano 2011, 475-520.

⁴⁰ Wittgenstein 2009, 23.

⁴¹ Smith 1993, 290.

In the imperial cults it must be considered that every action, whether it be a political or social expression, had an inherent religious transmission.⁴² W. S. Ferguson thought that the Hellenistic ruler cult was similar to the Roman ruler cult, and A. Momigliano observed an obvious line for this dilemma: from heroes-cult to Hellenistic rulers, then to the Roman magistrates and finally to the Roman emperor.⁴³ S. Price has denied this theory, considering there was no continuation in the reification of ruler cults.⁴⁴ The alleged relationship is known as *ισόθιοι τιμαί*. This concept can be translated as “honours pareils à ceux des dieux”,⁴⁵ “honours equivalent to those given to the gods”,⁴⁶ or “honours equal to those bestowed upon the gods”.⁴⁷ Despite of the subtle difference on the translations, there is no need to believe that the emperors were similar to the gods.⁴⁸ D. Fishwick said that the monuments rendered to the rulers were not *τεμένη* - for the gods but *σηκοί* - for humans,⁴⁹ and Cassius Dio conveys that in the year 29 BC when the people of Pergamum made the arrangement for a temple for Augustus and Rome, but Dio used the word *τέμενος*, considering the goddess and not Augustus as the principal deity.⁵⁰ This example evidences the importance of words, the translations and the interpretations. Caesar's death closes a way to understand the honors to politicians and generals, the so called *ισόθιοι τιμαί*.

Commonly the title *θεός* was conferred after the death of the individual⁵¹ but at some point, in history it was bestowed upon the living (see Julius Caesar). Records of this religious title could be tracked back to the decree in honor of Ptolemy V, an ever-living king and *θεός ἐκ θεοῦ καὶ θεᾶς καθάπερ Ὠρος ὁ τῆς Ἰσιδος καὶ Ὀσίριδος υἱός*.⁵² Official or unofficially, the emperors were addressed as living gods and as having the power of gods, perhaps for eulogy, recognition, religiosity or just politics like Gordianus - *Θεὸς Γορδ.*,⁵³ and the title *invictus* that was understood as an unofficial title years ago, and now the interpretations of official contents in four documents might indicate that it indeed had official status.⁵⁴ Aurelianus was related with the Sol Invictus, keeping the religious sentiment of the period, and some inhabitants believed that, just as the papyrological record in POslo 3.96.1.14 and the POxy 7.1036 who calls the emperor as *ἀνίκητος*. For this point, J. De Jong declared “it may be that the appearance of *ἀνίκητος* in imperial titulature in third-century papyrus texts does reflect the perception of Aurelian's imperial representation by at least some

⁴² Scheid 1985.

⁴³ Ferguson 1928, 14; Charlesworth 1935, 8-12; Momigliano 1986, 184-186.

⁴⁴ Price 1984a, 53; Price 1984b, 23; Millar 1984, 53; Cid Zurita 2013, 8; Cid Zurita 2018, 77. For emperor-cult: Herzog-Hauser 1924, 806-853.

⁴⁵ Cerfaux – Tondriau 1957, 201.

⁴⁶ Price 1984b, 28.

⁴⁷ Chaniotis 2003, 433.

⁴⁸ Cid Zurita 2018, 73-75.

⁴⁹ Fishwick 1993, 21-31.

⁵⁰ Dio 51.20.6-8.

⁵¹ Cuss 1974, 24.

⁵² OGIS 90.1.10 = CIG 3, 4697 = SB 8299.

⁵³ PAnt. 3.191.9; cf. Peachin 1990, group A, 8.18: *divi Gordd.* in allusion of legal recognition to Gordianus I and II? Gordianus III as a descendent of divinized emperor: TAM 4, 14 - Imp. Caes. *divi Gord. nepos.*

⁵⁴ De Jong 2006, 109; cf. De Jong 2016, 39, n. 60.

inhabitants of Egypt".⁵⁵ And similar it must be for Domitian with the plausible inscription of him, which calls the princeps as unconquered god - Αὐτοκράτορα Καίσαρα Σεβαστὸν Γερμανικὸν ἀνίκητον Θεόν.⁵⁶

