

## The *Pulvinar* in Roman Culture\*

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**SUMMARY:** This paper examines the cultural workings of the Latin term *pulvinar* in its rhetorical, literary, and material contexts. The aim is to illuminate the term's specific meanings and to assess its broader symbolic or ideological point. Three uses constitute the central focus of this essay: 1) the "lectisternium," 2) the "sacred-marriage bed," and 3) the *Pulvinar ad Circum Maximum* ("temple" at the Circus Maximus). The essay draws from scholarship on public representations of the domestic sphere and on emperor worship in order to understand the term as a vibrant and sophisticated cultural emblem in the early Empire.

### INTRODUCTION

What precisely did the Latin term *pulvinar* signify? The question harbors more narrowly a lexical problem (what is the referent in a particular context?) and more broadly a cultural one (how was *pulvinar* symbolically or socially significant?). The answers are bound up with an often contradictory set of modern and ancient habits of thought. For modern observers the paucity and the complexity of the material and lexical records have hindered understanding. But ambiguity was also part and parcel of the term's usage and message. What *pulvinar* meant was difficult to extricate from the competing

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\* The following article was developed in the course of research at the Thesaurus Linguae Latinae in Munich, during which I contributed the (forthcoming) *TLL* entry on *pulvinar*. Although the methods of analysis in the present article differ from those of the *TLL*, the generous support and tutelage provided in Munich were essential to the material discussed here. Versions of this article were presented to audiences at Amherst, Cornell, Stanford, and the University of Arizona, who provided stimulating feedback. A host of corrections and invaluable suggestions were offered by Sinclair Bell, Kathleen Coleman, Tony Corbeill, and two anonymous referees for *TAPA*. All translations are mine unless indicated otherwise.

ritual and symbolic associations it was meant to evoke. Semantic differences often become visible only upon consideration of the ideological or rhetorical contexts in which the *pulvinar* was typically implicated by design. Nevertheless, the available evidence paints a fascinating and well-rounded picture of the *pulvinar*, a capacious emblem in the cultural repertoire through which sanctity, legitimacy, and power were constructed and construed.

### THE MEANINGS OF *PULVINAR*

Most of the meanings of *pulvinar* may be divided as follows: 1) divine couch, 2) sacred marriage-bed, 3) sacred edifice or space (similar to *aedes*, *fanum*, or *templum*), including the *Pulvinar* in the *Circus Maximus*, and 4) *lectisternium* (a sacrificial meal for a god). Given the wealth of religious objects, spaces, or practices designated by *pulvinar*, caution is warranted in regarding “divine couch” as the basic definition. Despite the ranging lexical entry in Forcellini (1865) and the discussion of *pulvinar* in Wissowa’s (1924) *RE* article “*lectisternium*,” the *OLD*’s primary definition fails to recognize anything beyond a physical seat (either religious or honorific), thereby occluding other basic meanings.<sup>1</sup>

*Pulvinar* seems to derive from *pulvinus*, a cushion or pillow, which has a fairly broad application in agriculture and architecture to describe upraised or bulging objects: a bed of raised earth (compare the diminutive *pulvillus*) or a bulging or protuberance in a variety of structures (compare the adjective *pulvinatus*). The precise connection between the essentially secular *pulvinus* and the religious *pulvinar* is unclear, though *pulvinar* may have indicated something like a “collection of *pulvini*,” as when Varro *L.* 5.167, if our text is correct, states: “*pulvinar vel a pluribus vel a pollulis declinarunt*” (They adapted *pulvinar* either from many [things] or from little [things]). The signal difference lies in the distinctly religious character of *pulvinar*.

This essay concentrates on three semantic categories of the term’s relevance for Roman culture: 1) *lectisternium*, 2) sacred marriage-bed, 3) the *Pulvinar ad Circum Maximum* (“temple” at the *Circus Maximus*).<sup>2</sup> *Lectisternium* has

<sup>1</sup> Forcellini 1865 s.v. *pulvinar*. Wissowa’s “*lectisternium*” entry in *RE* significantly influenced Hug’s for “*pulvinar*.” *OLD* 1 “A cushioned couch, one of several on which images of gods were placed at a *lectisternium*; (also used singly in commemorations of particular gods or deified human beings).” *OLD* 1b “(applied to a couch occupied by an actual deity or person enjoying quasi-divine honours)...applied to a bed of state...applied to a seat of honour.” *OLD* 2 notes Plautus’s use as “a kind of beaching platform for ships” at *Cas.* 557: “*ibo intro, ut subducam navim rusum in pulvinaria*.” Plautus’s use is obscure.

<sup>2</sup> I purposely use the capitalized form *Pulvinar* throughout for the *Pulvinar ad Circum Maximum*, in order to distinguish it from other senses. It was the endpoint for the *pompa*

often been overlooked, despite its use as early as Cicero. The “sacred marriage-bed” is entirely absent from modern discussions. Lastly, the *Pulvinar ad Circum Maximum*, largely due to mention of it in Augustus’s *Res Gestae* and in Suetonius, has become a contested subject for scholars of Roman material culture and religion in the imperial period.

This essay draws upon two distinct yet overlapping focuses in the scholarship. Building on recent work on the civic relevance of the domestic sphere, I discuss the *pulvinar* as a key element in connecting moral and religious discourses with representations of the imperial family and *domus*.<sup>3</sup> Recent years have also seen salutary changes in our understanding of emperor worship. Gradel (2002) has provided new impulse to the scholarship, stressing the careful distinction of private worship, such as the compital cults in Rome, from state sanctioned public worship, including state cult of the emperor’s *Genius* or consecration by the senate. Reflecting larger tendencies in the scholarship, he has underscored the anachronism in regarding emperor cult in theological rather than sociological terms and has emphasized emperor worship as an honorific practice which should not be colored by modern (Christian) ideas of divinity.<sup>4</sup>

The paper concludes by considering how *pulvinar* illustrates general features of Roman language habits. While we can typically determine the meaning of *pulvinar* in a given context, ancient authors often neglected fine distinctions, sometimes deliberately so. Attempts to account for this phenomenon will be stymied by regarding it either as inattention to meaningful differences or, at the other extreme, as sophisticated ambiguity. The *pulvinar* came to emblemize central Roman values: religious piety, martial achievement, divine honor, or even some combination of these. Authors utilized this emblematic character

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*circensis*, where accoutrements and images of the gods were brought: “tensam ait vocari Sinnius Capito vehiculum quo exuviae deorum ludicris circensibus in Circum ad Pulvinar vehuntur” (Fest. p. 364M). Humphrey 1986: 78 discusses the Festus passage, which has often been wrongly interpreted to mean “sacred couch.”

<sup>3</sup> Discussions of the Roman household, “public” and “private” space, the imperial family and *domus*, and Roman moral life portrayed through women are legion. I have found the following most useful: Millar 1977: 189–201; Saller 1984; Purcell 1986; Rawson 1986; Treggiari 1991; D’Ambra 1993; Edwards 1993; Millar 1993; Treggiari 1994; Wallace-Hadrill 1996; Riggsby 1997; Royo 1999; Keith 2000; Severy 2003; Milnor 2005; and Langlands 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Justice cannot be done to this topic in a footnote. The following have significantly influenced the approach taken here: Taylor 1931; Weinstock 1971; Price 1984; North 1986; Fishwick 1987–2005; Beard, Price, & North 1998; Feeney 1998; Clauss 1999; and Gradel 2002. This short list largely excludes the voluminous bibliography on Caesar, since the bulk of the paper focuses on later developments.

in order to claim and to contest legitimacy and authority in moral, religious, political, and aesthetic spheres. The symbolic manipulation of the term, with its attendant disregard for semantic distinctions, conflicts with the modern lexicographical impulse to posit “lexical correspondences.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, it will seem at times that this essay is working in two diametrically opposed directions: on the one hand to understand the *pulvinar* at the lexical level as precisely as possible, but on the other hand to emphasize how obstacles to that endeavor are rooted in the symbolic and communicative habits of Roman culture.

## 1. THE *LECTISTERNIUM*

The *pulvinar* in the sense of “sacred couch” was a central element in the religious rites of the *supplicatio* and the *lectisternium*. *Supplicationes* were traditionally acts of *obsecratio* (entreaty to ward off impending danger or actual misfortune) or *gratulatio* (thanksgiving after a felicitous outcome). At such ceremonies Romans would typically offer wine and incense to the gods on the allotted day (or days) of *supplicatio*. In ever increasing frequency towards the end of the Republic and into the imperial period, *supplicationes* publicly recognized military success or events otherwise considered beneficial to the *res publica*.<sup>6</sup>

The *lectisternium* (from *lectus* and *sternere* “to lay out a couch [for dining]”) was a sacrificial meal for a god (or gods). Like *supplicationes*, *lectisternia* could be held to seek divine good-will either in anticipation or in celebration of a particular event. However, the *lectisternium* was also a regular element of Roman cult. During both the *supplicatio* and the *lectisternium*, representations of the gods rested on “sacred couches” (*pulvinaria*) as offerings were placed before them. The close connection between *lectisternium* and *pulvinar* resulted in the transference of the meaning of *lectisternium* onto *pulvinar*. *Pulvinar* did not, however, acquire the meaning *supplicatio*.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See Kaster 2005: 6–9 for the difficulties of lexical “correspondence” or “equivalence” in the case of Roman emotion-talk. Considerable flexibility in the use of the singular and plural of *pulvinar* in both prose and poetry adds to the difficulties.

<sup>6</sup> This outline of the *supplicatio* is simplified in some details for the sake of clarity. On *supplicationes* see Lake 1937; Halkin 1953; Freyburger 1977 and 1978. Halkin 1953 is the most comprehensive study of *supplicationes*. Freyburger 1977 highlights linguistic and ritual aspects.

