

Augustus and the
Romana Religio

Augustus and the *Romana Religio*:

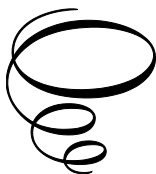
*A Time of Respect for
Traditions and Changes*

*Studies in honorem et Sacram
memoriam Santiago Montero
Herrero*

Edited by

Sabino Perea-Yébenes

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



Augustus and the *Romana Religio*:
A Time of Respect for Traditions and Changes
Studies in honorem et Sacram memoriam Santiago Montero Herrero

Edited by Sabino Perea-Yébenes

This book first published 2026

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2026 by Sabino Perea-Yébenes and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN: 978-1-0364-6860-6

ISBN (Ebook): 978-1-0364-6861-3

Nous voici aujourd'hui au bord du vide
Puisque nous cherchons partout le visage que nous avons perdu.
Il était notre avenir et nous avons perdu notre avenir,
Il était des nôtres et nous avons perdu cette part de nous-mêmes,
Il nous questionnait et nous avons perdu sa question.
Nous voici seuls, nos lèvres serrées sur nos pourquoi,
Nous sommes venus ici chercher, chercher quelque chose ou quelqu'un,
Chercher cet amour plus fort que la mort.

(Paul Éluard, « Au bord du vide »)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	ix
<i>Sabino Perea Yébenes</i>	
Chapter 1	1
The ‘Alexandrian’ <i>senatus consultum</i> issued in 30 BC as de foundation of Imperial cult <i>Cesare Letta</i>	
Chapter 2	23
Augustus and the Celtic religion <i>Giuseppe Zecchini</i>	
Chapter 3	32
Again about Augustus and the Gods of Debod <i>Sabino Perea Yébenes</i>	
Chapter 4	57
How to present the story of Romulus during the reign of Augustus? <i>Dominique Briquel</i>	
Chapter 5	87
<i>Magnus saeculorum ordo</i> . Augustus and the Political Control of Time <i>Ciro Parodo</i>	
Chapter 6	111
The recovery of some traditional Priesthoods by Augustus <i>Javier Cabrero Piquero</i>	
Chapter 7	128
Apollo in the Augustan ideology (<i>Apollo palatinus</i> / <i>Apollo medicus</i>) <i>Pilar Fernández Uriel</i>	
Chapter 8	144
The Imperial <i>Consecratio</i> and Divine Signs <i>Yann Berthelet and Romain Loriol</i>	

Chapter 9	164
Avoiding the Imperial Cult: Jews and the Homage to the <i>Princeps</i> in the Augustan Age	
<i>Raül González Salinero</i>	
Chapter 10	178
The beginnings of the “imperial cult” in Carthage and Leptis Magna between Augustus and Tiberius: two African capitals compared	
<i>Attilio Mastino and Paola Ruggeri</i>	
Chapter 11	213
The Implementation of The Imperial cult in the Roman West: Religious Tradition and Political Innovation	
<i>Gonzalo Bravo</i>	
Chapter 12	230
Augustus and the origins of the Imperial cult in Baetica	
<i>Mauricio Pastor Muñoz</i>	
Chapter 13	245
Augustus, the Imperial cult and the <i>conventus iuridici</i> of Hispania Citerior	
<i>Narciso Santos Yanguas</i>	
Chapter 14	259
The Capricorn’s soar. <i>Nova aetas Augusti</i> on engraved glass gems	
<i>Alessandra Magni</i>	
Chapter 15	276
The Festival in Honour of Venus regarding her Depiction in the Mosaic of the Months from Thysdrus. Transformation and Continuity from the Augustan period	
<i>Luz Neira</i>	
Contributors List. Academic Affiliation.....	294

INTRODUCTION

SABINO PEREA YÉBENES

Foreword

This book is the tribute that a group of professors has dedicated, in each of its chapters, to the memory of Santiago Montero Herrero (1954-2023), a recognition of his work as a historian and an act of love for a friend.

He devoted his life to the study of Roman antiquity, music, family and friends. Today we give back to him only a small part of what he gave us.

I met him, as a professor of History of Religions, in 1992, at the Complutense University; therefore, more than thirty years ago. I have shared many things with him in the field of the University: teaching, conferences, books, endless conversations about Augustus, and many other important things in life itself. I admired Santiago – and I told him so many times – his genius when it came to looking for topics on which to investigate, most of them on Roman religion, and many of them with Augustus as their central axis. For example, *Política y adivinación en el Bajo Imperio Romano: emperadores y arúspices (193 d.C. - 408 d.C.)* (Bruxelles, Latomus, 1991); *Diccionario de adivinos, magos y astrólogos de la Antigüedad* (Madrid, Trotta, 1997); *Augusto y las aves. Prodigio, exhibición y consumo en la Roma del Principado* (Barcelona, Universitat de Barcelona, 2006); *El emperador y los ríos. Ingeniería, religión y oposición política en el Imperio Romano* (Madrid, UNED, 2012); *La escoba y el barrido ritual en la religión romana* (Madrid, Signifer Libros, 2017); *Prodigios en la Hispania romana. Rayos, terremotos, epidemias, eclipses* (Madrid, Guillermo Escolar Editor, 2020); etc. Many of these books I had the opportunity to read before Santiago gave the OK for the *imprimatur*. I have reviewed other works of his, and I have read them all. With him I have written several book chapters, a monograph (*Romana religio / Religio romanorum. Diccionario bibliográfico de religión romana*, Madrid, UCM, 1999), and we have coordinated another collective book, entitled *Adivinación y violencia en el mundo romano*, Salamanca, University, 2020. All this, thanks to his generosity as a companion and teacher. With these few references I just want to remember that there have been many years of

academic coexistence in which there has always been mutual respect for our work.

Undertaking the adventure of this book has been for me a moral obligation and a responsibility. My only merit is having had the initiative, but the real value is in the generosity and love with which all the professors who participate have demonstrated with their research in this collective volume. All the people who write here knew Santiago, have shared conference sessions with him, or have read his books. Each of them could tell many things about Santiago, all agreeing in his goodness, his bonhomie and his humility. It is possible that Santiago himself would have blushed if he could have had in his hands a book written by friends and colleagues as a tribute. But he is no longer alive, his memory remains, and this book has as its main mission that his name remains present in the academic world that he loved so much, for many years and forever.

θανάτῳ συνβίῳ μνήμης χάριτι.

Sabino Perea Yébenes
Madrid, April 2025

This volume is part of the production of the Research Group with reference: GI94 RES “Res publica et sacra. Poder y sacralidad en el mundo romano (conflicto y alianza de poder y la religión en Roma), UNED, Madrid.

Notabilia and Key Dates in the Life of C. Caesar Augustus¹

Born:

September 23, 63 BC in Rome (his birthday was later celebrated, but still during Augustus's lifetime, on September 23 and 24, cf., for example, Dessau, *ILS* 154. Son of C. Octavius, praetor in 60 BC, and Atia.

Name²:

—C. Octavius since May 8, 44 BC.

—C. (Iulius) Caesar, since the end of October/beginning of November 40 BC

—Imperator Caesar Divi filius Augustus, since January 16, 27 BC.

The nickname Octavianus was not used by the young Caesar, not by his followers. However, it can be found in Cicero until November 44 BC. Later, Cicero also used only the name C. Caesar.

