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Mortal Gods: Divine Associations of Humans as an Urban and Neighbourhood Phenomenon

Abstract

This paper is concerned with a phenomenon that is poorly documented in any of our traditional sources, but which was potentially much more widespread than usually appreciated: mortal individuals' association with the divine in late Republican and imperial-period Rome. It is argued that divine acclamation and honours were normally a matter for a limited group of people who felt a specific attachment or obligation towards a particular person, and that, for this reason, domestic and neighbourhood contexts are the most frequent locations for their celebration. At the same time, while there is evidence for such worship in large rural villas and smaller towns, the bulk of the Western evidence comes from the city of Rome, suggesting that the urban environment was particularly conducive to the development of a range of forms of divine associations, including divine acclamations and worship, praise of character features perceived as divine, and the adoption and worship of tutelary deities.

Keywords: mortal divinities, divine assimilations, divine honours, ruler cult, portraits in divine costume, tutelary deities, August(an) deities, genius, compita

1 Background

The earliest evidence for the association of individual humans with gods comes from the Greek world, where the designation of superior faculties or character traits as divine, or of divine origin, can be traced back to Homer.[1] Later, Sicilian tyrants and Hellenistic kings and queens assumed divine status in certain contexts, and also received public worship.[2] Late Republican Roman generals and promagistrates accepted similar honours in the

1 *ThesCRA* II (2004), 125–214 s. v. Heroisierung und Apotheose, for a convenient summary.

2 The bibliography on the Hellenistic ruler cult is vast; see Habicht 1970; Fishwick 1987, 3–45; Chaniotis 2003; and esp. Versnel 2011, 439–492; on literary tradition of divine praise: Bosworth 1999; images: Bergmann 1998, 19–38.

RRE 6 (2020), 159–180
ISSN 2199-4463
DOI 10.1628/rre-2020-0012
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East,[3] and when they later received such honours also in the West, and finally even appeared in divine costume in statues and on coins in Rome,[4] this experience shaped their practices to a significant extent.

And yet, to conclude, as is often done, that divine assimilations and honours in the West are outright foreign is misconceived. At Rome, various forms of divine honours for living men (much more rarely women) that merged Greek and Roman ideas were explored relatively early as well. Worship of the divine *Genius* of the *paterfamilias* by members of his household is generally assumed to have Republican origins and been a widespread practice.[5] To be sure, this worship was not of the *paterfamilias* directly but of his life-force. Still, *the* tutelary deity of a *familia* was inseparable from the human being and connected him with the divine in a direct way.[6] Assimilating *rulers* to a god goes back even to the Etruscan kings, if their dress was indeed intended to liken them to Jupiter.[7] Ittai Gradel has further argued convincingly that hailing individuals as gods, and especially addressing them as a new Jupiter, was customary in Rome at least from the third century BCE onwards. Much of the Republican evidence comes from comedy, but the notion could only make sense to the audience if it was familiar with such practice. Plautus and Terence were not ridiculing such hyperbolic address *per se*, but its inappropriate application. Differently from the real world, in which always a much superior person, mostly an owner or patron, was likened to Jupiter by an inferior dependant, in their plays it is typically an individual of low status or morals that is so addressed.[8] It is consistent with such practice that we find the first Roman portraits with divine attributes, which are the visual equivalent of such divine acclamations, on gems from pre-imperial Rome and Italy.[9] Their exact use and spread cannot be ascertained, but if they are the more modest equivalent to the large cameos of Hellenistic rulers and Roman emperors, we may tentatively conclude that

3 Price 1984, 40–47; Hallett 2005, 137–148; for a list: Bowersock 1965, 150–151; for Asia Minor: Tuchelt 1979, 45–118, 133–251, 252–257.

4 Wrede 1981, 27–30; Pollini 1990, esp. on coins; Hallett 2005, 148–158, on nude statues.

5 Gradel 2002, 36–44, 50.

6 Gradel 2002, 372.

7 Weinstock 1971, 292–293; Clauss 1999, 41–46; Gradel 2002, 32–53.

8 E. g., in *Persa* 99–100, where the parasite calls his host, a slave(!), *Iuppiter terrestris* (earthly Jupiter); cf. Gradel 2002, 41–48; see also Clauss 1999, 44–45; Beard 2007, 253–256; Cole 2013, 27–28. For a similar argument regarding Greek comedy and ruler cult, see Versnel 2011, 467.

9 E. g., M. Iunius Brutus with the attributes of Mercury: Vollenweider 1974, 285 s. v. Mercur, with Vollenweider 1972, pls. 93.1–3; 101.1–3; 127.1; 148.16, 18; generally with further examples: Vollenweider 1974, 179–183 (Marc Antony), 214–217 (Octavian). Cf. Wrede 1981, 28–29.

Fig. 1: Carnelian showing portrait of a man (M. Iunius Brutus?) with divine attributes; Collection Arndt no. 2224, Staatliche Münzsammlung, Munich. © Staatliche Münzsammlung München, Photographer: Nicolai Kästner.

they were not only used by the person represented but could function as gifts to (or from?) guests, thus obtaining a semi-public function.