For instances of eulogy and thanksgiving, there are inscriptions like that of the people of Larisa to Claudius for the buildings and attention of the princeps: θεὸν Κλαύδιον ὁ δῆμος ὁ Λαρειαίων.⁵⁷ In 30-29 BC, four lamplighters of two temples in Egypt made an oath to Octavian, calling him Καίσαρος θεὸν ἐκ θεοῦ.⁵⁸ Here, a potential word was found: god of god. If a lamplighter's oath is curious, then an oath made by some sheep farmers would be even more curious and significantly less common after reparations and re-erection of the surrounding walls of the temple: They have made an oath for the safety of the emperor, writing again the formula ὑπὲρ Καίσαρος Αὐτοκράτορος Θεοῦ ἐκ Θεοῦ.⁵⁹ The people from Cyzicus without any complication or doubt recognized the emperor Caligula as the biggest and most eminent god: μέγιστος καὶ [ἐ]πιφενέσ(τα)τος θεὸς [[Γάιος]] Καῖσαρ.⁶⁰ On the other hand, Claudius was celebrated as god for this birthday at the official festivals and banquets of Pergamum - Σεβαστοῦ Τιβερίου Καίσαρος θεοῦ γενεθλίῳ.⁶¹ The epigraphical records go even further and by the Coan decree. It was declared Augustus as a god and even superior to the Olympian Gods, but not by power, but by his benefactions to all men: Αὐτοκράτωρ Καῖσαρ θεοῦ υἱός, θεὸς [Σεβαστός, ταῖς εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους εὐεργεσίαις ὑπερτεθεικῶς καὶ τοὺς Ὀλυμπίους θεούς].⁶² A similarly enthusiastic epigraph comes from Mytilene, when the people of the polis decreed that Augustus had a heavenly reputation and possessed the power and authority of the gods, and the city would do anything to deify him.⁶³ In Pergamum it was declared that Augustus was a god and son of god of every land and sea, and even the overseer ([Αὐτοκράτ]ορ[α Καίσαρα [θ]εοῦ υἱὸν θεὸν Σεβαστὸ[ν] [πάσης] γῆ[ς] καὶ θ[αλάσσης] ἐπ[ό]π[την]).⁶⁴ After a century, the name of Augustus will be associated as a title, and sometime later from the time of Marcus Aurelius, someone named Tiberius Claudius Milatos as ὑμνωδοῦ θεοῦ Αὐγούστου ('singer of hymns of the God Augustus') and her daughter was priestess of the Goddess Faustina - ἱερείας θεᾶς Φαυστείνης.⁶⁵

In official titulature, the ruling emperor was associated in some cases with the divinity of the dead emperors, as is the case of Tiberius and others. He was officially saluted as [Τ]ιβέρι[ος Καῖσαρ θεοῦ Σεβαστοῦ υἱὸς θεοῦ Ἰουλίου υἱωνὸς Σεβαστός], linking his person with official gods Au

⁵⁵ De Jong 2006, 110.

⁵⁶ SEG 32, 1099.

⁵⁷ IG 9.2, 605.

⁵⁸ POxy 12.1453 = Sel. Pap. 2.327.

⁵⁹ OGIS 655 = IGR 1.1116 = SEG 26, 1750.

⁶⁰ IGR IV, 146.

⁶¹ I.Ephesos 3801.

⁶² I.Olympia 53.

⁶³ IGR 4.39 = OGIS 456.

⁶⁴ I.Pergamon 381.

⁶⁵ I.Pergamon 523.

gustus and Caesar;⁶⁶ Titus and Domitian were saluted as sons of the god Vespasian (θεοῦ Οὐεσπασιανοῦ Σεβαστοῦ υἱῶ⁶⁷); Heliogabalus as *div[i] Antonioni Magn[i] fil(io)*, *divi Sever(i) nep(oti)*;⁶⁸ Hadrian in the statue base erected by the linen workers as θεοῦ Τραιῖανου Παρθικοῦ υἱ[όν]⁶⁹ or in the thanksgiving for distributed food among children: *[Imp(eratori) Caesari] divi Trai]ani [Parthici] fil(io) [divi Nerv]ae [nepoti] [Traiano Hadr]iano [Aug(usto)]... [pueri et p]uellae [alimentariae]*;⁷⁰ Marcus Aurelius was saluted in Samos and linked as heir and grandson of gods: ἀ[τοκράτορα Καίσαρα Μ]ἄρκου[ν Αὐρήλιον Ἀντωνεῖ]γον Σ[εβαστόν, θεοῦ Ἀντω]γείν[ου υἱόν, θεοῦ Ἀδριανοῦ υἱόν, θεοῦ Τραιανοῦ ἔκγονον, θεοῦ Νέρουα ἀπόγονον];⁷¹ Antoninus Pius is even remembered in a judicial verdict of the titles and divinity of his predecessors: θεοῦ Ἀδρια-ν[οῦ υἱ]ὸς θεοῦ Τραι[ανοῦ Παρθικοῦ] υἱόνος θεοῦ Νέρ[ουα] ἔκγονος.⁷² Caligula, despite knowing that Tiberius was not considered a god by the Roman estate, tried to associate his principate with another imperial divinity, and for this, he found the utilization of the formula Αὐτοκράτωρ Σεβαστὸς Καίσαρ, θεοῦ Σεβαστοῦ ἔκγονος, Τιβερίου Καίσαρος υἱόνος as the solution for the correct transmission of power.⁷³