Chronology

* Religious positions and events are highlighted in bold

Official name until the year 40 BC: C. Octavius

59 BC: Death of C. Octavius *pater*.

51 BC: *Laudatio funebris* for his grandmother Julia. He was raised by his stepfather, L. Marcius Philippus, cos. 56 BC.

48 BC (October 18): Adoption of the *toga virilis*. **Octavius was made a member of the board of Roman priests, *pontifices***. Julius Caesar became the chief priest, *pontifex maximus* (Suet. *Iul.* 13).

47 BC (April/May): *praefectus urbi feriarum Latinarum causa*.

46 BC (Sept.): *Dona militaria* on the occasion of Caesar's African campaign. Journey to Hispania (46-45 BC).

¹ Adapted from Kienast, D. 1996, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, Darmstadt, 61-65.

² On the official name of Caesar Augustus, see also: Syme, R. 1958, "Imperator Caesar. A Study in Nomenclature". *Historia* 7, 172-188; Rubincam, C. 1992, "The Nomenclature of Julius Caesar and the Later Augustus in the Triumviral Period". *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 41, 88-103; Savino, E. 2016, "Augusto e il toponimo Ottaviano: un caso di invenzione della tradizione". *Maia* 68/2, 515-530; Wallace-Hadrill, A. 2016, "The naming of Augustus", *Maia* 68/2, 264-27; Perea Yébenes, S. 2023, "A new study of the *Life of Augustus* of Nicolaus of Damascus", *Histos. The On-line Journal of Ancient Historiography* 17 (2023) xcvi–cii (<https://histos.org/documents/2023RR18YebenesonBurgeon.pdf>).

- 45 BC (autumn): Journey to Apollonia, previously (?) *adlectio inter patricios*.
- 44 BC (Beginning): *magister equitum designatus*.
- 44 BC (March 15): Assassination of Caesar, testamentary adoption.
- 44 BC (May 8): Official acceptance of Caesar's inheritance.
- 44 BC (20-30 July): *ludus Victoriae Caesaris*; **appearance of *sidus Iulium***³.
- 43 BC (Jan. 2): *imperium propraetore, adlectio in senatum, locus consularis sententiae dicendae*.
- 43 BC (January 7): *dies imperii*. The young Caesar leads the fasces for the first time.
- 43 BC (April 14): Battle of *Forum Gallorum*.
- 43 BC (April 16): First imperial acclamation.
- 43 BC (April 21): Battle of Mutina.
- 43 BC (Aug. 19): First Consulate, *lex curiata de adoptione*.
- 43 BC (Nov. 27): *lex Titia*. The young Caesar becomes *IIIvir Rei Publicae Constituendae* together with M. Antonius and M. Aemilius Lepidus.
- 42 BC (October 23): Battle of Philippi.
- 41 BC (Since about): **Augur**.
- 40 BC (Jan./Feb.): L. Antonius has the young Caesar declared *hostis rei publicae*.
- 40 BC (End of February): Capture of Perusia, capture of L. Antonius.
- 40 BC (March 15): *Arae Perusinae*.
- 40 BC (autumn) Treaty of *Brundisium*.

Since 40 BC, official name: C. (Iulius) Caesar

- 40 BC (End of October/beginning of November): First *ovatio*. Acceptance of the Praenomen *Imperatoris*. **Consecration of Caesar**.
- 39 BC (Early summer): Treaty of *Misenum*.
- 38 BC (17 Jan.) Marriage to Livia Drusilla.
- 37 BC (Sept./Oct.): Treaty of *Tarentum*. Renewal of the Triumvirate is decided. The young Caesar calls himself *IIIvir Rei Publicae Constituendae II*.
- 36 BC (August): Battle of *Mylai*.

³ Scott, K. 1941, "The *Sidus Iulium* and the Apotheosis of Caesar", *Classical Philology* 36 (3), 257-272; Ramsey, J.T. & Lewis Licht, A. 1997, *The Comet of 44 BC and Caesar's Funeral Games*, Atlanta, Scholars Press; Pandey, N.B. 2013, "Caesar's Comet, the Julian Star, and the Invention of Augustus", *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 143 (2), 405-449.

- 36 BC (September): Battle of *Naulochus* (September 3) and surrender of Lepidus (September 22).
- 36 BC (Nov 13): *Ovatio ex Sicilia. Sacrosanctitas tribunicia.*
- 35/34 BC War in Illyria.
- 37/35 BC (Since about) *Quindecimvir sacris faciundis.*
- 33 BC, not 32 BC (December 31): End of the 2nd Triumvirate period.
- 31 BC (September 2): Battle of *Actium.*
- 31 BC (Late autumn): **Initiation into the Eleusinian Mysteries.**
- 30 BC (Aug. 1): Fall of Alexandria.
- 29 BC (Jan. 11): **Closure of the Janus Temple.**
- 29 BC (August): *Triplex triumphus* (over the Dalmatians, because of the Battle of Actium, over Egypt: August 13-15), **dedication of the Temple of Divus Iulius** (August 18), **consecration of the ara Victoriae in the Curia** (August 28).
- 28 BC Octavian becomes *princeps senatus*. Holding of the census with Agrippa. **Consecration of the Palatine Temple of Apollo** (October 9).

Since 27 BC, official name: Imperator Caesar Divi Filius AUGUSTUS

- 27 BC (January): *Restitutio rei publicae.* Award of the *corona civica* (January 13). Transfer of the *imperium proconsulare* for 10 years. **Honored with the name Augustus, duo laurea, and clupeus virtutis** (January 16).
- 27 BC (May/June): Departure for Gaul (stay there until the end of 27 BC).
- 26-25 BC Stay in Spain and participation in the Cantabrian War.
- 25 BC **Second closure of the Temple of Janus** (2nd half of 25 BC). **Consecration of the aedes Neptuni by Agrippa** (23 September 25 BC).
- 24 BC (Before June 13): Return to Rome.
- 23 BC Varro Murena's conspiracy (in 22 BC according to Cass. Dio 54, 3). Augustus falls ill (June). Resigns from the consulship on the orders of Albanus (before July 1?). Augustus receives the full *tribunicia potestas* and the *imperium proconsulare maius*.
- 22 BC Assumption of the *cura annonae*. Rejection of dictatorship and censorship. Journey to Sicily and the East.
- 22 BC (Sept. 1): **Consecration of the Iuppiter Tonans Temple in Rome** (Cass. Dio 54, 4, 2).
- 20 BC Return of the Roman standards by the Parthians, settlement of the Armenian question. Takeover of the *cura viarum*. Establishment of the *miliarium aureum*.
- 19 BC (May 12): **Dedication of the Temple of Mars Ultor on the Capitol?** (Cass. Dio 54, 8, 3).

- 19 BC (October 12): Return from the East. **The Altar of *Fortuna Redux* is approved. Foundation of *Augustalia*.**
- 19 BC (autumn): Award of the *Imperium consulare*.
- 19 BC (15 Dec.): **Altar of *Fortuna Redux* consecrated.**
- 18 BC Moral legislation (*leges Iuliae*). Reconstitution of the Senate.
- 17 BC Adoption of Caius and Lucius Caesar and **secular celebrations: Senate resolutions on the *ludi Saeculares*** (February 17 and May 23), ***ludi Latini Saeculares*** (May 31/June 1)⁴, *ludi Latini in theatro* (June 3), *ludi Latini et Graeci honorarii* (June 5-11), *venatio, ludi circenses, lusus Troiae* (June 12).
- 16 BC (29. Jun.): **Consecration of the Temple of Quirinus** (Ovid. *Fasti* 6, 795).
- 16 BC Early summer. *Clades Lolliana*. Augustus's departure for Gaul.
- 13 BC (July 4): Return to Rome. **Foundation of the *ara Pacis*.**
- 12 BC (March 6) **Election as *Pontifex Maximus*.** (End of March/beginning of April) Funeral oration for Agrippa. (April 28) ***Signum et ara Vestae consecrated on the Palatine.*** (August 1) **Consecration of the *ara Romae et Augusti in Lyon*** (Suet. *Claud.* 2, 1; Cass. Dio, 54, 32, 1). Journey of Augustus to Aquileia and meeting with Herod?
- 11 BC (May 4) Inauguration of the Theatre of Marcellus (Plin., *N. H.* 8, 65). Death of Octavia Minor. End of 11 BC) Journey to Gaul.
- 11/10 BC (Winter). Stay in Lyon.
- 10 BC **Third closure of the Temple of Janus decided.** Funeral oration for Octavia Minor.
- 9 BC (January 30) **Dedication of the *ara Pacis*.** Decree of the governor Paullus Fabius Maximus on the reform of the calendar in the province of Asia (OGIS 458). *Lectio senatus* in Rome. Funeral oration for Drusus.
- 8 BC **Calendar reform in Rome.** Renaming of the month Sextilis to Augustus. Census. Division of Rome into 14 regions. Expansion of the Pomerium (?). Journey to Gaul.
- 7 BC Start of the list of *vicomagistri*.
- 4 BC (June 27). Restoration of the *Lares Temple in summa sacra via* (Ovid. *Fasti* 6, 791).
- 2 BC (February 5) Award of the title *Pater Patriae*. (August 1) Inauguration of the *Forum Augusti*. **Dedication of the Temple of Mars** (Cass. Dio 60, 5, 3).

⁴ On the religious character of the *ludi saeculares*, see: Coarelli, F. (1993), "Note sui *ludi Saeculares*". In *Spectacles sportifs et scéniques dans le monde étrusco-italique. Actes de la table ronde de Rome (3-4 mai 1991)*, Rome : École Française de Rome, 211-245. (Publications de l'École française de Rome, 172.

- 4 AD (June 26 or 27) Adoption of Tiberius and Agrippa Postumus⁵.
- 6 AD (Jan. 27) **Dedication of Castor Temple.** (Jan. 17) *Consecration of the ara Numinis Augusti in Rome.* Establishment of the *cohortes vigilum.* Census of Quirinius in Judaea.
- 6-9 AD Pannonian Uprising.
- 7 AD (Aug. 10) **Dedication of the ara Cereris Matris et Opis Augustae.**
- 9 AD (Sept.) *Clades Variana. Lex Papia Poppaea de matrimonio.*
- 11 AD (Sept. 22) **Dedication of the ara Numinis Augusti at Narbo Martius**⁶.
- 13 AD (Jan. 8) **Consecration of the signum Iustitiae Augustae by Tiberius.** (April 3) Augustus writes his Testament (Suet. *Aug.* 101, 1).
- 14 AD (ca. Mai 11) Completion of the *census. Lustrum* with Tiberius.
- 14 AD (Aug. 19). Died in Nola (Campania). (First half of September 14), burial in the *Mausoleum Augusti* in Rome.
- 14 AD (Sept. 17) **Consecratio: Divus AVGVSTVS.**

⁵ See: Jameson, S. 1975, "Augustus and Agrippa Postumus". *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 24.2, 287-314.

⁶ Fishwick, D. 2007, "Numen Augustum". *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 160, 247-255. The text read : *Pleps (sic) Narbonensium aram Narbone in foro posuit, ad quam quot annis VIII k. Octobr., qua die eum saeculi felicitas orbi terrarum rectorem edidit, tres equites Romani a plebe et tres libertini hostias singulas inmolent et colonis et incolis ad supplicandum numini eius thus et vinum de suo ea die praestent; et VIII k. Octob. thus vinum colonis et incolis item praestent* (CIL I².4333 = ILS 112, lines 11-21).

CHAPTER 1

THE ‘ALEXANDRIAN’ *SENATUS CONSULTUM* ISSUED IN 30 BC AS THE FOUNDATION OF IMPERIAL CULT

CESARE LETTA

1 Caesar’s apotheosis and the worship of the *princeps* only after his death

In a synthesis work on the imperial cult, published in 2021, I tried to demonstrate that the two fundamental principles of this cult, relating to the deceased and the living prince respectively, were established with great foresight by Octavian even before taking the name Augustus¹.

Already in the summer of 44 BC proclaiming the apotheosis of Caesar as *divus Iulius*, he had affirmed the principle that a man can become god by his merits only after death.

In 30 BC, after his final victory at Alexandria, he got the senate to establish the limits within which religious practice should be maintained with respect to the person of the prince while he was alive.

As regards the first aspect, I shall confine myself to recalling the conclusions which I have reached in two recent papers. While Caesar had accepted to be proclaimed god when he was still alive, under the official name of *Iuppiter Iulius*², Octavian did not want to repeat the same mistake. Taking advantage of the impressive appearance of a comet (the so-called *sidus Iulium*), already in the summer of 44 BC he induced the senate to recognize that Caesar had ascended to heaven: the name *Iuppiter Iulius* was dropped, he was officially given the new divine name of *divus Iulius*, and in the Forum a *simulacrum* and an altar were erected to him on the

¹ Letta 2021, 17-22 and 40-54.

² Cass. Dio. 44.6.4; cf. Letta in print (and Letta 2021, 10-13; Facella and Letta 2022, 117-120).

very place where his body had been cremated and where the temple of the *divus Iulius* would later arise³.

The choice of the new divine name for Caesar, which continued to be considered *parens patriae*, compared it to the *divi parentes* (or *parentum*)⁴, and thus reiterated that he had become god only after death, but at the same time his ascension to heaven, which united him with the *di superi*, showed his uniqueness and superiority over the traditional *divi parentes*, linked to the sphere of hell⁵.

In this way Octavian repudiated the *senatus consultum* of the beginning of 44 BC that had proclaimed Caesar as god when alive and on the contrary affirmed the principle that a man can become god only after death, thus laying the foundations for his own future apotheosis without claiming it already in his lifetime.

This principle established by Octavian at that time remained undisputed throughout the imperial period. It was to be reaffirmed in AD 65, when the proposal to proclaim *divus* Nero while he was still alive was rejected. In Tacitus' commentary (*deum honor principi non ante habetur quam agere inter homines desierit*) the use of the present tense clearly indicates that this principle was still perceived as indisputably valid when he wrote, at the beginning of the Antonine age⁶; Tertullian also attests to this for the Severan age: *maledictum est ante apotheosin deum Caesarem nuncupare*⁷.

