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DIVI AUGUSTI AND *THEOI SEBASTOI*: ROMAN INITIATIVES AND GREEK ANSWERS*

This article explores Greek cultic answers to Roman imperial cult developments. It tries to assess the extent to which the absence of a policy of imposing from the centre a homogeneous practice regarding emperor worship allowed significant variety and divergence in provincial innovations. In particular, it focuses on two new abstract concepts, the *Divi* and the *Augusti*. The first section explores the relation between *Divi Augusti* and *Theoi Sebastoi*. I hope to prove that even though the Latin and Greek concepts are analogous and have a close semantic relationship, they were not exactly equivalent, because they never comprised the same number of deities. The second part is aimed at showing that the conventional definition of who comprised the wider group of *Augusti–Sebastoi* is not correct. The third section delineates the reasons for the existence of these differences between Rome and its empire. The main one is the lack of concern by Rome to impose her own religion on the empire. Provincials were in principle free to retain their previous religious autonomy and traditions, as long as they incorporated new cults, mainly, but not only, of imperial character. Civic status, local history, and religious background played then a major role in the specific configuration of emperor worship rituals in each particular town and provincial community. Lastly, I attempt to illustrate the semantic richness of the notions under examination. I believe that the real importance and political potential of the new terminology does not lie in the identity of the particular Roman figures that were included in it, but in the conception of power that it communicated.

A divine cult to Julius Caesar was devised in Rome at the end of his political career. Mark Antony was designated Caesar's flamen before his death, but he had not been inaugurated when the tyrannicides murdered Caesar in 44 B.C. The Senate officially consecrated Caesar as Divus Iulius in 42. The decree included a set of honours, namely, the building of a temple and the celebration of festivals. The priest in charge of the cult, Mark Antony, the first *flamen divi Iulii*, was finally inaugurated after the peace of Brundisium in 40.[1] Caesar's deification was, according to Suetonius, 'more than a mere official decree since it reflected public conviction'.[2] Augustus used the

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[1] For Caesar's honours see: Cic. *Phil.* 2.43. 110; Cass. Dio 44.4–8; App. *B Civ.* 2.106, and Suet. *Iul.* 76.1, and 84.2. For a detailed study of Caesar's honours and different interpretations of them, see S. Weinstock, *Divus Julius* (Oxford, 1971), in particular chapter 17. See also M. Clauss, *Kaiser und Gott. Herrscherkult im römischen Reich* (Stuttgart–Leipzig, 1999), 46–53.

[2] Suet. *Iul.* 88.

official cult of Caesar to strengthen his position at the head of the Roman state, and he frequently called himself *divi filius*.[3]

After the death of Augustus in A.D. 14, the first of the emperors received his own divine cult in Rome in accordance with the model devised for his father. Dio Cassius described this set of rituals and marks of distinction as follows:

> At that time they declared Augustus immortal, assigned to him priests and sacred rites, and made Livia his priestess … A shrine voted by the senate and built by Livia and Tiberius was erected to the dead emperor in Rome … While his shrine was being erected in Rome, they placed a golden image of him on a couch in the temple of Mars, and to this they paid all the honours that they use to pay to the other one (that of the god Mars). Other votes in regard to him were, that his image should not be borne in procession at anybody's funeral, that the consuls should celebrate his birthday with games like the Ludi Martiales … [4]

The cult of Augustus created the basic framework in Rome for the rest of the Principate.[5] Provincials also adopted these ritual practices typical of the capital. However, they did not copy them directly, and significant differences took place. The most important is that, while in Rome emperors were only worshipped posthumously, in the provinces they could receive divine cult while alive.[6] Imperial cult practice, in its Roman or provincial variety, turned out to be one of the most widespread religious manifestations throughout the Roman empire. Thus, in honour of the rulers of the Mediterranean and their families, festivals were created, sacrifices were celebrated, and imperial priests were appointed.[7]

I. *DIVI AUGUSTI* AND *THEOI SEBASTOI*

In Rome, the Senate gathered after the death of each emperor in order to decide if the deceased should be consecrated and numbered among the Roman deities. This was

[3] For Octavian's approach to the cult of his deified father, see H. Whittaker, 'Two notes on Octavian and the cult of Divus Iulius', *SO* 71 (1996), 87–99. See also Clauss (n. 1), 57–9.

[4] Dio Cass. 56.46 (translation Loeb).

[5] For emperor worship in Rome, see recently I. Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion* (Oxford, 2002). On imperial divinization at Rome, see J. Arce, *Funus imperatorum* (Madrid, 1988) and S. Price, 'From noble funerals to divine cult: the consecration of Roman emperors', in D. Cannadine and S. Price (edd.), *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge, 1987), 56–105.

[6] The best description of the difference between Greek rituals and Roman practices and the exchange between centre and province (Greeks) is S. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge, 1984), in particular, chapter 3.