That divine associations were not just a domestic affair is confirmed by other sources.[10] Already in 168 BCE, Aemilius Paullus was officially granted the right to wear triumphal garb outside a triumphal context, and so were Pompey the Great (in 63 BCE) and Caesar, who was even wearing the outfit at senate meetings, a right that Marius had previously awarded himself in

10 Wrede 1981, 140–149; Clauss 1999, 46–53; Gradel 2002, 55–72, on Caesar; Hallett 2005, 154–158, and Pollini 2012, 72–74, for a brief review of coin images and public monuments dedicated by Romans.

104 BCE. This effectively allowed them to liken themselves to Jupiter more permanently than was the case at the traditional Roman triumph.[11] Ennius' writings were probably meant to pave the way for public deification of his patron, P. Cornelius Scipio Africanus, the victor over Hannibal († 183 BCE). While his *Scipio* celebrated Africanus' *res gestae*, his 'translation' into Latin of Euhemerus' *Sacred Record* promoted among Latin speakers that all the gods were in fact deified kings, generals and benefactors, suggesting that divinity was achievable by the great and the good of his own time as well – including, of course, Africanus. As a highly respected *Roman* author, who may also have been the first to highlight, perhaps even to invent, Romulus' apotheosis and deification as the god Quirinus, he greatly influenced later generations, who now could also claim Roman traditions for their deification of mortals.[12] In the increasingly competitive climate of the middle to late Republic, his ideas resonated with the Roman élite who actively explored how to enhance their prestige through divine associations, but who also found a receptive audience among the growing population of the city of Rome. Even Cicero, a stern and passionate defender of the Republic, regarded divine honours as an appropriate reward for outstanding achievement and benefactions, and piled all sorts of divine associations onto Pompey the Great, Marius and others (though stopping just short of calling them a god directly). Eventually, in overwhelming gratitude to P. Cornelius Lentulus Spinther for his instrumental role in Cicero's return from exile, he addressed him as 'parent, god, and salvation of my life, reputation, and name' (*parens, deus, salus nostrae vitae fortunae, memoriae, nominis*; *Ad Quir*. 11), and there are good reasons to believe that he would have appreciated to be hailed a god himself.[13] Against this background, the divine cult offered to Caesar during his lifetime may seem less outrageous and extraordinary.[14]

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11 Hölscher 1967, 140, 149, 152; Gradel 2002, 35, 49 with n. 31; on the triumphator as temporary Jupiter, see Versnel 1970, 56–93; Beard, North and Price 1998, 143; Beard 2007, 225–256.

12 Bosworth 1999, 9–11; Winiarczyk 2002, 113–114; Cole 2013, 88–91.

13 On Cicero and deification, see esp. Cole 2013, *passim*, 34–62, on *Pro lege Manilia* and the praise of Pompey; 70–71, on Lentulus; on Lentulus, cf. also Gradel 2002, 52, who capitalises *salus*/*Salus* in the above quote. It is noteworthy that Cicero pushed for public apotheosis of great men even in his speeches of the 50s that were designed to stabilise the Republican political order (Cole 2013, 85–110, with bibl.). According to *Dom*. 92, Clodius accused Cicero of calling himself Jupiter (and his sister Minerva): Cole 2013, *passim*, and 67–68, on the passage, makes it clear that Cicero constantly compared himself to Jupiter even in his public speeches, so that it is certainly possible that he went one step further in more private contexts.

14 Cf. Weinstock 1971, 300–308, with North 1975, esp. 175; Gradel 2002, 69–71, who argues that the title Jupiter Iulius was offered to Caesar, but rejected in favour of the more modest Divus Iulius; for a recent discussion with bibl., see Koortbojian 2013, esp. 30–36.

What is important in our context is that, in all instances, the divine acclamations were a particularly strong expression of honour and acknowledgement of the recipient's pre-eminence, and expressed the special relationship between the two parties involved: the honorand who typically felt immensely indebted to, or in admiration of, the addressee, and the benefactor who, at least in the specific situation, possessed the superior power to bring about what caused the gratitude and respect. The divinity here at stake was not ontological but relational; it was in the eye of the beholder.[15] It is not possible here to address in any detail the extensive debate over whether or not the Romans took such honours seriously, and whether the recipients were in fact seen and addressed *as* gods or just as god-*like*.[16] Yet I think if we accept the argument for the relational character of divine worship, there is plenty of evidence that the spectrum of divine associations was rather wide, ranging from the praise of character features of the honouree as divine (i. e., exceeding normal human measure) to his or her outright divinity; we shall return to a third kind of divine association.