The title of θεός was not the only one bestowed upon the emperors, and there are two peculiar variations of this divine word in the imperial cults. They were also addressed as θεϊόστατος. Some emperors were known for their military capability, such as Septimius Severus who was addressed by a scribe as most divine: [θει]οτάτο[υ] Αὐτοκράτορος Καίσαρος Λουκίου Σεπτιμίου [Σεουή-ρου]⁷⁴, and with Caracalla who were called in a formal petition as τοῖς μεγίστοις καὶ θε[ε]ι[ο]τάτοις κυρίοις ἡμ[ῶν] Σεουήρω καὶ Ἀντωνίνω.⁷⁵ In the third century, several emperors were acclaimed with titles such as Maximinus and Maximus as ὁ μέγιστος καὶ θεϊόστατος.⁷⁶ In Moesia Inferior, Gordianus was saluted with the same formula⁷⁷ and even as a god.⁷⁸ Phillipus the Senior was acclaimed as ὁ θεϊόστατος Σεβ.,⁷⁹ ὁ μέγιστος καὶ θεϊόστατος,⁸⁰ ὁ θεϊόστατος Αὐτ. Καίσ. Μ. Ἰουλ. Φιλ.,⁸¹ and using the name of Augustus as a title with the formula of the most divine: θεϊόστατος

⁶⁶ SEG 45, 1644.

⁶⁷ IGR 4, 1393 = CIG 3173.

⁶⁸ ILTG.221 = AE 1955, 210.

⁶⁹ IGR 3, 896.

⁷⁰ AE 2009, 207.

⁷¹ IG 12.6.1 no. 421.

⁷² POxy 47.3361.

⁷³ IG 07.2711 = Smallwood 1967, 361.

⁷⁴ SB 18.13175.

⁷⁵ POxy 47.3364.

⁷⁶ IG 2.2.3420; IGBulg 1515.

⁷⁷ IGBulg 641 and 642; AE 1902, 115.

⁷⁸ IGR 3, 235.

⁷⁹ IGR 1, 1478.

⁸⁰ SEG 28, 1978, 589, 590, 591; IGR 4, 19.

⁸¹ IGR 1, 757.

Αὐγ. Ἰουλίου Φιλίππου Σεβασ.⁸² The same official formula was repeated with Decius in Achaëa and Thrace.⁸³ In Achaëa, Gallus was known as the lord of us, the biggest and most divine, embodying the word κύριος as a royal title adding now a divine aura: ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν ὁ μέγιστος καὶ θεϊόστατος Αὐτ. Καῖσ. Γαλ.⁸⁴ Valerian, Gallienus and the young Valerian were acclaimed in the form of most divine, a word given to them to state their beyond human status: τοῖς θειοτάτοις Αὐτοκράτορσι Π(οπλίος) Λικιννίοις Οὐαλεριανῶ καὶ Γαλληνῶ καὶ Οὐαλεριανῶ.⁸⁵ The other variation is the title θεοφιλέστατος which singularity is important, because it can be translated as ‘dearest to the gods’ and ‘most god-loving’. It is common to find this title after the collapse of the Severan dynasty and it seems that the concept tried to calm the stormy years of anarchy. Gaius Julius Vero, better known as Maximus (AD 235-238), was called on Latin inscription as *nobilissimus Caesar*, but in the Greek inscriptions is called θεοφιλέστατος Καῖσαρ,⁸⁶ Hostilianus was addressed as ὁ θεοφιλέστατος Γ. Οὐαλ. Ὅστ.⁸⁷ In the reconstruction of the Nicaea Council, it is said that Constantine was the most God-loving emperor - Θεοφιλεστάτου Βασιλέως.