[7] Much has been written about ruler cult. Two classic books are L. Cerfaux and J. Tondriau, *Le culte des souverains dans la civilisation greco-romaine* (Paris, 1957), and F. Taeger, *Charisma. Studien zur Geschichte des antiken Herrscherkultes* (Stuttgart, 1957). Fundamental and influential works by Nock and Taylor shaped the topic: A. D. Nock, 'Studies in the Graeco-Roman beliefs of the empire', *JHS* 45 (1925), 84–101; '*ΣΥΝΝΑΟΣ ΘΕΙΣ*', *HSCPh* 41 (1930), 1–62; 'The institution of ruler-worship', *CAH* 10[1] (1934), 481–9; 'The cult of heroes', *HThR* 37 (1948), 141–74; 'Deification and Julian', *JRS* 47 (1957), 115–23; and L. R. Taylor, *The Divinity of the Roman Emperor* (Middletown, 1931). For Hellenistic ruler cult, see C. Habicht, *Gottmenschentum und griechische Städte* (Munich, 1970[2]). Of recent scholarship on Roman emperor worship, two works deserve special mention because they have changed our understanding of the subject: K. Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* (Cambridge, 1978), 197–242, and Price (n. 6). See also W. den Boer (ed.), *Le culte des souverains dans l'empire Romain* (Geneva, 1973). The monumental work of D. Fishwick, *The Imperial Cult in the Latin West* (Leiden, 1987–2004), vols. 1–3, is also basic for a detailed study of relevant material. A work on imperial cult in the entire empire, following in the steps of Cerfaux and Tondriau, but with a modern conception of the topic, appeared recently: Clauss (n. 1).

the standard procedure for deification in Rome set up after the model of Julius Caesar and Augustus. The question of who should become a new god of the Roman state generated political as well as religious tensions. The Senate was the institution that took the final decision. However, the role of the new emperor was decisive in the final outcome of the debate. And, as Pliny pointed out in his *Panegyricus* to Trajan, their intentions were varied:

> Tiberius deified Augustus, but his purpose was to introduce the charge of high treason; Nero had done the same for Claudius in a spirit of mockery; Titus had similarly honoured Vespasian, and Domitian Titus, but only for one to be thought the son and the other the brother of a god. You (Trajan) gave your father (Nerva) his place among the stars with no thought of terrorizing your subjects, of bringing the gods into disrepute, or of gaining reflected glory, but simply because you thought he *was* a god.[8]

Consecrated members of the imperial family were called *divus* or *diva*. Collectively they were called *Divi* or *Divi Augusti*. Their number was never very high. Between Augustus' reign and the end of the Antonine dynasty, only twenty-five members of the imperial family were granted this extraordinary distinction.[9]

In the *Urbs*, incoming *divi* were decreed the standard set of honours, namely, a temple, a festival, and a priest. Almost all deified emperors had their own temple, with the deified empresses sharing the temple of their husbands. So as time passed and new emperors were divinized in Rome, the first *divi* were joined by many others. Each one of them had his or her distinct cult and temple.

The cult of the *Divi* was not restricted to Rome, but it was also observed in the Western provinces from early in the principate. The Greek East also developed a similar concept, that of the *Theoi Sebastoi*. They were a Greek answer to a Roman creation and, in this sense, the Greek term can be considered a translation of the Roman one. However, the resulting Greek term is not synonymous with the original Roman creation. Admittedly, both terms referred generally to Roman imperial gods, but religious practice meant that they were used to refer to a different selection of people.[10] This inadequacy has been best pointed out by Price.[11] In fact, 'The Greeks did not create a category comparable to *divus*',[12] and the difference shows in the different lists of Roman *Divi* and Greek *Theoi*.

Therefore, the frequent equation made between the two categories should take into account that, in the Greek East, members of the imperial family were called *Theoi* and *Sebastoi* before the Roman Senate converted them into *Divi*, if it ever did. In Rome the difference between the members of the imperial family and the *Divi* was clearly established. As Fishwick has rightly pointed out: 'Though all *divi* are *Augusti*, not all *Augusti* are *divi*.'[13] However, in Greek civic cults the vast majority of the *Sebastoi*

[8] Plin. *Pan*. 11.1–3: *Dicavit caelo Tiberius Augustum, sed ut maiestatis crimen induceret; Claudium Nero, sed ut irrideret; Vespasianum Titus, Domitianus Titum, sed ille ut dei filius, hic ut frater videretur. Tu sideribus patrem intulisti non ad metum civium, non in contumeliam numinum, non in honorem tuum, sed quia deum credis.* I would not go so far as to propose the straightforward acceptance of the information in Pliny; but it is a good example of the opinions that were shared (and communicated) regarding the reasons for official deification at Rome.

[9] Clauss (n. 1), Appendix 7.

[10] See most clearly H. J. Mason, *Greek Terms for Roman Institutions: A Lexicon and Analysis* (Toronto, 1974), 124–5, '*Θεός* remains nonetheless the standard version of *divus*', at 124.

[11] On the differences in cultic language, see S. Price, 'Gods and emperors: the Greek language of the Roman imperial cult', *JHS* 104 (1984), 79–95.

[12] Price (n. 11), 84.

[13] Fishwick (n. 7), 1.2, at 275.

Table 1. Comparison of divinized members of the imperial family from Athens and Rome. Julio-Claudian period.

