

Emperor Meets Gods: Divine Discourse in Greek Papyri from Roman Egypt¹

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Roman emperors communicated a number of qualities which constituted an ideological basis for their unique position of power. These qualities were expressed by both verbal and visual references to the emperor. Besides references to his dynastic lineage or to his military capability, a recurring line of imperial discourse is the use of divine association. Connections between emperors and divinity ranged from references to a quality of an emperor that evoked divine associations to identification with a specific god and could be brought about by emperors themselves or anyone else. This article discusses how and why Roman emperors are presented in divine contexts in Greek papyrus texts from Egypt. Even if the majority of papyrus texts were written for practical reasons and their relevance was limited to the persons to whom the documents concerned, many texts are instructive for how emperors were divinely embedded in language. By applying a discourse approach, I aim to show that Greek papyri can be read on several levels. In this way, I hope to offer a new perspective on how divine language in papyrus texts can be looked at and how these documents can be read within a wider imperial context.

Introduction: Imperial and Divine Discourse

The defeat of Marc Antony by Octavian is usually considered as the beginning of Rome's new political order in which power was concentrated in the hands of a single individual. Indeed, many innovations by Octavian, who in 27 BCE received the title Augustus, constituted the fundament of the governing system headed by an emperor, which was to be the political arrangement for the next centuries. Although Rome's military dominance implied that it could enforce its wishes, many documentary sources show that the discourse of running the empire was

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one of *consensus* over the existing situation.² As the ultimate representative of Roman power, the emperor and his household featured as a focal point in multiple forms and media, by which Roman rule was expressed and justified to the widely differentiated population of the empire. This worked both ways: the visual and verbal messages that were communicated by the imperial centre emphasizing the emperor's qualities such as dynastic background, military capability, divine assent and other virtues or ideologies of empire were favourably responded to and replicated by subjects. One feature of the Roman Principate, then, seems to be that it was manifest throughout the empire through the use of a shared vocabulary and imagery.

We may label the totality of these expressions, both visual and verbal, both expressed by emperor and subjects, and both in the form of one-way directed messages or dialogues, as 'imperial discourse'.³ The term discourse has been employed in the humanities and social sciences to analyse communicative statements for a multitude of purposes, such as communication of ideologies and establishing power relations, in which discourse is both a tool and a product.⁴ Moreover, the polysemy of the word 'discourse' gives room to study statements on multiple levels, ranging from simple factual statements to what may be called a *Wortprogramm*.⁵ It also offers the opportunity to study multiple facets of statements: in the context of the Roman emperor, discourse can be dynastic, military, provincial, legal, etc. Thus, if statements explicitly link the emperor to the divine, we may speak of 'divine discourse'. In this contribution I aim to tackle the question how and why the emperor was verbally connected to the divine in Greek papyri from Roman Egypt (30 BCE-284 CE). This will be done by analysing some texts, paying attention to the communications and strategies encountered in them. I will pass over the question of the organization and impact of emperor cult in Egypt, which has been extensively and excellently analysed by Stephan Pfeiffer.⁶ Instead of focusing on cult actions and temple contexts, I discuss a number of selected documents that I think are relevant because they exemplify how 'language of divinity' can be connected to imperial legitimation. With language of divinity, I mean words that

² Ando 2000 is fundamental for the idea of construction of consensus by the Roman empire; Noreña 2011 on the basis of an analysis of inscriptions and coins for the western Roman empire states that "the dissemination of specific imperial ideals was more pervasive than previously thought" (Quote from p. i.). A different type of consensus is discussed by Flaig 2011, who points to the ritualized transference of power to the emperor by senatorial decree and popular law.

³ De Jong 2014; Benoist 2014a and 2014b (forthcoming).

⁴ For general studies on discourse, see, for example, Van Dijk 2011; Blommaert 2005; Fairclough 1989.

⁵ For the polysemy of discourse, see Benoist 2014a and 2014b (forthcoming). The term *Wortprogramm* is an analogy to the notion of *Bildprogramm*, which has probably most famously been applied to Augustus' selfpresentation since Zanker 1968 and 1987. With *Wortprogramm*, I mean a recurrent verbal communication of imperial ideologies, which may be expressed by the emperor or the imperial centre or by subjects. For an example of this in imperial titulature, see below and De Jong 2014.

⁶ Pfeiffer 2010 and 2012.

identify the emperor with a specific god, equate him with a god or that associate him with a god or gods. In language, the divinity of the emperor could be referred to by various agents, such as subjects, representatives of the Roman administration and the emperor himself. Assuming that language use is a matter of choice, I will argue that this language of divinity was one of the most self-evident methods to express the relation between the emperor and subjects. I will first discuss some noticeable examples that illustrate diverse ways and contexts in which the emperor was linked to a deity or the divine in a specific or more general sense in words uttered by various actors. In the second part, attention will be paid to divine discourse in the particular case of imperial titles. Imperial titles were not only an important tool for evoking divine associations, but developments in titlature also illustrate developments in imperial presentation. This bipartite approach aims to demonstrate the importance of the use of 'divine imperial language' as an underlying principle when expressing Roman imperial power. Because of their specific everyday life reflective nature, Greek papyri offer valuable information on how this may have worked in various practical settings. Attempting a discourse analytical reading of verbal expressions of imperial divinity in Greek papyrus texts, I will argue that these demonstrate that there was a subtle interplay and reciprocity between emperors, representatives of the imperial administration and subjects in their divine conception of the emperor.

Emperors as Gods: Some Examples

The use of papyri as a source for imperial history cannot be underestimated. Notwithstanding difficulties of methodology and interpretation imposed by the fragmentary state of many documents and the lack of context, their sheer quantity and their diversified contents make papyri a goldmine for studying many aspects of antiquity, such as the relation between Roman emperors and gods. However, in contrast to other documentary sources, such as images on coins, and artefacts, where visual references to and connections with gods are abundant, it might seem less easy to find direct links between an emperor and a god in papyrus texts. This is a direct consequence of the practical and private character of papyri.⁷ Nevertheless, examples of various types of 'divine phrasing of emperors' are found among the tens of thousands of edited documents. I will discuss examples that illustrate various cases of connecting emperors with divinity: phrasing the emperor as a god (Claudius as θεός (god), emperors in oaths), equating an emperor to a specific god (Augustus as Zeus Eleutherios in oaths, Vespasian as son of Ammon, Commodus as Hercules Romanus), and evoking divine associations in titlature. These are not clear-cut categories, though: as we will see, the equation of Commodus with Hercules Romanus also belongs to the group of titlature. Furthermore, oath formulas use imperial titlature and hint at the emperor's divine status as he, or

⁷ For an overview of the possibilities, but also discussions on the methodological problems of using papyri as historical sources, see Bagnall 1995; Hickey 2009; Palme 2009; Kelly 2011.

his τύχη (genius), is the object of the oath. Each example will be discussed for its communicative and strategic aspect, which, as I aim to show, allows one to read the documents on several levels.⁸

A good starting point is the famous letter of Claudius to the Alexandrians. A copy of the announcement of the letter by the prefect was preserved together with the letter itself on the back of a fiscal document.⁹ The following selection shows different examples of putting the emperor Claudius in a divine framework:

(LI. 1-13) "Lucius Aemelius Rectus announces: as the whole city, owing to its numbers, was unable to be present at the reading of the most sacred letter and (the letter) most beneficent to the city, I have deemed it necessary to display the letter publicly in order that reading it one by one you admire the greatness of our god Caesar and be grateful for his goodwill towards the city. Year 2 of Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus Imperator, 14th of Neos Sebastos."