At the same time, this relational character of divine acclamations and worship of mortals also explains the social and topographical framework within which most of them occurred. Any kind of worship created (or exposed) a status gap that was only acceptable in specific circumstances, and normally involved people that already occupied different positions in the social hierarchy. This is what made Caesar's divine honours during his lifetime so controversial, and cautioned Augustus against agreeing to similar honours when they were offered by the senate of Rome since this would have destroyed his carefully curated image of *primus inter pares*. Where this status discrepancy was uncontroversial – be it temporarily or permanently –, however, divine acclamation and worship was often a spontaneous and arguably natural reaction towards a benefactor or man of superior power. Secondly, where those feeling the need to offer such honours extended beyond the honouree's household, or where they wanted their sentiments to be known more widely, neighbourhoods would have been the natural places to celebrate them.[17]

Some of the more striking cases of actual worship (which therefore made it into our literary sources) can demonstrate the point. In 121 BCE, after the Gracchi had been killed – Tiberius fleeing from his enemies in front of the Capitoline Temple and his brother Gaius in the sacred grove of Furina *(lucus Furinae)* on the Janiculum – the people spontaneously established cult for

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15 Gradel 2002, 26, 29, 46, 101–102, 148, 267, 270 (and elsewhere).

16 The issue is discussed at greater length in Borg 2019, 223–229.

17 On the centrality of honour in Roman social relations and politics, Lendon 1997 is still essential.

them at these very places including divine honours and offerings of the first fruits of crops.[18] In 101 BCE, the people poured libations to C. Marius at their dinners after his victory over the Cimbri and Teutones, thus extending to the general and consul an honour typically awarded their household gods.[19] In 86 BCE, and in gratitude for currency reforms people hoped would solve major economic problems, the voting tribes set up statues of his nephew Marius Gratidianus in 'all' Roman *vici* (streets, neighbourhoods), possibly in or near *compita* (street shrines for the worship of the local *lares*), where he also received offerings of incense, candles and libations of wine.[20] When Sulla took the city, Gratidianus' statues were overturned and perhaps (all?) replaced by those of Sulla, as a surviving base for one statue set up by the Vicus Laci Fundani on the Quirinal Hill suggests,[21] and Robert Palmer has argued that the practice of such honours to benefactors may have been more widespread during the Republican period.[22]

These cases demonstrate the spontaneous nature of divine cult to mortals, which manifested itself at locations meaningful to the people awarding it. While, in C. Marius' case, this was people's houses, it was the place of their killing for the Gracchi and the neighbourhood shrines for Marius Gratidianus and Sulla. Except for Sulla's statue base, it is notable that the reason we know about these instances is the scandalous circumstances and/or the involvement of particularly large numbers of people. Any more limited worship of men (or women) in individual *compita* or other shrines in local neighbourhoods was very unlikely to leave any traces in our records given the rarity of (surviving) epigraphic evidence from the Republican period in general, and especially for statue dedications which of course did exist in huge numbers.

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18 Plut. *TGracch.* 18.3, 19; Plut. *CGracch.* 17.2, *de vir. ill.* 65; Marco Simón and Pina Polo 2000, 155–156; Flower 2017, 236.

19 Val. Max. 8.15.7; Plut. *Mar.* 27.9; cf. Gradel 2002, 51; Flower 2006, 88–89. Note that the same practice was later decreed by the senate for Octavian after his victorious return from Egypt (Dio 51.19.7).

20 Cicero, *Off.* 3.80; Seneca, *De Ira* 3.18.1; Pliny, *NH* 34.27; Clauss 1999, 43; Gradel 2002, 51, 125; Flower 2006, 94–95; Marco Simón and Pina Polo 2000; Flower 2017, 234–236, who notes that 'both Marii were being recognized as personal and collective saviours.' The suggestion that the cult was in fact for Gratidianus' *genius* has rightly been rejected by Gradel 2002, 207–212; and Flower 2017, 71, 299–310.

21 Coarelli 2014, 69–70; Palombi 2016, 137–138 no. 237; Flower 2017, 236–238 fig. III.18, on *CIL* 6.1297: *L(ucio) Cornelio L(uci) f(ilio) / Sulla Felici / Dictatori / vicus laci Fund(ani).*

22 Palmer 1978–80, with reference to a statue of Verres in the Vicus Statuae Verris, a Vicus Statua Valerianae (*CIL* 6.975, 31893), and a place called *ad statuam Planci* in the Vicus Longus. In none of these cases is cult at these statues attested, but the prominence that these examples were obviously given may be suggestive of cult as well.

Compita may have been deemed particularly suitable for such activity as a matter of convenience, but also since some of them were already strongly connected with particular families from which they took their names, and which may have either provided the land for a shrine or paid for its building.[23] Moreover, the very character of *compita* as shrines for their neighbourhood's *lares* will have recommended the location for honours and even worship of benefactors more generally since the *lares* were precisely that, patron deities of these neighbourhoods who were called upon for protection and other favours. Yet *compita* were not the only shrines in local neighbourhoods, which featured multiple cult sites, often *sacella* (open precincts) were dedicated to divinities particularly relevant to the neighbourhood (or a family or group living there). While they stood under the state authorities and the quaestors or aedils oversaw their maintenance, they were typically private foundations and remained *local* foci of worship and cult activity.[24]