ROME[a]		**ATHENS**			
Member of the imperial family	Date of divinization	Member of the imperial family	Called Theos/a?	Called Sebastos/a?	Date of divinization[b]
(1) Julius Caesar	Post mortem; 44 B.C.	(1) Augustus	Yes	Yes	Lifetime (shortly after Actium)
(2) Augustus	Post mortem; A.D. 14	(2) Livia	Yes	Yes	Lifetime (before 2 B.C.)
(3) Drusilla	Post mortem; A.D. 38	(3) Julia, daughter of Augustus	No	No	Lifetime (before 2 B.C.)
(4) Livia	Post mortem; A.D. 41	(4) Gaius Caesar, son of Julia and M. Agrippa	No[c]	No	Lifetime[d] (reign of Augustus)
(5) Claudius	Post mortem; A.D. 54	(5) Tiberius	Yes	Yes	Lifetime
(6) Claudia Augusta	Post mortem; A.D. 63	(6) Drusus Nero, brother of Tiberius	No	No	Post-mortem; 9 B.C.[e]
(7) Poppaea Augusta	Post mortem; A.D. 65	(7) Drusus Caesar, son of Tiberius	No[f]	No	Lifetime (reign of Tiberius)[g]
		(8) Julia Livilla, daughter of Germanicus	No	No	Lifetime (reign of Gaius)
		(9) Drusilla, daughter of Germanicus	Yes	No	Post mortem (?) (reign of Gaius)[h]
		(10) Germanicus	No	No	Lifetime (reign of Tiberius)[i]
		(11) Gaius Caesar, Caligula	Yes	Yes	Lifetime[j]
		(13) Claudius	Yes	Yes	Lifetime
		(14) Messalina	Yes	Yes	Lifetime
		(15) Agrippina	Yes	Yes	Lifetime
		(16) Nero	Yes	Yes	Lifetime
		(17) Antonia Minor	Yes	Yes	Lifetime (starting during the reign of Tiberius)

[a] See Clauss (n. 1), p. 533.

[b] Date of divinization at Athens is not as secure as it is at Rome. Firmly dated inscriptions point to a divinization of the emperor as soon as he assumed power. The moment when the rest of the members of the imperial family were accorded divine rituals is not as clear. Admittedly, it is plausible that wives of emperors followed in the step of their husbands. Other members might have started to be worshipped after a visit to Athens, a Roman historical development, or some other event unknown to us. For a discussion of imperial cult in Athens during this period, see Lozano (n. 17).

[c] However, he was assimilated to Ares: M. Levensohn and E. Levensohn, 'Inscriptions on the south slope of the Acropolis', *Hesperia* 16 (1947), 68–9, and *IG* 2^2 3250.

[d] The date of the assimilation is uncertain and there are several opinions about it; all of them place the dedication in the first half of the reign of Augustus. See Lozano (n. 17), 47–8.

[e] The use of Roman dates for dating Athenian acts is not always as straightforward as it has usually been thought to be. See Lozano (n. 36).

[f] He was also assimilated to Ares: *IG* 2^2 3257.

[g] It has usually been linked to his military command in Illyricum in A.D. 17–20.

[h] She was assimilated to Aphrodite (*SEG* 34.180), but the date of the inscription is not known. Any year within Gaius' short reign is possible.

[i] An ephebic festival in honour of Germanicus was created when he visited Athens (A.D. 18): Graindor (n. 18), 176–9. It is among the better-documented festivals of Athens and it was long-lived since there is epigraphic evidence of its celebration from the reign of Claudius down to the middle of the third century.

[j] No inscriptions have been recovered attesting such cult, but it does not seem to be far fetched to assume that Gaius received cult during his lifetime, as was common practice before his time with other emperors.

received cult during their lifetimes, and the instances when a member of the *domus augusta* was called a god while alive are frequent.

The case of the emperors is the clearest one; they were commonly termed gods and *Sebastoi* in the East during their reign, and priests were appointed to their cults.[14] The same applied also to empresses who were often called *Thea* and *Sebaste* before they were consecrated in Rome (if they finally were). Even excluding those who were later deified in Rome, the list is long: (1) Julia Minor, daughter of Octavius and Scribonia; (2) Antonia Minor, daughter of Mark Antony and Octavia; (3) Livia Minor, daughter of Drusus Nero and Antonia Minor; (4) Agrippina Maior, wife of Germanicus; (5) Messalina, wife of Claudius; (6) Agrippina Minor, wife of Claudius; (7) Claudia Octavia, daughter of Claudius and wife of Nero; (8) Statilia Messalina, third wife of Nero; and (9) Domitia Longina, wife of Domitian.[15]

These cults of living emperors and empresses were celebrated hand in hand with rituals dedicated to other figures of the imperial family. Many of these notables were termed gods and *sebastoi* during their lifetime, usually without even eventual divinization in Rome. In Athens, for example, the cult of Drusus Nero, brother of Tiberius, was created around 9 B.C. and was observed at least up to the reign of Hadrian. The cult must have been important in the religious life of the city because it was linked to the eponymous archon.[16] His wife, Antonia Minor, called Antonia *Sebaste*, mother of Claudius, was also worshipped in Athens, as the seat reserved for her priestess in the theatre of Dionysus attests. During the reign of Claudius, a high priest took care of her cult. He was the leading citizen of the city at that time.[17] The cults of Drusus and Antonia were not unique. Another example is that of Germanicus, who was honoured in Athens with an ephebic festival that was inaugurated during his lifetime and lasted until the middle of the third century.[18] Table 1 compares the divinities that were worshipped in Athens with the Roman *Divi* during Augustan and Julio-Claudian times. As is clear from this comparison, the number of divinized members of the imperial family at Athens was much larger than that at

[14] Examples are too numerous to be cited here. For a general overview, see Clauss (n. 1), Appendix 1.

[15] The best catalogue is U. Hahn, *Die Frauen des römischen Kaiserhauses und ihre Ehrungen im griechischen Osten anhand epigraphischer und numismatischer zeugnisse von Livia bis Sabina* (Saarbrücken, 1994).