(LI.14-16) "Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus Imperator Pontifex Maximus holder of the tribunician power, consul designate, to the city of Alexandrians, greeting. [...] (l. 29-32) And first I permit you to keep my birthday as a *dies Augustus* as you have yourselves proposed; and I agree that everywhere the statues of myself and my family are erected[...] (ll. 40-42) it would perhaps be silly that I, allowing so many honours, would refuse the institution of a Claudian tribe and the establishment of groves according to Egyptian custom [...] (ll. 48-51). But I decline the appointment of a high priest to me and the building of temples, for I do not wish to be offensive to my contemporaries, and my opinion is that sacred things and the like have in all ages have been granted as prerogative to the gods alone [...]"¹⁰

Starting with the letter proper (in line 16), Claudius responds to three questions posed to him by two embassies of residents of Alexandria, one composed of Greek citizens, the other one of Jews. The first question concerns honours that the Greek Alexandrians had offered to Claudius, the second is about political matters, such as the request to grant a city council to Alexandria, and the third is to resolve the conflict that had arisen between the Alexandrian citizens and the resident Jews. Both the prefect's announcement of the letter and the question for permission to bestow honours on Claudius contribute to establishing a framework of divinity in which the emperor was put. The proposed variety of honours fits in with practices found for Hellenistic kings. For instance, installing priests for the ruler, erecting (cult) statues, and celebration of the king's birthday are recurrent elements in Hellenistic

⁸ There is a multiplicity of definitions, approaches and methods to analyse discourse. In this paper, I look at the texts for what I label as a 'communicative' and 'strategic' aspect or level. With 'communicative', I mean the message of the text and the terminology used to express that message. With 'strategies', I mean the aim or effect of the expression, such as the use of ideology for legitimation.

⁹ P.Lond. VI 1912 (Alexandria, 41 CE) = Select Papyri II 212; Pfeiffer 2010, 74, 81.

¹⁰ Translation slightly adapted from that of A.S.Hunt and G.C. Edgar in Select Papyri II 212.

ruler celebrations.¹¹ After subordination of the former Hellenistic kingdoms, the worship of rulers continued to be an important communicative tool between Roman administrators (first governors, later emperors) and their new subjects.¹² This continuity may be recognized in the Alexandrians' proposals of divine honours for Claudius. Roman leading men became more and more involved in the politics of this longest-lasting Hellenistic kingdom, likely resulting also in their divine treatment in Egypt.¹³ As for the origins of such (divine) honours for rulers, we may look at developments in the Hellenistic period.¹⁴ Apart from distinguishing between a cult (divine honours for rulers as equal to gods) and honouring (divine honours to gods on behalf of rulers), Pfeiffer argues for a differentiated model of presentation and interpretation of rulers as gods, in which actions by and reactions of both rulers and subjects could and did vary.¹⁵ From the beginning of their dynasty, votive inscriptions demonstrate that Ptolemaic kings and queens were sometimes honoured as gods by subjects. There are also indications that the Ptolemaic kings were actively involved in establishing a cult for themselves. Prime of place in this respect should be given to Ptolemy II, who installed a cult for the Sibling Gods, himself and his deceased sister and wife Arsinoe.¹⁶ Such royal initiatives are furthermore reflected in the royal titulature appearing in date formulas in Greek and Demotic papyri.¹⁷ The deceased predecessors of the Ptolemaic rulers appear as the 'objects' of the dynastic cult for which eponymous priests were responsible.¹⁸ The Alexandrian Greeks' divine proposals to Claudius can thus be considered in the differentiated framework of Hellenistic ruler cult, with which the Romans had already become familiar in the Republican period when they gradually incorporated the Hellenistic

11 Chaniotis 2003, especially 436-437. Chaniotis 2003 also refers to the variations of the different Hellenistic ruler cults. Similarly, Roman emperor worship as a whole was not a uniform institution, but rather differently organized and practised throughout the empire. See, for example, Gradel 2002; Ando 2008; Peppard 2011 (especially chapter 2).

12 Chaniotis 2003, 442-443. For the conceptual difference between a ruler cult, in which the ruler is addressed as a god, and ruler worship, in which the ruler is honoured, but not as a god, see Pfeiffer 2008, pp. 31-32.

13 Chaniotis 2003, 442-443 states that: "Late Ptolemaic Egypt played a very important part in the transmission of the ruler cult to Rome", connecting this to divine honours for Julius Caesar, Marc Antony and afterwards for Octavian.