The first princeps open a new form of official and unofficial dedications. Augustus was celebrated in 29 BC by the Senate and the People of Rome as a savior and protector: *Imp(eratori) Caesari divi [...] re publica conservata*.⁸⁸ Twenty years after that acclamation, Augustus was given a supplication in the Fasti Cumae: *Imperio Caesaris Augusti custo[dis]*.⁸⁹ Certainly, these two inscriptions do not expose any divine attribute in the Latin West, but in the Greek East the story was quite different. The word for this difference is σωτήρ. The *soteria* is understood as a power of safety, protection and many others. In the Greek world, it was understood as a language to express gratitude to the gods or individuals with divine potential “tying the dedicator to the divine in a personal relationship”.⁹⁰ The application of this word is not just from the Principate alone. Some utilization of this concept can be established even before the Principate (like when Antiochos -the founder of the Seleucid dynasty- died, it was obviously deified, and also honored as savior: Ἀντίοχος Ἀπόλλων Σωτήρο[ς]).⁹¹ It seems like some *poleis* repeated the same formula when speaking of Julius Caesar since he was also called *soter* in his lifetime, but not by any official dedications approved by the emperor; for example: in Mytilene IGR 4.57, in Megara IG 7.62, in Athens IG 22.1222 and ὁ δῆμος [Γ]άιον Ἰούλιον Καί[σαρα ἀρ]χιερέα καὶ δικτά[τορα τὸν ἑα]υτοῦ σωτήρα κα[ὶ εὐεργέτην].⁹² However, this presents a predicament, given that not only emperors were acclaimed as *soter*. For example, two politicians were saluted as saviors: Publius Servilius Isauricus

⁸² AE 1913, 175.

⁸³ AE 1899, 4; AE 1932, 28.

⁸⁴ SEG 11, 122.

⁸⁵ IGBulg 2, 834.

⁸⁶ IGBulg 638; also AE 1927, 63.

⁸⁷ AE 1890, 130 = I.Keramos 33.

⁸⁸ CIL 6, 873.

⁸⁹ CIL 10, 3682.

⁹⁰ Moralee 2004, 3.

⁹¹ CIG 4458.

⁹² Syll³ 759.

Eleutherios in Alabanda,¹⁰⁴ Zeus Boulaios,¹⁰⁵ as Ζεὺς Ἐλευθέριος¹⁰⁶ and in Mytilene too,¹⁰⁷ and Zeus Caesar Olympios,¹⁰⁸ Hadrian was recognized as [Αὐτοκρά]τορι Καίσα[ρι Τραϊανῶι Ἀδρια-ν]ῶι Ὁ(λ)υμπίῳ¹⁰⁹ and in his second visit to Ephesus as Ζεὺς Ὀλύμπιος;¹¹⁰ Nero by official decree from Acraephia was potentially addressed as lord of the entire world and new Helios κόσμου κύριος Νέρων [...] νέος Ἥλιος.¹¹¹

To conclude, a change has to be made. There is information after the battle of the Milvian Bridge in AD 312 which shows that in the city of Cirta in Africa, the priesthood for the gens of Flavia was settled as an attempt to again establish a link the emperor and his family with the tradition of the imperial cults, but Constantine took away all his portraiture from the temples.¹¹² When Constantine died, he was divinized.¹¹³ The Senate of Rome begged for the body but it was all in vain. Now, a new city has the privilege: Constantinople, and with this city comes a new form of funeral. No more apotheosis, the norm now is a Christian burial, and in a Christian church.¹¹⁴

III. Final Considerations

Artemidorus said that the ruler was not a god; the ruler had the power of a god - τὸ κρατοῦν γὰρ δύναμιν ἔχει θεοῦ.¹¹⁵ Th. Witulski avoids some interpretations from the ancient world, and he believed that in the Greek context, the subjects worshipped the sovereigns who ruled over them as gods.¹¹⁶ Elias Bickerman clearly manifested on a conference that “we should not confuse the divinity and the association with the divine. The monarch by the grace of God, by definition is no deity himself.¹¹⁷

Even if the inscription considers the emperor and the imperial as gods, the rulers were not gods in the very sense of the word. The epigraphical records must be seen under a hermeneutical analysis and not literally. Obviously, the rulers and their families were considered special for their position, but to speak openly that they were gods is a misinterpretation. Just as S. Price said: the emperors were something else, and the function of the gods must be understood as power and not as a personification.¹¹⁸

¹⁰⁴ OGIS 457.

