

Closing a Highway to Heaven

Discontinuities in the Divinisation of Human Beings in Roman Times

Fernando Lozano and Elena Muñiz Grijalvo

1 Introduction

By the time Octavian defeated his main rival, he was already well known in the Greek East, where he had been accorded divine honours. Similar honours had been offered to other Roman generals of his time, most notably his defeated enemy, Mark Antony. The message emanating from the seat of power depicted the elimination of Octavian's final contender and the end of the civil wars that had dominated the preceding decades as ushering in a new era of prosperity and peace, and there is no reason to doubt that at least some of the emperor's subject populations agreed.¹ The Greek cities quickly grasped the tenor of the new times and echoed it in grandiloquent honorary decrees. In the year 1 BCE, for example, the city of Halicarnassus in Caria referred to the Emperor Augustus as follows:

Immortal nature, after overwhelming benefactions, has bestowed on men the greatest Good of all. She has given us the Emperor Augustus, who is not only the father of his country, Rome, giver of happiness to our lives, but also the Fatherly God and Saviour of all mankind. It is He whose Providence has not only fulfilled but even surpassed the prayers

1 For the reign of Augustus as the beginning of a new era, see recently A. Cooley, 'From the Augustan Principate to the invention of the age of Augustus', *The Journal of Roman Studies* 109 (2019), 71–87, esp. 79–85. Also see K. Galinsky, *Augustan Culture. An interpretative introduction* (Princeton 1996), esp. 90–121. For new approaches, see K. Morrell, J. Osgood & K. Welch, eds., *The alternative Augustan age* (Oxford-New York 2019). For the representation of this new era in art, see still the fundamental P. Zanker, *The power of images in the age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor 1988), esp. 167–215 (originally published as *Augustus und die Macht der Bilder* (Munich 1987)). For the particularities of the development of this idea in the East see: S. Price, *Rituals and Power. The Roman imperial cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge 1984), 54–57, and U. Laffi, 'Le iscrizioni relative all'introduzione nel 9 A.C. del nuovo calendario della provincia d'Asia', *Studi Classici e Orientali* 16 (1967), 57 and note 86, with bibliography.

of all. For land and sea lie at peace and the cities bloom with the flowers of order, concord and prosperity.²

This is merely one example – chosen for its forceful ideological message and flamboyant language – from among surviving honorary decrees through which many cities in the Greek East first praised Augustus and then the successive emperors thereafter.³ As in this instance, the emperors are often described in these decrees as fatherly gods, saviours of cities and humankind in general and as benefactors whose actions bring all manner of benefits to humanity, including order, concord and prosperity.⁴ In return for their benevolence, the Roman rulers received cultic honours of various kinds: temples, sacrifices, *agones*, processions, hymns and banquets, in a practice with political and religious overtones.⁵ Emperors were, thus, incorporated into the by then centuries-old Hellenistic tradition whereby communities offered cultic honours to eminent figures – male and female – and in particular to kings, but also to local benefactors and Roman magistrates and generals.

Here, we shall concentrate on a very specific facet of the much broader subject of awarding divine cultic honours to individuals in Greek cities in the Hellenistic period and during the Principate. On the one hand, we shall

2 *GIBM* 894, ll. 2–10 (trans. Hopkins): [ἐ]πεὶ ἡ αἰώνιος καὶ ἀθάνατος τοῦ παντὸς φύσις τὸ [μέγ]ιστον ἀγαθὸν πρὸς ὑπερβαλλούσας εὐεργεσίας ἀνθρ[ώ]ποις ἔχαρισατο, Καίσαρα τὸν Σεβαστὸν ἐνευ[χ]αμένη [τ]ὴ ὁ[ν] τῷ καθ' ἡμᾶς εὐδαίμονι βίῳ πατέρα μὲν τῆς [έ]αυ]τοῦ πατρ[ρ]ίδος θεᾶς Πώμης, Δία δὲ πατρῶων καὶ σωτήρα τοῦ κο[ιν]οῦ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένους, οὐ ἡ πρόνοια τὰς πάντων [ἐ]πιδ]ας οὐκ ἐπλήρωσε μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑπερῆρεν· εἰρηνεύου[σ]ι μὲν γὰρ γῆ καὶ θάλαττα, πόλεις δὲ ἀνοοῦσιν εὐνομία[ι] ὁμοιοίαι τε καὶ εὐετηρίαί.

3 On the importance of the message of the honorary decrees dedicated to the emperors, the words of Hopkins are still illuminating, see K. Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* (Cambridge 1978), 217 n. 27 and 218.

4 This message was spread by many means, not only through the publication of inscriptions but also in works of art and coins. In this sense, it is also closely related to the information communicated by imperial virtues. On this message, see the recent reassessment in G. Mitropoulos, 'The Imperial qualities in Roman Greece (31 BC–AD 235): The evidence and a first assessment', *Studi Classici e Orientali* 66 (2020), 173–201. A complex narrative of the Roman Empire – to a great extent centrally inspired, but also drawing from the communities subject to Rome – was being created. For this process see F. Lozano, J.M. Cortés Copete & E. Muñoz Grijalvo, eds., *Narratives of Empire: Words and Rituals that shaped the Roman Empire* (Berlin-Boston forthcoming).