2 The wait for a *post mortem* apotheosis of the prince during his lifetime

Caesar's precedent created the conditions for the living prince to await his own apotheosis after death. The same Augustus, leaving precise written provisions on his funeral, which certainly also included divine honours⁸, showed that he was sure to have deserved his apotheosis after death. On

³ Letta 2024.

⁴ Fest. p. 260 L.; Corn. Nep., *de vir ill.*, fr. 2 Windstedt = 15 Peter; CIL VI, 29109 = ILS 8047; EDR 118847 from Aquileia (50-31 BC); cf. Letta in print, § 4, n. 47.

⁵ Cf. Cancik 1996, 306-307 on the expressions *honores caelestes* (in the calendars) and *caelestes religiones* (in Tac., *ann.* 1.10.8).

⁶ Tac., *ann.* 15.74.3.

⁷ Tert., *apol.* 34; cf. lastly Bonamente 2017, 155.

⁸ As Gradel 2002, 276-277 shows, the words of Tacitus *ann.* 1.10.6 (*nihil deorum honoribus relictum cum se templis et effigie numinum per flamines et sacerdotes coli vellet*), mostly mistakenly understood as referring to Augustus alive (see e.g. Cancik 1996, 308-309), are to be understood in this way; cf. also Bonamente 2017, 140 and Letta 2021, 36-37.

closer inspection, the same conviction and the same expectation is expressed by all the Augustan poets, even in the passages in which many scholars have believed to recognize more or less explicit proclaims of the deity of Augustus in his lifetime.

Already in Triumviral age Virgil in the Georgics says that with his victories Octavian is looking for the way to ascend to heaven (*viamque adfectat Olympo*)⁹, where the gods prepare to welcome him¹⁰, and the constellation of Scorpio is ready to make room for him¹¹. At the same time this certainty is a cause of anxiety, because his ascent to heaven also means his detachment from men¹². For this reason, the passages in which it seems that Virgil considers Octavian a god in his lifetime must be understood as a hyperbolic anticipation: the expression *iam nunc* is only an incisive way of reaffirming the absolute certainty of future apotheosis¹³.

The same certainty of apotheosis and the same desire that it should come as late as possible are found in Horace. The poet knows that one day Augustus will drink nectar with the gods¹⁴, but he hopes: *serus in caelum redeas diuque / laetus intersis populo Quirini*¹⁵. The verb *bibet* in the future tense shows that Horace aligns perfectly with the Augustan orthodoxy, whereas the verb *redeas* recalls Cicero's theorizations in the *Somnium Scipionis*, according to which the souls of the great men have come down from heaven and will return to heaven, deserving to be honoured as

⁹ Verg., *georg.* 4.559-562.

¹⁰ Verg., *georg.* 1.24-25: *tuque adeo, quem mox quae sint habitura deorum / concilia incertum est*; cf. Xinyue 2022, 9: «he is not a god yet».

¹¹ Verg., *georg.* 1.34-35: *ipse tibi iam bracchia contrahit ardens / Scorpius et caeli iusta plus parte relinquit*.

¹² Verg., *georg.* 1.503-505: *iam pridem nobis caeli te regia, Caesar, / invidet atque hominum queritur curare triumphos, / quippe ubi fas versum atque nefas*.

¹³ Verg., *georg.* 3.22-23: *iam nunc sollemnis ducere pompas / ad delubra iuvat*; 1.40-42: *da facile cursum atque audacibus adnue coeptis, / ignarosque viae mecum miseratus agrestis / ingredere et votis iam nunc adsuesce vocari*. According to Xinyue 2022, 91, n. 78 in this passage Octavian would be invoked as god, in the same way he was invoked in the *vota* decided by the senate in 30 BC (Cass. Dio. 51.19.7); but, as we shall see later, those votes, being *pro salute* of Octavian, considered him a man.

¹⁴ Hor., *carm.* 3.3.11-12: *quos inter Augustus recumbens / purpureo bibet ore nectar*. Xinyue 2022, 139, n. 119 rightly rejects the variant *bibit*, citing *carm.* 3.5.2-3: *praesens divus habebitur / Augustus*).

¹⁵ Hor., *carm.* 1.2.45-46. Also in this case Xinyue 2022, 57-58 believes that Augustus is presented as god and emphasizes the correspondence with the *senatus consultum* of 30 BC, but see above, n. 13.

gods after death¹⁶. Later we will see that even the passages where according to many scholars Horace would speak of a direct cult of Augustus alive have to be referred to the cult of his *genius*.

Even Propertius, the least aligned of the ‘Augustan’ poets, seems to refer to a divinization yet to be fulfilled in the passage where invokes the protection of *Venus Genetrix* on Augustus so that he remains alive (*sit in aevum*)¹⁷. For this reason, when Propertius defines Augustus as *deus Caesar*, we must understand that he considers him a potential god, because he is absolutely certain of his future apotheosis after death¹⁸.

Ovid is more explicit: speaking of the sending of Gaius Caesar to the East in 2 BC, with the approval (*numen*) of Mars and Augustus, he says: *nam deus e vobis alter es, alter eris*¹⁹; then repeatedly takes up the now topical wish that the apotheosis of Augustus will arrive as late as possible: *tarda sit illa dies*²⁰, and *optavi peteres caelestia sidera tarde*²¹.

Finally, I recall the *Consolatio ad Liviam*, which speaks of the apotheosis of Augustus in the future tense: *sed tibi debetur caelum, te fulmine pollens / accipiet cupidi regia magna Iovis*²².

3 The ‘Alexandrian’ *senatus consultum* issued in 30 BC

Having thus quickly recalled the decisions by which Octavian established that the apotheosis of a man was possible only after his death, I would now like to focus in more depth on the *senatus consultum* issued in 30 BC and on the religious practices which it introduced for the person of the living

¹⁶ See in particular Cic., *de re p.* 6.13: *omnibus qui patriam conservaverint, adiuverint, auxerint, certum esse in caelo definitum locum, ubi beati aevo sempiterno fruuntur... harum (scil. civitatum) rectores et conservatores hinc profecti huc revertuntur*; cf. Cole 2013, 85 ff. This motif occurs also in Manil. 1.799-802 (*descendit caelo caelumque replebit*) and in an epigraphic *carmen* from Acerrae, that presents the future ascent to heaven of Augustus as a return: *quom te, Caesar, tem[pus] / exposcet deum caeloque repetes sed[em qua] / mundum reges* (CIL X, 3757 = ILS 137, see Letta 2002 = *AE* 2002, 360).

¹⁷ Prop. 3.4.19-20; cf. Xinyue 2022, 63-64.

¹⁸ Prop. 3.4.1; cf. also 4.11.57-60: for the death of Cornelia, stepdaughter of Augustus, *lacrimas vidimus in deo* (where the tears of a god are a wanted oxymoron: cf. Xinyue 2022, 106-108).

¹⁹ Ov., *ars* 1.203-204.

²⁰ Ov., *met.* 15.868-870; see also *met.* 15.838-839, in which, despite the *crux*, the meaning is clear: Augustus *aetherias sedes cognataque sidera tanget* only as late as possible.

²¹ Ov., *trist.* 2.57.

²² *Cons. ad Liv.* 213-214.

prince. As we shall see, the rules introduced on that occasion will remain valid not only for the whole reign of Augustus, but also for those of his successors.

When the news of Octavian's final victory at Alexandria on 1 August 30 BC arrived in Rome, the senate hastened to vote a resolution which Cassius Dio recounts in these terms²³: τοὺς τε ἱερέας καὶ τὰς ἱερείας ἐν ταῖς ὑπὲρ τε τοῦ δήμου καὶ βουλῆς εὐχαῖς καὶ ὑπὲρ ἐκείνου ὁμοίως εὐχεσθαι, καὶ ἐν τοῖς συσσιτίοις οὐχ ὅτι τοῖς κοινοῖς ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς ἰδίοις πάντας αὐτῷ σπένδειν ἐκέλευσαν (the senators ordered that the priests and priestesses, on the occasion of vows for the salvation of the people and the senate, should also pronounce vows for his salvation, and that on the occasion of banquets, not only public but also private, all should offer libations for him).

The expression αὐτῷ σπένδειν has been mostly understood as 'offering libations to Octavian', evidently as a god²⁴, but the interpretation of these words cannot disregard the context. If the senate decided that the religious authorities, on behalf of the whole community, should invoke the gods to protect and keep alive and in good health Octavian, it is evident that the latter was considered a man, however exceptional, in need of protection and potentially in danger. It does not seem possible that, simultaneously, the same senate could decide to offer him libations as if he were a god²⁵. As we will see later, the convivial context indicates that they were libations to the *genius* of the prince, in the tradition of the libations to the *genius* of the *pater familias*.

4 *Vota pro salute* and oath of allegiance

The close link between the two senatorial decisions of the summer of 30 BC is evident if we consider that the annual votes for the prince, added to those traditional for the *res publica populi Romani*, provided for bloody sacrifices to various deities. These involved a public banquet (*epulum*), during which the same *senatus consultum* prescribed that a libation was to be offered for the prince, which means, as we will see, a *supplicatio ture et vino* to his *genius*.

²³ Cass. Dio. 51.19.7. The translations of the Greek and Latin passages are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

²⁴ See for instance Clauss 1999, 221; Gradel 2002, 212; Flower 2017, 300-301; Xinyue 2022, 55-56.

²⁵ Fishwick 1987, 84 and 1991, 375-377; Scheid 2006-2007, 667-668; La Rocca 2011, 127; Letta 2021, 40-47.

It also seems very probable that the annual votes for health were accompanied by an oath of allegiance by the *genius* of the prince, as in the precedent of Caesar²⁶. In a mostly misunderstood passage Horace seems to allude to this union during the reign of Augustus²⁷: *praesenti tibi maturos largimur honores, / iurandasque tuum per numen ponimus aras, / nil oriturum alias, nil ortum tale fatentes* (to you still present here we confer the honors that you have earned and set up altars on which we swear by your *numen*, proclaiming that nothing comparable has ever been anywhere else nor will there ever be). The use of the first-person plural and the mention of *tuus hic populus* in the next verse indicate that the context is not private: with *aras* the poet refers to public sacrifices for Augustus, during which one swears by one of his gods (*tuum... numen*). It must therefore be the annual health votes and the simultaneous oath of allegiance; but if the votes are for a man's *salus*, the *numen* for which one swears cannot be the same Augustus as god, but only his personal protector god, that is his *genius*²⁸.

An indirect confirmation comes from the fact that in the early days of his reign Tiberius did not allow to swear by his *τύχη*, that is by his *genius*²⁹; this suggests that such an oath in his *genius*' name was expected on the model of that for Augustus. In any case, this union between annual votes and oath by the *genius* of the prince was already consolidated under the same Tiberius³⁰ and remained the rule for all his successors, even if in the formula of the oath the *divi* were added to the *genius* of the living prince, as they were proclaimed³¹.

This continuity shows that the *senatus consultum* of 30 BC did not prescribe one-off celebrations for that year alone, but introduced a regular practice destined to last. For the annual *vota* we have the impressive documentation offered by the *commentarii* of the Arval Brethren, but as we shall see, there is sufficient evidence to affirm that even the libation at banquets remained a pervasive practice throughout the imperial age.

²⁶ Cass. Dio. 44.6.1; cf. Letta 2021, 47-48.

²⁷ Hor., *epist.* 2.1.15-17.

²⁸ Cf. Letta 2021, 47-48. Du Quesnay 1995, 176 and 183; Gradel 2002, 247; Flower 2017, 307 and Xinyue 2022, 200-201 understand *tuum... numen* as 'your divinity', that is 'your divine nature' and think that Horace alludes to a private cult of Augustus as a god in his lifetime.

²⁹ Cass. Dio. 57.8.3.

³⁰ Cass. Dio. 58.2.8 (Xiph.): εὐχοντο ὑπὲρ ἀμφοῖν (= for Tiberius and Sejanus) καὶ ἔθουον τήν τε τύχην αὐτῶν ὄμυσσαν; cf. also 58.6.2 (Xiph.).

³¹ Cass. Dio. 60.4.6, who attests to this continuity up to his time; cf. Letta 2021, 49-51.

5 Libations at public and private banquets

Many scholars have argued that the decision on libations was limited to the celebrations for the victory of Alexandria; some went so far as to suppose that Octavian himself had dropped it³²; in any case, it would have been libations offered to Octavian himself and not his *genius*³³ and there would be no evidence that the measure was implemented after 30 BC³⁴. This is not correct. Its application in public banquets for the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius is attested by an inscription from the *Augusteum* of Forum Clodii, whereas the *commentarii* of the Arval Brethren document it with continuity until the age of Caracalla

The inscription from Forum Clodii attests that in AD 18 the local decurions were required to offer libations *thure et vino* to the *genii* of Augustus and Tiberius before the public banquet that followed the sacrifices celebrated in their respective *dies natales*³⁵. If in AD 18, four years after the death and divinization of Augustus, the community of Forum Clodii continued to offer libations to the *genius* of Augustus and that of his heir and successor Tiberius, this means that the decision was a 'perpetual' commitment taken when Augustus was still alive³⁶.

For the later emperors there is the fundamental testimony of the commentaries of the Arvals, from which we learn that on the second day of the annual ritual that took place in the sacred grove of the goddess at the fifth mile of the *Via Campana*, the *epulum* consumed by the Arvals in the *Caesareum*, in the presence of the statues of the emperors, included a *supplicatio thure et vino* with wishes of happiness and health for the living emperor³⁷. This character of rite for health clearly shows that the libation was offered for the emperor, but not to him; the convivial context and the presence of his image indicate that the recipient was his *genius*³⁸.

If we consider the private banquets, we can see that the practice of the libation to the *genius* of the prince is documented with certainty through-

³² Gradel 2002, 207; Flower 2017, 302.

³³ Gradel 2002, 212; Flower 2017, 300; Xinyue 2022, 199-200.

³⁴ Flower 2017, 301-302.

³⁵ CIL XI, 3303 = ILS 154; photo of the original finally recovered and a cast in Gasperini 2008, 122 and 124, figg. 11-13; see also Gradel 2002, 240-250; Marengo 2005; Scheid 2005, 238-245; Koortbojian 2013, 172-178.

³⁶ Letta 2021, 41-42; for a more in-depth analysis and translation of the entire text, *ibid.* 109-113.

³⁷ Scheid 1990, 109-132 and 158-166.

³⁸ Letta 2021, 42-43; for the meaning of libations poured in front of men's *imagines*, see *infra*, § 6.

out the reign of Augustus by Horace and Ovid and still under Nero by Petronius. The passages we will examine, often misunderstood, show that to the traditional libation to the *genius* of the *pater familias*, with wishes of long life and happiness for him and his guests, a libation was added to the *genius* of the emperor, with similar wishes of happiness for the latter.

In an ode that can be dated with certainty to 14 or 13 BC³⁹, in the imminence of Augustus' return to Rome from Spain, Horace says that thanks to the peace assured by the prince, *quisque .../ ad vina redit et alteris / te mensis adhibet deum, / te multa prece, te prosequitur mero / defuso pateris et Laribus tuum / miscet numen ut Graecia Castoris / et magni memor Herculis* (everyone... goes happy back to his wine and invites you (already) as a god to the second tables, honors you with many prayers by pouring wine into the paterae and unites your god (= your *genius*) to the Lares, remembering Castor and the great Hercules, as Greece remembers them). The expression *te... adhibet deum* has led scholars to believe that the libation was addressed directly to Augustus as a god⁴⁰. However, immediately before and immediately after (vv. 25-27 and 37-38), Augustus is wished long life and health, hence it is evident that here once again is described a rite for health, which still considers Augustus as a man and is therefore addressed not to him, but to a deity who must protect him. Considering the convivial context and the approach to the Lares, clearly this tutelary deity of Augustus is his *genius* and therefore the expression *tuum... numen* should be understood as 'your god (protector)'⁴¹, not as 'your divine nature'⁴². We have already seen that also in *epist.* 2.2.16 Horace defines as *tuum numen* the *genius* of Augustus, in whose name public oaths of allegiance are pronounced. Therefore, the expression *te... adhibet deum* should not be taken literally and understood as a proclamation of the deity of Augustus alive, but as an hyperbolic expression of Horace's certainty of Augustus' future apotheosis after death, comparable to the expression *iam nunc* in Virgil⁴³. This interpretation is confirmed by the comparison with Castor and Hercules, topical examples of men deified only after death⁴⁴.

³⁹ Hor., *carm.* 4.5.29-36; for the dating see Du Quesnay 1995, 131-133; Xinyue 2022, 190.

⁴⁰ Du Quesnay 1995, 173-181; Gradel 2002, 207-208; Xinyue 2022, 195-199.

⁴¹ Mommsen 1909; Hänlein-Schäfer 1996, 84, n. 54; Fenechiu 2008, 74.

⁴² Du Quesnay 1995, 176 means *numen* as 'the quintessential property of a god' and thinks of a statuette of the *numen Augusti* present in the *lararium* of the house next to those of the Lares; see also Xinyue 2022, 198.

⁴³ Verg., *georg.* 1.42 and 3.22 (cited above, n. 13).

⁴⁴ Letta 2021, 43-45.

The convivial libations described by Ovid for the feast of Caristia on 22 February have an even more evident character of *pro salute rite*⁴⁵: *iamque ubi suadebit placidos nox ultima somnos, / larga precaturi sumite vina manu / et "Bene vos, bene te, patriae pater, optime Caesar", / dicite; suffuso sint bona verba mero* (and when the late night will induce a peaceful sleep, while you are about to pray, pour yourself wine in abundance and say: "May everything be well for you (here present) and for you, excellent Caesar, father of the country"; that your words may be effective, once that wine is poured). The formula of wishes concerns not only Augustus, but also the diners; it is clear, therefore, that the libation is not offered directly to Caesar, but to his *genius*, as it is offered to the *genii* of the *pater familias* and his diners⁴⁶.

A passage from Petronius' *Satyricon*, finally, attests that a libation to the *genius* of the living emperor was customary at private banquets even in the time of Nero⁴⁷. In the *cena Trimalchionis* wine is poured, while wishes of happiness for the prince are pronounced (*Augusto patri patriae feliciter!*). This probably happens in front of an emperor's image that was perhaps mentioned in the lacuna⁴⁸, in the same way that the guests offer libations, according to tradition, to the *genius* of the *pater familias* Trimalchion in front of his portrait and to the Lares of the house in front of their statuettes.

The detail of the libation offered in front of the portrait of Trimalchion, whose realism is emphasized, makes it clear that for the rite was not indispensable the presence of a statue of the *genius* to which it was offered, but was sufficient an image of the man protected by him. Moreover, the possibility that the features of a man could also serve to evoke his *genius* is confirmed by cases in which the image of a *genius*, identified as such by an inscription or an attribute, presents the features of a portrait. This is the case of the famous Pompeian herm explicitly dedicated to the *genius* of L. Caecilius Iucundus⁴⁹. Furthermore, in one of the few painted *lararia* where it is possible to evaluate faces, we see that the figures of the *genius*

⁴⁵ Ov., *fast.* 2.631-634.

⁴⁶ So, I would see the *genius* of Augustus also behind the *Augustum numen* who receives libations of incense and wine in Ov., *ex Ponto* 3.1.161-164 and the *genii* of Augustus and Tiberius in the *numina* present in the *lararium* of Ovid (*sacrum Caesaris*), to which he offers incense every morning in Ov., *ex Ponto* 4.9.105-108 and 111-112. Du Quesnay 1995, 180 and Turcan 1996, 57-58 understand differently.

⁴⁷ Petr., *sat.* 60.7-8.

⁴⁸ Letta 2021, 45-47, where it is proposed as an example: *unus* (scil. *puer*) *pateram vini circumferens "dii propitii" clamabat <dum omnes ante imagines et Lares vinum effundunt>*.

⁴⁹ CIL X, 860; Beard 2012, 215-216, fig. 68; Rosso 2015, 56-57; Letta 2021, 93.

of the *pater familias* (denoted as such by a cornucopia) and of his wife's *iuno* «appear to be rendered as individual portraits»⁵⁰. Finally, I recall the careful dosage of idealization and physiognomic signals that is found in many representations of the *genius Augusti*, starting with the famous statue of the Pio Clementino Museum with cornucopia and *paterna*⁵¹.

6 The meaning of a libation in front of the image of a man

Let's now return to the testimony of the *cena Trimalchionis*, during which wine is poured in front of the images of the *pater familias* and the emperor as a libation to their respective *genii*. The ritual shows that offering wine or incense in front of a man's image was simply paying homage to his *genius*, asking to ensure that man's life, health and prosperity.

This is, therefore, the meaning to be attributed to the *statuae* (not *simulacra*!) erected *vicatim* to the praetor of 86 BC, Caius Marius Gratidianus, before which the people burned incense and lit candles⁵². Those libations were not offered to him as a god, as is usually said⁵³, but to his *genius* so that he would protect and preserve him for the good of the people, just as the libations offered a few years before 'to Marius' for his victories against Cimbri and Teutons, were certainly addressed not to him, but to his *genius*, being offered by each *apud sacra mensae suae*⁵⁴.

The situation remained the same even for the living emperor's images, as evidenced by various sources from the age of Tiberius until the third century AD. According to Tacitus, in AD 23 Tiberius was so condescending towards Sejanus, *ut... coli... per theatra et fora effigies eius interque principia legionum sineret*⁵⁵, and Suetonius, using the same verb *coli*, specifies: *quamvis iam et natalem eius (scil. Seiani) et imagines aureas coli passim videret*⁵⁶. These statues of Sejanus, evidently, had been placed alongside those of Tiberius and Drusus the minor erected in the previous

⁵⁰ Flower 2017, 59-60, tabb. 11-13; see also Giacobello 2008, nr. 113; Van Andringa 2009, 249-253.

⁵¹ Rosso 2015, 59, fig. 12 p. 72 (and 58-63 for other examples of 'pseudo-portraits'); Letta 2021, 65-66, fig. 2.

⁵² Cic., *de off.* 3.80; Sen., *de ira* 3.18.1; cf. Letta 2021, 9-10 and 40-41.

⁵³ See for instance Marco Simón and Pina Polo 2000; Tarpin 2002, 153; Flower 2017, 234-236.

⁵⁴ Val. Max. 8.15.7; Plut., *Mar.* 27,9; cf. Letta 2021, 9.

⁵⁵ Tac., *ann.* 4.2.3. Already in *ann.* 3.72.3 Tacitus reports that in that year the senate approved the erection of a statue of Sejanus in the theater of Pompey (cf. also Cass. Dio. 57.21.3).

⁵⁶ Suet., *Tib.* 65.1.

year in various points of the city⁵⁷. For this reason, Dio can say that statues of Tiberius and Sejanus were erected everywhere, the senators sacrificed to the images of Sejanus as to those of Tiberius⁵⁸, and Sejanus sacrificed even *ἑαυτῷ*, that is to his own image⁵⁹. Considering the clear refusal of Tiberius to any form of worship for his own person⁶⁰, it seems apparent that the expressions *imagines* (or *effigies*) *colere* of the Latin sources and εἰκόσιν θύειν of Cassius Dio (where terms as *simulacra* or ἀγάλματα are carefully avoided) can only allude to libations. These libations, which were probably poured on portable altars, were offered to the *genii* of the prince and Sejanus in front of their statues set in public places⁶¹.

It is interesting to note that Cassius Dio also tells a very similar story for Plautianus, the powerful praetorian prefect of Septimius Severus, to whom statues were erected, before his fall, even more numerous and larger than those of the emperor, while soldiers and senators also swore for his *genius* and formulated for him also public *vota pro salute*⁶². Plautianus, therefore, was also considered as a man, in need of divine protection, and it can be assumed that libations were offered to his *genius*, also invoked in the oaths, even in front of his statues and portraits (ἀνδριάντες αὐτοῦ <καὶ> εἰκόνας).

A passage from the Panegyric of Pliny the Younger shows that not only simple libations with wine and incense, but also bloody sacrifices offered in front of the image of a despot like Domitian were not addressed to him as a god, but to his *genius*⁶³. At § 7 of chapter 52 Pliny complains that by Domitian's will, herds of victims were taken away from Capitoline Jupiter so that *saevissimi domini atrocissima effigies tanto victimarum cruore coleretur, quantum ipse humani sanguinis profundebat*. Most scholars have thought of sacrifices offered to Domitian *dominus et deus*, but at the preceding § 6 Pliny clearly shows that with *imaginem colere* he refers to public sacrifices offered to the *genius* of the prince in front of an image of the latter. In fact, contrasting the late Domitian with the new

⁵⁷ Tac., *ann.* 3.57.1 (*effigies principum circum*).

⁵⁸ Cass. Dio. 58.4.4: καὶ τέλος καὶ ταῖς εἰκόσιν αὐτοῦ ὥσπερ καὶ ταῖς τοῦ Τιβερίου ἔθουον.

⁵⁹ Cass. Dio. 58.7.2.

⁶⁰ Paci 2008.

⁶¹ Letta 2021, 90-91. Plut., *Galba* 22.3 seems to testify that the oath of allegiance taken by soldiers at the beginning of the year was pronounced in front of the images of the emperor: the soldiers of the Germanic legions refuse to swear, and they shoot them (the term used is εἰκόνας).

⁶² Cass. Dio. 75 [76].14.6-7, p. 353 B.

⁶³ Plin., *paneg.* 52.6-7.

emperor Trajan, he addresses the latter with these words: *simili reverentia, Caesar, non apud genium tuum bonitati tuae gratias agi, sed apud numen Iovis optimi maximi pateris* (with equal respect, o Caesar, you will let them thank for your goodness not to your *genius*, but to the divine power of Jupiter Optimus Maximus)⁶⁴.

Pliny the Younger once again helps us by showing us the true meaning of a routine gesture like offering incense and wine in front of an image of the emperor. In the famous letter to Trajan on the treatment of Christians, he states: *Qui negabant esse se Christianos aut fuisse, cum praeunte me deos appellarent et imagini tuae, quam propter hoc iusseram cum simulacris numinum adferre, ture ac vino supplicarent..., dimittendos esse putavi* (I thought should be released those who denied being or having been Christians, by invoking the gods with the formulas that I myself would have intoned and offering a libation of incense and wine to your portrait, that for this purpose I had brought together with the cult images of the gods)⁶⁵. Pliny carefully distinguishes between the *imago* of the emperor, which is a simple portrait of a man, and the *simulacra* of the gods, true cult statues. This means that the *supplicatio* of which he speaks cannot be addressed directly to the emperor; the god to whom it is addressed is not Trajan, but his *genius*, in union with the other gods of the state cult at the same time invoked (*appellarent*). Precisely for this reason Trajan, in his answer, does not name the libation to his own image, but only those to the gods: *qui negaverit se Christianum esse... supplicando dis nostris, veniam impetret*⁶⁶; evidently, by *dis nostris* the emperor refers also to his own *genius*.

A similar practice for the interrogation of Christians is attested even a century later in the Acts of Pionius, martyred at Smyrna in the time of Decius. During an interrogation he proclaims: καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τοῖς λεγομένοις θεοῖς ὑμῶν οὐ λατρεύομεν καὶ τῇ εἰκόνι τῇ χρυσοῦ οὐ προσκυνοῦμεν (Therefore we do not worship your supposed gods, nor bow down to the golden image of the emperor)⁶⁷. Later the exhortation of the neochorus Polemon, ἐπίθυσον τῷ αὐτοκράτορι (8.4), makes it clear that the homage to the image of the emperor included a ‘sacrifice’, that is likely a

⁶⁴ Letta 2021, 91-92.

⁶⁵ Plin., *epist.* 10.96.5-6; cf. Letta 2021, 151-152.

⁶⁶ Plin., *epist.* 10.97.1.

⁶⁷ *Mart. Pionii* 4.24. In Bastiaensen *et alii* 1987, 162 Silvia Ronchey translates τῇ εἰκόνι τῇ χρυσοῦ as ‘al Simulacro d’Oro’; in fact the term εἰκών (lat. *imago*) is not synonymous with ἄγαλμα / *simulacrum*, but it indicates mostly a portrait, in this case certainly a portrait of the emperor (so Robert 1960, 319, nt. 1; Lanata 1973, 174), of the type known in silver or gold foil from Aventicum, Marengo and Plotinopolis (De Pury-Gysel 2017).

libation. The inquisitors press Pionius by saying to him that the Christian Euctemon has already sacrificed in the temple of the Nemeseis (15.2); the narrator then points out that he sacrificed a milk lamb (18.13), but also adds that ὁμοσε τὴν τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος τύχην καὶ τὰς Νεμέσεις στεφανωθεὶς μὴ εἶναι χριστιανός (18.4: wearing the sacrificial crown on his head he swore on the *genius* of the emperor and on the Nemeseis not to be a Christian). The renegade Euctemon, therefore, had sealed his oath by offering the sacrifice of a lamb to the Nemeseis and a libation of wine to the *genius* of the emperor, and it was precisely this that Polemon asked Pionius⁶⁸.

The link between the oath for the *genius* of the emperor and sacrifice to the gods returns in the *Martyrium Polycarpi*, from the same period⁶⁹. The irenarch Herod and Polycarpus' father try to persuade him: τί γὰρ κακόν ἐστιν εἰπεῖν Κύριος Καῖσαρ καὶ ἐπιθῦσαι καὶ τὰ τούτοις ἀκόλουθα καὶ διασώζεσθαι; (What's wrong with saying 'Caesar Lord' and to perform the sacrifice and other formalities of rite and to save your life in this way?)⁷⁰. These formalities included the oath for the *genius* of the emperor, expressly mentioned⁷¹, whereas a hint at the refusal of προσκόνησις⁷² makes it clear that this oath was to be taken by paying homage to an image of the emperor.

In the Acts of the Martyrs of Lyon (AD 177) there is a general reference to ὀμνύναι κατὰ τῶν εἰδῶλων⁷³, whereas in those of Apollonius there is talk of an oath for the *genius* of Commodus and sacrifices τοῖς θεοῖς καὶ τῇ εἰκόνι τοῦ... Κομόδου⁷⁴. In the *Martyrium Dasii* there is also talk of sacrifices to the gods and *supplicationes* to the images of the emperors⁷⁵.

The meaning of these sacrifices linked to the oath for the *genius* of the emperor is clarified in the words of the proconsul of Africa Vigellius Saturninus to the martyrs of Scilli, put to death in AD 180. In order to overcome their stubbornness, Vigellius exhorts them to do what all good Romans do: *et iuramus per genius domni nostri imperatoris et pro salute*

⁶⁸ Letta 2021, 153.

⁶⁹ Bastiaensen *et alii* 1987, 6 ff.; Zucca 2008, 261-262.

⁷⁰ *Mart. Polycarpi* 8.2 (translated by S. Ronchey in Bastiaensen *et alii* 1987, 15).

⁷¹ In chap. 4 we find simply ὁμοσαι καὶ ἐπιθῦειν, but at 9.2 and 10.1 the exhortation of the proconsul is: Ὅμοσον τὴν Καίσαρος τύχην.

⁷² The crowd rails against Polycarpus, ὁ πολλοὺς διδάσκων μὴ θύειν μηδὲ προσκυνεῖν (12.2).

⁷³ *Mart. Lugd.* (V).1.53 (cf. the commentary in Bastiaensen *et alii* 1987, 402).

⁷⁴ *Mart. Apollonii* 3: ὁμοσον τὴν τύχην τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Κομόδου τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος, and 7: θύσον τοῖς θεοῖς καὶ τῇ εἰκόνι τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος Κομόδου (Hingelfeldt 1898, 186-187).

⁷⁵ *Mart. Dasii* 11.2 (θυσίας τοῖς... δαίμοσιν) and 8.1 (ικέτευον, Δάσιε, τὰς ἱερὰς εἰκόνας τοῦ... Κομόδου, where the verb ἰκετεύω corresponds to the Latin *supplicatio* and alludes to a libation).

*eius supplicamus*⁷⁶. Also in the *Passio Perpetuae* and *Passio Crispinae* there is talk of sacrifices *pro salute*⁷⁷. Offering a sacrifice for the emperor's health means admitting that he is not (yet) a god. Similarly, swearing by his *genius*, i.e. by the divinity that keeps him alive and protects him, means recognizing that the emperor is a man in need of protection⁷⁸. For this reason, even the *supplicatio* before one of his images can only be understood as an offering to his *genius*, that is, as another ritual *pro salute*. Expressions such as 'sacrificing to the image of the emperor' or 'sacrificing to the emperor' are to be considered brachylogical ways of referring to libations offered to his *genius* before his image.

By insisting that the Christians agree to swear by the *genius* of the emperor and offer him a libation, the authorities showed a lack of understanding: for the Christians this *genius* was a pagan god to whom they could not pay any homage in any form, as they could not worship the other pagan gods. It is then explained why, in the 4th century, when libations or sacrifices to the *genius* of the emperor were no longer offered, Gregory of Nazianzus could accept the προσκύνησις in front of emperor's image as a legitimate tribute from the Christians⁷⁹. Still, he expressed deep indignation for the attempt by Julian to associate this homage to the adoration of the pagan gods⁸⁰. With these words he seems to allude to an attempt to reintroduce

⁷⁶ *Acta mart. Scil.* 3; cf. also 5: *iura per genium domini nostri imperatoris*. For the Christians such an oath would have involved the recognition of the divinity of the *genius* (cf. Bastiaensen *et alii* 1987, 407).

⁷⁷ *Pass. Perp.* 6.3: *fac sacrum pro salute imperatorum*; *Pass. Crispinae* 1.3: *ut omnibus diis nostris pro salute principum sacrifices*.

⁷⁸ The comment of Bastiaensen *et alii* 1987, 377, according to which «swearing on the τύχη of the emperor... was equivalent to recognizing his divinity» is ambiguous; it should be stated more clearly that to take such an oath was to recognize the divinity of emperor's *genius*, not of the emperor.

⁷⁹ Greg. Naz., *orat.* 4.80: ἀλλὰ δεῖ καὶ προσκυνήσεως αὐτοῖς ὑφ' ἧς σεμνότεροι δόξουσιν, οὐχ ἦν αὐτοὶ προσκυνούνται μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς ἐν πλάσμασί τε καὶ χρώμασιν, ἢν' ἡ τὸ σέβας αὐτοῖς ἀπλεστότερον τε καὶ τελεώτερον (Il faut encore qu' on se prosterne devant eux pour rehausser leur majesté; il ne suffit même pas de se prosterner devant leur personne, il faut aussi le faire devant leurs traits sculptés et peints afin que rien ne manque au respect qu' on rend à leur dignité [translation by Jean Bernardi]).

⁸⁰ Greg. Naz., *orat.* 4.81.1-2: τῶν βασιλέων τιμαῖς τὴν ἀσέβειαν καὶ εἰς ἐν ἀναγεῖν νόμους Ῥωμαίων καὶ εἰδώλων προσκύνησιν. Καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ταῖς εἰκόσι συμπαραγράφων τοὺς δαίμονας, ὡς δὴ τινὰς ἄλλας τῶν ἐξ ἔθους γραφάς, προϋτίθει δῆμοις καὶ πόλεσι, καὶ μάλιστα τοῖς τῶν ἐθνῶν ἄρχουσι τὰς εἰκόνας, ὡς κακοῦ γέ τοῦ πάντως μὴ εἶναι διαμαρτεῖν (il veut mêler l' impiété aux honneurs réservés aux rois, et confondre avec les lois de Rome le prosternement devant les idoles. Dans ce but, il ajoute à ses portraits ceux des démons et il les présente, sur