[16] For this priesthood, see P. Graindor, *Athènes sous Auguste* (Cairo, 1927), 19, nn. 4 and 5 and *Chronologie des archontes Athéniens sous l'empire* (Brussels, 1922), 18–19. The relation with the eponymous archon was also emphasized by S. Dow, 'The list of Athenian *archontes', Hesperia* 3 (1934), 149, and M. Woloch, *Roman Citizenship and the Athenian Elite A. D. 96–161. Two Prosopographical Catalogues* (Amsterdam, 1973), 118, no. 2(2) and 215, C(1).

[17] The inscription in the theatre of Dionysus is *IG* 2^2 5095. Antonia's high-priesthood: *IG* 2^2 3535 + *SEG* 21.742. For these priesthoods see N. Kokkinos, *Antonia Augusta: Portrait of a Great Roman Lady* (London, 1992), 55, and Graindor (n. 16), 157–8. The name of the priest is Tiberius Claudius Novius. See F. Lozano, *La religión del poder: el culto imperial en Atenas en época de Augusto y los emperadores Julio-Claudios* (Oxford, 2002), 61–6 with further bibliography. For religion in Roman Athens, see recently E. Muñiz, 'Elites and religious change in Roman Athens', *Numen* 52 (2005), 255–82.

[18] On the Athenians' ephebic festival for Germanicus, see P. Graindor, 'Etudes sur l'éphébie attique sous l'empire', *Musée Belge* 26 (1922), 176–9, and S. Follet, *Athènes au II^e^ et au III^e^ siécles* (París, 1976), 321–2. The same endurance of Germanicus' memory is to be found in Roman state religion. He was mentioned in the military calendar found in Dura Europus; his birthday was to be celebrated with a *supplicatio*. See R. O. Fink, A. S. Hoey, and W. F. Snyder, 'The feriale duranum', *YClS* 7 (1940), 1–222, at 45.

Rome. A similar synoptic chart could be drawn up for most poleis. Athens is used only because of the wealth of evidence for emperor worship.

In Mytilene, for instance, the cult of Germanicus is also well attested. This cult was of the god Germanicus Caesar and that of his wife, the goddess Agrippina.[19] Germanicus was honoured with a festival in Aphrodisias and was also included in the imperial festival at Gytheum.[20] The cult of this important member of the Julio-Claudian dynasty was also present in the West. Three *flamines Germanici Caesaris* are known, coming from Olisipo, Vienna and Nemausus.[21] A similar case is that of Antonia Minor, whose cult in Athens is not the only attestation of her favour among Greek cities. She also received cult in Aphrodisias, Ilium, Clazomenae, and perhaps Egypt.[22]

It seems right to think that all these Roman potentates (emperors, empresses, and other members of the imperial family) were subsumed under the general term of *Theoi Sebastoi*, independently of the Roman framework of post mortem divinization, since they were worshipped during their lifetime and they were frequently termed *theos* and *sebastos*.[23]

Taking into account the difference between the *Divi Augusti* adored in Rome and the *Theoi Sebastoi* worshipped in the Greek East, it is incorrect to equate the categories. The *Divi Augusti* formed a smaller collective, whose members were accepted in accordance with the complex balance of power typical of imperial Rome, while *Theoi Sebastoi* were recognized as a result of the interaction of local tradition with the central power. Even if we accept that *Theoi Sebastoi* constitute a reaction to the *Divi Augusti* created at Rome, the resulting Greek term was not used to refer to the same group of people.[24]

II. REDEFINING *AUGUSTI–SEBASTOI*.

The standard definition of *Augusti* was clearly stated in 1950 by Oliver, for whom they were: 'The living emperor and the consecrated *divi* of the Roman religious calendar.'[25] In 1970 Fishwick revisited the topic in an article entitled 'Flamen Augustorum'. He reviewed many relevant inscriptions from the entire empire, paying special attention to a dossier of three inscriptions from Hispania Citerior. His conclusion was that Augusti 'in the title of the provincial *flamen* can only mean dead

[19] *IGRom.* 4.74 and 75. Also from Mytilene is an inscription for the emperor Gaius: *IGRom.* 4.77. For Germanicus called *theos*, see also *IGRom*. 3.680.

[20] Aphrodisias: J. Reynolds, 'Ruler-cult at Aphrodisias in the late Republic and under the Julio-Claudian emperors', in A. Small (ed.), *Subject and Ruler: The Cult of the Ruling Power in Classical Antiquity* (Ann Arbor, 1996), 48–9. Gytheum: *SEG* 11.923, lines 10–11.

[21] Olisipo: *CIL* 2.194. Vienna: *CIL* 12.1872. Nemausus: *CIL* 12.3180 and 3207.

[22] See, in general, Kokkinos (n. 17), 57. The author also supports the idea of a temple of Antonia in Rome (Kokkinos [n. 17], 119–20), an opinion that I do not find convincing. But on cults to Antonia, see J. Reynolds, 'New evidence for imperial cult in Julio-Claudian Aphrodisias', *ZPE* 43 (1981), 322.

[23] The inclusion of these members of the imperial family in the *Theoi Sebastoi* also helps to explain the existence of priesthoods consecrated to the 'house of the *Sebastoi*' as a whole. I will argue later that *Theoi Sebastoi* and *Sebastoi* are the same, unlike *Divi Augusti* and *Augusti*.