5 The ample and heterogeneous set of rituals and beliefs labelled as “imperial cult(s)” has been the subject of countless works. For a recent historiographic overview of scholarship, see T. Gnoli & F. Muccioli, 'Introduzione', in: T. Gnoli & F. Muccioli, eds., *Divinizzazione, culto del sovrano e apoteosi. Tra Antichità e Medioevo* (Bologna 2014), 11–27; and C. Alarcón Hernández 'Una revisión historiográfica sobre el culto a la *domus imperatoria*: siglos XX y XXI', *Revista de Historiografía* 31 (2019), 181–205.

illustrate how this tradition was modified to better suit the objective of the new Roman imperial power, focusing on the elimination of cultic honours for people who did not belong to the imperial family. This seems to us to be an important issue, because, with some exceptions, the reign of Augustus meant the closure of this highway to heaven. In our view, this constituted a dramatic change because of its impact on the number of people who were thus honoured and because of the short period of time over which it was put into practice. Furthermore, this change represents a clear case of reworking a pre-existing tradition with the primary purpose of endorsing a new structure of power (that of the emperor) and forestalling competition. On the other hand, we shall show how this reworking of tradition – a reworking that benefitted from the widespread practices of the previous period, but substantially modified them – implies the involvement and religious agency of the emperors themselves, which will enable us to offer some insights as to how the emperors organised and devised their own cults.

2 Closing a Highway to Heaven: the Imperial Monopoly on Divine Cultic Honours

Many different ways of awarding cultic honours to individuals existed simultaneously in the Hellenistic period. Of these, the main one was the divine cult of monarchs, which was highly diverse and took various regional and dynastic forms, ranging from the numerous civic cults of living sovereigns to cults created by the monarchies themselves for living or dead members of the royal families.⁶ The prolific cult of benefactors in the Hellenistic period has also been the subject of several fundamental studies.⁷ The relative vigour of recent

6 On these cults, the studies by Habicht, Price, Chaniotis and more recently Caneva are particularly relevant to this paper: C. Habicht, *Gottmenschen und griechische Städte* (Munich 1970, 2nd ed.); Price 1984, op. cit. (n. 1); A. Chaniotis, 'The Divinity of Hellenistic Rulers', in: A. Erskine, ed., *A Companion to the Hellenistic World* (Oxford 2003), 431–445; 'La divinité mortelle d'Antiochos III à Téos', *Kernos* 80 (2007), 151–173; A. Chaniotis 'The Ithyphallic Hymn for Demetrios Poliorketes and Hellenistic Religious Mentality', in P.P. Iossif, A.S. Chankowski, and C.C. Lorber, eds., *More Than Men, Less Than Gods: Studies on Royal Cult and Imperial Worship* (Leuven 2011), 157–195; S.G. Caneva, 'Queens and Ruler Cults in Early Hellenism: Festivals, Administration, and Ideology', *Kernos* 25 (2012), 75–101; Caneva, *From Alexander to the Theoi Adelphoi: Foundation and Legitimation of a Dynasty* (Leuven 2016).

7 See P. Veyne, *Le pain et le cirque: Sociologie historique d'un pluralisme politique* (Paris 1976); Ph. Gauthier, *Les cites grecques et leurs bienfaiteurs* (Paris 1985); J.-L. Ferrary, 'De l'évergétisme hellénistique à l'évergétisme romain', in: *Actes du X^e Congrès International d'épigraphie grecque et latine (Nîmes, 4–9 octobre 1992)* (Paris 1997), 199–225; G. Thériault, 'Remarques

research into cultic honours in Hellenistic cities and during the Principate is, we think, a happy circumstance derived in large part from the renewed interest in the last decades in two broader issues: on the one hand, the cult of rulers in the ancient Mediterranean in general, the appeal of which seems never to wane over time; and on the other, the study of changes and continuities in a characteristic intrinsic to the Greek cities, namely euergetism and public munificence.⁸

An overall review of recent research shows that, far from diminishing over time, cultic honours became more frequent throughout the second century BCE, and witnessed an evident surge in the first century BCE, when the traditional cults of sovereigns, Roman magistrates and benefactors were joined by the institution of cultic honours rendered to the Roman generals who contended for pre-eminence in Rome, such as Pompey, Julius Caesar and, of course, Mark Antony and Octavian themselves. It is therefore particularly important to note that the elimination of competitors which marked Augustus' reign had major consequences for this rich and varied panorama, as it brought an end to the thriving appearance of new cults of this type.

This early suppression is clearly apparent in the case of governors, and according to G. Bowersock, it was related to the legislation approved by Augustus and aimed at forcing out corruption and forestalling competition from this elite group of Romans.⁹ G. Bowersock has identified three cases of cultic honours during the reign of Augustus, namely for M. Vinicius (consul 19 BCE), Paullus Fabius Maximus (consul 11 BCE) and C. Marcius Censorinus (consul 8 BCE), but found only one subsequent example, that of Cn. Vergilius Capito, prefect of Egypt, during the reign of Claudius, whom he believed had

sur le culte des magistrats romains en Orient', in: P. Senay, ed., *Mélanges Pierre Rodrigue Brind'Amour* vol. II, (Trois-Rivieres 2001), 85–95, and J.H.M. Strubbe, 'Cultic honours for benefactors in the cities of Asia Minor', in: L. De Ligt, E.A. Hemelrijk & H.W. Singor, eds., *Roman Rule and Civic Life: Local and Regional Perspectives. IMEM 4* (Leiden 2004), 315–330. For the Romans who were included in this cultic system, see G. Bowersock, *Augustus and the Greek World* (Oxford 1965), 118–121 and appendix I. H. Seyrig, 'Inscriptions de Gythion', *Revue Archéologique* 29 (1929), 95 n. 4.