14 Chaniotis 2003; Pfeiffer 2008.

15 Pfeiffer 2008, chapter 4.2.5.

16 Pfeiffer 2008, chapter 4.3.2.

17 E.g. BGU VI 1227 (a receipt in Greek for a delivery of grain from the Oxyrhynchite nome, dated 259 BCE), ll. 1-7: Ἰβασιλεῦοντος Πτολεμαίου τοῦ ἑταίρου Σωτήρος (ἔτους) κζ' ἐφ' ἰσέρειως Μηδείου τοῦ Λαάγωνος Ἀλεξάνδρου καὶ θεῶν Ἀδελφῶν ἑκατηφόρου Ἀρσινόης Φιλαδέλφου ἑταίρας τῆς Ἀνδρωκάδου μητρίδος Θῶου κη'. "When Ptolemy, son of Ptolemy Saviour was king, year 27, when Medeios, son of Laagon, was priest of Alexander and the Sibling Gods, when Mêtala, daughter of Androkades, was *kanêphoros* of Arsinoe the brotherloving, 29 of the month Thoth." The references to the priest(esse)s of the deceased Ptolemies demonstrates that cults to them were institutionalized. See the next footnote. For the statement that Demotic official documents follow the Greek practice of eponymous priests, cf. Hoffmann 2000, 80-81, providing as example the translation of the date formula of P.Tor.Botti 9.

18 Pfeiffer 2008, chapter 4.4. For Egyptian cults for the Ptolemies, see Idem 2008, chapter 5.

kingdoms into their empire. Claudius responded cautiously to the proposed honours. Whereas he accepted, for instance, the celebrations of his birthday and the naming of a district after his name, he refused the institution of temples or a high priest for himself.¹⁹ His refusal of a temple and priests is, as Claudius states himself, motivated by his wish not to upset contemporaries by receiving what is due to the gods.²⁰ The divergence between the action manifested by the Alexandrians, who in their proposals framed him as a god, and the reaction by the emperor, who tries to avoid being honoured in a manner he connects with worship reserved for gods, may be taken to reveal not only the delicate political situation in Rome and Alexandria, but probably also a difference in attitude towards divine honours on both sides. The argument that temples and priests should be reserved for the gods demonstrates Claudius' political sensitivity, first and for all with respect to his own position as a new emperor. Pfeiffer notes that Claudius could emphasize the contrast between himself and his predecessor Gaius, who had behaved as if he were a god all too explicitly, by refusing a cult for himself.²¹ Furthermore, given the tensions between the Greeks and the Jews in Alexandria that had only a few years earlier resulted in violent confrontation, allowing the Greeks to dedicate a temple and a priest to the living emperor might have been sensitive to the Jews – even if at this time Claudius would not been brought into the synagogue.²² Given Claudius' concern not to receive a temple or priests, it is the more interesting that the Roman prefect announced him as a god, and uses several other ideological terms. The letter by Claudius is described as "most sacred" (ἱερωτάτης) and "most beneficent" (καὶ εὐεργετικωτάτης ἐπιστολῆς) and is published, "in order that the greatness of our god Caesar" (τὴν τε μεγαλειότητα τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν Καίσαρος) is known to all.²³ The discrepancy between the prefect's announcement of "our god Caesar" and Claudius' own reply that he was not to be put on the same level with θεοί is striking. Whereas a century ago, Ulrich Wilcken felt the need to solve this, arguing that these could not have been the Roman prefect's words, and proposed to read θεῖος (adjective) instead of θεός (noun), the use of the noun has recently been explained as an example of Roman flexibility concerning Greek-speaking

19 Pfeiffer 2010, 74-87 for a discussion of the letter.

20 A similar refusal and motivation is given by Nero in a letter to the inhabitants of Arsinoe, in SB XII 11012.

21 Pfeiffer 2010, 86, corroborating this assumption by pointing to a similar refusal to receive a temple was issued to the Thasians in 42CE. For that inscription, see Oliver 1989, No. 23.

22 For the conflict between the Greeks and the Jews at Alexandria in the 30s, which is described in Philo, *In Flaccum*, see CPJ II; Pfeiffer 2010, 70-72; