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Principate: Between Human and
Divine**

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**The Implementation of the Roman Principate:
Between Human and Divine**

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Abstract

The crisis of the republican government and the Republic itself brought new political scenery: the implementation of the Principate and the figure of the princeps not just the first in the Senate House because now it becomes the first man of Rome and the empire. This paper proposes the revision of the divine characters of the Principate, the relations between the political system and the religious affairs, the divines' attributes in epigraphic and also numismatic sources, all connected with the literary sources of the historians of that time and the modern discussion of scholars.

Key Words: Late Republic, Roman Principate, Julio-Claudian emperors, Politics; Religion, Epigraphy, Numismatic

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The Roman Empire debts so much to the Republic, because the formation of this system begins in the Civil War in the second half of the first century BC. One of the connections for the implementation of the Principate it finds in the connection between politics and religion just as it was in the Republic.¹ An important part of this process is when the second triumvirate declares officially by law the *consecratio* of Julius Caesar² but there have been some problems dating this monument.³ The *consecratio* means that the statue of the deified Julius was erected by order of the Roman people in accordance with the *lex Rufrena* (CIL VI, 872). This means that the cult of the *Divus Julius* began in towns of the entire Italy, and there is other contemporary evidence that communicates the *Genius* of the *Divi Julius* was accepted by decision of the Senate and the People of Rome, and Caesar now is counted among the gods (CIL IX, 2628). Syme says for this historical moment: ‘the young Caesar could now designate himself ‘*Divi filius*’.’⁴ The numismatic of that time do not confirm what Syme exposes (‘*C. CAESAR III VIR R.P.C.*’; ‘*CAESAR IMP.*’; ‘*ANTONIVS IMP.*’; ‘*C. CAESAR IMP.*’)⁵ The other propagandistic element was the conjunction of the comet and the funeral games of Caesar in 44 BC. Suetonius (*Aug.* 10) mentions that Octavian took the decision to realize the games. The truth is that while the games were running in honor of Caesar’s departed spirit a comet appeared in the sky for seven (Pliny *HN* 2.94, Vergil *Ecl.* 9.47-49, Dio 45.7.1 and Suet. *Iul.* 88).⁶ Maybe Syme was remembering the words of Cicero who calls Octavian as ‘*Heaven-sent young man*’ (*Phil.* 5.43), the young man who was born to save the Republic: ‘*mindful of the name he bears and an imitator of his ancestors*’ (*Phil.* 3.8), or the man born by the kindness of the gods (*Phil.* 12.9).

After Caesar’s *consecratio* begins the official cult across the empire. Three examples are very clear about that: 1) the partial inscription of Terentium of the IV region in Rome; 2) from Reii in the Narbonensis; the last one from Rusicade, in the ancient province of Numidia (CIL IX, 2598; CIL XII, 370; CIL VIII, 7986).⁷ The importance of these inscriptions is the geographical location, meaning that the cult of the *Divus Julius* was soon adopted in different places.

After the dissolution of the second triumvirate, Octavian pursued all alliances with Italy and in the *Res Gestae* 25 he said that *tota Italia* swear

¹Beard (1992: 730): ‘The religious affairs of the state were in the hands of the same men who directed her politics.’

²Honours to Caesar: Dio 44.4-8; App. *BCiv.* 2.106; Suet. *Iul.* 76 and 84; Cic. *Phil.* 2.43; 2.110

³Alföldy (1973: 100) 43 BC; Weinstock (1971: 375); cf. Sweet (1903: 60) 43 BC; ^{Fowler (1914: 121)} 42 BC

⁴Syme (1939: 202)

⁵*RSC* 227; *Sear* 1538; *RSC* 514; *Sear* 1536; *RSC* 248; *Sear* 1573; *Sear* 1534. For more discussion, Morawiecki (1983: 96-103)

⁶Galinsky (1996: 17); Weinstock (1971: 370 ff.); for some religious attributes of Caesar with political actions: Cid, A. (2011a: 4 ff.); Sumi (2005: 151 ff.)

⁷Cf. cult inscriptions before Caesar’s *consecratio*: *IG* VII, 62 (48 BC.); *CIG* 2957 (ca. 48 BC). Anthony as Caesar’s *flamen*: Dio 44.4-6; Suet. *Iul.* 76

absolute loyalty to him and Bringmann make an academic joke of that.¹ This was achieved by *consensus*, and Augustus (*RG* 34) clearly said ‘[...] *after receiving by universal consent* (per consensum universorum) *the absolute control of affairs* [...]’. Recently this has been work seriously in the investigations of Lobur and Eder.² The immediate consequences were the young Caesar’s victory over the enemies of the state (Anthony and Cleopatra). Other ones were: the libation to the *Genius* of Octavian in public and private banquets (Dio 51.19.7; cf. Plut. *Marius* 57) by senatorial decree passed the year 30 BC (*CIL* IV, 5285) reflecting the master strike for his later deification;³ the derogation in the year 28 B.C. of any legal and political agreement reached with the triumvirs because this will complicate his future republican reorganization (Dio 53.2.5; Tac. *Ann.* 3.28.1-3).⁴ Other consequences we must link with the built of the temple in 29 BC by Octavian (*aedes Divi Iulii*);⁵ the Senate’s decision to concede the control and administration of the empire to Octavian in the 27 BC.⁶ There are two gold roman coins (*aureus*) with the legend: ‘*leges et Iura Popvli Romani Restituit*’, ratifying the words said by Octavian in the *RG* 34: ‘*I transferred the republic from my power to the dominion of the senate and the people of Rome.*’

If Octavian transferred the *res publica* to the Republic, it cannot be proved with any certainty.⁷ When he presented to the Senate House to refuse of his powers the senators invests him with the title *Augustus* (‘the revered one’),⁸ and gives him a shield inscribed with the roman virtues (*CIL* VI, 40365; cf. *RG* 34.2; the Arles copy in *AE* 1952, 165). From this moment many scholars conceived the beginnings of the Principate. From this moment make much stronger the relation with gods (especially Apollo); for example, the fragmentary statue base inscription in (*IG* II² 3262 united with the *IG* II² 4725) made by a man called Poseidonios: ‘*Augustus Caesar New Apollo*’.⁹ Other examples from the East we can find in the *Palatine Anthology* (Anon. *Anth. Pal.* 09.553), which recognized the foundation of Nicopolis by Caesar as a gift to Phoebus for the victory at Actium and numismatic evidences states that so;¹⁰ a contemporary inscription in Nicopolis from the 29 BC dedicates to the gods Neptune and Mars, and also recognizes the victory of the Emperor Caesar, who is the son of the divine Julius (*AE* 2002, +1297). The city of Aphrodisias

¹Bringmann (2008: 103); about the propaganda against Anthony: Scott (1929: 133-141); Charlesworth (1933: 172-177)

²Lobur (2008); Eder (1990: 13-33)

³Cid (2012: 97); Cid (2013: 7); Fishwick (1991: 375); Taylor (1975: 151-152; 181-182); Niebling (1956: 329); for the cult of the *Genius* of Caesar in 44 B.C., Weinstock (1971: 213); cf. Fishwick (1991: 377)

⁴Millar (1973: 51); Lange (2007: 183); Grant (1949: 101)

⁵*RG* 19; cf. Dio 51.22.2. For topographical explanation Ashby & Platner (1929: 286-287)

⁶About the Republic restoration of Augustus: Cruz (1986: 155 ff.); Syme (1939: 313 ff.)

⁷Lange (2009: 182)

⁸Historical events: Dio 53.16.8; Suet. *Aug.* 7; cf. Nic. Dam. *Vita Caes.* *FGrH* F 125; cf. other literary sources: Macrobian. *Sat.* 1.12.35; Ovid. *Fasti.* 1.587-616

⁹Correct transcription: Peppas-Delmousou (1979: 127)

¹⁰*RIC* 170; *RIC* 180; *RIC* 193a; *RIC* 272; *RIC* 366

has one particular inscription of Kalikrates: ‘*I am Victory, always present with Caesar, the descendant of a god. For the gods Augusti and the People*’ (SEG 30, 1244-1245).¹ Other example from the East: an Athenian inscription at Delphi (12 BC) recognized the new office of the *princeps* as high priest, and tried to link the city (ancient favorite of Anthony) with the victor of the civil war (SEG 19, 401).²

Every *princeps* receive different manifestations of honours, from common titles to open divinity.³ If we follow the analysis of Bowersock the Eastern Empire had grown accustomed to tribute different expressions of titles and the highest honour of all was the honour of worship;⁴ but to speak of a continuation of honours from Hellenistic to the Roman period in the Augustan era is -in words of Simon Price- an unacceptable reification of ruler cults.⁵ Augustus, his successors and the rest of the family joint the two classes of titles but not all the *Augusti* were *Divi* so as Fishwick and Lozano remarks.⁶ The Greek East could denominate the emperor as *theos* (god) in lifetime with no problem (*θεος* and *θεος Σεβαστος*),⁷ but the Western Empire use the word *divus* (divinized one), not *deus*. The *apotheosis* of the emperor took place by senatorial decree only after his death and only when the *princeps* demonstrated a good government so as Steven Freisen assets.⁸

The problem is the Western Empire. But do not means in any aspect that the imperial cult was impossible or a rare expression.⁹ In Rome in the year 29 B.C. we have an inscription (probably on a triumphal arch) dedicated to Augustus for the Senate and the People of Rome: ‘*Imp(eratori) Caesari divi [...] re publica conservata*’.¹⁰ Although the inscription does not expose any divine attribute, delivers a clear affirmation that Octavian is the savior of Rome: the state having been saved, ‘*re publica conservata*’. And we go on with many more evidences. The inscription above is connected with two obelisks in Rome from the 10 BC. The words used are: ‘*Aegypto(!) in potestatem / populi Romani redact[a]*’ (CIL VI, 701).¹¹ The next year, in 9 BC, the Romans dedicate to Augustus the Altar of Peace ‘*ara Pacis dedicata*’ and give a *supplicatio* to Caesar Augustus, the guardian of the Empire ‘*Imperio Caesaris Augusti custo[dis]*’, just as the *Fasti Cumae* records (CIL X, 03682).

Chronologically in 7 BC it was decided that the *lares Compitales* would be *lares Augusti*. Means that the *Numen Augusti* (the potential spirit of Augustus)

¹Iaph translation, available in <http://insaph.kcl.ac.uk/iaph2007/iAph130116.html>

²Oliver (1981: 414)

³Price (1984b: 53)

⁴Bowersock (1965: 112)

⁵Price (1984b: 24)

⁶Fishwick (1970: 305-306); Lozano (2007: 141)

⁷Price (1984b: 75); a previous example of Caesar for the Greeks as ‘the god, the *imperator*, the Saviour of the *οἰκουμένης*’ (IG XII, 5, 557)

⁸Freisen (2001: 28)

⁹For the roman cult in Hispania, Santos (2011-2012: 42 ff.)

¹⁰CIL VI, 873

¹¹Pliny *HN* 36.72-73; Vell. Pat. II.39.2; cf. *RG* 27. Rehak, P. (2006: 81); Mazzarino (2002: 66); cf. Millar (1984: 44)

and the *Genius* of Augustus were worshiped by every *collegia*.¹ We have some examples of altars:

Genius Augusti (AE 1994, 624); *Laribus Augusti* (ILS 3614; CIL VI, 441; 442; 443; 30954; 30956; 30957; 36809); *Genius* and *Laribus Augusti* (CIL X, 816); *Numini Augusti* (AE 1946, 198; CIL XII, 4333); especial dedications (CIL X, 1613); *sacerdos Augusti* and *flamen Augusti* (CIL XIII, 5688; ILS 6250; CIL X, 830); on the temple of Rome and Augustus (Suet. Aug. 52; cf. Dio 51.20.7-8; CIL V, 18); ILS 4027); CIL X, 6305).

Whit these examples of the cult to Augustus, and even Rome, we must expect that the rest of the imperial family could be designated so as the *princeps* was. Claudius will be the only example of this. He declares her grandmother *Diva*, who was denied by her son, and something so much important recorded for Suetonius (*Cla.* 22): ‘Touching religious ceremonies [...] he corrected various abuses, revived some old customs or even established new ones’. He associated himself with Augustus on coins, reproducing legends such as *pax*, *cives serbatos* and *libertas*.² He used the *modestio* of Augustus denying the divinity offered to him by the Alexandrians (*Select Papyri* 2.212.48-50). Phrygia send a letter to the emperor calling ‘divine saviour and benefactor’ and call to his son Britannicus ‘god manifest’ (*Small.* 134). In Caria in the year 52-53 AD calls Claudius ‘saviour and benefactor of all mankind’ (*Small.* 135) but also call the *princeps* in the beginning in this way ‘Tiberius Claudius Caesar Germanicus Imperator Divine Augustus’; obviously the word divine was used in the Greek term (*theos*), but Claudius must be warned by Romans of this situation. Just dead Claudius the community of Acmonia in Phrygia calls to his son Britannicus ‘son of New Zeus Claudius Caesar Augustus’ (*Small.* 138).

The successor of Augustus refuses the divine attributes. In fact as Dio (57.8.2) records he says in one occasion: ‘*I am master of the slaves, imperator of the soldiers, and chief of the rest*’, and when Tiberius was recognized as *princeps* he openly refused some titles like *Imperator*, *Pater Patriae* and *Augustus* (Suet. *Tib.* 26; Dio 57.2. 2; 8. 1). Santo Mazzarino explains the reason: ‘dalla costante ripugnanza del nuovo imperatore ad ereditare alcune forme decisamente monarchiche dell’ideologia augustea’.³ Some example about this: Tiberius gave a letter to the people of the Gytheum in Laconia, saying: ‘[...] *but as for myself, I am satisfied with honours more modest and of a human sort*’ (*SEG* 11, 922).⁴ Same idea is recording by Suetonius (*Tib.* 26) and Dio (57.9.1 ff.), and also Tacitus (*Ann.* 4.37.5) mentions when Tiberius openly refused the honours of the embassy of Hispania Ulterior and consider ‘*with a statue, like the gods, would be pretentious and arrogant*’. But despite his opposition, different cities across the empire tributes to him honours. Seager exposes: ‘Where private individuals and even communities acted on

¹Cooley (2006: 250); Galinsky (1996: 301-306); Taylor (1975: 151-152); Cid (2012: 97); for iconographical explanation, see Zanker (1988: 129 ff.)

²*RIC* 9; *RSC* 35; *RIC* 15; *Sear* 1849; *RIC* 112

³Mazzarino (2002: 135). Also Taylor (1929: 87-101)

⁴Taylor (1929: 88)

their own initiative, there was little Tiberius could do'.¹ Before of his ascension, Tiberius was saluted with enthusiasm by the Athenians. We have five inscriptions of statues erected by the Athenians to Tiberius (*IG II*², 3243-3247). During his lifetime Tiberius was also called *θεον* (*IG II*², 3265; *IG II*², 3264) and he have a priest for a cult at Eleusis (*IG II*², 3530),² and despite he refused the title of *Augustus* (*Σεβαστος*) he was called with that appellative³ and also we have some recording for the worship to his *Genius* (*CIL XIII*, 941; *AE* 2003, 596); the *Genius* of Tiberius and Augustus with ambiguous words to Livia: '*Genio Augusti et Ti(beri) Caesaris, Iunoni Liviae*'⁴ (*ILS* 116). This examples show us the failure of Tiberius' actions about the divine attributes. In fact, the worship and cult to other members of the family is clear in the inscriptions. Livia, the wife of Augustus, was denied for his son Tiberius to have public honours, but communities do so and she was deified in the reign of Claudius.⁵ She had temples with the *Divi Augusti* (*CIL VI*, 4222); two examples of cult with priest for her and her husband in Lusitania (*AE* 1966, 177; *HEp* 7, 1997, 111).

The measure of Tiberius was the antagonist of the next reign. Caligula spread his power and influence to an unknown step in the politics of the *princeps*. He was the first of the emperors in enforced the oath of his *Genius*.⁶ Two inscriptions records that: "*pro salute [...] Genio / Caesaris Au[gusti]*" (*CIL VI*, 811), and a short inscription found on the frontal facade of the altar at *Nemausus* interpreted for Rosborough as '*G(enio) G(ai) N(ostri) / Ascanius ser(vus)*' (*CIL XII*, 3052).⁷ The ancient sources tell us that the emperor ruled correctly in the beginning but then he abused and had assumed despotic characteristics. '*So much for Caligula as emperor; we must now tell of his career as a monster*', says Suetonius.⁸ Philo of Alexandria records that the emperor represents himself superior to the demigods and even the roman gods;⁹ another Jew, Flavius Josephus, believed that Caligula was completely mad.¹⁰ But his madness does not stop there. Before of his illness, the emperor refused the imperial titles, but after this he wishes to assume all in just one day.

Politically, some magistrates suffer for the politics of the *princeps*. In the year AD 39, two consuls were removed because they forgot to realize the *supplicatio* in honor of Caligula's birthday.¹¹ In addition, four months before

¹Seager (2005: 122)

²Inscriptions to the emperor Tiberius at Athens, see Vanderpool (1959: 86-90)

³Eleusis: *IG II*², 3261; *IG II*², 3262

⁴Barret (2002: 209) exposes that *Iunoni Livae* means 'to the Juno of Livia, rather than to Livia Juno.'

⁵For the official cult of Livia under the emperor Claudius: Tac. *Ann.* 4.6.6; Dio 60.2.5; Sen. *Apocol.* 9.5

⁶Suet. *Cal.* 27

⁷Rosborough (1920: 41)

⁸Suet. *Cal.* 22

⁹Philo *Leg.* 13.93

¹⁰Jos. *AJ* 19. 1; 11; 17

¹¹Suet. *Cal.* 26; Dio 59.20.1-4

his assassination, Caligula declares officially the divinity of his sister, Drusilla. Always has been the Senate who recognized the title 'divus', but at this time occurred a break and a clear sign of abuse. After his death, Caligula suffers the *damnatio memoriae*, which means the public damnation of every manifestation related with the person condemned. Some examples: '[[[C(aius) Caesar]]] Augustus / Germanicus [[p(ater) p(atriciae)]] / refecit' (CIL XI, 720); 'Iuliae Drusilla[ae] / Germanici Caes[aris] f. !!!!!!! / !!!!!!! / d. [d.]' (CIL V, 5722). His name erased and changed for the name of Domitian (SEG 37, 1640, very strange, because both receive *damnatio*); his name erased from a statue base in honour to Drusilla (IG XII, 6 1: 411); a *strategos* Theomnistos Ptolemai realizing worship to Caligula and the name of the emperor erased (OGIS 695).

Nero like all the other emperors of the dynasty was saluted with good auguries. The Oxyrhynchus Papyri (POxy 1021, lines 1-20) salute the deceased emperor as a god and recognize Nero as *princeps* with celebrations and sacrifices. Nero promised to the Roman world that he will rule like Augustus did (Suet. Nero 10) and in some way he did so. This is the historical moment known as *quinquennium Neronis*, the five good years. Thornton, Anderson and Haverfield believe that this period was about of buildings construction. Lepper is several critic about this, because Aur. Vic. Caes. 5.2-4 and Eut. Epit. 5.2-5 are the only two ancient sources who records that.¹ Nero was the emperor of the arts. Pausanias (7.17.3) exposes that noble souls were corrupted by the inappropriate education, meaning the relation with Nero. The *princeps* was linked with the *Iulii* and the *Claudii* in an inscription from Macedonia, mentioning that he is even 'divi Aug(usti) abnepos' (AE 1994, 1557) and also the bilingual inscription of Nicaea (CIL III, 346) and from Hispania Citerior (AE 1987, 0612)

His government was catalogued as bad reign. His relation with religion shows us that Nero did not care about it. Suetonius (Nero 56) manifest that the emperor 'despised all the cults, with the sole exception of that of the Syrian Goddess' (Atargartis, similar with the Magna Mater in the work of Apul. Metam. 8.25). Pliny (HN 30.1-18) only records that Nero feels passion for magic, the lyre and the tragic song. Curtius Rufus (10.9.3-5) consider the emperor as *novus sidum* (new star) and his lights restore the world from the darkness. Star o solar deity, Nero was saluted by Tiridates with the *proskynesis* but this no mean at all that the King feels inferior to the emperor, because Rufus Fears remember us that this means the respect of Tiridates for being in front of a living god. Dio (63.5.2) records the supposed words: 'and I have come to thee, my Lord, to worship thee as I do with Mithras'.² Lucan (B.Civ. 1.45) assent that Nero would be god by *apotheosis* while he links himself with the Sol. Suetonius (Nero 53) writes that the emperor believes that he was equal to Apollo singing, was similar with the Sol riding chariots. The numismatic evidences show us that the emperor really believe the link with these two deities.³

¹Anderson & Haverfield (1911: 177); Thornton (1973: 117); cf. Lepper (1957: 95)

²Rufus Fears (1976: 495)

³Like Sol: RIC, n° 46; like Apollo with the lyre RIC 211

Beard, North and Price exposes about the relation between the emperors and religion: the good ones were who paid public care of *religio* through public rituals and the bad ones were those who ignore the gods and the religion, being criticized for their impiety.¹ The worst action of Nero to religion was the rape of the temples when he was remodeling Rome and building his *domus aurea*. Tacitus (*Ann.* 14.44. 2-5) and Suetonius (*Nero* 32) write that Nero ordered that all the gold, silver and precious elements should be taking off of the temples. Before of his dead Nero was condemned and was adopted the *damnatio memoriae*, an unexpected action because no emperor has been condemned in lifetime. For the damnation we have some examples: *AE* 1984, 650; *AE* 1999, 1397; *CIL* III, 6123; *AE* 1983, 193. And even a *dupondius* with the image of Nero's head decapitated (*RPC* 53; 425).

Conclusions

Trough the revision of the divine characters of every *princeps* appears the concrete implementation of the Roman Principate, but this implementation was not a homogeneous development. The different manifestation of natural persons and communities to every emperor are true, but the politics of every *princeps* to the religion changes. Claudius tried to conserve the *modestio* and the religious program of Augustus, and he was declared god after his death. Tiberius rejected all possible links with the first emperor and also presented himself not with *modestio* but with some contempt, and he did not reached the divinity and even many romans want to throw him to the Tiber ('*Tiberius in Tiberim*', quoted by Suet. *Tib.* 75). Caligula was assassinated for his madness and also for his religious activities. Nero never tried to take care for the religion of the state and despoil the temples of their relics and precious sacred objects. Also, the emperor abuse of his power was the result for the beginning of the civil war in different places of the empire as a sign of dissatisfaction. Nero died, and the new dynasty tried to ruled and associate with the good governments of the past (like Augustus and Claudius). Vespasian would try to rule in accordance with the Augustan precepts of the founder of the empire, and this will mark the other dynasties, but always finding the problem with the relations between the temporal power and the religious affairs. The questions arise immediately: What elements will be used for the emperors of the other dynasties? What changes occurred in the new governments? Was religion revitalized?

¹Bear, North & Price (2004: 216)

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