<sup>7</sup> For examples of *pulvinar* to mean *lectisternium*, cf. Cic. *Tusc.* 4.4 “et deorum pulvinaribus et epulis magistratuum fides praecinunt; the *Lex Coloniae Iuliae Genitivae*” (CIL I<sup>2</sup> 594=Crawford 1996: 415) 128.16–18 “suo quoque anno ludos circenses sacr[i]ficia pulvinariaque facienda” and 19–21 “[lu]dis circensibus faciendis sacrificiis procu[r]andis pulvinaribus faciendis”; Liv. 5.52.6 “in Iovis epulo num alibi quam in Capitolio pulvinar

In the aftermath of Caesar's assassination, Cicero skillfully manipulated this constellation of religious terms and their meanings as part of a larger strategy to discredit Antony's *pietas* towards the *res publica* and towards the memory of Caesar. Cicero's sophisticated attack spans two passages from the *First* and *Second Philippics*, 1.13 and 2.110. Through reference to the *pulvinar*, Cicero claims that Antony indulges in self-serving irreverence for Roman religious custom more broadly and for Caesar's memory more specifically. That two-pronged assault, the following section will argue, depends on the meaning of *pulvinar* as both "sacred couch" and "*lectisternium*" at *Philippics* 2.110.

Cicero launched this attack in the *First Philippic* when he excused his previous day's absence from the senate (September 1) and registered opposition to the legislated *supplicationes*. Antony had forced through a measure in Cicero's absence and before an unwilling senate (*Phil.* 1.13):

an me censetis, patres conscripti, quod vos inviti secuti estis, decretum fuisse, ut parentalia cum supplicationibus miscerentur, ut inexpressibiles religiones in rem publicam inducerentur, ut decernerentur supplicationes mortuo? ... adduci ... non possem ut quemquam mortuum coniungerem cum deorum immortalium religione; ut, cuius sepulcrum usquam exstet ubi parentetur, ei publice supplicetur.

Do you suppose, senatorial fathers, that I'd have voted for the proposal to which you unwillingly agreed: offerings for the dead mixed up with thanksgivings, practices introduced into the republic that cannot be atoned for, thanksgivings voted to a dead man? ... I couldn't bring myself to associate anyone who's dead with worship of the undying gods; that a man, whose tomb stands anywhere where offerings for the dead may be brought to it, receive communal supplication.

Cicero mocks the proposal that Caesar should receive divine cult after death, sardonically quipping that Antony has mixed *supplicationes* with *parentalia*, religious observances to honor dead relatives (*parentes*). Just how much Cicero aimed to stigmatize that impious mixture shaped his complex, nearly baroque, manner of expression. The clauses *ubi parentetur, ei publice supplicetur* are carefully arranged in parallel through assonance (*ubi, publice, suppli-*) and through homoeoteleuton in verbs with an equal number of

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suscipi potest?"; Prud. *perist.* 10.1056 "macellum pingue pulvinarium"; Macr. 3.11.6 "mensa arulaeque eodem die, quo aedes ipsa dedicari solent, unde mensa hoc ritu dedicata in templo arae usum et religionem obtinet pulvinaris." Although the sense is difficult to determine, *pulvinar* may also mean *lectisternium* at: Hor. *Carm.* 1.37.3, Nep. *Timoth.* 2.2, *Année Épigr.* 1927 num. 158 (an inscriptional fragment from the reign of Tiberius), Serv. A. 2.148. On the *lectisternium* see Nouilhan 1989 and Hölscher 2007.

syllables, *parentetur* and *supplicetur*. That Cicero sought the latter effect is suggested by the unexpected tense and fairly uncommon impersonal usage of *supplicetur*. That verb is also separated from the governing *ut* in order to bracket the intervening clauses, *cuius...exstet* and *ubi parentetur*. Syntactical chiasmus “mixes together” these two irreconcilable practices: Cicero’s rhetoric tangibly demonstrates Antony’s sacrilege.<sup>8</sup>

Cicero reprises this attack with renewed vigor in the *Second Philippic*. In-veighing against Antony’s failure to observe a fifth day’s celebration of *Ludi Romani in Circo* (September 19, 44 B.C.E.), which was previously decreed for the now defunct Caesar, Cicero poses the following questions (*Phil.* 2.110):

et tu in Caesaris memoria diligens, tu illum amas mortuum? quem is honorem maiorem consecutus erat, quam ut haberet pulvinar, simulacrum, fastigium, flaminem? est ergo flamen, ut Iovi, ut Marti, ut Quirino, sic divo Iulio M. Antonius. quid igitur cessas? cur non inauguraris? sume diem, vide, qui te inauguret; collegae sumus; nemo negabit. o detestabilem hominem, sive quod tyranni sacerdos es sive quod mortui! quaero deinceps, num, hodiernus dies qui sit, ignores. nescis heri quartum in Circo diem ludorum Romanorum fuisse? te autem ipsum ad populum tulisse ut quintus praeterea dies Caesari tribueretur? cur non sumus praetextati? cur honorem Caesaris tua lege datum deserui patimur? an supplicationes addendo diem contaminari passus es, pulvinaria contaminari noluisti? aut undique religionem tolle aut usque quaque conserva.

You hold dear Caesar’s memory? You cherish him in his grave? What greater honor did he obtain than to have a sacred couch, an image, a gable, a flamen? Just as Jupiter, as Mars, as Quirinus have a flamen so Julius “The Divine” has Marcus Antonius. Why delay? Why not be inaugurated? Set a day, have someone inaugurate you; we’re [augural] colleagues; no one will refuse. You wretch of a man, you priest of a tyrant, priest of a dead man! Next I’ll ask you whether you’re unaware what day it is? Don’t you know that yesterday was the fourth day of Roman games in the circus? And don’t you know that you yourself put a law through an assembly of the people providing that a fifth day be added for Caesar? Why are we not in festival garb? Why do we let the honor granted Caesar by your law be abandoned? Perhaps you let Thanksgivings [*supplicationes*] be contaminated [*contaminari*] by adding a day, but did not want the same to happen to the sacred couches [*pulvinaria*]? Either do away with

<sup>8</sup> We would expect *supplicaretur*, as noted in the standard editions, Halm-Laubmann 1905; Denniston 1952; and Ramsey 2002; though none remark upon Cicero’s motivation for that change. Ramsey nicely elucidates Cicero’s compressed expression “*ut ... supplicetur*” is explanatory of what precedes, dependent on an understood *qua coniunctione efficitur* (Halm). Hence the shift from secondary sequence after *possem ...* to primary. It is rare for *supplicare* + the dat. to be impersonal passive as it is here” (2002:114).

religious custom altogether or preserve it on every point (trans. adapted from Shackleton Bailey 1986).

This is fine-tuned invective at full throttle. Cicero pillories Antony's claim to honor and to preserve Caesar's memory. After "contaminating" the *supplicationes*, Antony now hesitates to carry out the ceremonies anticipated for the fifth day of *ludi Romani in Circo*. Is Antony's inaction motivated by reluctance to contaminate the *pulvinaria* as well (so Cicero's taunting suggestion)? How lamentable it is, Cicero concludes, that Antony's sudden reverence for religious custom should hinder his otherwise reckless ambition.<sup>9</sup>

The rhetorical flourish that concludes Cicero's imaginary interrogation (*pulvinaria contaminari noluisti?*) has troubled modern readers in no small measure. Given that *pulvinaria* were used during *supplicationes* to support representations of the gods, commentators have puzzled over Cicero's suggestion that the "sacred couches" could not be contaminated if the *supplicationes* were. Reference to the fifth additional day of *ludi* compounds the problem. If the couches had already been a ceremonial element during the preceding days of the *ludi*, would they not already have been contaminated? Cicero's rhetoric seems logically implausible in its painting of Antony's religious dereliction.<sup>10</sup>

What Cicero means by *pulvinaria* depends on the larger rhetorical strategy of the *Philippics* and on the ceremonial context that he discusses. The problem can be solved if we take *pulvinaria* to mean *lectisternia* rather than "divine couches." In fact this solution is anticipated to some degree by Halm-Laubmann (1905), Lacey (1986), and Mosca (1996). Their interpretations are in the right direction but require refinement and clarification.<sup>11</sup> Additional background will help to illuminate the reading proposed here.

<sup>9</sup>Two measures are described by Cicero in the *First* and *Second Philippics*: 1) a law passed at Antony's instigation by assembly at an unknown time to accord a fifth day of *ludi* to Caesar, 2) the *senatus consultum* on *supplicationes* from September 1.

<sup>10</sup>Denniston 1952 posed the problem in these terms and is largely followed by Ramsey 2002. We have reason to insist on the coherence of Cicero's rhetoric. We possess, after all, his response to Atticus, *Att.* 16.11, in which he says that Atticus both quoted the purple patches and suggested (even quite minor) changes. If Atticus expressed confusion over the present passage, it has left no trace in Cicero's letters.

<sup>11</sup>Halm-Laubmann 1905 described it as "Verehrung *ad pulvinar*" (126), but connects it to the *supplicationes*. Lacey 1986: 147, 239 refers to the *pulvinaria* as "banquet days." Mosca 1996: 239 translates as "la cerimonia dei sacri cuscini." Mosca 1996: 264n226 remarks on the *lectisternium* but not on *pulvinar* as a lexical equivalent. This line of interpretation has not been picked up on by recent editions and translations: cf. Fuhrmann 1982: 197 and 477n151; Shackleton Bailey 1986: 99; and Ramsey 2002: 324.



The *Second Philippic* was from the outset a literary pamphlet. Unlike the more conciliatory *First*, Cicero never delivered the *Second*, but chose to bide his time and to circulate it during the fall of 44 B.C.E. among political allies. Wedded to the fiction of its delivery on September 19, the *Second* is crafted as an immediate response to Antony's actual speech of the same day, a meticulously staged reply in which Cicero cried havoc and let slip the dogs of invective.

The *Ludi Romani* were annual games in honor of *Iuppiter Optimus Maximus*. The centerpiece of the festival was likely the *epulum Iovis*, held on September 13; *ludi scaenici*, theatrical performances, preceded the *epulum Iovis* and *ludi circenses* (or *in Circo*), equestrian competitions, began on September 15.<sup>12</sup> An important dimension of these games comes to us through various accounts treating the Roman general and statesman, Marcus Furius Camillus. In 367 B.C.E. Camillus achieved agreement among the Roman orders (*concordia ordinum*) by bringing it about that plebeians could be admitted to the consulship. In celebration, a fourth day was added to the *ludi Romani in Circo*. It was Weinstock's (1971) insight that the subsequent addition centuries later of a fifth day for Caesar (September 19) would be interpreted in light of Camillus's precedent, and would present a forceful public manifestation of *concordia* achieved under Caesar. Weinstock also stressed the extraordinary honors expected on the fifth day for Caesar.<sup>13</sup>

Cicero was alert to the potential symbolic relevance of the day, which he cleverly manipulated within the fictional staging of the *Second Philippic*. It is important to remember the "now" of the *Second Philippic*: Cicero persists in the elaborate fabrication that it is delivered in Antony's presence and before the Senate on September 19. He insinuates that the ritual act of *pulvinaria* (meaning *lectisternia*) would be contaminated *at the moment of performance*. The phrase *supplicationes ... contaminari* at *Philippics* 2.110 reformulates *supplicationes miscere* from *Philippics* 1.13. *Contaminare* means not only "to contaminate" but more strictly "to mix together (improperly)."<sup>14</sup> Cicero has

<sup>12</sup> See DeGrassi 1963 on the calendrical record of the games. Bernstein 1998 details *ludi publici* in the Republican period; 142–56 the *ludi Magni* (i.e. *Romani*); cf. Bernstein 2007.

<sup>13</sup> On Camillus see Liv. 6.42.9–14 (with Kraus 1994: 330–333); Ov. *Fast.* 1.641–44; Plut. *Cam.* 42.4; and Hellegouarc'h 1970; on Caesar and *concordia*, Weinstock 1971: 260, 265, and 285–86.

<sup>14</sup> TLL IV 629.11–12 [1907, Goetz] gives under heading IA: "*miscendo depravare, male miscere, deformare, aliquid aliqua re.*" It places *Philippics* 2.110 under heading IB2a: "*i.q. corrumpere, inquinare, maculare aliqua re.*" The careful reprisal of Cicero's earlier *supplicationes miscere* makes *Philippics* 2.110 an equally strong candidate for IA. There is textual uncertainty about the second instance of *contaminari*, but its exclusion or acceptance does not affect my argument.



abandoned the ostensibly more civil tone of the *First Philippic* while still drawing on its statements. Thus, at 2.110 Cicero means, roughly: “although you have permitted the *supplicationes* to be mixed together/contaminated (by awarding *supplicationes* to a dead man), you’re now unwilling to mix together/contaminate the *lectisternia* (which were anticipated for today, the fifth day of the *ludi*).”<sup>15</sup>

Yet why does Cicero focus so intently on this point and choose to make it in terms that, undoubtedly confusing to the modern reader, would likely have exercised the interpretive faculties of his contemporaries? The semantic slippage between *pulvinar* meaning “sacred couch” and *pulvinar* meaning “*lectisternium*” is a carefully executed rhetorical device. Cicero turns the tables on Antony’s attempt to profit from Caesar’s memory. Antony’s imputed defilement of *pulvinaria* was essential to Cicero’s strategy. The *pulvinar* represented Caesar’s divine legacy and Cicero ruthlessly undermines Antony’s position as its guardian. At the opening of 2.110 (quoted above), he states: “et tu in Caesaris memoria diligens, tu illum amas mortuum? quem is honorem maiorem consecutus erat quam ut haberet pulvinar, simulacrum, fastigium, flaminem?” The association of Caesar’s *pulvinar* with his memory becomes a measuring stick by which Cicero publicly judges Antony. Cicero can in turn use that stick to thrash Antony’s alleged impiety.

It is bad enough that Antony conducts senatorial business on a day once legislated in Caesar’s honor. More importantly Cicero’s rhetorical trap relies on the following point: even to carry out the intended celebrations would

<sup>15</sup> Sacrificial offerings are attested in conjunction with the first day’s *pompa circensis* (Dionysius of Halicarnassus 7.72 and Scullard 1981: 183–86) and a *lectisternium* is held repeatedly throughout the *ludi saeculares* (cf. Val. Max. 2.4.5 on the three nights of *lectisternia* and games in honor of Dis Pater and Proserpina). It is plausible to expect that Caesar would have been honored with a special ceremony, including sacrificial offerings, on the day in his honor. Weinstock 1971: 286 notes: “on this fifth day Caesar would no doubt have received special homage.” Latte 1960: 250 and 250n1 remarks that the increased number of days for the games did not include an increase in the attendant religious ceremonies. I am not convinced by his suppositions, which rest largely on the assumption that the games lost their religious meaning and devolved into an outlet for “Volksbelustigung.” It is reasonable to assume that a *lectisternium* in honor of Caesar on September 19 could have been anticipated. The *Lex Coloniae Iuliae Genitivae* (cited above) lays special stress on the planning of *pulvinaria* (in the sense of *lectisternia*) in the context of circus events. Nevertheless, I do not wish to insist that a particular ceremony was in fact planned or even that it would have been carried out in the Circus Maximus (since other venues for *lectisternia* are possible). Rather, I wish to emphasize that Cicero’s rhetoric implies—and his implication is plausible—that a *lectisternium* could have been intended for September 19.

entail a sacrilege against all “*pulvinaria*,” Caesar’s included.<sup>16</sup> His calculated language permits Cicero just enough semantic wiggle-room for his rhetorical point: to expose Antony’s true motivations (*Phil.* 2.111): “nisi forte vis fateri te omnia quaestu tuo, non illius [sc. Caesaris] dignitate metiri” (Maybe you’ll admit that you assess everything by its advantage to you and not out of consideration for his [Caesar’s] dignity).

The exchange between Cicero and Antony (one thoroughly colored by Cicero’s portrayal) exemplifies the rhetorical complexity, ideological concerns, and political jockeying surrounding the usage and meaning(s) of *pulvinar*. Cicero is, in part, self-consciously using old tricks. He had repeatedly excoriated Clodius for defilement of the *pulvinaria* as part of the *Bona Dea* scandal. He alleges at *Philippic* 1.12 that Antony threatened to tear down his house, which had been (already torn down by Clodius and) rebuilt with public moneys. Years later Cicero paints Antony as a latter-day Clodius and the *pulvinar* is a seminal term through which that connection is made. Memory of Cicero’s taunting of Clodius would endure well into later centuries (Quint. *Inst.* 5.11.12 and Iulius Severianus’s *Praecepta Artis Rhetoricae* 19 both cite it with admiration).<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, the passage touches upon two common difficulties in the term *pulvinar*: the philological difficulty of knowing what a particular instance of the term means and the broader yet related question of its rhetorical and ideological point. Beyond Cicero’s self-citation, the passage derives its power from skilled manipulation of the socially charged practices, symbolic value, and semantic variance inherent in the term. Such complexities persisted into the imperial period, during which the *pulvinar* played a signal role in representations of the emperor, his family, and the imperial *domus*. Before turning to the *pulvinar* as “sacred marriage-bed” and to the *Pulvinar* in the *Circus Maximus*, the following section briefly addresses the *pulvinar*’s connection to imperial consecration.

<sup>16</sup> On the way in which Cicero deftly backs Antony into a corner, cf. Craig 1993: 147–68 on Cicero’s strategy of “dilemma” in *Philippics Two*. Craig 1993: 25 remarks: “Dilemma is the offering to the opponent ... of two choices such that he must choose one or the other, and either choice hurts him.... the situation that gives rise to the dilemma may be some fixed circumstance, some presumable error of the target, or a fundamental inconsistency in the target’s behavior.” Cicero underscores Antony’s inconsistency in the handling of religious matters.

<sup>17</sup> Cicero again makes a point of Antony’s threat to tear down his house at *Philippics* 5.19, where Cicero also mentions the *supplicatio* legislated at the senate meeting of September 1, 44 B.C.E. See now Evans (forthcoming) on Cicero’s likening of Antony to Clodius (and to Catiline) in the *Philippics*.

## THE PULVINAR AND IMPERIAL CONSECRATION

The array of honors, symbols, and titles accorded to Caesar left a harrowing precedent for the heirs to his legacy. Caesar's unchecked ascendancy and violent demise sternly admonished subsequent pretenders to the purple (Augustus most of all) who craved more lasting success. There developed a peculiar game of cat-and-mouse, in which, to maintain autocratic control and to sustain the *dignitas* of Rome's ruling classes, the emperor obligingly waived certain *honores* as he willingly assumed others.<sup>18</sup> One particular dimension, the emperor's "divine status," was an unsettling problem for the ancients and is now a heated subject for modern scholars.<sup>19</sup> Manifest unease about the emperor's unfettered status on the one hand, and about the aristocracy's standing in relation to the *princeps* on the other, guided and constrained public ruler cult at Rome. State worship of the *divi*, in which the *pulvinar* assumed a symbolic and honorific function, evolved into a system to sanctify dead emperors with supreme honors.<sup>20</sup>

One might be tempted to refer other occurrences of *pulvinar*—a tendency not absent in the scholarship—to the emperor's "divinity." Yet, the evidence paints a far more complicated and nuanced picture. The *pulvinar* fulfilled various roles in different circumstances, and context determined the meaning of the symbol within a complex social framework. The present section briefly addresses the *pulvinar* in imperial consecration after death in order to distinguish it from the usage discussed in the subsequent sections of this essay: the "sacred marriage-bed" and the *Pulvinar* in the *Circus Maximus*.

The first example of the *pulvinar* in connection with deification comes in Ovid's account of Romulus's apotheosis (Ov. *Met.* 14.827–8):

<sup>18</sup> Béranger 1948 and 1953 are the classical studies. Wallace-Hadrill 1982 teases out many of the tensions in the emperor's interaction with all segments of Rome's populace.

<sup>19</sup> Gradel 2002: 109 "Even when the principate in practice evolved into an office with unlimited powers, rather than a position resting on a conglomerate of different prerogatives and general *auctoritas*, this was never completely formalized in the constitutional façade of Rome. No living emperor ever became a state god after Caesar; though the sources have sometimes been taken to imply cases such as Caligula and Domitian as exceptions, this was, as we shall see, not the case;" compare also the "notion that formal divine status had become linked with the emperor's death" (161).

<sup>20</sup> Clauss 1999 amasses the evidence. For treatment of the mechanics of consecration, see Price 1987 and Gradel 2002: 261–371. Zanker 2004 summarizes the visual spectacle of apotheosis and the funeral *pompa*.

pulchra subit facies et pulvinaribus altis  
dignior, est qualis trabeati forma Quirini.

His handsome image arises, more worthy of *pulvinaria*[?],  
such beauty has Quirinus of the sacred robe.

Romulus's divine ascent to "*pulvinaria* on-high"<sup>21</sup> is more than mythical embellishment to explain his death. His appearance as a constellation in the subsequent lines anticipates the apotheosis of Caesar at the close of Book 15, in which Ovid refers to the comet of July of 44 B.C.E., and through which he can suggest the eventual deification of Augustus. The passage testifies to the notional connection of *pulvinar* with deification after death. Romulus's ascent to the heavens is a calculated example through which the reworking of Rome's mythological and historical past pointedly bears upon conceptions of the present and the future.

Although we lack confirmation that Augustus in fact received a *pulvinar* upon deification (September 17, 14 C.E.), disparate pieces of evidence point to an essentially uniform group of cult elements that were a kind of shorthand for state consecration of *divi* and *divae*: a locus of worship, the *pulvinar*, and a priest.<sup>22</sup> In the case of *divus Nerva*, Pliny not only details these elements of cult worship but also explicitly elaborates the constraints imposed upon deification (Plin. *Pan.* 11.2–3):

tu sideribus patrem intulisti non ad metum civium, non in contumeliam numinum, non in honorem tuum, sed quia deum credis. minus hoc est, cum fit ab his, qui et sese deos putant. sed licet illum aris, pulvinaribus, flamine colas, non alio magis tamen deum et facis et probas, quam quod ipse talis es.

You set your father among the stars not to terrorize the citizens or slander the gods or for your own standing, but because you thought him a god. This act is less when done by those who consider themselves gods too. You may worship him with altars, *pulvinaria*[?], a flamen, yet you make and prove him a god all the more by being such a man.

Pliny lauds Trajan's role in Nerva's deification and his simultaneous refusal to arrogate such honors as incumbent *princeps* (mentioned to point up

<sup>21</sup> The meaning is trying. Bömer 1986: 243–44 appears to favor "sacred couch," but adduces examples of *pulvinar* in the sense of "temple" along with interpretations of this passage in that vein. The difficulty is telling: the right answer is possible and necessary when the distinction is certain and therefore meaningful.

<sup>22</sup> See Clausen 1999: 358 and Cic. *Phil.* 2.110; Suet. *Jul.* 76.1; Sen. *Dial.* 11.17.5; Tac. *Ann.* 15.22.3; Pl. *Pan.* 11.3. It is often difficult to determine what *pulvinar* designates in many of these contexts: couch, *lectisternium*, temple/sanctuary, or some combination of the three.

Domitian's alleged excesses). His statements reflect unease over state worship of living emperors and offer evidence of the role of the *pulvinar* to express that anxiety.<sup>23</sup> To underscore such tensions and to direct emperors was part of the effectiveness of panegyric. It was a means to exert pressure and to impose limits on the emperor's activities within the framework of praise.

Similar considerations arise in the criticism of deification involving the *pulvinar* in Tacitus and Seneca: Tacitus claims that senatorial obsequiousness (*adulatio*) urged divine honors for the daughter of Nero and Poppaea. Seneca criticizes Gaius's honors for Drusilla, a negative *exemplum* in the restraint that he urges in his consolation of Polybius.<sup>24</sup> These examples are clear enough in describing the role of the *pulvinar* in public cult after death. Yet many uses in conjunction with the *princeps* discuss it *Caesare vivo*.

## 2. THE "DOMESTIC" PULVINAR: "SACRED MARRIAGE-BED"

Although convention withheld consecration, including the bestowal of a *pulvinar*, for living emperors in state cult, the *pulvinar* nevertheless became connected with the imperial household. My aim in this section is to examine the larger relevance of the *pulvinar* in its "domestic" context, that is, how notionally private virtues were refashioned in the context of Roman public discourse. The *pulvinar* in such contexts signally shaped ideas of the imperial household, drawing attention, for example, to the conjugal partnership of emperor and empress. It became a locus for and reflective of concerted moral and religious discourses that acquired new currency under Augustus, although they already were and would remain an inalienable element of Roman moral thought. The emperor's wife enjoyed a prominent role in this regard, as the *pulvinar* was connected, with varied emphasis, to her sexual chastity (or indiscretions), and to the dynastic or generational continuity of the imperial household.

Catullus gives us a foretaste of the *pulvinar* as a sacred or divine marriage-bed (Cat. 64.47–49 and 64.265–66):

<sup>23</sup> Gradel 2002: 347 "By voting state divinity to dead emperors, the Senate didactically displayed to the ruling emperor, and empress, the reward awaiting them if they ruled and behaved according to the senatorial ideal." What *pulvinaria* means here is, again, trying: couch, temple, *lectisternium*?

<sup>24</sup> *Exortae adulationes censentium honorem divae et pulvinar aedemque et sacerdotem* (deified in 63 as *diva Claudia* (*virgo*). "The adulation of those according the honor of a goddess, a *pulvinar*, a temple, and a priestess" (Tac. *Ann.* 15.23.3). *Gaius furiosa inconstantia...templa illi constituebat ac pulvinaria* (deified in 38 as *diva Drusilla*). "Gaius, with his raging lack of control, ordered temples and *pulvinaria* for her" (Sen. *Dial.* 11.17.5). Cf. Dio 59.11.2.

pulvinar vero divae geniale locatur  
 sedibus in mediis, Indo quod dente politum  
 tincta tegit roseo conchyli purpura fuco.

.....  
 talibus amplifice vestis decorata figuris  
 pulvinar complexa suo velabat amictu.

But the nuptial couch of the goddess is set  
 in the center of the home, which, polished by Indian ivory,  
 purple cloth imbued with the reddish dye of the shellfish did cover.

.....  
 The coverlet, magnificently adorned with such forms,  
 embraced and covered the couch with its wrapping.

Thetis's *pulvinar* is distinct from the typical "sacred couch." Catullus transfers the meaning from the goddess's cult *pulvinar* to refer to the *lectus genialis* in a domestic context. However, he also emphasizes its public quality, at the center of the household, as a visible marker of impending matrimony.

We cannot know if Catullus coined the usage. Perhaps the innovation required *geniale* for clarity: the adjective otherwise never occurs with *pulvinar*, but is a standard epithet with *torus* or *lectus*. Had we no other example of the term in this sense, we might understand it as an imaginative fancy permitted by poetic license. However, Catullus's precedent found echoes among representations of the empresses, beginning with Livia.<sup>25</sup>

Writing in exile from Tomis, Ovid mentions Livia's *pulvinaria* in an elaboration of the ways in which Augustus has extended Roman power (Ov. *Pont.* 2.2.67–74):

tempus adest aptum precibus. valet ille videtque  
 quas fecit vires, Roma, valere tuas.  
 incolumis coniunx sua pulvinaria servat;  
 promovet Ausonium filius imperium;  
 praeterit ipse suos animo Germanicus annos,  
 nec vigor est Drusi nobilitate minor.  
 adde nurum neptemque pias natosque nepotum  
 ceteraque Augustae membra valere domus.

<sup>25</sup> See Treggiari 1991 and especially 1994 on marriage-bed(s) in the Roman household. It has generally been thought (Treggiari 1994 urges caution) that the elaborately decorated *lectus genialis* stood in the *atrium* and represented the *torus genialis* in the *cubiculum*. See Riggsby 1997 on textual evidence for the *cubiculum*. Later poets followed Catullus's lead: Stat. *Th.* 10.102–104 and Martianus Capella 9.902–903.

The time is upon us for prayers. He [sc. Augustus] flourishes and sees  
 the strengths of yours, Rome, which he made flourish.  
 His unimpaired wife watches over her sacred marriage-bed.  
 His son extends the Ausonian empire.  
 Germanicus himself surpasses his years in courage.  
 And Drusus's vigor is not less than his noble birth.  
 Add that his pious daughter-in-law and granddaughter, the sons of his grand  
 sons,  
 and the other members of the Augustan house are well.

Livia's *pulvinar* surfaces in a context that champions sexual chastity. *Incolumis* not only expresses safety from calamity (*in-columis*), but here has a distinct sexual coloring, implying that her well being, like Rome's, depends on the virtue of chastity. The focus on Livia's *pulvinar* reflects a key association of the term with the emperor's wife. Though not the exclusive domain of an *Augusta*, as the following examples will make clear, the domestic *pulvinar* often emphasizes the empress's role. That fact has often been occluded by the disparate pieces of evidence, and by confusion of such domestic uses with the *pulvinar* in cult practice and in connection with consecration of the emperor.<sup>26</sup>

In Ovid's description moral rectitude parallels imperial conquest and dynastic continuity, as expansion of the empire shades into growth of the family. Corporal metaphors (*valere, vires, vigor, membra*) were a common feature of imperial ideology, which conceived of the body politic as an organic entity whose health could be assessed in physical terms and was often coextensive with the health of the emperor (cf. *valetudo, salus*). The *pulvinar* serves two key purposes: 1) to emphasize the generational continuity of the imperial family; 2) to connect Augustan moral ideas to the achievements of Augustan rule.

<sup>26</sup> Confusion over the meaning in this passage has been exacerbated by the alternate reading of *incolumi* for *incolumis*. Even those reading *incolumis* have occasionally ascribed the *pulvinaria* to Augustus. Millar 1993: 13 translates: "A wife in good health guards his couch." Rodríguez 2005: 624 (reading *incolumi*) states that the passage "clearly tied the *Pulvinar* to Augustus as a divine honor during his lifetime" and imagines Livia as Augustus's priestess. Conversely, Hug's 1959 *RE* article "*pulvinar*" ascribes such uses to the empress, which goes too far in the other direction. My point here is not that the sacred marriage-bed "belonged" to either emperor or empress, but that it symbolically engaged a larger set of issues involving chastity and the integrity of the familial structure. One sees a marked emphasis on chastity when the empress is described and on dynastic continuity in cases concerning the emperor, though the two cannot be separated. See Parker 2004 on the notional connection of sexual continence with state well-being and Langlands 2006: 62–64 and 92 on the marriage-bed's symbolic association with *pudicitia* and marriage as an institution.



However, another dimension is added by considering the *pulvinar*'s relevance to the message of the poem, which is more than just fulsome praise by a penitent seeking recall. Earlier in the poem Ovid claims that he cannot discuss his crime (Ov. *Pont.* 2.2.55–59):

num tamen excuses erroris origine factum  
an nihil expediat tale movere, vide.  
vulneris id genus est quod, cum sanabile non sit,  
non conrectari tutius esse puto.  
lingua, sile! non est ultra narrabile quicquam.

Yet consider whether you would seek to excuse my deed owing to the source  
of my error  
or if it's of no use to stir up this sort of thing.  
It's the sort of wound which, since it can't be healed,  
can't be handled very safely, I think.  
Silence, tongue! Nothing further can be told.

The sentiment is true only in a manner of speaking. In the verses that follow Ovid harnesses the symbolic connection of the *pulvinar* with Livia's *pudicitia* as a foil to his unspeakable crime. He addresses his transgressions indirectly, by praising the moral value that contrasts with and sheds light on his confessed error. As Livia's virtue is placed on a pedestal it is also placed in the service of Ovid's poem. His panegyric is not merely adulation by a hopeful exile, but a carefully fashioned substitute for defense, a way to discuss what Ovid hesitates to name. The larger symbolic relevance of the *pulvinar* enhances, indeed is essential to, the coherence of the poem's message.

Valerius Maximus connects Livia's *sanctissimus genialis torus* to Juno's *pulvinar* in his address to the goddess *Pudicitia* (6.1.praef):<sup>27</sup>

tu enim prisca religione consecratos Vestae focos incolis, tu Capitolinae Iunonis  
pulvinaribus incubas, tu Palatii columnen augustos penates sanctissimumque Iuliae  
genialem torum adsidua statione celebras, tuo praesidio puerilis aetatis insignia  
munita sunt, tui numinis respectu sincerus iuventae flos permanet, te custode  
matronalis stola censetur: ades igitur et recognosce quae fieri ipsa voluisti.

For you inhabit the fires consecrated to Vesta by ancient religion, you rest upon  
the sacred couches of Capitoline Juno, you haunt in constant vigil the pinnacle

<sup>27</sup> In this passage, as at Plin. *Pan.* 8.1, the *torus genialis* is used, I would argue, as a substitute for the *pulvinar*. Both contexts compare (or contrast) the *pulvinar* of a god (Jupiter) or goddess (Juno) with the *torus genialis*. These are the only two instances in Latin in which *torus genialis* and *pulvinar* are so joined. Valerius adds *sanctissimum* to the description of Livia's marriage-bed, leaving little doubt as to what is meant.

of the Palatine, the august abode, and the most sacred marriage-bed of Julia [*i.e.* Livia], with your aid the honorable emblems of youth are safeguarded, by reverence for your godhead the unadulterated bloom of youth endures, with you as guardian the matron's cloak receives the censor's appraisal: come then and look upon what you yourself wished to be done.

The celebration of *Pudicitia* establishes a nexus between the goddess (and the virtue she embodies), Juno, and Livia. Valerius locates the moral force of *pudicitia* in Juno's temple and in the Augustan *domus*, itself described in conventional religious language. Mueller (2002) rightly stresses the contemporary relevance of Valerius's description.<sup>28</sup> The connection to the Augustan moral program can be seen in one particular detail. The *leges Iuliae* of 18 B.C.E. included provisions to promote the wearing of *stolae* and to deny them to women who contravened its limitations. *Pudicitia* is imagined as both author and enforcer of Augustus's legislation; his measures are painted as the fulfillment of divine will. The parallel between *Pudicitia*, Juno, and Livia interconnects moral and religious considerations with specific provisions of Augustan governance. Valerius understands how such representations bear upon the *realia* of Augustan rule.

The counterpoint to positive portrayals of Livia and her *pudicitia* surfaced in the possible sexual implications of the *pulvinar*, a dimension already exploited by Cicero in his repeated taunting of Clodius. The *pulvinar*, like the *pulvinus*, *lectus*, or *torus*, could never entirely escape potential association with moral decadence or sexual transgression. It could therefore serve as a vehicle of censure. This aspect is brought out in the second century by Juvenal and Suetonius, who employ the *pulvinar* to underscore *impudicitia*. Juvenal scathingly inverted the term's usage by Ovid and Valerius in depicting Claudius's wife Messalina (Juv. 6.127–32):

mox lenone suas iam dimittente puellas  
tristis abit, et quod potuit tamen ultima cellam  
clausit, adhuc ardens rigidae tentigine volvae,

<sup>28</sup> Mueller 2002: 25 "Valerius ... quite perceptively saw (and felt) the close connection between Juno and Livia, perhaps even anticipating later developments. Valerius's view at the very least, however, not only corresponds to contemporary evidence, but more significantly provides a contemporary literary perspective on how such religious, legal, and political ideas would be synthesized by a supporter of the new order." By *Iulia* Valerius means Livia; see Mueller 2002: 24–25 for summary. See Langlands 2006 on *pudicitia* in general and 39–41 on this passage. Marriage laws: Brunt 1971: 557–66; Edwards 1993: 34–62; Severy 2003: 52–56 and 232–51. On *stolae* and Roman *matronae*: Sebasta 1998; Scholz 1992 for literary and visual evidence, especially 13–20 for literary handling of the *stola*.

et lassata viris necdum satiata recessit,  
 obscurisque genis turpis fumoque lucernae  
 foeda lupanaris tulit ad pulvinar odorem.

She then unhappily left, as the pimp was already  
 sending off his girls, and delaying as much as possible she was the last  
 to close her cubicle, still burning in the salacious swelling of her stiff clitoris,  
 worn out by the men but not yet satisfied she departed,  
 both filthy on her dark cheeks and sullied by the smoke of the lamp  
 she bore the whore-house odor to her sacred marriage-bed.

What had been the significant marker of *pudicitia* for Livia here expresses Messalina's sexual depravity. Only in the context of earlier connections of the *pulvinar* to chastity can the extent of Juvenal's harshness come to light. *Rivales divorum* ("rivals of the deified," Juv., 6.115) sarcastically underscores how far Messalina had fallen, not just in comparison to the divine, but to those deified by the state (*divi*).

The connection persisted well into the fifth century. Dracontius's *Orestes* offers an apparent reminiscence of Juvenal, in which the interloper Aegisthes figuratively turns the royal marriage-bed of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon into a brothel (Drac. *Orest.* 647–50):

deliciis fruitur polluta matre potitus,  
 templa triumphorum, regalia tecta potentum,  
 et delubra deum vel pulvinaria regum  
 crimine prostituens gaudet fecisse lupanar.

He enjoys pleasures, having conquered your polluted mother;  
 prostituting by his crime the temples of triumphs,  
 the regal abodes of the powerful,  
 and the sanctuaries of gods or the sacred marriage-beds of kings,  
 he's pleased to have made them a whorehouse.

A somewhat complicated example occurs in Suetonius's account of Domitian's use of the term while *princeps* (Suet. *Dom.* 13.1):

principatum vero adeptus, neque in senatu iactare dubitavit, et patri se et fratri imperium dedisse, illo sibi reddidisse; neque in reducenda post divortium uxore edicere <re>vocatam eam in pulvinar suum.

But once he obtained the principate he neither hesitated to boast in the senate that he had bestowed rule upon his father and his brother, and given it back to himself, nor in bringing back his wife after divorce, to proclaim that he had called her back to his sacred marriage-bed.

Suetonius includes the remark among examples of Domitian's *arrogantia* (the vice examined in 12.3–13). Jones remarks that Suetonius could have just as easily offered this as an example of Domitian's humor, rather than as an instance of a particular vice (1996: 107). The context still begs the question as to why Suetonius chose the potentially humorous quip to demonstrate Domitian's *arrogantia*. It is possible that he means to stress Domitian's *superbia* in relation to Domitia or that he reflects his contemporaries' tendency to criticize Flavian rule and Domitian especially.<sup>29</sup> But the detail is far more damning in the context of Domitia's past transgressions.

Earlier in the biography, Suetonius discusses Domitian's divorce and remarriage to Domitia (Suet. *Dom.* 3.1):

[Domitiam] Paridis histrionis amore deperditam repudiavit intraque breve tempus impatiens discidii quasi efflagitante populo reduxit.

He rejected [Domitia], who was hopelessly corrupted by love for the actor Paris, and within a brief space of time, since he couldn't bear divorce, took her back on the pretext that the people demanded it.

Suetonius patently expresses the unsuitability of Domitia as a wife; she is not only an adulterer, but her infidelity was carried out with an actor, someone among the dregs of Rome's social (and legal) hierarchy. Trading on earlier associations of the *pulvinar* with *pudicitia*, Suetonius points up Domitian's fickleness and suspect reasons for taking back a hardly chaste wife. Domitian added insult to injury by excusing his actions as a concession to the people, and by then announcing that Domitia had been brought back to the *pulvinar*, the traditional locus of imperial chastity. The material object connected to Domitia's return becomes, in Suetonius's rhetoric, an index for moral condemnation.

The *pulvinar* in the examples above stresses conjugal fidelity in markedly moral terms and draws attention to the virtues or vices that strengthen or undermine it. Although the domestic sphere was constitutionally innocuous, representations of it were key to promoting and imposing a particular conception of Roman civic life. The *pulvinar* in such contexts was an important symbolic vehicle to explore moral action within public discourse. It could therefore provide a domestic framework to accompany the constitutional framework of imperial rule and could permit private life to encroach progressively on public life. As an intimate icon of the imperial *domus*, the *pulvinar* was the notional "seat" of imperial legitimacy articulated in domestic terms.

<sup>29</sup>This aspect will be addressed more fully at the conclusion of the article.

Drawing upon this association, Pliny significantly reorders the terms of debate (Plin. *Pan.* 8.1):

non in cubiculo, sed in templo, nec ante genialem torum, sed ante pulvinar Iovis optimi maximi adoptio peracta est, qua tandem non servitus nostra, sed libertas et salus et securitas fundabatur.

The adoption was carried out not in his bedroom, but in a temple, not before his marriage-bed, but before the sacred couch of Jupiter Best and Greatest, by which adoption the basis was formed not of our servitude, but of our freedom, well-being, and security.

The juxtaposition of the emperor's *torus genialis* with Jove's *pulvinar*, though it forms a parallel to Valerius's association of Livia with Juno, serves entirely different ends. Here it symbolically distinguishes the domestic and civic spheres, opposing the *torus genialis* to Jupiter's *pulvinar*. Pliny draws a line between the emperor's power as *paterfamilias* and his frequent public standing as *pater patriae*. Whereas the *pulvinar* was previously a vehicle to promote imperial rule through private virtues, Pliny now offers an antithesis adapted to changed conceptions of imperial legitimacy. The new regime, unlike its predecessors, was predicated upon adoption as the best means to select an emperor. Pliny's rejection of the *pulvinar* thereby underscores succession in a public rather than domestic context. Trajan becomes *princeps* not by right of blood kinship (a disparaging reminder of Julio-Claudian and Flavian practice), but as a fitting successor to the purple on account of his excellence. The dynastic power associated with the *pulvinar* is returned to the *res publica*.<sup>30</sup>

### 3. THE PUBLIC SPHERE: *PULVINAR* AND *CIRCUS MAXIMUS*

Among the flurry of monuments catalogued in Augustus's *Res Gestae* the lone contribution to Rome's *Circus Maximus*—the massive hippodrome nestled in the valley between Palatine and Aventine—comes in Chapter 19: *Pulvinar ad Circum Maximum*. Caesar introduced major changes to the Circus, yet Augustus built this significant structure which served as the endpoint of the *pompa circensis* and as seating for the imperial family.<sup>31</sup> Trajan would later

<sup>30</sup> Adoption did not dispense with the prevailing framework. The family was still the mechanism through which imperial succession occurred. Pliny's point is that the particulars have been modified: the emperor's biological offspring are no longer automatic successors to the principate and the religious basis that legitimizes succession lies with the state gods rather than in the imperial *domus*.

<sup>31</sup> Humphrey 1986 remains the seminal work on the Circus, with a valuable collection of images. The *Pulvinar* is discussed at 78–83. Stupperich 1989 gives an overview of the images and representations depicting the Circus Maximus, with a discussion of

undertake major renovations, rebuilding the *Pulvinar* and replacing the top stories of bleachers.

Despite only scattered bits of textual and visual evidence, most of which reflects Trajan's version of the Circus, we know a fair amount about the *Pulvinar*. Modern opinion varies concerning its broader function in the early imperial period, especially the "secular" or "religious" relevance of the structure.<sup>32</sup> This "[q]uestion brulante" (Veyne 1976: 785n482) involves essentially two problems: it has been thought that little evidence exists for the meaning of *pulvinar* as a religious structure. Second, if the *Pulvinar* had a religious function, what was it?

Discussion has tended to the following conclusions: either that the *Pulvinar* served the emperor's political self-promotion (if one stresses his activities at the Circus as a "political" phenomenon), or that this religious structure underscored the emperor's "divinity." Neither option captures, I believe, the significance of the *Pulvinar* and neither accords well with the available evidence.<sup>33</sup>

There can be no doubt that the *Pulvinar* served a religious purpose; evidence pointing to that aspect abounds. The translation in the *Res Gestae* as

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the *Pulvinar* and the Obelisk. Coleman 2000: 210–17 succinctly reviews the design and development of the Circus as well as the social and political functions of the events held there. Plin. *Nat.* 36.102 and Suet. *Jul.* 39.2 discuss Caesar's modifications.

<sup>32</sup> Most arguments for the secular meaning have claimed that the imperial loggia from which Augustus watched the games was not the same as the *Pulvinar*. The claim has also been made that the Greek translation of *Pulvinar* as ναός is either incorrect (translator's error) or that *Pulvinar* cannot mean "temple" since we allegedly lack corresponding lexical evidence. Pro "secular" meaning: Gagé 1935: 109–10 and 1964: 203; Alföldi 1970: 159–60; Brunt and Moore 1979: 61; Veyne 1976: 701–6 and especially 1976: 785n482; Guizzi 1999: 110. Pro "religious" meaning: Weber 1936: \*217–\*19; Bollinger 1969: 74–77; Volkmann 1969: 34; Humphrey 1986: 78–83; Stupperich 1989; Dareggi 1991; Zanker 1997: 32; Steinby 1999: 169–70 [P. Ciancio Rossetto]; Marcattili 2005; Rodriguez 2005; Hugoniot 2006; and Scheid 2007: 55–56.

<sup>33</sup> The terms of debate seem to reflect a dichotomy largely predicated upon modern separation of politics from religion. Alternatively, the issue may depend upon the long accepted account in Dio of the separation of urban from provincial worship. Gradel 2002 has clarified—to my mind quite convincingly—a number of sticking points in the traditional interpretation of Cassius Dio's remarks on the geographical organization of emperor worship. Cf. Dio 51.20.6–8 and Gradel 2002: 73–80. Rodriguez 2005 suggests that scholars may have been reluctant to ascribe the *Pulvinar* a religious significance under Dio's influence (she, however, implicitly equates religious significance with emperor cult). Hugoniot 2006 does not address the controversy. He sees the *Pulvinar* as undoubtedly religious and outlines some of its possible uses.

ναός is hard to interpret otherwise. Later visual depictions clearly underscore the structure's likeness to a temple. The (Severan) Marble Plan, the Luni mosaic, and a third century gem from Geneva all clearly indicate the temple-like structure of the *Pulvinar* that was (re)constructed by Trajan, who built upon Augustus's precedent (Humphrey 1986: 81 figs. 35a and 35b, 123 fig. 55, 243–44). Trajan's version does not *per se* confirm that Augustus's was a temple, though Stupperich (1989) has argued that a relief from Castel S. Elia depicts the *Pulvinar* in the reign of Claudius.<sup>34</sup>

Significant lexical evidence supports the religious significance of the structure. As discussed above, *pulvinar* denotes more than just “sacred couch.” The meaning “temple” is far more common than has typically been acknowledged and has often been overlooked.<sup>35</sup> In fact, by creating a “temple” at the Circus Maximus, Augustus employed a usage familiar to his contemporaries and apparently used to designate the pre-Augustan informal structure, often thought to be an elevated platform to which the gods were carried during the *pompa circensis* and from which they “watched” the games (cf. Fest. p. 364M).

Proponents of the “secular” interpretation of the *Pulvinar* rely primarily upon Suetonius, who does not stress its religious aspects, but rather its use as a place from which to watch the *ludi*. At the other extreme, Rodriguez

<sup>34</sup> Stupperich 1989: 371 fig. 1 shows the full relief. Humphrey 1986: 194 fig. 95 only gives the bottom half of the relief, following the standard interpretation that the top half depicts a theater not connected to the *Pulvinar*. See also Dareggi 1991 on the architectural typology of the imperial loggia (arguing for a religious significance).

<sup>35</sup> Two examples: Guizzi 1999: 110 states: “Il *pulvinar* indica, qui, una loggia del Circo Massimo e non il sacrario (letteralmente ‘letto sacro’), come l’espressione potrebbe indurre a pensare.” Guizzi’s claim is instructive; literally the term does not mean “sacred bed/couch” but rather “temple/sanctuary,” just as “bed” in English has different literal meanings depending on context: a bed of roses, the sea bed, the bed of a truck, etc. Brunt and Moore 1979: 61 state: “The *pulvinar* was a kind of box from which Augustus watched races in the circus; the word occurs in another sense in 9.2.” They call the *pulvinaria* “cushioned couches” (52, though they do not translate the term in the English text). In fact, at both 9.2 and 19.2 it means roughly the same thing, but differs in the scope of application: one instance refers to the temple at the Circus Maximus, the other to all “temples” or “sanctuaries” (among which the *Pulvinar* could be included). This is the same sense as in the very common phrase *supplicatio(nes) ad/apud/circa omnia pulvinaria*, first appearing in Cicero, frequently in Livy, and occasionally in inscriptions. The *pulvinaria* in such cases may not have been formal structures: there is also the *Pulvinar Solis* (Quint. *Inst.* 1.7.12) on the Quirinal, likely a sanctuary without a significant edifice. In this case the term *pulvinar* perhaps designates a raised mound of earth, cf. Steinby 1999: 170 [F. Pesando]. A marked tendency to overemphasize “divine couch” has contributed to endless confusion about the nature and purpose of the *Pulvinar*.



(2005) has proposed that the *Pulvinar* served as a means to express Augustus's divinity. There can be no doubt of the *Pulvinar*'s central role in the larger structure of the *Circus* and in the religious festivals held there. Yet a number of considerations complicate, and speak against, its use as a vehicle of imperial cult at Rome during the emperor's lifetime.<sup>36</sup> The sources give no indication that it was used to that end. Furthermore, the context of the *ludi* as a state sponsored public ceremony rule out that possibility. While Augustus eagerly promoted public *ludi* (Suet. *Aug.* 43), numerous political and religious officials also actively sponsored the games. The *Res Gestae* details *ludi* put on by the consuls and priestly colleges in Augustus's name (Aug. *Anc.* 2.9):

vota pro valetudine mea suscipi per consules et sacerdotes quinto quoque anno senatus decrevit. ex iis votis saepe fecerunt vivo me ludos aliquotiens sacerdotum quattuor amplissima collegia, aliquotiens consules. privatim etiam et municipatim universi cives unanimiter continenter apud omnia pulvinaria pro valetudine mea supplicaverunt.

The senate decreed that vows should be made for my well-being through the consuls and priests every four years. As a result of these vows the four most distinguished colleges often put on games during my lifetime, as did the consuls. Even privately and throughout the municipalities all citizens harmoniously and repeatedly offered supplication at all sacred spaces on behalf of my well-being.

The question of who presided at these games cannot be separated from their religious function. *Ludi* put on by the senators in the name of the state could not have been used for the worship of Augustus. The passage demonstrates Augustus's careful orchestration of public honors. The *ludi* were not for worship of Augustus (as they were for *Iuppiter* or *divus Iulius*), but on behalf of his well-being. In these examples Augustus follows the traditional Republican mechanism by which the gods are worshipped at these ceremonies. The true innovation was in his substitution of his own *valetudo* for that of the Roman state. Anything more would have left him defenseless against charges of *ar-*

<sup>36</sup> Rodriguez 2005: 625 "From the historical and contemporary literary contexts in which the term appears, one is forced to read overtones of divinity in connection with the *Pulvinar* in the *Circus Maximus*." See also: "We should ask ourselves, therefore, whether the poetic references reflect a confusion of the human and divine regarding Augustus among the citizens of Rome whom we know worshipped his *genius*, and a possible relaxation after 12 B.C. of the strictures against public worship that had previously existed. The construction of the *Pulvinar* in the *Circus Maximus* enhances the idea that Augustus allowed some sort of divine recognition of himself in the city" (625). Hugoniot 2006: 225 similarly remarks upon the ambiguous message that the *Pulvinar* may have created.

*rogantia* and *superbia*, that he was playing at being a god. Such a blatant *faux pas* would have destroyed the careful equilibrium necessary to sustain the constitutional façade that Augustus constantly strived to maintain. When, for example, illness forced him to be carried into the Circus on a *lectica* (Suet. *Aug.* 43) the gesture was clear: he might accompany the gods on their *tensae*, but the symbolic difference between the human *lectica* and the divine *tensae* or *fercula* would not have been lost on any Roman. Augustus publicly indicated the gap between himself and those whom he followed. Although Rodriguez (2005) is right to ascribe the *Pulvinar* a religious significance, that significance remains unclear.<sup>37</sup>

Can the available evidence point us in the right direction? A few prefatory considerations are necessary. Beyond its function as a place for equestrian competition, the *Circus Maximus* offered a singular opportunity for imperial interface with the public. It was also a venue for the imposition and celebration of key social norms within a broad sweep of society. The most disparate elements were present, categorized by rank, age, and gender. They were ordered by location, with special seating for magistrates and religious officials, women, children and their tutors, and married people. Clothing was subject to strict regulation. The Circus was not solely a show of the various competitive events, but the spectators themselves were collectively put on display as a larger reflection of Roman social codes. Individuals took up their place in this venue in a way that mirrored the roles they were expected to perform outside of it. In many regards the Circus was a monumental miniature of Roman society. It is no wonder, then, that the “place” of imperial rule at the *ludi* would reflect its place in Roman society. The *Pulvinar* was crucial in that process and its structural formalization was accompanied by significant changes in its use and importance.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Rodriguez 2005, it should be clarified, only suggests that the *Pulvinar* may have been part of imperial cult for provincials or the lower class. This assumes that emperor cult was otherwise absent from Rome. Gradel 2002: 223 forcefully demolishes the idea: “The oft-repeated assertion that there was no cult of the living emperor in Rome is ... absurd.” Private cult of the emperor at Rome was everywhere and regular (cf. Lott 2004 on the compital organizations). There was no need for Augustus to make concessions to individuals otherwise lacking opportunity for worship.

<sup>38</sup> On imperial interface with the public: Bollinger 1967; Alföldi 1970: 79–84 and 121–86; Veyne 1976: 701–6. Wallace-Hadrill 1982: 38 keenly suggests that the Circus became the *de facto* replacement for the *comitia* as a means of interaction between *princeps* and *populus*. On dress and seating: Kolendo 1981 and Humphrey 1986. Rose 2005 discusses the “social seating order” and circulation in public entertainment buildings. For further discussion of the socializing role of the Circus see Feldherr 1995.

The textual evidence on the *Pulvinar* comes to us through Suetonius (Suet. Aug. 45.1):

ipse circenses ex amicorum fere libertorumque cenaculis spectabat, interdum ex pulvinari et quidem cum coniuge ac liberis sedens.

Augustus himself would typically watch the games from the dining-quarters of his friends and freedmen, on occasion from the *Pulvinar* and in that case sitting with his wife and children.

Suetonius does not stress the religious aspects of the *Pulvinar*. He narrowly focuses on seating arrangements, because the passage forms part of a larger account of that aspect at the Circus. One key detail slips through: when Augustus used the *Pulvinar* he did so in the company of his family.<sup>39</sup>

Suetonius's biography of Claudius cites a letter to Livia from Augustus which, if authentic, is the only contemporary notice of the *Pulvinar*. Augustus expresses concern over Claudius's presence at the *Pulvinar* (Suet. Cl. 4.3):

nam semper aestuabimus, si de singulis articulis temporum deliberabimus... posse arbitremur eum gerere honores necne. in praesentia tamen quibus de rebus consulis, curare eum ludis Martialibus triclinium sacerdotum non displicet nobis, si est passurus se ab Silvani filio homine sibi affini admoneri, ne quid faciat quod conspici et derideri possit. spectare eum circenses ex pulvinari non placet nobis; expositus enim in fronte prima spectaculorum conspicietur. in Albanum montem ire eum non placet nobis aut esse Romae Latinarum diebus. cur enim non praeficitur urbi, si potest sequi fratrem suum in montem?

You know we'll always be in hot water, if we debate at individual points of time...whether we think he can bear honors or not. Yet as to present matters about which you're asking: it doesn't bother me if he wants to preside over the priest's banquet during the Martial games, if he permits himself to be advised by his kinsman, the son of Silvanus, not to do anything which would be conspicuous and ridiculed. I don't like his watching the circus events from the *Pulvinar*: placed in the front row of seating he'll be visible. I don't like his going to the

<sup>39</sup>The important detail *et quidem* does not imply disapproval by Suetonius; rather, it underscores that this was par for the course: "and in fact, and in that case." Humphrey 1986: 79 considers it a point of criticism: "Much more worthy of public comment (and implied criticism) was the fact that on occasion he would permit his wife and children to watch from there." His interpretation seems to stem from the assumption that *et quidem* is the opposite of *ne...quidem*, interpreted as "and even." But cf. OLD *quidem* 5a and Kroon 2004. Suetonius expresses not disapproval but that restrictions on seating did not apply to the imperial family, who existed within Rome's social structure even while partly standing outside its limitations.

Alban mountain or his being at Rome during the Latin festival. Why shouldn't he oversee the city, if he can accompany his brother to the mountain?

At issue here is not simply Claudius's potential embarrassment to the imperial family, but also his assumption of state duties (*honores*), that is, his place within the ad-hoc *cursus* through which the emperor's descendants would assume increasingly important functions. Augustus offers a diplomatic solution in that he involves Claudius in the games in a religious capacity, to superintend the priestly banquet. His proposal may reflect a key aspect of the imperial family's presence at the games: the participation in state religion. Indeed, Augustus's solution was not only tailored to the tricky problem of Claudius, it also accorded well with the larger use of the *Pulvinar* and with Claudius's own expectations. Despite his physical deficiencies, Claudius was no dolt. He knew the significance of the honors he actively sought, and Augustus's proposal, though denying Claudius a seat in the *Pulvinar*, may have been an ingenious solution to accord him a similar honorific role. The passage suggests that an important aspect of the imperial family's role at the games was the participation in state religion.

Furthermore, the missing attribution in Suetonius of any religious reference to the *Pulvinar* need not be due to its secular character. It occurs as a stray detail in the context of Suetonius's larger narrative: we hear of Augustus sitting at the *Pulvinar* with his family only when Suetonius discusses seating arrangements more generally. Augustus's refusal to let Claudius sit in the *Pulvinar* comes in a broader discussion of the various *honores* eagerly sought by, yet repeatedly refused to, the future *princeps*. That Suetonius does not explicitly indicate its religious importance may simply reflect the fact that he and his readership took that aspect for granted. Already under Trajan (and certainly for Suetonius's readers) the religious element was clear. Nevertheless, Suetonius provides some sense of the purpose of the *Pulvinar*, and his evidence is supplemented by other stray details about the Circus.

Dio 56.29.1 reports that an image of *divus Iulius* sat in a chair during the games. It has often been asserted, and seems quite logical, that the imperial family would also sit with his image.<sup>40</sup> At 61.16.4 Dio reports a fascinating anecdote following Nero's murder of his mother Agrippina, on account of which the gods expressed their anger in various ways. As elephants escorted images of *divus Augustus* into the Circus, they proceeded to the row of senators but would not continue on to Nero's position, because he was defiled by

<sup>40</sup> Weber 1936: \*217–\*19; Volkmann 1964: 34; Scheid 2007: 55–56. Scheid also refers to Dio 50.10.2 for the idea that *divus Iulius*'s image was present at public ceremonies (though the venue at 50.10.2 is the theater). See also now Hugoniot 2006.

the assassination of his mother. The story, as Bollinger points out, has greater merit if Nero was sitting in the *Pulvinar* and if it was a sacred location (1969: 76). Not only was Nero polluted, but he had defiled a sacred space by sitting at the *Pulvinar*; the elephants would refuse to contaminate themselves or *divus Augustus* by going there. Lastly, there is the very basic problem of where the images of *divus Iulius* (and later *divus Augustus*) were placed at the Circus, if not in the *Pulvinar*.

The accounts point towards the use of the *Pulvinar* for state cult of the *divi* along with the traditional state gods. Just as the domestic *pulvinar* created a published model to direct expectations of private life, the *Pulvinar* fulfilled a similar role in the thoroughly public context of the Circus. On display for the spectators was not the emperor's divine status, but the pursuit and promotion of religious and familial *pietas*. The *Pulvinar* was the best available means on a mass scale and in a single venue to present and to reinforce the religious sentiment of the new order. Like the "sacred marriage-bed," the *Pulvinar* emphasized the imperial family's reverence for those traditional Roman values that formed a key element of imperial self-representation.

Another aspect merits consideration and can be placed in the context described thus far. The *Pulvinar ad Circum Maximum* lacks the divine attribution typically found for a temple. It is designated by location, not by the divinity (or divinities) to whom it is dedicated. But perhaps that was the point, when we consider not only who occupied the *Pulvinar* in the immediate sense, but for whom it was made in the long term. We know that *divus Iulius* watched the games from the *Pulvinar*. Dio's anecdote of the elephants also suggests that *divus Augustus* had a place there. There may be a connection between the uncertain designation and its purpose. The *Pulvinar* was understood not only as a site to worship traditional state gods during a religious festival, but also as a place intended for worship of state consecrated *divi*, both present and future.

The suggestion receives support from and in turn may explain an important fact in Augustus's deification: the date. Recent interest in the Roman calendar, and especially in imperial versions, has emphasized the structuring of social and religious order through the organization of time.<sup>41</sup> Augustus received celestial honors on September 17. The ancient sources give no explanation for the day. The literature does not even give us a date, and the inscriptional evidence, which confirms it, provides nothing beyond that factual confirmation. September 17 fell in the middle of the *ludi Romani in Circo*, Rome's

<sup>41</sup> Beard 1987; Rüpke 1990 and 1995; and Feeney 2007. In literature, Ovid's *Fasti* have stood at the center of resurgent interest in Roman calendrics.

most significant traditional public festival, spanning September 15 to 19. Just as worship of Jupiter was the kernel of the entire *ludi Romani*, worship of *divus Augustus* was placed at the “center” of the *ludi Romani in Circo*. The arrangement had advantages for both worshipped and worshippers. For *divus Augustus* as well as for his family this presented the most significant venue at which to display the *religio* and *pietas* of the imperial family. Augustus constantly stressed his role as *divi filius*, and after his death the remaining family could continue that practice by honoring *divus Augustus* in the most prominent of settings.

## CONCLUSION

The *pulvinar* denoted basic elements of Roman religion (“sacred couch,” “*lectisternium*,” “temple”). As Wissowa has emphasized, close connections existed between each distinct register within a broad semantic range (1912: 315–16, 399, and 425 and 1924). This partly explains the difficulty for modern observers in making clear-cut distinctions. Even so, much of the usage suggests that Romans themselves did not insist on clarity and that in many instances the term’s broader “meaning” was directly tied to that lack of clarity. When Ovid, for example, claimed that Romulus’s divine transformation made him more worthy of *pulvinaria alta*, the significance is less in the precise definition (“sacred couches” or “temples”?) than in the symbolic connection of *pulvinar* with deification. This larger relevance—the cultural work the term could do—allowed for multiple interpretations, while at the same time giving shape to a central feature of imperial rule.

Similarly, the *pulvinar deorum* in Horace’s “Cleopatra Ode” (*Carm.* 1.37.3) seems to suggest both couch and *lectisternium*. Whatever the meaning, the poem reinforces the traditional connection of *pulvinar* to the celebration of Roman victory during ceremonies such as the *lectisternium* or the *supplicatio*. This association may have provided some impetus for the remodeling of the *Pulvinar*. Games at the Circus were first and foremost about victory, both through the competitive contests held there and through the awe-inspiring display of Roman conquest. The Obelisk and the Arch of Titus, to name two examples, powerfully reminded a captive Circus audience of the conquest of Egypt and Jerusalem.

Furthermore, the *pulvinar* was a dynamic force in shaping conceptions of imperial governance and domestic virtues. The “sacred marriage-bed” and “*Pulvinar* at the Circus Maximus” forged a public interface between Roman rule and its civic reception. Spatial proximity of these two *pulvinaria* enhanced that connection, suggesting a continuity that stretched from the marriage-bed in the *domus* to the prominent public structure at the nearby Circus.

The *pulvinar* was a ravenous symbol that could in a single word consume the distance between the public and private spheres of the imperial family.<sup>42</sup>

These two senses of the term were in some regard an imperial creation, even if they had had Republican precursors: one a pre-existing sanctuary that Augustus then adopted in his physical and conceptual remodeling of the Circus, the other Catullus's coinage adapted by Ovid and later authors. As a feature of sophisticated language use the general phenomenon was not new. Ideological emphases and cultural developments shape and reshape the meaning of material objects and cult practices. Such terms are susceptible to the kinds of pressures that can be imposed from above (the *Pulvinar*) or recast by a cultural elite (the "sacred marriage-bed"). There is much similarity in this case to the mutability that studies of *Wertvorstellungen* have demonstrated for key Roman values. Both applications of *pulvinar* seem to exemplify semantic shift in an ideological context.<sup>43</sup>

Yet, although such language could serve the emperor's public image, it was not within his purview alone. The "sacred marriage-bed" also challenged authority. Just as Cicero used the *pulvinar* to attack political rivals such as Clodius or Antony in religious terms, imperial authors similarly (though more circumspectly) sought to constrain and to shape imperial rule. Pliny eagerly manipulated the term as part of his bold public articulation of the extent and limit of Trajan's authority, a forceful reminder of how challenges to power are also constitutive elements of that power.

Suetonius's criticism of Domitian's use of the term *pulvinar* may shed light on the honorific practices of Rome's ruling classes. Although Suetonius, as I have argued above, draws upon the moral discourses surrounding the "sacred marriage-bed," his criticism may also be read as part of the frequent dismissal of Domitian's excesses, that he acted like a god. Suetonius does not reject imperial divine honors wholesale, but his displeasure over Domitian's *arrogantia* in connection with the "sacred marriage-bed" touches on the

<sup>42</sup>In later imperial *domi* the Circus with a *Pulvinar* became an inalienable part of the emperor's residence. See Humphrey 1986, Stupperich 1989, and Royo 1999.

<sup>43</sup>The classical modern account of *Wertvorstellungen* is Thome 2000, which contains bibliography on a range of individual studies. For summary of the emperor's virtues, see Noreña 2001: 152–153. Krostenko 2001 addresses the rise of social performance language in the Late Republic. It should be noted that stability more commonly accompanies the vocabulary of emotion, whose vicissitudes depend on larger cultural reformations and significant shifts in the psycho-social values of a society and its individuals. The point is brought out by Kaster 2005: 11, whose study of Roman emotion spans the Late Republic and Early Empire: "Despite many profound alterations in social and political life, the basic structures abide: the 'Roman Revolution' did not entail a revolution in affect."



complexity of the honorific mechanism, that is, who was permitted to use the term in this particular context.

The “sacred marriage bed” was created by the elite to describe imperial rule. Up until Suetonius’s time, the literary and inscriptional records otherwise provide no account of the sacred marriage-bed as part of imperial propaganda issued from the *princeps*. Suetonius’s negative portrayal of Domitian implicitly reminds us that such honors were the private purview of those honoring the *princeps* during his lifetime, and not the prerogative of the honored. While authors like Ovid or Suetonius, may employ the language about the emperor, the emperor did not possess the same license. The “sacred marriage bed” was part of a carefully guarded discourse. The *pulvinar* in this sense became a piece of watershed vocabulary, separating those entitled to use it (Rome’s elite) from those who were not (Rome’s emperors). Its cultural power, therefore, lay not only in the meaning of the symbol itself, but in the mechanisms of honoring, in the right to determine the dispensation of divine rewards in a scrupulously monitored system of honorific exchange.<sup>44</sup>

In any of its many contexts, circumspection is warranted in equating the *pulvinar* with public state propaganda for the divinity of the living emperor. Careful attention to the varied emphases of the term permits us to see the evolution of a sophisticated cultural and semantic process. *Pulvinar* readily crossed the porous boundaries separating object from ceremony, domestic from public, or human from superhuman. Ideological and ritual associations vitally distinguished the word from its secular *confrère*, the *pulvinus*. In the end the incompleteness of the material and lexical records can only partly guarantee modern scholars precise knowledge of the term’s meaning, either for the semantic force of a particular usage or for the conceptual force in the assembly of uses.

Yet the laudable scholarly aim of certainty, of discrete meanings and of transparent practices, may lead us down a false path. The force of the term—what it could specifically denote and less specifically what it might evoke in the mind of an observer—depended on its flexibility. That aspect added essential coloring to the rich palette of symbolic and cultural functions it performed. The *pulvinar* was, to be sure, not for lounging about.

<sup>44</sup> See Lendon 1997 on honor in the Roman world and Roller 2001 on exchange contexts between the elite and the emperor. On the attribution of divine honors, I follow the general framework developed in Gradel 2002, whereby individuals could accord the living emperor private honors without restraint (in this case, the attribution of the “sacred marriage-bed” in literary texts). The formal award of a *pulvinar* after death, however, was altogether different, a public honor requiring ratification of the senate.

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