

Sources on the Imperial Cult

1. Pertinax as God

Cassius Dio LXXV.4.2–5.5

Despite the lapse of time since his death, his funeral was celebrated as follows. A platform was constructed of wood near the *rostra* in the Roman Forum and on it a shrine of gold and ivory was set up, with no walls only columns. Inside this, there was a bier of the same materials, decorated with the heads of animals, of land and sea, and having covers of purple and gold. On the bier was Pertinax, in waxen effigy, laid out in the dress of a triumphing general; a handsome boy was keeping the flies off him with peacock feathers, as though it were a real person asleep. As the body lay in state, Severus together with us senators and our wives approached it wearing mourning; the women sat down in the porticoes, we in the open air. Then a procession passed by: first, the famous Romans of ancient times; then men and boys singing hymns of mourning for Pertinax; after that all the nations of the empire, represented by figures of bronze dressed in the local costumes; next, members of the Roman guilds – those of the *lictors*, the scribes, the heralds and so on. Then came images of men famous for some deed, or invention or activity. Then came the cavalry and infantry in arms; the racehorses; and then all the offerings sent by us senators and our wives, by the more distinguished of the knights, by the people and by the guilds of Rome. After the offerings, came an altar, entirely gilded and set with ivory and gems from India. (5) When the whole procession had passed by, Severus went up on the *rostra* himself and read out a speech in praise of Pertinax. We often shouted out in enthusiasm in the course of this speech, sometimes praising Pertinax and sometimes bewailing him; but the loudest shouts of all came at the end. Finally at the point when the bier was going to be moved, we all lamented and wept together. It was taken down from the platform by the priests and by the magistrates in office and the magistrates elect; they then handed it over to be carried by some of the knights. The rest of us marched in front of the bier, some beating our breasts, some playing a dirge on the flute; the emperor followed last of all; and in this order we reached the Campus Martius. There, in the form of a three-storey tower, a pyre had been built decorated with ivory, gold and many statues; at its peak there was a golden chariot that Pertinax used to drive. The funerary offerings were thrown inside this pyre and the bier put into it. The effigy of Pertinax was then kissed by Severus and by members of the family. The emperor climbed up on to a platform; we senators (except the magistrates) on to stands of wood from which we could view the rituals easily and safely. The magistrates and the equestrian order in their appropriate dress, and likewise the cavalry and the infantry, passed in and out around the pyre performing intricate manoeuvres, both those of peace and those of war. Then finally the consuls set fire to the structure and, when this was done, an eagle flew up from the pyre. In this way Pertinax was made immortal.

2. Claudius as God

The scene is set on Mount Olympus, where the old gods debate the new arrival. The procedure parodies that of the senate in Rome, where the decision to deify was made. The gods turn out to be divided on the issue, but Claudius' claim is in the end rejected on the advice of *divus* Augustus, who lists Claudius' crimes.

See further: Griffin (1976) 129–33*; Eden (1984); Braund (1993); Relihan (1993) 75–90.

Seneca (?), *Pumpkinification of Claudius* 9

It finally dawned on Jupiter that so long as strangers were loitering in the senate house¹ the senators were not allowed to express opinions or take part in debate. 'Conscript Fathers,' he said, 'I gave you permission to ask questions, but all you have done is to create mayhem. I require you to obey the rules of the senate house. What impression will this man (whatever he is) have formed of us?' So, Claudius was sent out and the first called to give his opinion was Father Janus. He was the consul designate, down to hold the office for the afternoon of the following first of July,² and a fellow who, so long as it's up his own street, always looks 'backwards and forwards at the same time'.³ He lived in the Forum and had much to say with an eloquence that the shorthand-writer could not keep up with.⁴ I'm therefore missing this out, so as not to put his speech into other words. He had a lot to say about the greatness of the gods and about how the honour should not be handed out to every Tom, Dick and Harry. 'There was a time,' he said, 'when it was a great thing to be made a god; but you have turned it into a Bean Farce.'⁵ To avoid seeming to give my views *ad hominem*, rather than on the issue, my proposal is that from this day onwards nobody should be made a god from those who 'consume the fruits of the earth' or whom the 'fruitful earth' sustains.⁶ Anyone who, contrary to this decree of the senate, is made, spoken about or represented as a god shall be delivered up to the spooks and lashed with whips among the new gladiators at the next public spectacle.'