2 Divine honours in the imperial period

This conclusion is further supported by the continuities and changes that came about with the principate. At least in Rome, the emperor increasingly claimed control over public space, limiting the options for private individuals' honorific impetus as he could not tolerate any other person receiving higher honours than he did, nor even equivalent ones.[25] We should therefore not be surprised that there is little evidence for further divine cult for private individuals there. The one exception is Tiberius' notorious praetorian prefect Seianus, whose statues are said by Dio to have received divine cult from 'the populace' just like the ones of the emperor. While Dio does not specify any particular locations, it is clear that they were publicly displayed.[26]

The story did not end well for the prefect, but the incident demonstrates that the impulse to offer such honours continued to exist, which can also be seen in Italian cities outside of Rome. The most striking case is an Augustan altar found in the theatre of Cumae (fig. 2). Its relief decoration, which includes a sacrificial scene on the front, has been much discussed, and most scholars interpret the sacrifice as one to the Genius Augusti. Yet sacrifices to this genius are nowhere attested, and the divinity to which the altar was originally dedicated must remain anonymous for now. Above the sacrificial

23 Flower 2017, 124, for the Acilii and Fabricii.
24 Flower 2017, 137–144, with bibl.
25 Lahusen 1982; Lahusen 1983, 97–107; Eck 1984, 143–148; Alföldy 2001; Eck 2010, 94–99.
26 Dio 58.4.3–4, 58.8.4, 58.11.2; cf. Gradel 2002, 224–226, with bibl.

Fig. 2: Altar of C. Manlius from the theatre of Cumae. Vatican City, Museo ex-Lateranense, Augustan. After Taylor 1921, fig. 1.

scene, an inscription records the dedication of the monument to C. Manlius, censor for life, by his clients. Friederike Fless has shown that this inscription is secondary, belonging to a re-dedication of the altar as a statue base. The effect on the viewer would now have been the suggestion that the sacrifice

was directed at Manlius himself.[27] At Aesernia, an inscription attests to a 'college of the worshippers of Lucius Abullius Dexter's statues and (portrait) shields *(collegi cult(orum) statuar(um) et clipeor(um) L. Abulli Dextri)*.[28] The designation is strongly reminiscent of the *cultores imaginum Augusti* in charge of the emperor's statues. A collegium of *cultores Flaminiani* existed in Saepinum (*CIL* 9.2483). It is possible that the epigraphic evidence base for similar cult is rather slim.[29] Yet I am not aware of any systematic collection of relevant inscriptions, and the more frequent attestations of *cultores* of the *genius* or the *lares* of private patrons suggests that such a systematic approach may be worthwhile.[30]

3 Divine statues with portrait heads

Against this background, we can also not exclude that some statues depicting a person in divine costume may have received such worship, even if only occasionally or just at the time of dedication. It is normally thought that visual assimilation of humans to divinities, where a body type clearly identifiable as that of a deity carries a head with the portrait features and fashion hairstyle of a human being, is merely metaphorical, praising some achievements or character features of an individual in hyperbolic terms.[31] There can be no doubt that such praise is the fundamental message that all such images convey. Yet given the attested cult for mortals on the one hand, and the fact that such iconographical assimilations are the visual equivalent of divine acclamations, we should not exclude from the outset that portrait statues *in formam deorum* occasionally may have attracted cult.[32] This could have been the case for an 'Aesculapius' from the Quirinal in Rome, possibly coming from one of the smaller neighbourhood baths that existed all across the city (fig. 3), another Aesculapius from the baths at Formiae, and a third one (or is he a water deity?) from Albano Terme, as well as a couple reclining on a rocky surface with the man posing as a river god from

27 The inscription is *CIL* 11.3616. Fless et al. 2018, 129–36 cat. 9 pls. 70–72.1, with previous bibliography. Flower 2017, for the observation that there were no sacrifices to the Genius Augusti; she suggests (305–306) that the sacrifice may have been to Augustus, but there is no evidence for this, and the rededication of the altar to a local magistrate rules this out.

28 *CIL* 9.2654; Gradel 2002, 215.

29 Gradel 2002, 216, points to the private nature of such worship, which is rarely attested in any permanent form.

30 Waltzing 1895, 264 with n. 4, pointing to *CIL* 12.2677, 9.6320 and 9.2481 for comparison.

31 Still essential: Wrede 1981.

32 For a new assessment of these statues, see now Borg 2019, chapter 4.

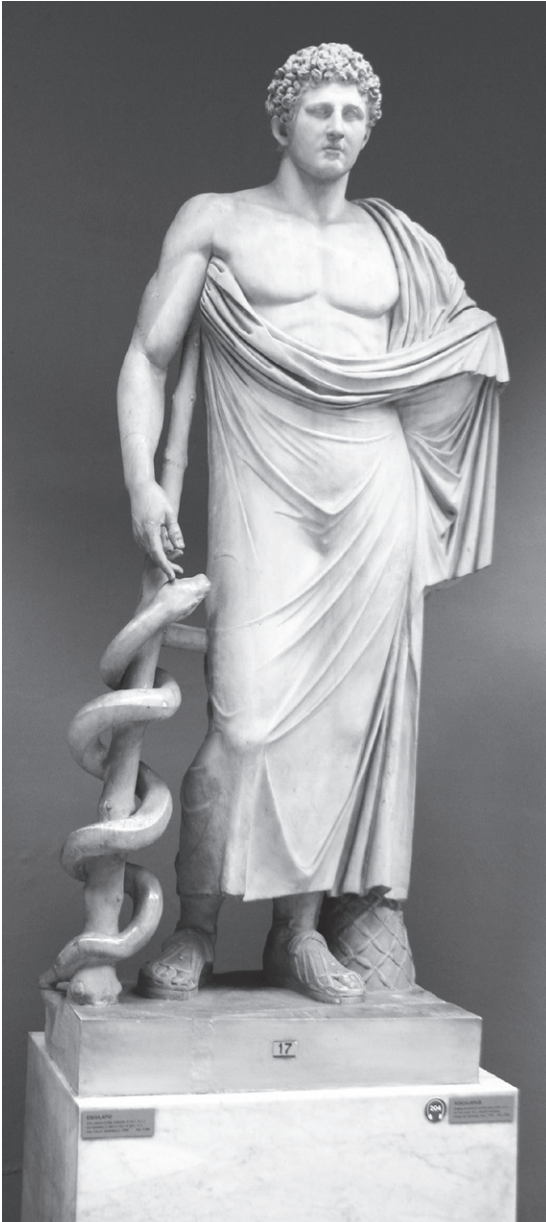

Fig. 3: Statue of a man as Aesculapius from the Quirinal. Rome, Vatican Museums, Braccio Nuovo 2288, c. 160 CE. © Flávio Cruvinel Brandão, in the public domain.

the baths of Bacucco near Viterbo.[33] They all may have contributed in one way or another to the amenities these places offered, and were therefore praised for being as beneficial to the health of those using the baths as were the respective divinities.

4 Tutelary deities

Yet such statues also raise another possibility. Since the Republic, families had sometimes claimed a very special relationship with a tutelary deity. A god's particular favour with a family (or individual) was also a distinction for the latter since the gods only favour those who deserve it. Some tutelary deities were even declared ancestors of a family.[34] The names of these deities were often composite, adding the name of the *gens* to that of the divinity, as for instance in Victoria Mariana or Diana Valeriana. While many of these divinities were Olympian, other families had their own Fortunas, called either Fortuna Tutela (e.g., *CIL* 6.177–9), or else Fortuna Crassiana (*CIL* 6.186), Fortuna Flavia (*CIL* 6.187), Fortuna Iuveniana Lampadia (*CIL* 6.189), Fortuna Pientiana (Eph. epigr. 9.727), Fortuna Torquatiana (*CIL* 6.204), Fortuna Tulliana (*CIL* 6.8706), and so forth.[35] In other cases, the deity was linked more specifically to an individual. Famously, Sulla adopted the cognomina Felix and Epaphroditus ('Aphrodite's favourite') and claimed a special and exclusive relationship with his patron goddess for himself alone.[36] Similar tutelary deities include Hercules Sullanus, Hercules Pompeianus, or Victoria Caesaris.[37] At least some of the Republican families also erected shrines to their patron and ancestral deities. This must have been the case for Hercules Sullanus since an entire *vicus* was named after him, and a sanctuary for Venus Felix, attested by two dedications and a second-century CE epitaph for *P. Aelius Aug. lib. Epaphus aedituus Veneris Felicis*, is likely to relate to him, too.[38] Pompey built a temple to Venus

33 Wrede 1981, cat. 3, 4, 43, 106. There is no indication that the head of the reclining male on the Louvre monument (inv. MA 351) has been reworked from a sarcophagus lid, as Wrede suggests.

34 Wiseman 1974; Hekster 2006.

35 Carter 1900.

36 Müller 2009.

37 Hölscher 1967, 144.

38 *LTUR* V (1999) 116 s.v. Venus Felix, aedes (L. Chioffi); Amendolea (ed.) 2009, 153–158, no. 2 (C. Noviello); Coarelli 2014, 176–177. Cf. *CIL* 6.781 = 30831, 782 (statue group: below n. 57), 8710 (epitaph).

Victrix on top of his theatre in the Campus Martius,[39] and a temple to Diana Planciana, which also featured the dedicant's statue in front of the shrine, was probably established by Cn. Plancius around 55 BCE.[40] Caesar's dedication of a forum and temple to Venus Genetrix, ancestress of the Roman people, but crucially also of his own family, therefore only took to another level a habit that already existed.[41] Dio relates the practice of taking oaths at Julius Caesar's Tyche (44.6.1: τήν τε τύχην αὐτοῦ ὀμνύναι, 'that they should swear by his fortune/Fortune').[42] If this note relates to an existing cult or statue rather than the abstract concept, it would surely have been in a public space.

The last recorded building (or restoration) of such a shrine is that of Diana Cornificia on the Aventine, restored by L. Cornificius after his triumph in 33 BCE,[43] and it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the cult for August(an) deities (in the form of Aesculapius Aug., Concordia Aug., etc.), which quickly became popular and spread widely from 7 BCE onwards, was modelled on and replaced such precedents, equally honouring personalised divinities. Suet. *Aug.* 57, Dio 54.35.2, and several inscriptions suggest that Octavian/Augustus rejected the offer of statues to himself by neighbourhood communities and asked them to spend their collected funds (which he supplemented) on statues of divinities instead.[44] Considering that these dedications were a substitute for dedications to Augustus directly, suggests that many of them were Augustan deities which the plebs viewed as in line with Republican precursors. At Pompeii, the *ministri Augusti Mercurii Maiae*, first attested in 2 BCE, later became *magistri Augusti*, i.e., 'attendants of Augustus',[45] which further demonstrates the very close link between worship of an Augustan deity and worship of Augustus himself. Interesting in our context are two things. First, while the concept of August(an) deities was first introduced by the senate (and Augustus' kin) in a highly public

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39 *LTUR* V (1999) 35–39 s.v. Theatrum Pompei (P. Gros).

40 Panciera 1970–71, 125–134 (c. 55 BCE); Jones 1976, dates the dedication to 69 CE, but this is impossible: Panciera 2006, 359–361; Coarelli 2014, 190–193, argues for Q. Munatius Plancus, *cos.* 42 BCE.

41 He had drawn attention to his divine ancestry already in 68 BCE in his funerary speech to his aunt (Suet. *Julius Caesar* 6). Forum and temple: *LTUR* II (1995), 299–306 s.v. Forum Iulium (c. Morselli).

42 Flower 2017, 300.

43 Suet. *Aug.* 29.5; *CIL* 6.29844.2: Panciera 2006, 360; the name of the sanctuary is attested in the epitaph of a *libertus* of Claudius and *aedituus* of the temple: *CIL* 6.4305.

44 Flower 2017, 263–268.

45 Cooley 2006, 251.

and official manner,[46] the epigraphically attested dedications to such deities are never commissioned by the senate or members of the first two orders; most of them were dedicated by individuals or groups closely related to the imperial household and administration, and the majority were slaves and freedmen, thus the same people that would previously have offered divine honours to their patrons directly.[47] Secondly, where their findspots have been recorded, these are neighbourhood contexts almost throughout, some potentially *compita*, others different local shrines.[48]

Epigraphic evidence demonstrates that private individuals continued to exploit their links with tutelary deities as well, and outside Rome, cult for such deities could even result in proper sanctuaries being founded, which were then linked closely to their human patrons. A dedication to Fortuna Tar(r)utenia Paulina was found inscribed on the architrave of an aedicula near Praeneste, which most likely contained a statue of the divinity.[49] It is therefore likely that the cult took a permanent architectural form to which this architrave belonged. Differently to most of the personal Fortuna cults just mentioned, which were linked to men and agnate families, here we have cult of the Fortuna of a woman or girl, an innovation typical of the imperial period.

The context of such a dedication can be gleaned from a much-discussed inscription commemorating the foundation, in 168 CE, of a cult for Venus Vera Felix Gabina by a rich silk merchant and *accensus velatus* from Gabii, A. Plutius Epaphroditus.[50] The temple *(templum)* contained a bronze statue

46 This important point is stressed by Cooley 2006, 246–250, who cites the Ara Pacis Augustae (vowed by the senate 13 BCE, dedicated 9 BCE) and the re-dedication of the temple of Concordia in the Forum to Concordia Augusta (vowed by Tiberius 7 BCE, dedicated 10 CE) as the earliest examples (cf. Flower 2017, 334 n. 21, for further three official cults). One may speculate whether the ambiguity of the epithet together with its choice after the cognomen of Augustus rather than his *nomen gentile* made these creations more palatable. Notably, the Lares Augusti were equally introduced on imperial initiative. The exact meaning of the August(an) divinities cannot be discussed here in any detail, and it may have changed somewhat over time; see esp. Fishwick 1978; Fishwick 1991, 446–454; Clauss 1999, 280–289; Panciera 2003; Cooley 2006, 246–252; Gregori 2009; Flower 2017, 329–335.

47 Panciera 2003, 233–236.

48 Panciera 2003, 219–227, for findspots, including, however, some dedications from the *Moneta* (A5, 14, 20, 22, 87). Flower 2017, 329–330, rightly cautions against concluding from dedications by *vilici* and *magistri vici* that their location must have been the *compita* given the multitude of shrines in neighbourhoods, yet this location may have been particularly suitable.