[24] This difference is particularly acute during the time when the emperor, who was alive and hence not divinized in Rome, was the recipient of cult in the East. The emperor was then a member of the *Theoi Sebastoi* but he was clearly not a *Divus*. This contrast was always present for those emperors such as Tiberius who were never divinized in Rome.

[25] J. H. Oliver, *The Athenian Expounders of the Sacred and Ancestral Law* (Baltimore, 1950), 96.

emperors with the living emperor or emperors combined'. He also stated that not all dead emperors were included among these *Augusti*, because 'deceased emperors who were not deified were, of course, also *Augusti*; but this is beside the point since emperors who were not deified were not included in the cult'.[26]

Both Oliver and Fishwick's definitions are clearly inexact, because, as we have seen with *Theoi Sebastoi*, provincial developments did not directly copy, and were not strongly constricted by, Roman initiatives. The case of Tiberius serves to clarify this point. He was never a *Divus*, but he received worship throughout the entire Eastern part of the empire, both during his lifetime and after his death. Burrell in her recent book, *Greek Cities and Roman Emperors*, has rightly argued against previous scholarship: 'The *Augusti* worshipped in the eastern provinces were not confined to those who became *divi* at Rome.'[27] The author gives the example of Asia's temple at Smyrna that had Tiberius as its principal cult figure. The continuity of its pre-eminence is proved by Tiberius' appearance on coins of the time of Caracalla. Smyrna is only one example of many cities which had Tiberian priests and cults.[28] There were also other members of the imperial family who received cult during their lifetime and were called *Sebastos/e*, as for example Antonia Minor (above p. 145), Agrippina Minor, Statilia Messalina, and Domitia Longina.

All this goes to prove, in my opinion, that a revision of the category of *Sebastoi* is needed. It should be broadened to include those members of the imperial family who received cult in a city or league, regardless of whether they were ever consecrated in Rome or were alive. This group will then include the living emperor, the living empress, as well as previous *Sebastoi* who were not *divi* but received state cult from cities or leagues, such as Tiberius and other members of the *domus augusta*. In addition, I believe that members of the imperial family who were not termed *Sebastos* could be included if they received cult in a given city. That would be the case, for example, with Germanicus and Drusus Nero in Athens.[29]

Sebastoi are then the group of members of the imperial family, male and female, whose divine worship has been approved by the competent institution of a particular political entity, city or league. Following this definition, it can be concluded that *Sebastoi* were equal to *Theoi Sebastoi*, the first being just a shorter variation of the latter. It is worth noting, however, that this synonymity is not present in the Latin part of the empire, because the group of consecrated emperors in Rome, called *Divi*, were not equal to the *Augusti*. This difference helps, in my opinion, to explain who were honoured by imperial priests in the West. As Fishwick has rightly stressed, the different titles of the imperial priest in the West (e.g. *flamen Divorum Augustorum*, *flamen Divorum et Augustorum*, *flamen Augustorum*) were stylistic variants, all of which denoted a priest charged with the same form of cult.[30] Such a variety of titles is also to be found in the East. Nevertheless, there is an important disparity in the form

[26] Fishwick (n. 7), 1.2, 275 and n. 37. His conclusions are widely accepted; see e.g. J. A. Delgado Delgado, *Elites y organización de la religión en las provincias romanas de la Bética y las Mauritanias: sacerdotes y sacerdocios* (Oxford, 1998), 50–1: 'En resumen, el flaminado provincial en la Bética tuvo como razón de ser y cometido principal el culto conjunto del (o de los) emperador vivo y de los deificados.'

[27] B. Burrell, '*Neokoroi*': *Greek Cities and Roman Emperors* (Leiden–Boston, 2004), 367.

[28] Cult of Tiberius: Clauss (n. 1), 507–9.

[29] However, the strength of the term, as I argue in the last section of this article, lay in its capacity to include all members of the imperial family. Its real importance is the abstract notion of power that it conveyed.

[30] Fishwick (n. 7).

of cult between East and West, because priests in the Latin part of the empire were frequently in charge of the *Divorum et Augustorum*, namely, the living emperor, the living empress and other members of the imperial family (that is, past *Augusti*), together with the *Divi*. As has been argued, their Greek counterparts did not usually pay cult to the *Divi* as such. The most appropriate abbreviation to sum up all the group of potentates adored by Western priests was *Augusti*, because this concept, like *Sebastoi* in the East, united all past and present members of the imperial family, including those who acquired divine status in the capital. That is why the overall tendency in all territories under Roman rule was to define priests as 'of the *Augusti*/*Sebastoi*'.[31]

III. THE FORMATION OF NEW IMPERIAL CULTS IN THE PROVINCES

The main explanation for the difference between *Divi Augusti* and *Theoi Sebastoi* is the fact that measures taken at Rome were not strictly followed in the provinces. Admittedly, they served as a model, but they were not binding. During the Principate, only the Roman army adhered closely to Roman central procedures and rituals. Therefore army units did not worship emperors during their lifetime.[32]

Colonies were also meant to pay attention to the norms created in the capital, but even they could create their own pantheon. A good example is provided by the religious organization of the *Colonia Genetiva Ursonensis* in Baetica that can be studied thanks to the preservation of its foundation *lex*. The inscription that has come down to us is a copy of Flavian date, but the original text is most likely to date from the time of Caesar himself. From this charter we learn that the actual foundation of the city was linked to Roman religious rituals, such as the taking of auspices and the ploughing of the *pomerium* of the *colonia*. Besides, the *colonia* closely mirrored religious institutions of Rome, for example, in the appointment of priests and *augures* and in the privileges granted to them. The charter also instituted cults and games in honour of central Roman deities, such as the Capitoline triad and Venus Genetrix. The organization of circus games and sacrifices and the setting up of *pulvinaria* also reflected Roman tradition and ritual practice. *Coloniae* followed a general religious pattern set by Rome, but, as Bendlin has recently argued, 'what is worth stressing is