1. I.e. the senate house on Mount Olympus. Jupiter and Janus are represented just as satirically as Claudius himself.
2. The consul-elect had the privilege of speaking first in the senate; the satirical reference is to short-term appointments to high office, which were much criticized.
3. Janus was always represented with a double head. Looking 'backwards and forwards at the same time' is quoted by Seneca in Greek; it is a phrase used commonly in Homer for heroes with knowledge of both past and future.
4. Janus' statue stood in the Forum, also the centre of speech-making – hence his 'eloquence'.
5. The reference to 'Bean Farce' is obscure; it was presumably some ridiculous comic performance.
6. Janus quotes Homer (in Greek) to refer to mortal men, as defined by their diet; the force of the mock decree is therefore to ban deification in future.

3. Law on imperial priests, from Narbonne (Gallia Narbonensis)

ILS 6964; CIL XII.6038

[Concerning the honours of the man who will be the *flamen*]

[... at Na]rbo[...] [...] the *lictors*[...] [...] and law of that province[...] [...] [...] among the town-councillors or senate[...] [...] [...] among the town-councillors or s]enators, in the first row, to watch [the games let him have the right]¹ [...] the wife of the *flamen* clad in white or purple garments[...] [...] [...] nor let her take an oath against her will nor touch a dead body[...] [...] [...] of a cremated man; and let her at public games[...] [...] ²

Concerning the honours of the *ex-flamen*³

[... if the *ex-flamen*] has done nothing contrary to this law, let the *flamen* [see to it that...] [...] [...] by ballot] they should decide on oath whether the *ex-flamen* should be allowed [to place a statue...] [...] [...] should have the right of] placing a statue and the name of his father, his origin and the year of his *flaminate*[...] [...] [...] at Na]rbo let there be the right of p[lacing the statue within the temple area, unless the emperor [...] ⁴ [...] [...] And let him] have the right in the local council and in the provincial council of Narbonensis amongst the men of his rank according to the law [...] [...] let there be the right of giving an opinion and voting; likewise at the public show in the province [...] [...] in the *toga praetexta* and on those days on which he sacrificed as *flamen* in that dress [...] [...]]

If the *flamen* ceases to be a Roman citizen

If the *flamen* ceases to be a citizen and no substitute has been appointed, then whoever [...] [...] within three days from the time of being informed and being able <to act>, let him perform the sacred rites at Narbo [...] [...] for the rest] of the year let him hold [the ?] in

the order in which [the ?] of the annual *flamines* [are held]⁵ [...] [...] if he shall have performed for not fewer than] thirty [days], the same law, right and claims [shall apply to him] as to the *flamen Augusti* [under this law].

In which place the assembly [of the province shall meet]

Those who assemble for the provincial assembly at Narbo [...] [...] what is enacted when an assembly has been held, let that be lawful and valid[...] [...] ⁶

Concerning money [...] [...]]

Whoever retires from the office of *flamen*, from the money [remaining (?) ... let him dedicate (?) statues or likenesses of *Imperator Caesar*⁷ ... at the discretion of the pro]vincial governor within the same [period (?) ... and offer proof that he has properly (?) acted about these matters to the one who reckons the acc[ounts ...] [...] [...] in th]at temple as [...] [...]]

1. The details are lost, but the *flamen* is receiving high privileges in the city of Narbo, even though he might come from some other city in the province.
2. These privileges for the *flamen's* wife correspond closely to those of the Roman *flamen's* wife. (Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* x.15.26–7; see 8.1b)
3. One difference between the original Roman *flamines* and these in the provinces is that the Roman ones held office for life.
4. The right seems to be subject to the emperor's approval; it may be that 'Caesar Vespasian Augustus' was named in the text.
5. Some regular duties of the *flamen* were to be performed in sequence – perhaps, the holding of meetings.
6. The meaning is lost here, but the clause illustrates the close connection between the *flamen* and the assembly of a province.
7. The word used (*imago*) implies a likeness of the living, so perhaps 'Vespasian Augustus' again appeared in the missing text.

4. Pergamon

10.5b *Singers of Roma and Augustus at Pergamum (A.D. 117–138)*

This association, sponsored by the province of Asia, was established to sing hymns at the temple of Roma and Augustus at Pergamum (in modern Turkey, about 110 km. north of Izmir). The following text, inscribed on four sides of an altar, lists: (A) the names of 36 members (omitted here), characteristic of elite names of the period; (B-D) the responsibilities of the three officers, the regulations for new members, and the regulations for members' funerals (omitted here). The principal festivals of the association were on 21–3 September (23 September, Augustus' birthday, was the start of the year in the province of Asia); 1 January; 24–6 May (the Rose Festival); 23–5 June (the Mysteries). There were also meetings on the monthly birthday of Augustus and on the annual birthdays of other emperors.

See further: Robert (1960a) 318, 321, 340–2; Price (1984) 90, 105, 118, 129, 190–1, 209; 3.4 and 12.2 for calendar and rules for other imperial associations.

Inscriptionen von Pergamon II 374; *IGR* IV.353

(B) With good fortune. The president shall provide the following during his year of office:

Month of Caesar, Augustan day <23 Sept>: for Augustus' birthday, 1 *mna*.¹

Month of Pereitios: for Kalends of January <1 Jan>,² 1 *mna*; 1 loaf.

Month of Panemos, Augustan day <24 May>: for Rose Festival,³ 1 *mna*; 1 loaf.

Month of Loos, 3rd <25 June>: for Mysteries,⁴ wine; 1 *mna*; 1 loaf.

Month of Hyperberetaios, 29th <21 Sept>: 1 *mna*, 1 loaf.

The president shall also provide garlands for the singers on the monthly celebration for

the birthday of Augustus and for those of the other emperors; also, on each day of the Mysteries, garlands for the singers' hall and the singers and their sons, as well as pastry and incense <for offerings>, and lamps for the image of Augustus < . . . regulations for members' funerals follow . . . >

(C) With good fortune. The priest shall provide the following during his year of office:

Month of Pereitios: for Kalends of January <1 Jan>, wine; setting; 1 *mna*; 3 loaves.

Month of Panemos, 2nd <25 May>: for Rose Festival, wine; setting; 1 *mna*; 3 loaves.

Month of Loos, 2nd <24 June>: wine; 1 *mna*; 3 loaves.

Month of Hyperberetaios, 29th <21 Sept>: 1 *mna*; 3 loaves.

Month of Hyperberetaios, 30th <22 Sept>: wine for the altar-song; setting costing 1 *denarius*.

The outsiders elected as singers shall provide 50 *denarii* towards busts of the Sebastoi <Augustus and Livia>.⁵

(D) With good fortune. The secretary shall provide the following during his year office:

Month of Hyperberetaios, 29th <21 Sept>: for the birthday of Livia,⁶ wine; setting costing 2 *denarii*; 1 *mna*.

Month of Pereitios: for Kalends of January, 1 *mna*; 1 *drachma* and 9 *assaria* in local coin.⁷

Month of Panemos, 3rd <26 May>: for Rose Festival, setting costing 1 *denarius*; 1 *mna*; 1 loaf.

Month of Loos, Augustan Day <23 June>: for Mysteries, wine; setting; 1 *mna*; 1 loaf. . .

A newly elected singer shall pay as an entrance fee: for sacrifices to Rome and the Emperor, 100 *denarii*; to each singer, 15 *denarii*; to the gods <Roma and Augustus>, double, 30 *denarii*, wine, 3 loaves; to the sons of the singers, half a loaf; half a *mna*; but if a new member is taking over his father's hymn, he will only pay 15 *denarii* to the gods, 7 *denarii* to each singer, wine and a setting; to sons who have paid attendance fees, the officers will refund half the amounts.

1. 1 *mna* (= 100 local *drachmae*) was probably the equivalent of 75 Roman silver *denarii*. One *mna* was a substantial sum, well over the average monthly subsistence of a peasant family.
2. The first day of the Roman year, increasingly celebrated as a festival in the Greek East.
3. This was a Roman festival: see 3.5 n. 4, 3.7 n. 3.
4. Imperial mysteries, perhaps focusing on the revelation of imperial images, were celebrated in various Greek cities.
5. 'Sebastos' is the Greek equivalent of Augustus, here used in the plural to refer to Augustus and Augusta (i.e. Augustus and Livia). See also 10.5c.
6. Livia's 'official' birthday was celebrated on this date, so as to lead up to that of Augustus. A *theologos* (mentioned on side A), who praised the gods, will have performed at this and other festivals.
7. This small sum, in local coinage, was perhaps given to each member.

5. Honours for Julia Domna at Athens (c.A.D. 190-200)

Julia Domna was the second wife of the Emperor Septimius Severus and was empress from his accession in A.D. 193 until his death in A.D. 211. This inscription records a decree of honours granted to her by the Athenians. She is given the title 'Saviour' – implying that the decree was in gratitude for some protection accorded to Athens. The surviving sections of the text are concerned particularly with honours that identify Julia Domna with the ancient protective goddess of Athens – Athena Polias; so her full title becomes 'The Saviour of Athens, Julia Sebaste <the Greek translation of 'Augusta'> Athena Polias'.

The damage to the text is more serious at the beginning than in later sections. The square brackets indicate where there is considerable doubt about the wording.

See further: Vol. I, 355; Oliver (1940); Stroud (1971) 200–4.

IG II 2.1076; revised *HSCP* Supp.1 (1940) 528–9

[...] of her inherent[...] philanthropy [...] co-operating[...] for all [...] of the saviour of [Athens] [Ju]lia Seb[aste, I propose] that in all other respects it should be done [as my colleague] in the office, Elpideph[oros son of . . .]ades from Palen[e, has during] my absence proposed:¹ [all the] annual [*archontes*² are to sacrifice to Good [Fortune] [on the most holy birthday of Julia] Sebaste [...] [and to make the *ei]seteria*³ to the [saviour of Athens Julia Sebaste] Athena Polia[s . . .] [...] the general over the ho]plites [...] the *archon* [...] the [...] day [of the month] Thargelion [is to be holy], the day on which Athens dedicated the a[n]cient t[em]ple to her [as Polias].⁴ The war-*archon*² is [to sacrifice to the Mothe]r of the Forces⁵ on the first [day of] the Roman year, and these sacrifices are to be started by the priestess of Athena [Polias] and she will receive the perquisites⁶ and a golden statue <of Julia Domna> is to be set up in the Parthenon; [and the general] is to perform the preliminary sacrifice to Good Fortune and [the *archontes*] and all the priests and [the herald] are to pour libations, and the priestess and the queen of the [king-*archon*²] are to [sacrifice] and to offer the *eiseteria* of the priesthood to Athena Polias; and the retiring *arrephoroi* are also to sacrifice and raise the torch and dance at the festival,⁷ in order that through these events also our reverence towards the saviour of Athens Julia Sebaste may be [made evident]. The account of these matters shall be inscribed on a tablet and set up by the altar of the Sebastoi⁸ [on the Acropolis.]

1. This formula shows that the text we have was an amendment to a decree, presumably on a related subject.
2. The *archontes* (archons) were ancient magistrates of Athens, by this time ceremonial in their functions. There were three: the *archon* of the year; the war-*archon* (*polemarchos*); and the king-*archon* (*basileus*).
3. The *eiseteria*, the opening sacrifices, were of special importance and honour.
4. The ancient temple on the Acropolis is rededicated to the newly recognized form of the goddess Athena.
5. This title was conferred on the Empress in A.D. 195; she is therefore receiving sacrifices under two divine titles.

6. Barbarian “observer” on the imperial cult / Augustus and Tiberius

Velleius Paterculus, *History of Rome* II.107

I cannot resist inserting a minor incident even into this narrative of great events. Our camp was on the nearer bank of the river I have just mentioned;¹ on the far bank there was a glittering array of the enemy’s troops, but hastily retreating [at every movement of our ships].² But one of the barbarians, a senior man in years, very tall, high-ranking as shown by his dress, embarked in a canoe – a hollowed out log, as is their custom – and steered his own course to the middle of the river. Then he asked if he could have permission to land in security on our bank, and to look at Caesar.³ Permission was granted, so he beached his canoe and gazed at Caesar for a long time without speaking. Then he spoke: ‘Our young men are crazy: they worship your divine power when you are absent;⁴ but when you arrive they would rather go in terror of your arms than put themselves under your protection. But I, Caesar, by your kind permission, have seen the gods of whom I used once only to hear; nor have I ever hoped for or experienced a happier day in my life.’ He was given permission to touch Caesar’s hand; and then he went back to his boat, and carried on ceaselessly gazing back at Caesar until he reached his own side’s bank of the river.

1. The Elbe.

2. The text is corrupt and the sense uncertain.

7. The Jewish view

As a result of conflicts between Jews and Greeks in the Egyptian city of Alexandria (see 12.6f and, for another extract from this text, 12.6c(ii)), which had come to a head with rioting and anarchy in the summer of A.D. 38, two delegations were sent to the Emperor Gaius – a Jewish one, led by Philo, and a Greek one. The Jewish objective was to secure, or if possible improve, their rights in the city, and especially their religious liberty; they particularly wished to be exempted from any orders to sacrifice to the emperor as a god. Philo here offers a vivid, polemical and, no doubt, highly embellished account of the exchanges between the emperor and the Jews, published after Gaius’ death.

See further: Vol. 1, 361–2; Smallwood (1961); (1976) 220–55*; Barrett (1989) 182–91*; R. Williamson (1989) 5–18*.

Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 355–7

Isidorus, that bitter sycophant,¹ realizing that Gaius enjoyed being offered titles beyond human nature, said: ‘You are going to hate these Jews here, my lord, and their fellow-countrymen more than ever when you hear about their ill-will and impiety towards you. For when all humanity was offering sacrifices of gratitude for your recovery, these were the only ones who could not bear to perform sacrifice. By “these” I mean to include all the other Jews as well.’ At that we all shouted out together, ‘Lord Gaius, we are being slandered; we did sacrifice – we sacrificed whole hecatombs. And we did not just sprinkle blood on the altars (as some people do) and then take the meat home for feasting and

celebrations, but put the whole offering into the sacred flame to be burned up.² We have already done this not just once but three times: the first time was on your accession as emperor; the second was on your recovery from that dreadful illness that the whole world suffered with you; the third was in expectation of your triumph in Germany.³ 'It may be true,' Gaius replied, 'that you did sacrifice but you sacrificed to somebody else, even if it was on my behalf. So where's the merit in that? You did not sacrifice to me.'⁴ Immediately we heard that, following on his previous remark, we were seized by a violent trembling, such that it was beyond all concealment.

1. Isodorus was the leader of the Greek, anti-Jewish delegation.
2. Philo is referring to one of the standard Jewish forms of sacrifice – the daily burnt offerings in the temple; and (with apparent gross tactlessness) he suggests that it is far preferable to the standard form of pagan sacrifice, in which the meat is consumed at the end of the ritual; see Yerkes (1953) 126–46.
3. The accession of Gaius, March, A.D. 37; the illness, September/October A.D. 37; the proposed German expedition, summer A.D. 39.
4. For the distinction between sacrifice 'to' and 'on behalf of' the emperor, see Price (1980). As he shows, sacrifice on behalf of (rather than 'to') the emperor was common.