- 8 A. Heller & O. van Nijf, *The Politics of Honour in the Greek Cities of the Roman Empire* (Leiden 2017); M. Domingo Gyax & A. Zuiderhoek, *Benefactors and the Polis: The Public Gift in the Greek Cities from the Homeric World to Late Antiquity* (Cambridge 2021); A. Zuiderhoek, *The Politics of Munificence in the Roman Empire. Citizens, Elites and Benefactors in Asia Minor* (Cambridge 2009).
- 9 Bowersock 1965, op. cit. (n. 7), 119. See the useful remarks on the continuity of remembrance of past magistrates in Asia Minor in A.-V. Pont, 'Rituels civiques (*Apantèsis* et acclamations) et gouverneurs à l'Époque romaine en Asie Mineure', in: O. Hekster, S. Schmidt-Hofner & C. Witschel, *Ritual Dynamics and Religious Change in the Roman Empire. IMEM 9* (Leiden-Boston 2009), esp. 206–210.

received cult in the province of Asia.¹⁰ These are the only known cases, from which J.-L. Ferrary subsequently eliminated Paullus Fabius Maximus and Vergilius Capito in his review of the subject, arguing that, in both cases, the testimonies refer to cultic honours offered to local benefactors rather than to governors.¹¹ In Ferrary's opinion, therefore, the last governor accorded cultic honours was C. Marcius Censorinus, who held the post of pro-consul of Asia between 8–7 and 3–2 BCE.¹² Meanwhile, G. Thériault has suggested that the last case was C. Vibius Postumus on the basis of an altar with bucrania where he is described as ἥρωι εὐεργέτη. This aristocrat also held the post of pro-consul of Asia in 12–13 CE or 15–16 CE.¹³ In spite of proposing Vibius Postumus as the last governor to receive cultic honours, G. Thériault has also argued, echoing G. Bowersock, that it was Augustus' legislation that was responsible for the

10 Bowersock 1965, op. cit. (n. 7), 119 and appendix I, 150–151.

11 Ferrary 1997, op. cit. (n. 7), n. 43. In the case of Paullus Fabius Maximus, Ferrary followed Robert who related the second or third century CE *Smintheia Pauleia* from Alexandria de Troade to a later local *evergetes* and not to the proconsul: L. Robert, 'Inscriptions grecques d'Asie Mineure', *Anatolian Studies presented to W.H. Buckler* (Manchester 1939), 227–248 = *Opera Minora Selecta* I (Amsterdam 1969), 611–632, esp. 629–630. *Contra* D. Erkelenz, 'Keine Konkurrenz zum Kaiser. Zur Verleihung der Titel *Κτίστη* und *Σωτήρ* in der römischen Kaiserzeit', *Scripta Classica Israelica* 21 (2002), 61–77, in particular 77 no. 28. In the instance of Vergilius Capito, there was a festival *Capitoneia* in Miletos c.200 CE (*I.Didyma* 84 and 278) and a calendar, dated to 195 or 215 CE (*SEG* 34, 1176), in which the birthday of a Vergilius Capitus was celebrated on August the 6th. It is a matter of debate if the Capito celebrated in the second and third centuries CE is the Claudian pro-magistrate or his second-century CE relative with the same name, mentioned in *I.Milet* I 2, 20, probably his grandchild. J. and L. Robert suggested the *Capitoneia* were consecrated to the Claudian Vergilius Capito because he helped to reconstruct the city after an earthquake: J. Robert & L. Robert, *Fouilles d'Amyzon en Carie* (Paris 1983), 267. Ferrary is of the same opinion, arguing that Vergilius Capito falls in the category of "des grands évergètes citoyens, plutôt que des magistrats romains à qui furent décernés des honneurs cultuels": Ferrary 1997, op. cit. (n. 7), n. 43. As to when the festivals started, J. and L. Robert suggested 47 CE, after Capito's post in Asia and before his departure to Egypt, where he was prefect. This reconstruction is accepted in M. Riel & S. Akat, 'A new honorary inscription for Cn. Vergilius Capito from Miletos', *Epigraphica Anatolica* 40 (2007), 29–32. However, Kuhn argued that he received "at the most heroic honours posthumously, or the games were merely named after their founder": A.B. Kuhn, 'Honouring Senators and Equestrians in the Graeco-Roman East', in: Heller & van Nijf 2017, op. cit. (n. 8), 317–338, quote 327 n. 45. She compared these honours with the well-known case of Tiberius Claudius Balbillus at Ephesos: *IEphesos* 1122 and Dio Cass., 65.9.2 (a prerogative granted by Vespasian to the Ephesians).

12 Ferrary 1997, op. cit. (n. 7), appendice 2, n. 19.

13 Thériault 2001, op. cit. (n. 7), 92 and n. 60. For Ferrary "ἥρωι εὐεργέτη" in *IG* XII 6, 365 "peut n'avoir que le sens de 'défunt évergète'": Ferrary 1997, op. cit. (n. 7), n. 43. Against this consideration of "hero", see C.P. Jones, *New Heroes in Antiquity. From Achilles to Antinoos* (Cambridge-London 2010), 66–74. Even if the existence of cultic honours is accepted, these were posthumous, see n. 17.

disappearance of cultic honours for Roman magistrates and for the emperor's subsequent monopoly on this type of practice.¹⁴

An analogous decline in divine cultic honours can be traced with respect to local benefactors. In the case of Asia, J. Strubbe has shown that this ancient practice died out during the reign of Augustus. In his view, the last instance was that of the Italic Lucius Vaccius Labeo from Kyme in Aeolis, which occurred between 2 BCE and 14 CE.¹⁵ This example, to which we shall return later, is particularly important because Labeo rejected the honours that had been bestowed on him as he considered them excessive. Beyond Asia, J. Strubbe indicated that the practice ended around the same time.¹⁶ His conclusion is solid and valid: "We must infer that the practice of conferring cultic honours on citizen-benefactors, which existed in Asia Minor since the beginning of the second century BCE, came to an end under the influence of the cult of the Emperor and the political situation. We clearly detect here the impact of Empire".¹⁷

14 Thériault 2001, op. cit. (n. 7), 92.

15 *I.Kyme* 19 (= *IGR* IV, 1302).