49 G. Thomasetti in: *BCom* 1892, 355–6 no. 3. The width of the architrave of 1.15 m suggests a relatively large image.

50 Paris, Louvre MA 1564 = *CIL* 14.2793; Wrede 1981, 85–86; Rüpke 2014, 27–33.

of Venus, four further *signa* (busts or statuettes?) set up in *aediculae*, and an altar, all made of bronze. The interest from an endowment of 10,000 sesterces was to pay for a public meal to be held by the decurions, the *seviri Augustales* and the *tabernarii* of Gabii once a year on the birthday of his daughter, Plutia Vera. In a somewhat contradictory way, Wrede interpreted this foundation as a cult for the deceased in imitation of Hellenistic hero cults, while maintaining that it was not really a cult for the divine Plutia Vera, but an elaborate version of Roman meals celebrated on the festivals of the dead.[51] Others see here a cult for Vera more akin to divine cult, but Emily Hemelrijk has noted that the cult is in fact to Venus, to which Epaphroditus gave the name of his daughter,[52] and there can be little doubt that the divinity was conceived along the same lines as, and in imitation of, the Augustan and other tutelary deities discussed before.[53]

It is normally thought that at least the statue of Venus would have featured the head of Plutia Vera, and there are in fact indications that, in the imperial period, such tutelary deities could assume the features of the person they were particularly attached to. John Pollini suggested this already for a famous denarius of 13 BCE (?) by the moneyer C. Marius Tormentinus that shows Augustus' head on the obverse and Diana with a strongly individualised face on the reverse, arguing that the latter does not represent the emperor's daughter Julia as Diana but rather Diana with the features of Augustus.[54] A statue from Leptis Magna dedicated to Ceres Augusta with the head of Livia wearing a mural crown, and an over-life-sized head of Minerva from Rome, now in Budapest, which clearly has portrait features (Domitian's?), may be further examples.[55] Essentially, in all these instances, the strategy of visual rhetoric is the same as with any other image of a divinity: pose and dress, physiognomy and attributes, serve to characterise and comment on this divinity. The representation of a god is not a portrait of 'what he really looks

51 Wrede 1981, 86.

52 Hemelrijk 2015, 305 n. 101.

53 As Wrede 1981, 99–100, noted Venus Vera Felix Gabina shows features of a city Tyche (cf. Venus Felix Pompeiana), and the idea may well have been that the goddess would watch over the community because of her particular connection with, and possibly the influence of, the girl. The death of the girl does not necessarily contradict such an understanding: see Borg 2019, 221–222. A similar case may be a dedication at Verona to one *thea Charis Bassaris* in memory of Avenia Bassaris, who was the freed *alumna* of an equestrian: *CIL* 5.3382; *IG* 14.2307; *CLE* 453, 1307; Wrede 1981, 113, with a different approach.

54 Pollini 1990, 353–355 fig. 29 with extensive bibl.; Pollini 2012, 77–78 fig. II.6.

55 Hallett 2005, 237–247, for examples, not all of which are equally convincing; Livia: also Zanker 1988, 234–235 fig. 185; Mikocki 1995, 19; Minerva: Varner 2008, 187–288 fig. 3 (further examples *ibid*. should be considered in relation to Augustan deities); Hekster 2015, 253–255 fig. 92.

Fig. 4: Statue of Fortuna with the portrait head of Claudia Iusta. Rome, Musei Capitolini, Galleria 58 inv. 933, late Trajanic. G. Singer, neg. D-DAI-ROM-68.3425. Rome, Pal. Cons., Galleria 58 inv. 933.

like' but visualises invisible characteristics that are relevant in the given context. While in images of humans assimilated to divinities the divine elements comment on the mortal concerned, in images of gods with portrait features of mortals a comment is made on the divinity.

Similar new foundations of shrines are unlikely to have been established after Augustus in the city of Rome for the reasons stated above. Yet we do find dedications to personalised deities that most likely come from already established sanctuaries. Not least the fact that we do not otherwise know about them suggests that they were typical neighbourhood shrines. A statue from around 110/120 that was found in a sanctuary of Fortuna on the Quirinal Hill is a case in point as already Carlo Visconti had suggested (fig. 4).[56]

56 *CIL* 6.3679 = 30873; Visconti 1872/73; Wrede 1981, 233–234 no. 107 pl. 13.1, 3; Fittschen and Zanker 1983, 56 cat. 73 pl. 91. There is no reason to believe that the statue was moved to the sanctuary from a tomb at a later stage, as some have suggested.

Its inscription reads *Fortunae sacrum / Claudiae Iustae* and depicts a female figure with oar and cornucopia with a portrait head. Generally speaking, both images of the divinity itself and portrait statues of the dedicant could be set up as votives to a deity. It is therefore not entirely clear who the statue represents. It cannot be excluded that we are looking here at an image of Claudia *in formam deorum*, i.e., an image of the dedicant claiming characteristics of the goddess (or even divinity?) for herself. Yet the statue may equally show her personal deity Fortuna, who assumed the features of the woman to whom she was particularly attached.[57] In the end, it may have been precisely this ambiguity that recommended the format to the dedicants. An epigram from the Greek Anthology (*Anth. Pal.* 16.68 = Asclep. 39 HE), tentatively ascribed to either Asclepiades or Posidippus, muses:

This is the portrait *(eikon)* of Cypris. – Come on, let's make sure it isn't Berenice's. I'm in two minds as to which of the two one should say it's more like. (transl. G. Zanker)

I have argued elsewhere that the inscriptions from the famous tomb of Claudia Semne as well as Statius' account of the statues from the mausoleum of Priscilla, wife of Domitian's powerful freedman Abascantus, played with exactly the same ambiguity.[58] For the patron of the statue from the Fortuna sanctuary, this same ambiguity would have allowed for the maximum of praise that was possible, without offending the emperor by claiming outright divinity in a public context.

A similar case is an Antonine votive relief to Hercules Iulianus, Iuppiter Caelius and the Genius of Mons Caelius (fig. 5).[59] While Iuppiter and the Genius relate to the Caelian Hill, where most likely the local shrine was situated, Hercules is related to a certain Iulianus, whose portrait features he assumed and who may have been the husband of Anna, the dedicator.

A middle to late Antonine nude statue of Venus with the portrait head of a woman is inscribed *Veneri Felici Sacrum Sallustia Helpidus D.D.*[60] The dative case for the goddess and the nominative for Sallustia indicate that the

57 Cf. n. 53. The position of the adjective *sacrum* would be a little odd for a dedication to Fortuna Claudia Iusta, but not an obstacle if we read *Claudiae Iustae* as a genitive. The alternative reading 'to sacred Fortuna and to Claudia Iusta' would, however, remain a possibility grammatically.

58 Borg 2019, 222–223.

59 *CIL* 6.334; here, *Iuliano* is dative and identifies the deity as Hercules Iulianus. Cf. Wrede 1981, 125, 245 no. 133; Schraudolph 1993, 209–210 G 23 pl. 23; Schultz (ed.) 2006, 64–65; Fittschen and Zanker 2014, 101102 cat. 102 pl. 109; La Rocca, Parisi Presicce and Lo Monaco (eds.) 2011, 293 cat. 4.37 (K. Fittschen). *CIL* 6.645 has a Hercules Naevianus but no provenance.

60 *CIL* 6.782; Vatican City, Musei Vaticani, Cortile del Belvedere, inv. 936: Wrede 1981, 313–314 cat. 306, with bibl. and different interpretation. If the portrait head of a statuette

Fig. 5: Votive relief for Hercules Iulianus, Iuppiter Caelius and the Genius of Mount Caelius. Musei Capitolini, Magazine 1264 (NCE 3022), late Antonine. C. Faraglia, neg. D-DAI-ROM-39.819.

dedication is by the latter to the former.[61] Nevertheless, the portrait head of Venus (and of Amor beside her?) clearly blurs some boundaries in that it assimilates Venus to Sallustia and suggests a particularly close relationship between Venus Felix and the dedicant. It is certainly possible that the deity is actually Venus Felix Sallustia; that is, the tutelary deity of the dedicant. The image fills in what the brevity of the inscription did not allow to be spelt out.[62] The statue group was found on the Esquiline in a residential area, and

inscribed *Iunoni Fortun. Helitia* belongs to the statuette now connected with it, we may see here another case of personalised Fortuna (Wrede 1981, 234 no. 108).

61 As noted by Koortbojian 2013, 89.

62 As Marianne Bergmann first noticed, a similar thought is clearly behind an altar dedicated by an imperial slave to Sol and Luna. It shows the god with the features of Nero,

may or may not have stood in the shrine established by Sulla.[63] A Severan statue of Venus Anadyomene with portrait head was found in the ruins of the forum of Praeneste, and may have been another example although its context was secondary and no inscription is preserved.[64]

5 Conclusion

Honouring superiors and benefactors by setting up dedications to them, often including their portraits, was an essential part of Roman social interaction and the establishment and maintenance of relationships between individuals and groups. To associate the honouree with the divine was arguably the greatest honour that could be awarded, ranging in degree from claims that the individual possessed divine character features to him or her being the favourite of a deity to outright divinity of the mortal him- or herself. As our sources make clear, the divine aspects and connections of the honouree lay first and foremost in the eye of the beholder; they were often linked to a specific situation; they were relational rather than ontological; and hence they were restricted to a limited group of people. While the melting pot that was the city of Rome will have offered inspiration for such thinking in particular abundance, and while the competitive environment of the capital city must have encouraged competition for and inflation of honours, the personal and relational character of divine associations of and honours for mortals made the neighbourhood the natural context for their celebration whenever funds, numbers of people involved, or ambition suggested publicity beyond the domestic.

thus suggesting that this is the visual equivalent of a dedication to Sol Augustus (Bergmann 1998, 194–201 pl. 38.1–4, followed by Hallett 2005, 242–243). A similar case has been made for the head of Minerva mentioned above at n. 55. The same is potentially true for dedications to a divinity *in memoria* of a deceased. Yet as the collection of evidence by Cesari 1998 demonstrates, such dedications are almost completely absent from Rome and originate primarily from places where few if any theomorphic statues with portraits have been found. Moreover, many of them (including the few examples mentioned by Wrede 1981, 188–189 nos. 2, 4, 5, 7, p. 190–191 nos. 2–8; Koortbojian 2013, 89) are dedicated to Augustan deities.

63 Cf. n. 38.

64 Wrede 1981, 314–315 no. 308 pl. 39.1; Visconti 1819, 347–348 on pl. 51, for the archaeological context.

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