¹⁰⁵ SEG 47, 218.

¹⁰⁶ IGR 1.5, 1295; SEG 8, 65.

¹⁰⁷ IG 12.2, 156 = IGR 4, 62.

¹⁰⁸ IG 12.2, 656 = IGR 4, 95; cf. IG 12.2, 206 from the time of Tiberius.

¹⁰⁹ I.Pergamon 2, 374; I.Smyrna 622.

¹¹⁰ I.Ephesos 4, 785.

¹¹¹ IG 7, 2713 = Small. 64.

¹¹² Aur. Vic. 40.28; Eus. V.C. 4.16, cf. with the mistake of Soc. Hist. Ecl. 1.18.

¹¹³ Eut. 10.8.3.

¹¹⁴ Price 1987, 102.

¹¹⁵ Onir. 2.36.

¹¹⁶ Witulski 2007, 38.

¹¹⁷ Bickerman 1973, 7.

¹¹⁸ Price 1984b, 94-95.

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Tanrılar Gibi: Roma İmparatorluğu'nda İmparator Kültündeki Bazı İfadeler

Öz

Augustus öldüğünde imparatorluk kültleri tüm Akdeniz'de yaygınlaşmıştı. Buna istinaden, *princeps* ve imparatorluk ailesine yönelik tanrısal ve tanrılaştıran sözcüklerin nasıl üretildiğini ve eğer bu ifadelerin (günlük yaşamda bile) tanrısallığın samimi bir şekilde dile getirilmesi ya da yaranma olup olmadığını hatırlamak önemlidir. Seçilmiş bazı Yunanca ve Latince yazıtların yorumlanması yoluyla, bu çalışma çeşitli zıt öğeler sunmayı ve imparatorluk kültleri konseptine yeni öneriler getirmeyi hedeflemektedir. Zira bu dini dışavurum sadece devamlılık ve eklemelerle giden bir kültür formu değildi. Aslında veriler, diğer yönetici kültür formlarıyla karşılaştırıldığında bazı farklılıklar göstermektedir. İfadelerin önemi üniktür: bir kişinin ya da çeşitli bireylerin ifade edilmesini olduğu gibi ya da mecazi olarak gösterebilmektedirler. Yazıtların bireylerin retoriğini abartabileceğini ve L. Wittgenstein'in işaret ettiği üzere, "dil oyunu"nun yok sayılamayacağına dikkat etmek önemlidir.

Ayrıca, coğrafi yerler ve kültürel dışavurumlar nedeniyle imparatorluk kültür ifadeleri değişebileceğinden bunları dikkate almak önem arz etmektedir. Makalede, dini ve politik içerikteki epigrafik veriler ve edebi metinler çerçevesinde, imparatorluk kültürü titulatürü ve hali hazırda devam sorunları hakkındaki bazı düşünceler gözlemlenebilir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: İmparatorluk kültürleri, Roma imparatorlarının tanrısallıkları, Eski Yunanca Yazıtlar, Latince Yazıtlar.

Similar to Gods: Some Words in the Imperial Cult in the Roman Empire

Abstract

When Augustus died, the imperial cults were widely spread all over the Mediterranean. Considering that, it is important to recall how the divine and divinizing words were produced for the *princeps* and the imperial family, and, if these words can be seen as a sincere expression of divinity (even in life) or just as a form of adulation. Through the interpretation of a few selected Greek and Latin inscriptions, the following study seeks to establish various contrasting elements and to put forward new suggestions to the concept of imperial cults, since this religious manifestation was not the only form of cult with continuations and additions. In fact, evidence has shown a number of differences when compared to other ruler-cult forms. The importance of words is unique: they are able to literally and figuratively show the expression of a person or several individuals. It is important to note that inscriptions can exaggerate the individuals' rhetoric and that "the language-game" cannot be forgotten, as L. Wittgenstein pointed out.

Furthermore, the geographical locations and the cultural manifestations are important to consider as the imperial cult words may vary because of it. By using the religious and political epigraphical monuments and the literature of the period, some ideas can be tracked about the titulature of the imperial cult and the problems that still arise.

Keywords: Imperial Cults, Divinity of Roman Emperors, Greek Inscriptions, Latin Inscriptions.