[31] Fishwick (n. 7), 275, found 'partly tautologous' the title *flamen Divorum et Augustorum*, since for him past *Augusti* were necessarily *Divi.* He believed that non-deified emperors were not included in the cult. However, as has been shown, that is not the case. Therefore, the title is not tautologous, in view of the fact that two different collectives were being adored. A different matter is why the priesthood title was sometimes abbreviated to *Divorum Augustorum* or just *Divorum*, when these titles clearly excluded some recipients of the cult (e.g. the living emperor and empress). The reason might rest in the personal choice of the person or institution that paid for the inscription or in the context where the stone was to be displayed. A possible parallel is founded in the epigraphic dossier of Ti. Claudius Atticus who is termed in several inscriptions 'priest of the *Sebastoi*' but who chose to address himself just as 'priest of Trajan' in a statue base of this emperor; see A. J. S. Spawforth, 'The early reception of the imperial cult in Athens', in M. C. Hoff and S. I. Rotroff (edd.), *The Romanization of Athens* (Oxford, 1997), 190. In any event I find it totally convincing that all these different titles were just stylistic variations of the same cult form.

[32] On Roman army religion, see A. Birley, 'The religion of the Roman army: 1895–1977', in *ANRW* 2.16.2, 1506–141 and J. Helgeland, 'Roman army religion', in *ANRW* 2.16.2, 1470–1505. The *Feriale Duranum* is a clear example of centrally directed rituals in the army.

not how great the religious obligations of the new colonist were, but how minimal a religious framework was imposed on them'.[33] Chapter 64 states clearly this freedom:

> The *duoviri* who hold office after the establishment of the *colonia* shall, within the first ten days of their office, bring for decision to the town councillors, in the presence of not fewer than two thirds of them, the question of which days and how many days shall be festal, which sacrifices shall be publicly performed and who shall perform them. Whatever shall have been decreed by the majority of those present at the meeting, that shall be lawful and valid, and those sacrifices and those festal days shall be observed in the said *colonia*.[34]

As is clear from this quotation, the charter instituted only minimal religious requirements. The constitution of Urso's local pantheon and rituals were left to the members of the *ordo decurionum*. The town council was entitled to change the calendar of the *colonia* so public *dies festi* and *sacra* were subjected to modifications.

Provincial cities of non-Roman background, the norm in the Greek East, were even less closely related to Roman religious practice, and so the way they integrated Roman emperors into their ancestral religion was more diverse. The epigraphic record provides many examples of the freedom of Greek provincials to create their own pantheon and ritual practices according to local traditions. Traditional institutions in charge of accepting new gods, which had an analogous role to that of the Senate in Rome and the town council in colonies, functioned in the Greek East. Such is the case, for instance, of the Assembly of the Asian League that decided to include Tiberius during his lifetime among their gods and appointed the choir of all Asia to perform rituals in his honour. A decree preserved the motion:

> Since one should each year make clear display of one's piety and of all holy, fitting intentions towards the imperial house, the choir of all Asia, gathering at Pergamum on the most holy birthday of Sebastos Tiberius Caesar god, performs a task that contributes greatly to the glory of Sebastos in hymning the imperial house and performing sacrifices to the Sebastan gods and conducting festivals and feasts … [35]

Examples of this type of local decree are very common. Another example worth citing comes from central Greece, from the city of Acraephia in Boetia. The magistrates, council and people of this city, following the proposal of the high priest of the ruling emperor, divinized Nero and decided to worship him. The reason for their action was Nero's liberation of Greece:

> It has been decided by the magistrates and councillors and the people to worship him (Nero) at the existing altar dedicated to Zeus the Saviour and to inscribe on it 'To Zeus the Liberator, Nero, forever' and to erect statues of Nero Zeus the Liberator and the goddess Augusta Messalina in the temple of Apollo Ptoios to share it with our ancestral gods.[36]

The continuous authority of these institutions in charge of local religious practices, together with the non-existence of a strict Roman policy regarding emperor worship, helps to explain the wide variety both of rituals and imperial deities that were created

[33] See A. Bendlin, 'Peripheral centres—central peripheries: religious communication in the Roman empire', in H. Cancik and J. Rüpke (edd.), *Römische Reichsreligion und Provinzialreligion* (Tübingen, 1997), 35–68.

[34] *ILS* 6087 par. 64 (translation from M. Beard, J. North, and S. Price, *Religions of Rome* (Cambridge, 1998), 2.242–3).

[35] Translation from Price (n. 6), 105.

[36] *IG* 7.2713, lines 45–53. Translation into English in C. B. Rose, *Dynastic Commemoration and Imperial Portraiture in the Julio-Claudian Period* (Cambridge, 1997), 137.

in the Greek East. It also gives an explanation of the difference in importance of members of the imperial family from town to town. Local history is usually the reason for divergent approaches to imperial figures. During the principate, the religion of provincial communities followed its own particular evolution, as they chose whether to remember or forget a classical divinity, and decided how to worship members of the imperial family. Each city adapted and created its own rituals and gods, taking into account many inside and outside stimuli. Certainly, the general religious and political situation created the basic framework of action, but in the specific formation of imperial cult, local communities acted with ample liberty. They were not forced to follow Roman practices or to do as their neighbours were doing.[37] Only subversive behaviour toward Roman power was prosecuted.

Therefore it is very important to pay attention to the preceding civic religious system in which imperial cult was integrated. It helps us to understand the ways in which emperors were assimilated to classical deities, and the heterogeneous rituals that we find in the epigraphical material. Thus, for example, in the Roman province of Achaea, the empress Livia shared the temple of Nemesis in Rhamnus,[38] and was assimilated to the Muses and Mnemosyne in Thespiae,[39] and with Artemis and Hygieia in Athens.[40] Previous cultural tradition also helps us to comprehend the difference between Roman *Divi* and Greek imperial gods.

Each city used its own past rituals to design new imperial gods and introduce them into its ancestral pantheon. That is why we find going hand in hand a centrally designed and supported empire-wide ideological construction, together with local honours granted to emperors by Greek cities. The development of local imperial cult was mainly based on each city's cultural and religious milieu and usually resulted in a close relation of the foremost local deities with members of the imperial family. Previous religious frameworks were employed to accommodate the new central power.

Numerous testimonies record the assimilation of emperors to main Greek deities. The chosen deity was usually the patron divinity of the community. And the assimilation was made despite the potential divergence between the significance and attributes of the traditional god and those of the imperial figure. The case of Megalopolis where the emperors were associated with Zeus Lycaeon is specially telling.[41] Another good example is the case of Hermione in Greece where Trajan was equated with Zeus Embaterius[42] or the assimilation of Nerva with Uranus in Sparta.[43] And the relation of Titus and Vespasian with the Cabiri in Thebes is also very telling.[44] These religious constructions were very distant from the ideological message and the imperial propaganda that emanated from Rome. The best way to understand them is as a fruit of a dialogue in power in which Greeks responded with their own creations to the political construction that surrounded them.

This conclusion does not imply that in some cases the Greek creations were not designed in accordance with Roman traditions. As Price has clearly illustrated, even

[37] See e.g. F. Lozano, 'Thea Livia in Athens: redating IG II2 3242', *ZPE* 148 (2004), 177–80.
[38] *IG* 2^2 3242.
[39] Muses: *BCH* 26 (1902) 153, no. 4. Mnemosyne: *BCH* 98 (1974) 649, no. 3.
[40] Artemis: *SEG* 22.152. Hygieia: *IG* 2^2 3240.
[41] *IG* 5.2, 515b, l. 31 and *IG* 5.2, 463.
[42] *IG* 4.701.
[43] *IG* 5.1, 667, *IG* 5.1, 659, *IG* 5.1, 662, and *IG* 5.1, 655.
[44] *SEG* 22.418.

though Greeks were not forced to adopt Roman procedures, 'there was nothing to prevent a Greek city from taking note of official developments in Rome'.[45] For example, Samos changed its traditional dating system so that the new one would start from the apotheosis of Augustus; and the choir of Livia at Ephesus revised its status when the empress was divinized in Rome.[46] Similarly, the city of Athens decided to celebrate Geta's accession:

> May it be resolved by the Council of the Areopagus and the Council of the Five Hundred and the Demos of the Athenians to offer sacrifices in every family and to keep holiday both publicly and privately for all the imperial family; to celebrate this *dies imperii* in accord with their other *dies imperii* as we have learned through their holy announcement.[47]

The traditional institutions of Athens were designing and accepting a new measure that was obviously centrally inspired, as is clear from the last part of the inscription that stated the activity of the *legatus pro praetore*.[48] However, the language employed, the civic bodies involved, and the rituals approved were all, as the text indicated, in accord 'with ancestral custom',[49] so that an external interference was subtly naturalized.

IV. *SEBASTOI*: AN ABSTRACTION OF POWER

The Athenians honoured Julia Domna, wife of the emperor Septimius Severus, at the end of the second century A.D. She received the title 'Saviour' (σωτῆρα) and was assimilated to the traditional protective goddess of Athens, Athena Polias. She was also honoured with divine worship. A seriously damaged inscription records the action:

> The war-*archon* is to sacrifice to the Mother of the Forces on the first day of the Roman year, and these sacrifices are to be started by the priestess of Athena Polias […] A golden statue <of Julia Domna> is to be set up in the Parthenon; and the general is to perform the preliminary sacrifice to Good Fortune and the *archontes* and all the priests and the herald are to pour libations, and the priestess and the queen of the king-*archon* are to sacrifice and to offer the *eiseteria* of the priesthood to Athena Polias; and the retiring *arrhephoroi* are also to sacrifice and raise the torch and dance at the festival, in order that through these events also our reverence towards the saviour of Athens Julia Sebaste may be made evident.[50]

As was common practice in the Greek world, the decree ended with a notice of where the inscription should be published: 'The account of these matters shall be inscribed on a tablet and set up by the altar of the *Sebastoi*.'[51] This text was published when the system of emperor worship in Athens and the entire empire had been

[45] Price (n. 6), 75.

[46] See further Price (n. 6), 75–6. The use of the apotheosis in a Greek context is not, however, a common procedure: L. Robert, 'Le dieu Fulvus à Thessalonique', *Hellenica* 2 (1946), 37–42. The case of Titus Flavius Praxias, a Roman citizen of Acmonia, who imitated Roman religious traditions—he imitated a *rosalia*—is also an interesting example of the inspiration of Greek festivals by Roman practices: Price (n. 6), 89–90.

[47] J. H. Oliver, *Marcus Aurelius: Aspects of Civic and Cultural Policy in the East* (Princeton, 1970), no. 23. Translation of lines 26–31.

[48] Oliver (n. 47), no. 23, lines 33–4.

[49] Oliver (n. 47), no. 23, lines 16–17.

[50] *IG* 2^2 1076; improved edition in J. H. Oliver, 'Julia Domna as Athena Polias', in *Athenian Studies in Honor of W. S. Ferguson*, *HSCPh* suppl. 1 (1940), 521–30. Translation from M. Beard, J. North, and S. Price (n. 34), 2.257.

[51] See previous note.

functioning for more than two centuries. Who were then honoured at the common altar of all *Sebastoi* by that time?

As we have seen, the answer is quite straightforward: the altar was a place for the worship of Roman emperors and their family, past and present.[52] However, the information in this inscription also helps us to assess the semantic richness of the concept we have been analysing. *Augusti* is a religious notion that combines both an individual and a communal meaning, because while it paid attention to individual members of the group, at the same time, it emphasized an abstract conception of power and the people who held it.

The permanence and remembrance of individual *Sebastoi* should be stressed. Even though, in general, 'cults of individual emperors did not long endure the death of that emperor',[53] there were also successful cults that were celebrated for a long time. Augustus, for instance, founder of the regime, was remembered individually in some cities and leagues long after his death.[54] But there are other examples, such as the cases already mentioned of Tiberius in Asia, and Germanicus and Drusus Nero in Athens.[55]

However, I believe that the real importance and political potential of these new terms does not lie in the identity of the particular Roman potentates that were subsumed in it, but in the abstraction of the imperial family, since the appearance of a cult to the *Sebastoi* constitutes both the creation of a more developed tool to control society and also a better vehicle to sustain and explain the privileged position of the emperors. By the middle of the first century the focus of the imperial cult became the living emperor and the *Sebastoi*. In general, individual names of previous emperors ceased to be regularly spelled out and came to be summed up as *Θεοὶ Σεβαστοί*.[56] This procedure led to an easy and politically unproblematic shift in the focus of the individual cult from deceased to new emperor, preventing the awkward abolition of previous cult by adding them to a wider and explicative concept. The decision to eradicate a cult was left to the central Roman government.[57] The cult of the *Sebastoi* was, thus, a convenient mean to stress devotion to the living emperor while maintaining due respect and worship of past rulers.

Moreover, from an ideological point of view, these new general terms presented substantial advantages over the mere list of divinized emperors, since they grant a vision of continuity able to assure the adhesion of citizens and the tranquillity of rulers. They also constituted a more durable governmental weapon, since emperors

[52] This is also confirmed by such priesthood titles as the Spartan *ἀρχιερεὺς τοῦ Σεβαστοῦ καὶ τῶν Θείων προγόνων αὐτοῦ* ('high priest of the reigning emperor and his divine ancestors'; *IG* 5.1, 305, 551, 553–5) who is frequently just called 'of the *Sebastoi*' (e. g. *IG* 5.1, 380, *IG* 5.1, 1172, *SEG* 11.779, *IG* 5.1, 500, *IG* 5.1, 525). A similar example is that of the Achaean *ἀρχιερεὺς Θεῶν Σεβαστῶν καὶ γένους Σεβαστῶν* ('high priest of the Augustan gods and the family of the *Augusti*', *IG* 2^2 3538) whose title is also shortened to 'of the *Sebastoi*' (e. g. *IG* 5.1, 463, *IG* 5.1, 1451 and *Syll.*^{3} 846).

[53] Price (n. 6), 61.

[54] See examples in Price (n. 6), 61–2.

[55] More examples in Burrell (n. 27), 367: 'Pergamon's temple of Zeus *Philios* and Trajan was celebrated on coins issued over a century after its dedication, to flatter Trajan Decius; there are late but specific references to the temple of Hadrian at Cyzicus; and Ephesus' temple of the Augusti was probably later known as the temple of Vespasian.'

[56] See Reynolds (n. 20), 48. The author was talking about Aphrodisias but her conclusions applied in general for the entire Greek East.

[57] A condemnation conventionally called *damnatio memoriae*; against the use of this term, see Price (n. 6), 194.

could change and dynasties could disappear but the religious concept in which the government of the *princeps* was based would continue ideologically intact.[58] These types of synthetic abstraction represent complex realities, as do examples from recent societies, such as The Unknown Soldier, All Saints, the Homeland or the Monarchy. These concepts lack a deep rational foundation, but they are useful in the political and religious fields. In conclusion, the category of *Divi Augusti* and its related Greek counterpart, the *Theoi Sebastoi*, helped to explain the difficult political construction that was the Principate.

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[58] See the interesting explanation of the use of the *Divi* in the Decian 'persecution' in C. Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire* (Berkeley–Los Angeles–London, 2000), 206–9 at 209, 'One did not need to know specific dates or deeds of these emperors in order to understand their function in this ceremony [i.e. public sacrifice]. If their identities as idiosyncratic individuals were ambiguous, their collocation expressed a message wholly devoid of ambiguity. Placed before such a gallery, individuals making their prayers for the eternity of the empire saw the current emperor as one in a series of uniquely capable individuals, whose succession encapsulated and expressed a narrative of stability and strength.'