I

MAKING MEN GODS

In Cicero's late treatise *De Natura Deorum*, the academic philosopher Cotta unleashes a vivid attack on Epicureanism, as well as on all those teachings that, in his view, would utterly destroy religion. He rails against "those who teach that brave or famous or powerful men have been deified after death, and that it is these who are the real objects of the worship, prayers, and adoration which we are accustomed to offer" (*ND* 1.119). Yet precisely such a doctrine had already emerged in Cicero's *De Legibus*, among his recitation of his laws: "They shall worship as gods both those who have always been considered to dwell in the heavens, and those who have been installed there on account of merit," and he then comments that "the law that prescribes [such] worship . . . makes it clear that while the souls of all men are immortal, those of good and brave men are divine" (*Leg.* 2.7.19, 2.9.27–8 and cf. *ND* 3.18.46).

The idea that one might make men gods was an old one, even among the Romans. The source of these ideas was well known, and in the *De Natura Deorum* Cicero goes on to point out that the theory had been expounded by Euhemerus, whose work was translated and imitated most notably by the Roman poet Ennius (*ND* 1.42.119). Ennius' text is lost, but according to Lactantius, writing at the end of the third century A.D., he had produced a *Sacra Historia* (ca. 180 B.C.), which was either a paraphrase or translation of Euhemerus' works. This was a history of the gods, one that attempted a rational explanation of ancient Greek myth. Amid this mass of material, the conception of the gods as former men and women who had been elevated to the heavens on account of their accomplishments held pride of place. Even Jupiter himself was to be considered in this light:

> And then Jupiter, after he had gone the round of the world five times and had made division of his dominions to all his friends and relations, and bequeathed to mortals laws and manners, and furnished grain and did

> many other good things, and having been honored with immortal glory and renown, he left everlasting monuments to be remembered by for his [friends and relations]. When he was sunk in the depths of old age, he parted with his life in Crete, and went away to join the gods.[1]

The doctrine of Euhemerus was similarly acknowledged by Cicero's contemporary Diodorus Siculus:

> As regards the gods, then, men of ancient times have handed down to later generations two different conceptions: certain of the gods, they say, are eternal and imperishable, such as the sun and the moon and the other stars of the heavens, and the winds as well and whatever else possesses a nature similar to theirs; for of each of these the genesis and duration are from everlasting to everlasting. But the other gods, we are told, were terrestrial beings who attained immortal honor and fame because of their benefactions to mankind, such as Heracles, Dionysus, Aristaeus, and the others who were like them. (Diod. 6.1–2 = Euseb. *Praep. Ev.* 2.2.53)

Yet Cicero was cautiously skeptical, and less than certain how such elevation to the status of the gods, however merited, was effected. Later in the *De Natura Deorum*, his spokesman Cotta questions not only the doctrine, but its underlying assumptions:

> As for those men whom you declare to have attained the state of divinity, you should explain – and I would be glad to learn – how this [apotheosis] could be done, or why it has ceased to be so. (Cic. *ND* 3.16.41)

Cicero's skepticism was topical, and the claim that apotheosis had "ceased" to be something Romans believed in, of current, or soon-to-be, concern.

What did it mean for the Romans to think of men as gods – or, perhaps more accurately, to treat them as if they were? The view of Cicero's Cotta, that belief in deification was a thing of the past, was much exaggerated. Divine honors, of a variety of kinds, were not uncommon. Throughout the second and first centuries, Romans had been honored as gods in the East, and this form of Greek cultic behavior would gradually find an equivalent at Rome. The sources report, unambiguously, that Romans began to offer to other citizens those same rites that were the staple of, indeed, that defined, their relations with their gods. But what such rites *meant* in these instances is far from clear.[2]

Cicero's own views at this time were informed by the tragic death of his young daughter, Tullia, sometime in late February of 45.[3] In a series of letters to Atticus, he contemplates the details of the monument he wants to build for her:

> I want it to be a shrine (*fanum*), and that idea cannot be rooted out of my mind. I am anxious to avoid its being taken for a tomb, not so much on account of the legal penalty as to get as near to deification as possible. (*Att.* 12.36.1)

This was to be a private monument, on private land Cicero hoped to acquire, despite the fact that the expenditure he envisioned was sure to incur a fine. He wanted it, somehow, to be *celebritatem* – to be in the public eye, in a place much frequented (*Att*. 12.37.2), and to be distinguishable from a common tomb. For the gods did not have tombs, and if Cicero's wish to evoke his daughter's apotheosis was to be realized, the shrine could not be mistaken for her sepulcher; indeed, he says that it would be like an *aphidruma*, and thus implies that it would become the object of cult. Cicero's plans seem to have come to nothing; the murder of Caesar, civil war, and finally his own death, intervened.[4]

In other cases, cult practice – and at time, shrines – came to fruition, and other cult forms emerged. Thus was the case with the famous celebration of the Gracchi, after the death of Gaius in 121, ten years after the murder of his brother Tiberius. According to Plutarch, the *populus*

> had statues of the brothers made and set up in a conspicuous place, consecrated the places where they were slain, and brought there offerings of all the first-fruits of the seasons, indeed more, many sacrificed and fell down before their statues every day, as though they were visiting the shrines of gods. (*C. Gracch*. 18)

It was one thing to make offerings to the dead: for in Roman tradition, their collective spirits, the *di manes*, had always been the focus of offerings. Yet it was rather different to make such offerings and obeisance to *living* men – and such were made. In 101, in response to Marius' defeat of the Cimbri, the Roman people brought him ceremonial offerings of food and libations of wine.[5] In 86 (85?), the *praetor* Marius Gratidianus was celebrated by the people with statues in every neighborhood, where they burned incense and candles, and poured offerings in his honor.[6] And in 77, supplications, with incense, were offered to Metellus Pius, "as if to a god."[7]

The intended purpose in all these instances was the same – to honor these men in a fashion above and beyond those that were regarded as the customary acknowledgments for human accomplishments; indeed, the point of such honors seems to have been to recognize, in full view of the citizenry, that those accomplishments were of the sort expected only from the gods. Two things stand out amid these various attestations. First, all these were private acts, engaged in the private sphere, without the slightest hint of *official*, that is, state, authority; this is true even in the case of Marius Gratidianus, whose statues, we are told repeatedly, were set up throughout the city of Rome. All such offerings and prayers were – or so the literary tradition suggests – the spontaneous response of the *populus*, and those who acted in this fashion did so on their own initiative. Second, the sources demonstrate, if taken at their word, that no *pattern* for such acts of worship was observed, and that no fixed practices for such exalted honors had been established. In addition to *statuae* (each attestation employs

the term for monuments to men, not gods), incense, candles, wine, "first fruits," and other foodstuffs were offered – and all these are attested in a variety of combinations. Thus it is striking that only in Seneca's description of the honors for Gratidianus do the offerings and his language correspond to what we know to have been a standard form employed by the Romans for divine worhip (*ture ac vino supplicabat*). Whatever the origins of all these accounts, it seems unlikely that if the official protocols of such sacrifices had been observed, they would have gone unremarked, repeatedly. None of these episodes suggests that any of these actions *made* the objects of such acts into gods – that was a matter for the state to decide, and would only first come to pass with the case of Caesar.

All of this provides at least part of the background to Cicero's *De Natura Deorum* with which we began. But what is perhaps more significant is that the treatise was composed at the very moment when Julius Caesar's increasingly unprecedented honors commenced – honors that would culminate, ultimately, in his divinization. Cicero clearly had qualms about the entire matter, and his skepticism in general should be regarded as an index of his views concerning Caesar in particular.

Divine Honors for Caesar?

The question has long been asked: did his unprecedented honors signal a new, divine status for Caesar while he still lived? – and if so, how? The honors bequeathed in 45 after Caesar's victory at the Battle of Munda are, despite much ingenious argument, hardly decisive. Nonetheless, the list is impressive: there were *supplicationes* in his honor for fifty days; games offered in his honor; the grant of the title of Liberator, and a temple vowed to *Libertas*; two statues on the Rostra, one with the *corona civica*, the other the *obsidionalis*; a statue among those of the kings on the Capitol; a statue in the Temple of Quirinus; an ivory statue, and a chariot in which it was to be carried in the *pompa circensis*; *supplicationes* in his honor to be held after every Roman victory; the right to wear the laurel wreath always and triumphal garb at the games; and finally, a triumph to be celebrated upon Caesar's return, in October.[8] None of these – not even *all* of these – presume Caesar's public acknowledgment as an official god of the Roman state religion, or that acknowledgment's confirmation by the institution of cult practice. What needs to be scrutinized with greater care is what a claim for Caesar's divinity, in his lifetime, might have meant. Cicero's testimony does suggest, at the very least, that the question had currency, and that it had undoubtedly been broached, publicly. At this moment, the old Greek ideas about making men gods clearly weighed on Roman minds.

It was in the aftermath of Caesar's assassination that the true topicality of Euhemerus' doctrines emerged. As we shall see in due course (Chapter II), in his speech of 2 September 44, the first of his *Philippics*, Cicero inveighed against

those who would honor Caesar with an altar, decried the popular emergence of a cult, and applauded its brutal suppression ordered by the consul Dolabella. And when he castigated his fellow senators for allowing the passage, on the previous day, of a decree that enacted the permanent extension of all public thanksgivings by an additional day in Caesar's honor, belief in Julius' divinization was challenged, not only on political, but religious grounds:

> Do you think, Conscript Fathers, that I would have supported the decree that you unwillingly passed, that those sacrifices offered in honor of the dead (*parentalia*) should be confused with thanksgivings (*supplicationes*)? That religious taints incapable of expiation should be introduced into the State? That *supplicationes* should be decreed in honor of a dead man? I will say not a thing about whom (*Phil*. 1.13).

Nihil dico cui – unmistakably, Caesar. What did Cicero mean here? The difference between the rites he referred to is clear. Public law and *religio* prescribed differing kinds of relations between men, and between men and the gods; these institutions were, in effect, the ways in which Roman society represented those relations to itself (cf. *ND* 1.117, 2.72). *Parentationes* were one of the "four solemn sacrifices" devoted to the consecrated dead, as a collectivity. These were offers of animal victims (*hostiae*) to placate the spirits of the deceased (*Di Manes*), and were customarily performed on the days of the *Parentalia* (13–21 February).[9] By contrast, the gods, deemed to be efficacious and propitious in the exercise of their powers on the Romans' behalf, were to be thanked for such *beneficia* with *supplicationes*. These were public thanksgivings decreed by the Senate by means of which the gods were either appeased, their assistance sought, or their beneficence celebrated; and, in the case of *supplicationes*, which were customarily invoked in response to victories, the leadership of Rome's commanders was acknowledged for the successful outcome of the state's affairs. As Livy preserves the doctrine, "they also decree supplications in the consul's name on account of the state's affairs being well-managed." All social ranks joined together in procession to the gods' temples, to offer them their gratitude, and to honor those magistrates under whose leadership such accomplishments transpired.[10]

There can be little doubt that the Senate, pressured by Antony, had voted to allow a *supplicatio* in Caesar's name, thus providing, probably for the first time, an honor that had been among those reputedly decreed in 45. The circumstance was quite possibly the voting of *supplicationes* to the gods in honor of the victory of L. Munatius Plancus over the Raetians, and this would have marked the first instance of the Caesarian honor's *posthumous* enactment.[11]

But why did Cicero object so strenuously, and to what, precisely? First, Cicero's text suggests that he had assumed that the meeting of the Senate on the first of September was to offer, as it were, *pro forma* gratitude for Plancus'

recent victories, and thus one understands both Cicero's willingness to absent himself and his shock at learning that Antony had moved the passage of the conjoined honor for Caesar. A new decree was required, since, despite Caesar's *acta* having been confirmed, this did not include an embrace of all those honors that had been bequeathed in his lifetime and that, for whatever reason, had not yet been enacted; in the fraught political climate, reconfirmation was deemed essential.[12] Cicero's objection was launched not only against this renewal of an honor for Caesar, but against Antony's political position as the dictator's champion.

The idea that Caesar might be honored in tandem with another's victory was, if unprecedented, clearly not illegal. But Caesar was *dead*, and, at least in part, Cicero's objection to *supplicationes* in his name was that this sacrilegiously extended to him an honor appropriate solely to the *living* – or so Cicero claimed. For the dead there were other forms of commemoration, other rites, and other representations – notably, the *parentationes* – and Cicero insinuates that the award of *supplicationes* would have been in flagrant disregard of the requirements of religious law. Yet Cicero made his objections still more evident – and more pointed. The full thrust of his polemic was to discredit Antony by exaggerating his position and by casting him as the proponent of Caesar's deification – and thus, branding him as the enemy not only of the "liberators" but of the newly won freedom of the senatorial class that, according to Cicero, the assassins had effected. Cicero's solidarity with the "tyrannicides" was explicit, and while he was willing to concede some things in the cause of peace (*Phil*. 1.18), even this had its limits. He exclaimed, rhetorically – and surely, disingenuously – that *supplicationes* of the gods in the dead Caesar's honor would be tantamount to acknowledging him as a god, and that this clearly went too far:

> I could not be persuaded to unite any mortal with the religion of the immortal gods, so that wherever there might exist a tomb for one where the *parentatio* was performed, there might be *supplicationes* offered publicly.[13]

For Cicero, it had been despicable that Caesar's partisans had established a monument in the Forum, where they had attempted to offer cult; even to *appear* to enshrine a similar practice in public law was too much for him to bear. While in his view, many of the honors decreed to the tyrant in his lifetime might, for the sake of peace, be tolerated and thus enacted (*Phil*. 1.7.16), this was one that, should it be observed, posed a serious threat to the state.

This was Cicero's position; in the turbulent wake of Caesar's asassination, Antony was carefully cultivating his own. The revelation that Caesar had named the young Octavian as his heir complicated Antony's already fraught political

predicament. When Octavian rapidly returned to Rome to claim his inheritance, Antony's opposition – and, according to Cicero, his connivance to seize power – had led to outright confrontation. From Cicero's point of view, if Antony were cast in the role of a proponent of Caesar's deification, the actions of the liberators would appear all the more justified, the position of Antony all the more untenable, and that of the young Octavian all the more desirable. Thus Antony balked at effecting those very divinizing honors whose passage he had provoked.

For Antony's hopes to succeed to Caesar's pre-eminence depended on thwarting Octavian's ability to capitalize on his inheritance, and Cicero's hopes for the *res publica* rested on the youth's rallying the support of Caesar's veterans and effecting a rapprochement with Cassius and Brutus. As late as January of 43, Cicero could declare that it was in Octavian "that our hope of liberty is placed" (*Phil*. 5.49), and in April he would propose *supplicationes* in honor of the youth, together with Hirtius and Pansa (*Phil*. 14.29); all this despite his own misgivings voiced the previous November (cf. *Att*. 16.9, 16.15). As we shall see, in all these maneuverings the potent rhetorical claims for and against Caesar's divinity played a prominent role.

Deus and *Divus*

But in what way could Caesar have been considered a god – in life or in death? Our problem is the lack of specificity of the sources, compounded by their actual language. The topic is never directly and unambiguously broached, and when Cicero speaks of Divus Julius, the very name poses problems. Despite the diatribes of the *Philippics*, Cicero employs it only once (*Phil*. 2.110), and it is not at all clear from the context, as we shall see, that the appellation had currency. Our Greek sources exacerbate the situation, as they provide the equivalent (*theos*) – as opposed to a transliteration – whose usage fails to correspond to the Latin. Dio would never use the term, merely stating, somewhat inexplicably, that Casear was called "Jupiter Julius" (*Día Ioúlion* [44.6.4]). If there was serious debate about Caesar's cult name, it is lost to us; *divus* it was to be, yet this was neither obvious nor inevitable.[14]

The idea of a *divus* had a history. It has long been observed that the language of religious doctrine that distinguished between eternal gods and those who had been men and had been rewarded with divinity on account of their merit underwent a fundamental transformation with the advent of official divinization in the imperial period. Our early evidence is ambiguous. Ennius, writing in the early second century B.C., had (according to Lactantius, late third-century A.D.) employed the Latin form *deus* when he told of Jupiter joining the gods (*ad deos abiit*), but according to Cicero, when the poet had spoken of Jupiter as the "father of men and gods," he had used *divus* (*pater divomque hominumque*).[15]

The confused state of our sources was widespread, as these same ideas were also held, in this same period (according to Servius), by both Varro and Ateius:

> For the most part the poet [*sc*. Vergil] uses *divum* and *deorum* without distinction, although there is a difference in that we call perpetual divinities *dei* and those who have become gods after a human existence *divi*. But Varro and Ateius hold the opposite view, calling perpetual divinities *divi* and those who are honored because of their being consecrated *dei*, as are the *di manes*. (Serv. *ad Aen*. 5.45)

Despite the authority of both Varro and Ateius, it was exactly the reverse of their views that would be established and become conventional. The institutionalization of the emperor's divinity would assert that while *dei* were eternal, the *divi* were "made."[16]

Caesar was indeed made a god, *in law*, but that would wait until 42; Cicero would be dead, and Octavian would by then have replaced Antony as Caesar's champion. The factions had metamorphosed amid profound rivalry, and civil war was once again imminent. Ultimately, the Roman world would change dramatically, in no small part under the pressure of Caesar's divinization and those that followed with that practice's institutionalization: henceforth, *some* men would become gods, and this very fact was to play a significant role in the character, and public response to, their earthly rule.

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The following chapters are about that new "divine" institution, the process of its coming into being, and its repercussions. They attempt to sketch the historical dimensions of Caesar's "divinity," in his lifetime as well as posthumously; to explain the foundations – political and religious – on which it was established, and by means of which it was to be continued; and, finally, to explicate the unique character of this new institution that so directly challenged so many others that were essential to republican tradition. All of these aspects of the present endeavor have long occupied scholars. Indeed, our evidence – literary, numismatic, epigraphic, archaeological, and art historical – has long been employed in attempts both to explicate those sources that suggest Caesar's lifetime divinity, and to adumbrate the myriad effects of the senatorial decision in January of 42 that prescribed those rituals that *made* Caesar – officially – Divus Julius and that paved the way for Octavian to eventually become, in like fashion, Divus Augustus. Yet, despite the precedents of republican cult offerings, the consecration of Caesar was an innovation, and as such, this new institution had many and varied consequences, some of which have seldom, if ever, been acknowledged. What ensues attempts to outline some of the repercussions of establishing such a new institution, and to open new avenues of inquiry.

Three Claims

This study attempts to take the measure of these changes, to describe their forms, and to analyze their effects. In doing so, its chapters, collectively, make three broad claims:

1. The imagery devised for the representation of Divus Julius was *amalgamated* from a series of models, whose roles in Roman tradition were well established, yet rarely – if ever – the subject of such appropriation and assimilation. These models were drawn from both history and legend, and represented not only the religious, but the political sphere – the reality of Caesar's military prowess required no such elaboration. This claim is rooted in an analysis of the changes made between the appearance of the two variants of the coin type issued to signal Octavian's plan to build a temple dedicated to Divus Julius (*RRC* 540) (Illustrations I.1 and I.2). As shall become clear, these coins' imagery drew upon that associated with the augural discipline; to a lesser, and less obvious, degree, the Genius of the Roman People; and made striking allusion to Romulus, who would pave the way for Julius' apotheosis. The amalgamation of these models, and of those monumental forms by means of which they were publicly commemorated, would thus endow the cult statue of Divus Julius with a form at once implicitly traditional and strikingly innovative. The intermingling of references, with respect to both form and content, was essential, for the ambivalent character of the Romulus story made outright identification unsuitable, and the very novelty of Divus Julius' status, in order to signal its virtually unprecedented character, required that it appear to have no model at all. Divus Julius was a unique religious and political reality – not a metaphor.

2. The monuments that celebrated Caesar's divinization underwent a gradual process of development, a process elaborated, in turn, following the apotheosis of his successor, Augustus. The historical record reveals not only a series of monuments of differing kinds, but a continuing refinement, indeed transformation, of these kinds, their modes of allusion, and their distinctive imagery. These monuments changed with the growth of the institution they signaled; they were *accumulative*, and this is borne out, as we shall see, not only by an analysis of the coins that proclaimed the imagery of the *Aedes Divi Iulii*, but by careful study of the continuing elaborations of the shrines at which the new *divi*, and the living emperor, were venerated.

3. Ultimately, the new institution of the *divus* would become conventionalized, and this was to undermine both its profound significance and its representability. As the new institution's ubiquity and acceptance would eradicate the *divus'*

I.1. Divus Julius: cult statue (augur). AR denarius. *RRC* 540/2, rev. (Octavian), 36 B.C. Photo: Fototeca Unione 9165.

novelty, the visual imagery forged for its depiction would collapse under the pressure of old patterns and practices of representation. The realilty of the new institution would eventually become little more than the old metaphors from which its representations derived.

Four Assumptions

The aforementioned claims are rooted in a series of four underlying assumptions about Caesar, Augustus, and the Roman world of their times – assumptions from which this book's chapters and their arguments have evolved. These concern the structure of Roman social, political, and religious institutions, and the representation of those institutions – in customs, in words, and in monuments – amid the society that gave rise to them:

1. *The new institution of* consecratio *profoundly transformed Roman society and reconfigured its relations to its gods.* While divinization had played a significant role in Rome's mythic past, the Romans of the late republic had no tradition – neither official rites, nor social mechanisms – on which to base the actual procedure. In the wake of Caesar's assassination, Varro apparently led the way, despite Cicero's misgivings. In his *De gente populi romani* – on which Varro was at work in 43 – a survey of Rome's early kings acknowledged that some had been elevated to the status of the gods after death: precedent existed, but not practice. As a result, what we witness in the sources is a gradual process that articulated a new status first for the dead, and eventually for the living, *Caesares*. For the novelty of divinization posed unique legal, religious, and political problems that questioned, and at times contradicted, other long-standing institutions.