16 He stated that the last award of cultic honours to a civic benefactor concerned one Barkaios. In any case, he was accorded posthumous honours in Kyrene in 16–15 BCE: Strubbe 2004, op. cit. (n. 7), 329 n. 61. As stated before, later possible instances are also Vergilius Capito (following Ferrary, see n. 12), Tiberius Claudius Balbillus at Ephesos (see n. 11), and Vibius Postumus (see n. 13). The study of posthumous heroic cults would go beyond the scope of this paper. However, we would like to make two observations on the subject. A recent article has highlighted the first one: "There was of course nothing new in presenting deceased relatives as heroes, but the concerted interest in specifying heroic status on *public* honorific inscriptions, all deriving from the reign of Augustus, arguably represents an anxiety over articulating distinctions between divine, ἱερόθρονοι, honours for the emperor, and 'heroic' ones for lesser benefactors, both Roman and citizen"; M. Chin, 'Roman power and the memorial Turn in civic honourability in Western Asia Minor, ca 85 BCE–14 CE', *Dialogues d'histoire ancienne* Supplément 26 (2023), 201–224, quote on 213. This reasoning is in line with the conclusion we draw here. The second one is that heroic cults are not unimportant formalities, as a seminal study has recently shown: Jones 2010, op. cit. (n. 13). However, the honours we study in this paper – the divine honours consecrated to the emperors – are the highest, as Price masterfully pointed out: Price 1984, op. cit. (n. 1), 32–36.

17 Strubbe 2004, op. cit. (n. 7), 329. It is interesting to note that the titles of *ktistes* and *soter* remained in use, albeit also restricted mainly to the imperial family. Furthermore, in her recent and thought-provoking article, Kuhn has observed that on the few occasions when such honours were granted to individuals beyond the emperor's family circle, said recipients were dignitaries of senatorial or equestrian rank: C.T. Kuhn, 'The Refusal of the Highest Honours by Members of the Urban Elite in Roman Asia Minor', in Heller & van Nijf 2017, op. cit. (n. 8), 328.

3 Augustus' Religious Agency. How the Imperial Monopoly on Cultic Honours Was Accomplished

Our brief review of the testimonies shows that during the reign of Augustus, public cultic honours became an imperial monopoly. This observation obviously requires an explanation. How did such a transformation take place and what was the nature of the emperors' involvement and religious agency in this regard, especially considering the widespread theory that the imperial cult in the East was generated from the bottom up, spontaneously, by the Greeks, whereas central power merely made modifications and adjustments?¹⁸ This view is linked to another cornerstone of modern scholarship, which is the idea that Augustus was loathe to accept cult.¹⁹ It would go beyond the limits of this chapter to illustrate how the alleged hesitancy and refusal of Augustus has been wrongly constructed using epigraphical and papyrological sources corresponding to the reign of Tiberius and Claudius and problematic and contended passages from Cassius Dio and Suetonius.²⁰ Suffice it to say here

18 See, for example: Bowersock 1965, op. cit. (n. 7), 121. This image of the emperor is related to the influential model put forward by Millar, especially in his seminal: F. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World (31 BC–AD 337)* (London 1977); and also in: F. Millar, 'L'empereur romain comme décideur', in C. Nicolet, ed., *Du pouvoir dans l'antiquité. Mots et réalités* (Geneva 1990), 207–220. An exposition of the different reactions that have been offered to Millar's work would exceed the limits of this article. See, for convenience, the lucid analysis by J. Edmondson, 'The Roman emperor and the local communities of the Roman Empire', in: J.-L. Ferrary & J. Scheid, eds., *Il princeps romano: autocrate o magistrato? Fattori giuridici e fattori sociali del potere imperiale da Augusto a Commodo* (Pavia 2015), 701–729, and G. Woolf, 'Fragments of an emperor's religious policy: The case of Hadrian', *ARYS. Antiquedad: Religiones y Sociedades* 16 (2019), 55–58.

19 On Augustus' alleged hesitancy see the classical paper of M.P. Charlesworth, 'The Refusal of Divine Honours: An augustan formula', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 15 (1939), 1–10, which is the standar work on the subject.

20 The sources mentioned above are well known. The inscriptions and papyri are: *SEG* 11, 922 = J.H. Oliver, *Greek Constitutions of Early Roman Emperors from Inscriptions and Papyri* (Philadelphia 1989), no. 15II (Letter of Tiberius to the Gytheates); P. Lond. 1912 = Oliver 1989, op. cit. (n. 20) no. 19 (Letter of Claudius to the Alexandrians), and Oliver 1989, op. cit. (n. 20) no. 17 (Proclamation of Germanicus at Alexandria). An additional inscription, in this case pertaining to a particular, is *LKyme* 19 (= *IGR* IV, 1302) (Labeo's refusal of cultic honours in Kyme) dated between 2 BCE and 14 CE. We will return to these last two inscriptions in this paper. The literary sources are: Suet., *Aug.* 52 (Augustus' policy regarding emperor worship), and Dio Cass., 51.20.6–8 (the inauguration of provincial cult in Asia). Additionally, see: Tac., *Ann.* 4. 37–38 (Tiberius's hesitancy to accept cultic honours). A critical assessment of these sources in F. Lozano, *La religión del poder: el culto imperial en Atenas en época de Augusto y los emperadores Julio-claudios* (Oxford 2002), 27–28, and J.M. Madsen, 'Who Introduced the Imperial Cult in Asia and Bithynia? The Koinon's Role in the Early Worship of Augustus' in: A. Kolb and M. Vitale, eds., *Kaiserkult*

that this image of passivity and hesitancy seems to us to be at odds with the kind of change described above, which was rapid, profound and widespread. Such a transformation rather suggests that the central power was involved in regulating these honours, at least in the specific aspect we are discussing here, which is the limitation of the granting of cultic honours for people who did not form part of the imperial family. This is not to say, however, that it was the emperor alone who was responsible for the emergence of a new system of honours, nor that this system was devised in Rome as a universally applicable mandate. As we have argued elsewhere, in the spectrum between imposition from Rome and Greek spontaneity there are explanations that better capture the nuances and richness of this fruitful and fluid process of change.²¹

To limit honours for the Roman oligarchy, and more specifically, for the provincial governors, specific rules were created. According to G. Bowersock and G. Thériault, this was the trigger for suppressing the cult of governors.²² The main testimony is Cassius Dio's account of Augustus' prohibition in 11 CE: "He also issued a proclamation to the subject nations forbidding them to bestow any honours upon a person assigned to govern them either during his term of office or within sixty days after his departure". The motive Cassius Dio attributes to this measure is that the governors "by arranging beforehand for testimonials and eulogies from their subjects were causing much mischief".²³ Concern about the honours that provincials granted to governors persisted, as evidenced by the fact that, according to Tacitus, laws were again enacted in 62 CE, in this case probably by a *senatus consultum*.²⁴ On this occasion, the law prohibited proposals for honouring governors in the senate or the dispatch of

in den Provinzen des Römischen Reiches. Organisation, Kommunikation und Repräsentation (Berlin/Boston 2016), 21–35. On the refusal of divine honours see also: C.P. Jones, 'Roman emperors and the acceptance of divine honors', in: A. Heller, C. Müller and A. Suspène, eds., *Philorhōmaios kai Philhellèn. Hommage à Jean-Louis Ferrary* (Genève 2019), 467–480.

- 21 On the shortcomings of this explanation, see: F. Lozano, 'The creation of Imperial gods: Not only imposition versus spontaneity' in: P.P. Iossif, A.S. Chankowski & C.C. Lorber, eds., *More than Men, Less than Gods: Studies on Royal Cult and Imperial Worship* (Leuven 2011), 475–519.
- 22 Bowersock 1965, op. cit. (n. 7), 119, and Thériault 2001, op. cit. (n. 7).
- 23 Dio Cass., 56.25.6 (trans. Cary): οὐ μὴν ἄλλ' ἐκεῖνό τε ἀπέειπε, καὶ τῷ ὑπηκόῳ προσπαρήγγειλε μηδενὶ τῶν προστασομένων αὐτοῖς ἀρχόντων μήτε ἐν τῷ τῆς ἀρχῆς χρόνῳ μήτε ἐν τὸς ἐξήκοντα ἡμερῶν μετὰ τὸ ἀπαλλαγῆναι σφας τιμῆν τινα διδόναι, ὅτι τινὲς μαρτυρίας παρ' αὐτῶν καὶ ἐπαίνους προπαρασκευαζόμενοι.
- 24 Tac., *Ann.* 15.20–22. For an interpretation of this passage, see: C.P. Jones, 'A decree of Thyatira in Lydia', *Chiron* 29 (1999), 16–21, who provides an interesting epigraphic analysis.

envoys for this purpose.²⁵ Again, the motive was said to have been to control the governors: “For as the dread of a charge of extortion has been a check to rapacity, so, by prohibiting the vote of thanks, will the pursuit of popularity be restrained”.²⁶

However, it is important to note that awarding cultic honours is not explicitly forbidden in either of the two fragments. Consequently, we believe that alongside this kind of legislative activity there must have been other, more informal procedures which were applied without exception to both Romans and Greeks, whereby Augustus and his entourage suggested that if cultic honours were to be bestowed, they should be conferred only on himself, his father and other members of the imperial family, and that it would be inappropriate for any others to be awarded this highest honour. Such procedures tending more towards persuasion and example-setting make more sense in the political and religious context of the Roman Empire during the Principate, in which cities retained a certain degree of freedom of action, especially in the arena of civic religion.²⁷

On some occasions, the emperor expressed himself directly via replies to envoys asking him about the honours he had been awarded. Such a response was, of course, taken into account, although the testimonies demonstrate that this did not mean his wishes were always followed to the letter. There are several well-known cases of emperors’ responses to envoys regarding awarding honours, cultic or otherwise, to members of the imperial family or to the emperor himself. Such replies sometimes concerned the acceptance or rejection of the honours granted and at other times dwelt on an appraisal of the manner in which the honours would be carried out. For example, Augustus met in Rome with envoys from the city of Sardis and accepted the honours that the city had bestowed on Gaius Caesar on the occasion of his assumption of the *toga virilis*, including the consecration of Gaius’ statue to be erected in the temple of his father, namely Augustus himself, in Sardis.²⁸ The emperor’s letter of reply to the city’s inhabitants, preserved in the dossier of the local dignitary Menogenes, records his approval of the honours bestowed on the

25 Tac., *Ann.* 15.22.

26 Tac., *Ann.* 15.21 (trans. Church and Brodribb): *Nam ut metu repetundarum infracta avaritia est, ita vetita gratiarum actione ambitio cohibe[bi]tur.*

27 On this question, see more recently: F. Lozano, ‘Unlikely imperial gods. A reflection on some unexpected results of the integration of emperors into local greek panthea’, in: E. Muñiz Grijalvo & R. Moreno Soldevila, eds., *Understanding integration in the Roman World* (Leiden 2023, 193–211).

28 *Sardis* 7.1, no. 8, ll. 7–15.

imperial family as a token of gratitude for the benefits that the city had received from Augustus.²⁹

Another, more complex case, occurred in the time of Tiberius, when the city of Gythium informed the new emperor at the outset of his reign of its intention to offer cult to Augustus together with Tiberius and Livia. This very well-known episode testifies to the often informal nature of the emergence of the cult of the Roman emperors in the Greek East, and to the capacity for action that the cities retained. Tiberius informed the inhabitants of Gythium that he did not want to receive cultic honours, because he was content “with the more moderate honours which are proper for men” (αὐτὸς δὲ ἀρκοῦμαι ταῖς μετριωτέραις τε καὶ ἀνθρωπεύοις).³⁰ However, he did not pronounce on the honours granted to his mother, stating that “she herself will reply to you when she hears from you what decision you have reached concerning the honours in her case” (ἡ μέντοι ἐμὴ μήτηρ τόθ’ ὑμῖν ἀποκρινεῖται, ὅταν αἰσθηταὶ παρ’ ὑμῶν ἦν ἔχετε περὶ τῶν εἰς αὐτὴν τιμῶν κρίσιν).³¹ We do not know if and, if so, what the empress replied. It can be argued, however, that any response of her would not be have been decisive either, for despite Tiberius’ response – or perhaps one could say precisely because of it, but that is a different question altogether – the sacred law which was published together with the emperor’s letter inaugurated divine rituals in his name and consecrated the second day of festivities to him as father of the fatherland. The first day was consecrated to Augustus as Soter Eleutherius and the third to Livia as Fortuna of the League (of the Eleutherolaconians) and the city.³²

At other times, governors themselves intervened in the matter of divine honours. This was a highly influential approach that was frequently and assiduously adopted in the time of Augustus and the early Julio-Claudian emperors. The cases are well known and have been written about extensively. For instance, the province of Achaëa provides the example of P. Cornelius Scipio, who, during the reign of Augustus, presided over the Caesarean Games in Messene and was even involved in details of their design. A later example, very

29 *Sardis* 7.1, no. 8, ll. 23–27.

30 *SEG* 11, 922, l. 20 = Oliver 1989, op. cit. (n. 20) no. 15II (trans. Oliver). On the ambiguity of Tiberius’ response, see: M. Rostovtzeff, ‘L’empereur Tibère et le culte impérial’, *Revue historique* 163 (1930), 20–24.

31 *SEG* 11, 922, ll. 20–22 = Oliver 1989, op. cit. (n. 20) no. 15II (trans. Oliver).

32 *SEG* 11, 923, ll. 7–10 = Oliver 1989, op. cit. (n. 20) no. 15I. On the imperial family members worshiped at Gythium, see recently G. Mitropoulos, ‘Some notes on Gytheion’s “Lex Sacra” and Germanicus’s Nike’, *ZPE* 219 (2021), 88–94.

well studied by A. Spawforth, is that of Memmius Regulus, who played a leading role in the spread of the imperial cult in the same province.³³

Perhaps the clearest episode, however, is the intervention in Asia by Paullus Fabius Maximus, the governor of the province, who in c.9 BCE won a curious competition to choose the best idea to honour Augustus.³⁴ His proposal was to make the beginning of the year in all the cities belonging to the League of Asia coincide with the emperor's birthday. The inscription through which we know of this sheds light on many relevant aspects. For example, as far as the emperor's religious agency is concerned, the measures taken cannot be seen to reflect the spontaneous will of the provincials, as has often been claimed.³⁵ No doubt many of the local dignitaries would have been enthusiastic, but their enthusiasm would have been mediated by the governor, who was a close collaborator and friend of Augustus. The Decree of the League of Asia approving the proposal of the governor, together with the letter of Fabius Maximus, was to be published in the temple of Rome and Augustus, as well as in the temples of Augustus erected in the main cities of the League.³⁶ The emperor must have known and agreed with the actions of his collaborator. Besides, we believe it is relevant to note that Fabius Maximus was also involved in the expansion of the imperial cult in the most remote regions of the province – modern Galicia and Northern Portugal –, when he was governor of Hispania Tarraconensis during 4–1 BCE, as attested by the erection of several altars to the emperor Augustus. Some, interestingly, on the occasion of his birthday.³⁷

In our view, this mediation revolved around two ideas that were rooted in earlier Hellenistic traditions but reworked for the benefit of Augustus, with his complete acquiescence, and most likely also with his own participation. The first of these ideas is the notion that the emperor's reign had ushered in a new age of universal benevolence. This powerful message is conveyed in the text with which we began this paper, but perhaps finds its maximum expression in

33 On P. Cornelius Scipio, see: R. Syme, *The Augustan Aristocracy* (Oxford 1986), 59 and 252. He conducted the Caesarea of Messene: *SEG* 23, 206; A.J.S. Spawforth, *Greece and the Augustan Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge 2012), 212–213. On Regullus, see: E. Groag, *Die römischen Reichsbeamten von Achaia bis auf Diokletian* (Vienna-Leipzig 1939), 26–30. For his involvement in the promotion of imperial cult rituals, see: A.J.S. Spawforth, 'Corinth, Argos, and the Imperial Cult: Pseudo-Julian, *Letters* 198', *Hesperia* 63 (1994), 211–32.

34 For the epigraphical record of this episode, see: Laffi 1967, *op. cit.* (n. 1). On P. Fabius Maximus, see for convenience: E. Groag, *Prosopographia Imperii Romani saec. I, II, III. Editio altera, Pars III* (Berlin 1943), 103–105, no. F 47.

35 Price 1984, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 54–56.

36 *OGIS* 458, ll. 63–67.

37 F. Marco Simón, 'Los inicios del culto imperial en la Hispania augustea', *Gerión* 35 (2017), 773–789, esp. 777–778 and 784–785.

the words of Fabius Maximus himself, for whom the birth of Augustus could be considered:

equal to the beginning of all things. If not exact from the point of view of the natural order of things, at least from the point of view of the useful, if there is nothing which has fallen to pieces and to an unfortunate condition has been changed which he has not restored, he has given to the whole world a different appearance, (a world) which would have met its ruin with the greatest pleasure, if as the common good fortune of everyone Caesar had not been born. Therefore (perhaps) each person would justly consider that this (event) has been for himself the beginning of life and of living, which is the limit and end of regret at having been born.³⁸

This view of Augustus' reign was repeated in the league decrees that accompanied the governor's letter. It also occurred in inscriptions from other parts of the Empire, such as the one on the Narbo altar, where the emperor's birthday is called the "date of happiness on which he was produced as the world's ruler" (*die eum saeculi felicitas orbi terrarum rectorem edidit*).³⁹

The second notion builds on one of the seminal ideas of the euergetic system, namely that rulers and benefactors were honoured and even worshipped for their munificence and their capacity to do good.⁴⁰ In the case of Augustus, this capacity was accentuated because he was considered not only to have surpassed those benefactors who had lived before, but even, as is stated in the same decree, to have left no "hope [of surpassing him] for those who are to come in the future" (ἀλλ' οὐδ' ἐν τοῖς ἐσομένοις ἐλπίδα τῆς συνκρίσεως ἀπολείπων).⁴¹ Augustus was thus presented as the ultimate universal and everlasting benefactor, a potent image that underpinned the imperial monopoly on cultic honours. But he did not rule and (allegedly) benefit humankind alone. Members of the imperial house (the *domus Augusta* or *Divina*) helped and accompanied him. Thus, the awarding of divine cultic honours to members of the imperial family partakes in the semantics of the cult granted to the emperor. Moreover, one of its members would inherit power, adding to

38 OGIS 458, ll. 5–11 (Trans. Sher): ἦν τῆι τῶν πάντων ἀρχῆι ἴσηι δικαίως ἂν εἶναι ὑπ[ολά]βοιμεν, καὶ εἰ μὴ τῆι φύσει, τῶι γε χρησίμωι, εἰ γε οὐδέ[ν ο] ὑχί διαπειπτον καὶ εἰς ἀτυχῆς μεταβεβηκός σχῆμα ἀνῶρθωσεν, ἐτέραν τε ἔδωκεν πάντι τῶι κόσμωι ὕψιν, ἥδιστα ἂν δεξαμένωι φθοράν, εἰ μὴ τὸ κοινὸν πάντων εὐτύχημα ἐπεγεννήθηι Καίσαρ. διὸ ἂν τις δικαίως ὑπολάβοι τοῦτο ἀτῶι ἀρχῆι τοῦ βίου καὶ τῆς ζωῆς γεγενῆσθαι, ὃ ἔστιν πέρασ καὶ ὄρος τοῦ μεταμέλεσθαι, ὅτι γεγέννηται.

39 CIL XII, 4333^a, ll. 14–16. See also n. 2 above.

40 See for convenience the examples in Lozano 2011, op. cit. (n. 21), 502–506.

41 OGIS 458, l. 39.

the idea of stability and eternal duration of the emperor(s)' power – consanguinity in our modern sense was not necessarily an issue. However, just as the end of the civil war meant a significant reduction in the struggle for power within the Roman elite, the creation of a dynasty represented the emergence of new dangers for the ruler within the imperial family itself. Unsurprisingly, the establishment of cultic honours for members of the *domus Augusta* was often communicated to the emperor so he could approve, deny or modify the proposal, as in the case of the envoys from Sardis discussed above.⁴² Members of the imperial family should also be wary of accepting cultic honours on their own accord. Without consent from the *princeps*, it could be interpreted as an assault on power. However, it would be wrong to undervalue the significance and the sometimes independent rise of cults to important members of the imperial family, who were locally worshipped for different reasons.⁴³

At this point, we would like to draw attention to an exceptional document, which dates between 2 BCE and 14 CE, that illustrates how these informal procedures affected Greek cities. It concerns Lucius Vaccius Labeo's rejection of the cultic honours conferred on him by the city of Kyme.⁴⁴ The polis had offered to dedicate a temple in the gymnasium to Labeo, with statues of the oligarch, and to confer on him the titles of *ktistes* and *evergetes*. In addition, he would receive gold statues, a public funeral and the honour of being buried in the gymnasium. Labeo rejected the temple dedication and the title of founder because he felt they were excessive and only appropriate for gods and god-like men (καὶ θεοῖσι καὶ τοῖς ἰσοθεοῖσι). Ferrary has interpreted Labeo's refusal of these honours as a sign that he was emulating Augustus' moderation and the example set by the emperor himself.⁴⁵ Along the same lines, J. Strubbe has

42 See pp. 35–36.

43 Examples of cults of members of the imperial family that acquired extraordinary significance in cities of the Empire are numerous. See, for instance, the case of Drusus the Elder and Germanicus in Athens in F. Camia, 'A note on the Athenian *hierus* of Drusus Hypatos', *Tekmeria* 11 (2013), 37–50 (the priesthood of Drusus continued from the end of the first century BCE until the beginning of the second CE) and Lozano 2011, op. cit. (n. 21), 41 (the festival consecrated to Germanicus in the city was the imperial religious ceremony that lasted longer, from the first to the third century CE). As Boatwright has recently stressed, dynastic emphasis, and thus the imperial family, took center stage in the Empire: M.T. Boatwright, *The imperial women of Rome: power, gender, context* (New York 2021). She also highlights the difficulty women of the imperial household experienced in gaining visibility within an ideological model center on the dynastic group and the family (see esp. chapter 3). On the dynastic emphasis, see also recently Cooley 2019, op. cit. (n. 1), 76–79.

44 *IKyme* 19 (= *IGR* IV, 1302). City's proposal: ll. 3–11; Labeo's response: ll. 12–20.

45 Ferrary 1997, op. cit. (n. 7), para. 11.

observed that, being Italian, Labeo “may have been especially sensitive to the official policy of Augustus, who declined divine honour during his lifetime, and whose words are echoed by Labeo”.⁴⁶ Kuhn goes a step further by arguing that “if an emperor rejected cultic honours, how, then, could a local Roman benefactor dare to accept them?”. In the case of Labeo, the acceptance of these honours would have amounted to challenging Roman imperial power. It would have been both an inappropriate and extremely risky undertaking. Labeo was, therefore, “wise enough to heed the Augustan precedent”.⁴⁷

In our opinion, however, what Labeo is actually saying is that divine honours are suitable for gods and god-like men, i.e. Augustus himself. The rest of mortal men should refuse them. In this respect, the text is reminiscent of Germanicus’ proclamation to the Alexandrians in which he, a member of the imperial family, vehemently declined the “invidious divine acclamations” offered to him on the grounds that “they are suitable to him alone who is really the savior and benefactor of the whole human race, namely my father and his mother, who is my grand-mother”.⁴⁸ In short, Labeo’s rejection of divine honours was not prompted by a supposed Augustus’ moderation and rejection of divine honours, but rather, in our opinion, by quite the opposite. It demonstrates that the emperor was acting to ensure that these cultic honours were reserved exclusively for his family and himself.

An additional argument suggesting the existence of these directives from Rome, for which Augustus himself had been responsible, is precisely the fact that the reduction in cultic honours occurred relatively quickly, and moreover, throughout the East, whereas in other aspects pertaining to the imperial cult – such as the type of festivals, the days on which they were celebrated, the way in which the community participated and the very definition of the new imperial gods – the communities retained considerable freedom and room for manoeuvre. Their capacity for autonomous action defines the diverse nature of the honours paid to emperors and members of the imperial family in the Greek world, and even led some communities to approve the creation of imperial gods and rituals that were far removed from the ideological messages

46 Strubbe 2004, op. cit. (n. 7), 329.

47 Kuhn 2017, op. cit. (n. 17), 204.

48 Oliver 1989, op. cit. (n. 20) no. 17, ll. 27–41 (trans. Oliver): την μεν ευνοιαν υμών ήν αϊεί επιδεικνυσθε, όταν με εί δητε, αποδέχομαιτάς δε επιφθόνου[ς] έμοι και Ισοθέους εκφωνήσεις υμών έξ [α]παντός παραιτούμαι. πρέπεισι γαρ μόμφ τώ σωτήρι δντως και ευεργέτη του σύνπαντος των ανθρώπων γένους, τω έμω πατρι και τη μητρι αυτού, έμή δι μάμμη. τα δε ημέτερα έν <λόγω> έστιν τής εκείνων θειότητος, ως εάν μοι μή πεισθήτε, αναγκατέ με μη πολλάκις ύμειν ένφρανίζεσθαι.

emanating from Rome.⁴⁹ Some striking results of this process, which gave rise to what we have termed elsewhere “unlikely imperial gods”, include the association between Augustus and Zeus Lycaeus and the inclusion of the emperors in the Sanctuary of Despoina in Achaëa.⁵⁰ It seems, therefore, that the ample room for action available to Greek communities in terms of creating new imperial gods and rituals did not extend to the approval of cultic honours for dignitaries outside the ruling family, which we believe can only be interpreted as a centrally orchestrated manoeuvre.

4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the evolution of awarding divine cultic honours to humans in the period under study takes the form of an inverted pyramid or funnel, as the greater possibility of receiving such cultic honours in Hellenistic times was subsequently restricted almost exclusively to the emperors and their relatives. This restriction, which could be more formally termed the “imperial monopoly on access to divinity”, clearly demonstrates the symbolic and social power invested in granting divine cultic honours and the political consequences that ensued.⁵¹ To paraphrase the famous fictional debate between Maecenas and Agrippa in Cassius Dio, the sovereign had no need of foreign gods, let alone men with divine status.⁵² The abrupt reduction in the award of honours suggests an underlying message, namely that rendering cult to men should be reserved exclusively for the emperors and their families, since it was they who were the most powerful figures and the most beneficial to humanity.

In addition, the rapid end – within a matter of decades – of cults for people other than the emperor or his family also suggests that Augustus was not a passive emperor hesitant to accept divine honours. Rather, the surviving testimonies seem to suggest that this change was spearheaded from Rome and that the emperor himself was directly involved in the creation of a new system of honours. As in so many other areas of political and religious life, Augustus

49 On the heterogeneous nature of the imperial cult: E. Bickerman, ‘*Consecratio*’, in: W. Den Boer, ed., *Le culte des souverains dans l’Empire romain* (Genève 1973) 1–37, esp. 9 and 26.

50 See more recently: Lozano 2023, op. cit. (n. 27).

51 It was described as a monopoly in Thériault 2001, op. cit. (n. 7), and F. Lozano, *Un dios entre los hombre. La adoración a los emperadores romanos en Grecia* (Barcelona 2010), 82.

52 Dio Cass., 52.36. On the debate see: U. Espinosa Ruiz, *Debate Agrippa-Mecenas en Dion Cassio. Respuesta senatorial a la crisis del Imperio Romano en época severiana* (Madrid 1982), and E. Adler, ‘Cassius Dio’s Agrippa-Maecenas debate: An operational code analysis’, *American Journal of Philology* 133 (2012), 477–520.

closed the door to his potential competitors. In doing so, an image was created – a model of reality – that much better reflected the distribution of power during the Principate, while at the same time establishing a model for the communities subject to Rome that was much more appropriate and beneficial for the rulers. Built on the solid foundations laid by more than three centuries of uninterrupted practice, the new form of access to divine honours entailed a profound reworking of the preceding tradition and the emergence of new and successful forms that would endure for several centuries.

Acknowledgements

This paper has been written with the support of the research projects “Discursos del Imperio Romano: Las procesiones y la construcción de la comunidad imperial” (PGC2018-096500-B-C32); “Discursos del Imperio Romano: Palabras y Rituales que Construyeron el Imperio” (PGC2018-096500-B-C31); “Discursos del Imperio desde las provincias” (PID2021-125226NB-C21) and “Celebraciones del Imperio desde las provincias” (PID2021-125226NB-C22), financed by the Spanish Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades.