

***THE ROMAN EMPEROR
AS GOD AND MAN: AN
AFRICAN BIOGRAPHER'S
PERSPECTIVE***

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by

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Let me first express some gratitude for the mere fact of having an inaugural; this somewhat off-beat beginning is informed by the experience of my colleague Emeritus Professor John Atkinson who after 35 years service to the institution was made professor in 2000. He never gave an inaugural because, believe it or not, the invitation went out to the wrong Atkinson; and the error was never rectified. So this is the first inaugural in the discipline of Classics since Richard Whitaker's in 1990. As part of my obligatory comments on Classics in its South African context I will reflect briefly on some earlier UCT inaugurals by professors of Classics. The earliest example preserved in the library's Manuscripts and Archives section goes back only to 1949, so we miss the words of that dangerous communist Benjamin Farrington, perhaps my most colourful predecessor. Nonetheless, in 2010 we shall be celebrating the 75th anniversary of Farrington's revolution, namely the teaching of Classical Civilisation as opposed to Latin and Greek at UCT. In 1949, shortly after the National Party assumed power, H.C. Baldry alluded to worrying developments: 'in the educational sphere a programme recently put forward should be sufficient warning of the kind of narrowness of outlook which a grasp of the best traditions of Europe can help prevent'. His fears were realised and his hope frustrated: what did Baldry, the author of a famous book on *The Unity of Mankind in Greek Thought*, think when the Classical Association of South Africa sent a message of sympathy on the death of Dr Verwoerd, author and arch-perpetrator of the narrowing vision against which he had warned? In 1970 André Hugo, a liberal Afrikaner at a time when that species was a genuine rarity, compared Roman slavery and the practices at the Cape under the Dutch East India Company and under the British before abolition; he described the new "rightlessness" of the "Cape Coloureds" as akin to the condition of the Roman slave, and seems to have likened them to the home-bred slaves of Rome, the *vernae*, many of whom shared the sophistication and learning of their masters. A profoundly patronising perspective in retrospect and his vision extended no further, no suggestion that 'rightlessness' of the majority was problematic.

A particular challenge to my discipline fifteen years into the democratic dispensation arises from ignorance: what on earth is Classics? Bantu education excluded study of the Greek and Roman worlds as irrelevant to the Gibeonites of the day; post 1994 all school syllabuses have relegated Greece and Rome to the very margins, something to fit somewhere in the junior years if at all, so that students come to university with no exposure to the worlds of ancient Greece and Rome. From time to time Hollywood helps: Russell Crowe as the gladiator, Brad Pitt as Achilles, Colin Farrell as Alexander. But the transformation of that publicity into recognition of what such an intelligent and culturally aware audience as this knows as 'Classics' is not simple. I will illustrate the depths of ignorance anecdotally: when Mamphela Ramphele became a deputy vice-chancellor of UCT in the early 1990s she was sent round to visit departments to get a broader view of the university and to be introduced to as many staff as possible. Her opening interchange with the then Classics Department remains indelibly etched in my memory. "Ah Classics", she said, "Now where would we be without Beethoven?" "Where indeed?" we replied, before steering the conversation onto safer ground. Why should she have known what we understand by "Classics"? The problem lies not in the subject, but in its conventional label, and I have no suitable alternative to suggest: our colleagues at Stellenbosch have plumped for 'Antieke Studie', but in English that smacks too much of the zimmer-frame for me. Despite its problems with profile, the discipline is alive and well at UCT, attracting more students than at any time, not relying on any element of compulsion and not receiving any support from areas that might be thought sympathetic.

In order to make my chosen subject with its deliberately arcane title intelligible I need to talk briefly about three things: i) the African biographer Suetonius, ii) the Roman emperor Augustus and iii) ruler cult in the Roman Empire.

i) C. Suetonius Tranquillus's work is one of the most useful, surviving sources for the period of the Roman Empire. In particular his *De vita Caesarum*, short biographies of Rome's rulers from Julius Caesar to Domitian, is a mine of information, historical and biographical, serious and trivial, sober and scandalous, about the lives of the emperors. For the purposes of this lecture I have deliberately (and justifiably) called him 'an African biographer'. Perhaps some explanation is necessary: he tells us very little about himself in his extant works, certainly none of the useful biographical details we would hope for; his contemporary, the Roman letter-writer Pliny tells us something of Suetonius the lawyer troubled by a dream and the writer hesitant to release his work into the public domain; a letter of the emperor Trajan reveals that Suetonius was unable to sire three children and thus accelerate his career. It was in the 1950s that an inscription was found in the forum of Hippo Regius, now Annaba in Algeria, formerly the Roman province of *Africa proconsularis*, that preserves, albeit fragmentarily, a dedication to Suetonius set up at public expense by the town council. Restoration of the full text is impossible, but enough survives to reveal a distinguished and rapid progression through the senior ranks of the imperial administration to arrive at perhaps the most senior civilian office of *ab epistulis*, the secretary in charge of imperial correspondence. A question that has exercised scholars and to which I directed

my attention in 2002 is ‘why was this inscription set up in Hippo Regius?’ A corpus of several thousand inscriptions from across the Roman world details the careers of members of the Equestrian status-group, by concentrating on those who had a non-military careers and by analysing the patterns of career representation I was able to conclude that there is a very high probability that Suetonius was born in, or had strong family connections with, Hippo Regius. Employees of this institution will, of course, realise that, were Suetonius applying for a job here, he would not be classified as an African, that problematic adjective still designating Dr Verwoerd’s racial category.

For our purposes this afternoon Suetonius offers two lessons: firstly, be careful how you deal with the boss’s wife. The *Historia Augusta*, a notoriously problematic source written in the early 5th c. AD, records Hadrian’s dismissal of Suetonius and C. Septicius Clarus, commander of the imperial bodyguard and the man to whom Suetonius dedicated the *Lives*, but, as so often happens, the text is corrupt at the very place where the motivation for the dismissal comes. In short they conducted themselves towards Hadrian’s wife more informally than the etiquette of the court required – depending on how we restore the text, was this simply a matter of not securing Hadrian’s permission *iniussu eius* or something potentially more scandalous *in usu eius*?

A second lesson, and one that provides a good link into both my second and third introductory subjects, is ‘how to give appropriate gifts to your boss?’ Suetonius gave Hadrian a small statue of the young Augustus that the emperor placed in his bedroom in his *lararium*, the cupboard or niche that housed the gods of the household in statue or painted form. He chose the gift with care: it was a rarity and fitted perfectly with his boss’s ‘pronounced devotion to Augustus’ which we know from his use of a signet ring bearing Augustus’ image and his dedication in the senate house of a silver shield in honour of Augustus.

ii) Augustus. Julius’ Caesar’s great-nephew, a sickly specimen of manhood, rose from inauspicious beginnings to be the first Roman emperor, or *princeps* as he preferred to be styled. After participating in the pitiless triumvirate with its trail of murders, land-seizures and blatant illegalities and finally after eliminating Mark Antony, he exercised sole control of the Roman world for 44 years, from 30 BC to AD 14. His achievements are legion: he greatly expanded Rome’s empire, restored financial security, peace and stability, and transformed the physical landscape of Rome as well as the political system. Although Augustus faced much criticism and opposition at the time, the system of government that he instituted over the course of his reign survived. With the passing of time and the indubitable experience of far worse emperors Augustus came to be considered the paradigmatic *princeps*, the one against whom his successors were measured. Many deliberately imitated him and associated themselves with him on their coinage, in their sculptural representations as well as in the building projects that they undertook. Suetonius’ *Life of Augustus* brings together in a unique way the negative assessments, particularly of the young Augustus, and a broader appreciation of his achievement; although far from perfect, Suetonius’ Augustus

exemplifies more of the virtues that his evaluative system rests upon than any other emperor. As I hope to demonstrate, Augustus' handling of the complex demands of what is commonly called 'ruler cult' in a multicultural empire was without equal.

iii) A striking phenomenon of the Greco-Roman world is what modern scholars call ruler cult. The ancients had no special term for the phenomenon, although the physical manifestations of the phenomenon were called in Greek *ισόθεοι τιμαί* ... 'honours equivalent to those of the gods' or in Latin *divini, caelestes* or *summi honores* and consisted of sacrifices, altars, cult-images, temples priests, anniversary celebrations, games. Any of us looking at the past century could point to examples of personality cults particularly in totalitarian states where the modern mass media have been mobilised to present an idealised and heroic image of the great leader – Hitler, Stalin and the Korean Kims come to mind. But what is striking about the ancient manifestation is its overwhelmingly religious nature, i.e. its expression in forms of worship that were given to the gods. We readily understand modern personality cults as political creations, for example to focus loyalty and to bolster the position of the leader. Is it right, however, to look at Roman ruler cult in that way? Great historians of ancient religion such as Arthur Nock and Martin Charlesworth had little doubt that we should understand such cult as homage and not worship, i.e. that it was religious in no more than form. More recent work, however, has emphasised the role that Christianising assumptions have played in modern scholarship in relegating to an inferior status not just ruler cult but also the polytheistic worship of the Greeks and Romans – for example Roman religion was dismissed as *geistlos* by the great Theodor Mommsen, the doyen of Roman historians. John Scheid and Jorg Rüpke have done a great service over the past twenty years in getting classicists to understand that a religious system which expresses itself in ritual actions rather than in credal statements does not lack a theology; Henk Versnel and others have highlighted ways in which pagan worship affected people's lives and morality as profoundly as Christianity did. Duncan Fishwick, the pre-eminent scholar on ruler cult in the west of the Roman empire and Ittai Gradel, in his controversial book *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion*, have emphasised that in Roman thought the man-god divide reflects a distinction in *status* between the respective beings rather than a distinction between their respective *natures*. All of this doxography and the tendency to conceive the difference between man and god in terms only of power, of rank or status achieved through merit, I think, gets us nowhere towards understanding the psychology or psychologies of those participating in ruler cult. It is a rational modern interpretation that runs the same risk of imposing wholly anachronistic and alien thought structures on the ancients as did the Christianising presuppositions of earlier generations.

Defining Greco-Roman religions, and by extension all religions, as a matter of seeking a benefit or blessing from those with the power to bestow it may be a valid sociological generalisation, but is not particularly helpful in illuminating any possible distinction between worship paid to an emperor or to another deity. In the polytheistic religions of the Greeks and Romans no god was all-powerful, not even Jupiter, and power was in effect parcelled out, sometimes to deities with highly

specialised areas of influence: Robigo, for instance, prevented the growth of mildew or rust on corn, Rumina caused the breasts to flow with milk. What benefit could a deified emperor confer? If that emperor were alive, we might cynically suggest he could provide what any human ruler might offer, security, material enrichment, career advancement; but if he were dead? Here, I think, is the more interesting phenomenon: Augustus continued to be worshipped long after his death, long after his dynasty had ended, and to be worshipped in ways which suggested that his worshippers attributed to him supernatural powers. His continued worship is not to be explained away as acknowledgement of the political system that he set up.

Suetonius contains a range of material from which we can extract interesting perspectives on ruler cult. Although I will concentrate on his portrayal of Augustus, it is necessary to range more widely in order to determine how well Augustus fits into the broader framework of Suetonius' views.

The transmission of ruler cult from the Greek into the Roman world proved controversial: no public awards preceded those to Julius Caesar after his victory at Thapsus in 45 BC; the awards Caesar received for defeating fellow Romans in this final battle of the Civil wars feature prominently in the historical accounts of his departure from traditional Roman practice into tyranny and in the explanations of the rise of hostility towards him which culminated in his assassination. By the time that Suetonius wrote the *Lives* more than 150 years later such honours were no longer controversial per se, but there were distinctions to be observed. While the overarching evaluative framework within which Suetonius assesses his emperors is that of the Roman elite and his assessment is Romano-centric, he also reveals a nuanced understanding of what was appropriate at different stages of an emperor's existence and in different parts of the empire.

Suetonius' disapproval of divine honours accepted in Rome during an emperor's life is an important example of such a distinction: his view is traditional and generally consistent. Caesar could be thought 'rightly slain' because, amongst other failings, he had allowed honours to be bestowed on him which were too great for mortal man: for example, a golden throne, a chariot and a litter in the circus procession, temples, altars and statues placed among the cult images of the gods, a *flamen* (that is a priest specifically dedicated to his worship) and the transfer of his own name to the month *Quinctilis*. The negative example of Caesar was crucial in defining an overarching term by which the Romans judged their rulers: *civilitas*. This encompassed all forms of behaviour by which the emperor did not exalt himself above the level of an ordinary citizen, but made himself accessible and demonstrated his humanity. Enthusiastic watching of the games, for example, was good, but actual participation (from the perspective of the elite) was going too far: emperors who sang and played or fought, however well they may have begun their reigns ended up as tyrants. Among the examples of *civilitas* that marked the early years of Tiberius' reign, Suetonius records that Tiberius refused the voting of temples, a *flamen*, priests; the only statues and busts he permitted were not to be placed among the cult images of the gods; he would not let

September be renamed after him and, when someone spoke of his 'sacred duties', he substituted the more down-to-earth adjective 'strenuous'. Suetonius' opening indictment against Caligula the monster is built around his usurpation of divine prerogatives: his own head was to replace those of the gods on many cult images, he stood in person between the statues of Castor and Pollux to receive worship, had a temple to his own divinity in Rome with priests, extravagant offerings and a gold cult image (*Cal.* 22). Augustus too fits into this pattern with one exception: he refused *tout court* the offer of a temple in Rome, even with his cult combined with that of the goddess Roma and melted down statues in precious metals that had been set up in his honour (52). The renaming of the month *Sextilis* as August, however, appears in the wholly positive context of actions that honoured the gods through the proper exercise of the office of the chief priest, the *pontifex maximus* (31.2), specifically in undoing the chaos that had befallen Caesar's reorganisation of the calendar. For Suetonius, then, the good emperor should avoid the trappings of cult during his lifetime, especially in Rome. This is without question the traditional, mainstream view that we see mediated through texts generated by the Roman elite.

In discussions of the development of ruler cult in Rome much attention has been devoted to two terms, which, it is held, were used to preserve the Republican tradition that worship was not offered to a living human being. Worship of the emperor in Rome was rather directed to his *genius* (his guardian spirit) and to his *numen* (the divine power within him). In Suetonius, however, neither term enjoys more than a minimal profile. A sidelight is thrown on the custom of swearing by the *Genius*: it was an aspect of *civilitas* for an emperor to refuse an oath by his *Genius*, whereas the cruel Caligula punished some for what Suetonius considers the minor reason of not swearing by his *Genius* (*Cal.* 27.4). Suetonius' attitude seems fully in line with that of the elite in his own day: in his *Panegyricus* Pliny expounds the difference between the *civilitas* of Trajan and the acceptance and implied encouragement of cult to his *Genius* by the excoriated tyrant Domitian. Swearing an oath by the *Genius* of the living emperor was inappropriate for Roman citizens, as it belonged in the relationship of a *Dominus* and his slaves, and emerged only after the time of Augustus, who studiously avoided the appellation *domine*.

As regards *numen*, I will discuss only one Suetonian passage where he attributes *numen* to the deified Drusilla. On one level, as every god possessed *numen*, what Duncan Fishwick calls 'the functional property of a god', then Diva Drusilla also possessed it and could by her *numen* guarantee any oath sworn in her name. On another level, however, Suetonius means us to understand that Caligula's action is not appropriate: the whole relationship with his sister was 'unnatural' (not just the alleged incest, but the unique honours he gave her and her appearance on a sesterce coin in AD 37 as a goddess) - particular dedication to one deity was *superstitio* rather than good religious practice and the deity sworn by had to be appropriate to the context of the oath and the audience, hence swearing by Drusilla before the troops was bizarre.

In dealing with worship of Roman emperors it is important to recognise that the bulk of the evidence available is epigraphical and archaeological, i.e. inscriptions and meagre remains of buildings and other artefacts. Inscriptions in particular shed much light on the infrastructural, administrative and ceremonial aspects of cult across the empire, especially in the provinces. What a writer like Suetonius, from his position at the heart of the imperial administration and writing with a close focus on the emperor himself, provides is different in emphasis, although there is sometimes a clear overlap in detail. Two reports of the offering of divine honours to Augustus outside Rome are relevant: he refuses provincial temples except when his worship was coupled with that of Roma (52) and secondly a broad generalisation on the extent of divine honours: Suetonius considers utterly unproblematic these manifestations of cult offered to Augustus during his lifetime outside of Italy and Rome. Archaeological evidence from a range of Italian communities (but excluding Rome) has revealed that Augustus was worshipped at the municipal level, that is, in temples commissioned and funded by town councils. Suetonius gives us nothing on this radical development, perhaps because imperial consent was neither sought nor given for such temples (by comparison with the practice at provincial level).

Official Roman practice, and certainly the position that obtained within the city of Rome, was that the emperor became a god only after death and only then could he be formally voted a temple, priests and festivals. Jacques Gascou, the pre-eminent French scholar on Suetonius, has suggested that Suetonius is frankly sceptical about the worship of the deified emperor, the *divus*. To evaluate this claim it is useful to separate notices of formal consecrations and the consequent award of cult from other kinds of detail. Detailed examination of Suetonius' references to deifications indicate that the formal consecration of a dead emperor by the competent bodies, the Senate and Roman people, evokes no scepticism or criticism, even when the subsequent worship had a checkered future (as in the case of Claudius).

Only one aspect of the description of the events of September AD 14 relating to the senatorial meeting at which divine honours were voted to the dead Augustus and the subsequent funeral gives any grounds for positing scepticism. Although the ultimate ascension of Augustus was common knowledge even during the emperor's lifetime, formal confirmation under oath that the ascension had actually occurred was still sought in AD 14. However, by the time Suetonius was writing, a formal witness to an imperial ascension was irrelevant, firstly because of the ridicule the practice had incurred and because the senatorial decision to consecrate came to precede the funeral, as in AD 112; the release of an eagle from the funeral pyre provided all the necessary evidence for an ascension. The words *nec defuit* with which Suetonius introduces this detail are a significant semantic marker and indicate, as it were, a smile. Gascou speaks of a 'ton voltairien', but Suetonius was not mocking the institution of imperial consecration *per se*. In the context of the *Life of Augustus* Suetonius' highly emphatic presentation of the powers of *divus* Augustus (an aspect we shall consider later) eliminates any notion of Suetonian scepticism at the divinity of *Divi*.

Having seen how Suetonius disapproves of imperial attempts to anticipate posthumous consecration by taking on the physical manifestations of cult in Rome and how he reports neutrally the practice of formal, posthumous consecration, we can look at what might be called 'acceptable expectation of consecration'. Suetonius' *Lives* offer a rich collection of divine messages to mankind that the divinatory techniques of the ancients were designed to explain, where the meaning was not already obvious, and also to authenticate. He is perhaps our major source for the frequency and variety of such communications in the early Empire: Annie Vigourt's study catalogues 529 ancient records of divine signs from the reigns of Augustus to Domitian, of which 187 come from Suetonius. For the most part, Suetonius uses this material to point to who will achieve imperial power; often the signs appear at times in their lives when such a possibility was remote or impossible; they foretell victory and success on the one hand and impending death on the other. Only four of Suetonius' emperors were formally consecrated as gods, that is became *divi*: among the signs that foretold Caesar's murder comes a dream that Caesar had on the eve of the Ides in which he saw himself flying above the clouds and shaking hands with Jupiter. The biographer introduces the chapter with the words 'his future death was made clear to Caesar by clear signs' and so does not direct the reader to any element foretelling the divinity of Caesar, although we might naturally interpret the dream as doing so. Whereas dreams and other techniques of natural divination enjoyed a privileged position in philosophical justifications of divination, they were accorded formal recognition only very rarely in the Roman state religion. However, Suetonius himself, from what Pliny tells us about him and from the role played by dreams in the *Lives*, has no reservations. Nonetheless, dreams do lack the status of a divinatory medium formally sanctioned by the Roman state and they never appear in Suetonius as the sole evidence of a major 'prophecy'. Of course, in the case of Caesar, one who had already been voted the paraphernalia of cult (and also consecration by the Senate) hardly needed further divine confirmation at that moment. It was to come, however, four months later. To this *post eventum* confirmation of Caesar's divinity (*Iul.* 88) Suetonius exhibits what appears to be a degree of detachment, although on examination it proves not to be. Caesar was numbered among the gods 'not only by the words of those who passed the decree but also by the conviction of the ordinary people'; from the appearance of a comet at the *Ludi Victoriae* in honour of Caesar held in July 44 shining for seven days 'the soul of Caesar was believed to have been received into heaven'. *Persuasio volgi* and *creditum* are both weaker than the formulations Suetonius uses for Augustus' impending translation, but the passage is a close paraphrase of Augustus' own words in his autobiography and probably also from a public statement he made in 44, that is the official version.

Suetonius' Vespasian only jokes about his future in the midst of fear and danger: as an example of his wit as death approached Suetonius quotes '*uae, inquit, puto deus fio*'. Whether we see humour or sincerity or a malicious slander concocted by his enemies, Vespasian evinces no certainty. His words are not the kind of inspired, death-bed prophecy that Suetonius, in full accord with ancient

divinatory theory, gives Augustus. Comparable material comes in a private letter from Augustus to Tiberius that must be dated no later than 9 BC. In this letter to Tiberius Augustus commends his own generosity at giving away 70,000 sesterces on the dice. The adjective *caelestis* shows that earthly renown is not what Augustus means. Whether his confidence as to his future consecration is born of revelation or of arrogant presumption based on political realities, or how seriously he takes the notion we cannot tell. Suetonius certainly, however, does not quote these words for any theological purpose, but in context to demonstrate that Augustus did not shy away from a reputation for gambling.

Divine signs indicating *future* divinity occur only for Augustus. Two minor details buried deep in the 'private life' suggest that, while Augustus rejected the formal acknowledgement of his divinity, there were other means to suggest recognition in the private sphere. We should, however, note that the Latin formulation is somewhat hesitant, only 'a kind of divine power' and the word used for power *vigor* is not *numen*, which would make an indisputable claim to divinity. Less clearly something that Augustus himself promulgated is the information on his birthmarks that appears in the next chapter, introduced by a key distancing formula 'it is said that'.

The constellation of Ursa Major was recognised by the ancients as the axis around which the universe rotated; specific significance under the principate comes from the declaration by Augustus that the comet identified with Caesar's soul appeared in Ursa Major for seven days. Augustus' birthmarks announce his exceptional destiny and predestination for empire, and equivalence with Jupiter, in whose region of the sky the constellation is and who is the god most closely connected with the myths relating to it. Whether, however, Suetonius understands this physical peculiarity of Augustus (not surprisingly unattested on any statuary) to have intimated a *divine* future rather than a great, imperial destiny is unclear.

Towards the end of the life there is an extended section on the divine signs that appeared at different stages of Augustus' life; the first part of this contains sixteen signs of his future greatness and uninterrupted good fortune. The last of these, the horoscope of Theogenes, contains indirect evidence of divinity but there are good reasons why Suetonius does not use it (as we shall see); the final section of this part of the *Life* is crucial for our purposes, that introduced by the words: 'his death and his divinity after his death were known in advance through the clearest of signs'

As Augustus was conducting the final rites of the census of AD 14 at the altar of Mars on the Campus Martius an eagle flew around before carefully alighting on the A of Agrippa's name on the prominent inscription of the temple of Mars that lay directly in line between the altar of Mars and Augustus' Mausoleum. As clearly as the topographical and ritual realities could allow, Jupiter was indicating to Augustus that the second founder of Rome would follow the first, Romulus, to the skies *after* his death. Augustus, the senior member of the college of augurs (the priests who sought and interpreted bird signs) and ever sensitive concerning augural communication, did not need to

consult his fellows, so clear was this sign that he had not sought; he accepted that the sign, principally because of the timing (the *vinculum temporis* in augural law), applied to himself, and with utter scrupulousness entrusted the census vows to Tiberius, who would be alive to fulfil them in due course. Although it may seem a case of semiotic overkill, the gods go further in the second sign: a bolt of lightning struck a statue of Augustus melting away the initial *C* of Caesar and leaving the word *aesar*. The *haruspices* were summoned in and, as practitioners of the Etruscan discipline (the study of animal entrails, portents and lightning), were able to recognise the Etruscan word for god; they then proceeded by analogy to conclude that the molten *C* when combined with *aesar* indicated that Augustus would die and become a god in exactly 100 days, as no doubt happened (or else we wouldn't have the story). Alone, then, of all Suetonius' *divi*, Augustus is assured of his future divinity by the gods. Thus for our biographer Augustus' consecration was no mere human procedure driven or compromised by transient political agendas, but was a recognition of what the gods had already demonstrated would come to pass.

A different, but equally valid, perspective is afforded in the immediate sequel, which Rudolph Hanslik, an Austrian Latinist, argues Suetonius constructed as a logical follow-on: now convinced of his impending divinity, Augustus manifests the characteristics of a god; he who was once so justifiably anxious about his health is now as carefree as a god. While Hanslik's view is valid, I think that another key concern of Suetonius is to show Augustus in another world, not primarily a private world but rather the Greek world, where conceptions of ruler cult were different. It is crucial to highlight that the context in which the following events take place is not Roman, but is a detailed description of four days that Augustus spent on Capri and then his time in Naples. Although the island and the city were in Italy, they were firmly in the Greek cultural world. While Augustus undoubtedly 'goes Greek', encouraging the swapping of the two very important constituents of identity, language and dress, and revelling in Greek athletic games, such behaviour does not betray Augustus' Roman-ness, e.g. undermining his public stance on Roman citizens wearing the toga, but rather defines what is Roman. By knowing what the boundaries were and in what context they could be moved or ignored, intelligent Romans could indulge themselves without compromising their Roman ideals. Suetonius presents an Augustus on holiday, as it were, from Roman attitudes to ruler cult in a way that reminds the reader of the empire-wide context.

For us the most important incident is Augustus' interaction with the passengers and crew of a corn ship from Alexandria that had just put in at Puteoli. Each and every element of the description underlines the religious nature of the encounter: Egyptian priests and Romans wore white on festive days. The wearing of crowns or wreaths was also a consistent element of cult, as of course was the offering of incense. *Fausta omina* are words with a positive religious sense, such as 'Augustus'. In Suetonius the connotation of *eximius*, which I translated as 'extraordinary', is always extremely positive, so the praises of the Alexandrians are not excessive or typical of eastern adulation. The clothing and the actions of the Alexandrians indicate that they were making an offering to Augustus, as had long been the custom in Alexandria. It is highly plausible, also, that

the artistic tricolon produced by the sailors derives from an acclamation to the living emperor as a god, such as the pharaohs and the Ptolemies had received. In strict context *vivere* could perhaps be restricted to the sense ‘we have not been killed on this voyage’, but, if the expression is rendered into the Greek that the Alexandrians undoubtedly used, διὰ σὲ ζῶμεν, there is a possible allusion both to the etymology by which the Greeks explained the name of Zeus, and to the worship of Augustus as Zeus, which was common in Egypt. The sailors had probably prayed to Caesar or Augustus Epibaterios for a safe voyage in the Caesareum at Alexandria as they left. The idea of the Egyptian ruler as able to save was expressed poetically by Posidippus and symbolically in the inscription on the Alexandrian Pharos to the two Ptolemies. ἂ σὲ πλέομεν should not be rationalised away as thanks for the suppression of pirates. ἔλευθερία καὶ τύχαις διὰ σὲ χρώμεθα may allude to the special title Zeus Eleutherios that was conferred on Augustus across Egypt. Taking due account of the Alexandrian, if not Egyptian, background of the sailors and passengers, this is a clear example of worship of the living Augustus. Augustus’ response is joy, *exhilaratus*, and lavish generosity to his friends; he does not reprimand or seek to prevent the response of the Egyptians to him, which is acceptable to Augustus in the context.

In fact what Suetonius shows us, although his work is not structured so as to bring this out clearly, is that at both ends of his public career Augustus received recognition and worship as a god from non-Romans; both episodes perhaps are to be seen as playing a role in the psychological assurance of Augustus before particularly trying moments of his life. The Egyptians worshipped him as a god days before his death, the Greek astrologer Theogenes when the nineteen year old was as yet unaware of his glorious future. Suetonius is our only source for the consultation with Theogenes in Apollonia, set in late 45 or early 44. Of the several intriguing aspects of the scene only one is important here, the response of the astrologer once Augustus had revealed his time and date of birth and once the astrologer had consulted his charts: *exsilivit Theogenes adoravitque eum* (94.12). *Adoratio* could involve raising the right hand to the lips and directing the kiss towards the deity, or take (from the Roman perspective) a more extreme form, that of bowing or complete prostration, physical forms which for the Greeks and Romans were those of a cult act. The typical Roman attitude to *adoratio* of a human being during the early Principate is exemplified in Suetonius’ categorisation of Vitellius’ introduction of the practice under Caligula as repulsive flattery, *adulatio*. No criticism of Theogenes, however, is intended by Suetonius, as his inclusion of the horoscope as a sign of future greatness requires.

Theogenes appears in no other context and he cannot be linked plausibly with any other known individual. The name itself is relatively common in the Greek world and tells us nothing about his potential origin. Even if it was the name of an historical individual in Apollonia in 44 BC, in retrospect, and I would argue certainly for Suetonius, it acquires greater significance: one whose name means ‘born of god’ acknowledges the one who was not only *Divi filius* in the Roman context, but in the east also θεός. Fifty-eight years before the Senate instituted worship of Augustus, he was recognised by someone who, from his name at least, was well qualified to

recognise another divine offspring. It is easy to imagine that Augustus, or whoever Suetonius' source for this incident may have been, either intended or constructed a significant relationship between the name Theogenes and his response to Augustus.

We receive, then, from Suetonius a compartmentalised picture of Augustus' expectation of divinity in which the clearest proofs possible in both Roman and non-Roman systems of thought are provided. The biographer, though, respects the differences between the two as he presents behaviour appropriate to Roman and non-Roman contexts.

Lastly I want to look at Suetonius' presentation of the reality of Augustus' divinity, which takes us to the other end of the *Life* and involves a sharp contrast of the human and the divine. In the first four chapters the biographer has compiled an account of the family history of Augustus' natural parents which sets out the comparative humbleness of his origins: the *princeps*' own claim that his paternal line was an old equestrian family is juxtaposed with the claims of M. Antonius that it was tainted with the servile and banausic – a great-grandfather who was an ex-slave and a grandfather who was a money-dealer. As to the maternal line, against Augustus' claims of senatorial ancestors, Antonius alleges the tar-brush – a great-grandfather of African origin who moved into the baking business after running a perfume shop. This section of the *life* ends with an extract from a letter written by Cassius of Parma, assassin of Caesar and notorious victim of Augustan revenge, which combines both strands of Antonius' attack and adds a smutty sexual dimension: Augustus' ancestry, then, was not the obvious stuff of gods, yet the very next words mark the beginning of a series of references to Augustus' divinity. It begins by recording that Augustus (Suetonius deliberately uses the anachronistic name) was born in a modest part of Rome, but then qualifies that by *ubi nunc habet sacrum* 'where he now has a shrine'. The present tense, comparatively rare in the *Lives*, signals to the reader that worship of Augustus continued to the present, more than a hundred years after Augustus' death. Laetorius' plea for mercy to the Senate is based on the idea that Augustus was *quasi proprius suus ac peculiaris deus*, 'as it were his own special and personal god', a private unofficial deity. Hanslik makes much of *deus* as bringing before the reader the whole course of Augustus' life and as the first appearance of this key term, but for Suetonius' readers it is not Laetorius' personal *deus* who is important but *Divus Augustus*. He emerges obliquely from final words of the passage, which bring before the reader a formal senatorial decision relating to the cult of a public deity. So far, then, Suetonius has established cult, even a state cult; the next chapter presents a god with the manifest power to punish.

Augustus' nursery remained as a place of pilgrimage or tourist interest to Suetonius' day; his use of two present tenses, *ostenditur adhuc* 'is still shown' and *religio est* 'there is a taboo', suggests autopsy, and that he has gathered the Velitani's story in person, thus adding to the credibility of a tale which tests the reader's credulity. The story of the new owner's physical ejection is a demonstration unparalleled in existing literature from the ancient world of the power of what might be referred to today as a 'poltergeist', something more than a haunting. Augustus was no

earthbound spirit, angry or dangerous, of the sort held to be responsible for haunting, like the unburied Caligula; rather Augustus was demonstrating that his godhead was to be taken as seriously as that of an Olympian god. Augustus' display of his *numen* to punish someone who violates his sacred terrain demonstrates clearly that he was no less an able vindicator of his own power than Hercules, Apollo or Aesculapius, or any other of the Olympian deities.

The historical Augustus was a highly complex and elusive figure: there was enough varied material in his long career for historians and others to create whatever they wanted. Suetonius rightly identifies that human and the divine are important facets of the problem of describing Augustus: a man who became a god and still received worship in the imperial household by the emperor himself, in Rome and across the empire in Suetonius' own day. While the experience of the people of Velitrae was hardly the norm among those who offered worship to Augustus throughout the Roman world, Suetonius's decision to include the remarkable story in the way that he has suggests, to me at least, that for him being a god requires more than a decision taken by competent legislative bodies, in fact both something of a divine nature, or at least the demonstration of divine power, and its recognition by his human worshippers. His inclusion of the story is a useful counterbalance to the otherwise plausible thesis that imperial cult concentrated almost exclusively on the living emperor. Suetonius' *Divus Augustus*, by comparison with the other *divi*, appears to be a deity whom Suetonius is encouraging his reader to take seriously. The Christian poet Prudentius, writing when Christian control of the Empire was secure, still inveighed against the power and the evil of pagan religion that refused to fade away before the new faith. Part of his shot-gun attack is to target the worship of a series of deified individuals; his most vicious comments are reserved for Hadrian's toy-boy, the delectable Antinous, whom Hadrian deified after his African misadventure; his second target is Augustus. Though dead for almost 400 years Augustus still answers the prayers of his petitioners by making oracular pronouncements and still earns his worship. Suetonius, then was not alone (nor perhaps wrong) in acknowledging the continuing efficacy of Augustus.

In conclusion, then, in his presentation of Augustus the material that involves the emperor's godhead is not, I would argue, less important than the political or social actions of the emperor, which normally form the heart of any historical presentation of an emperor, but demonstrates a vital element of what the emperor was to the world over which he ruled and had ruled. Our African biographer has skilfully and subtly put together a picture that challenges modern perspectives and illuminates what I at least consider to be a fascinating element of the ancient world, and something worth professing.

Dixi.

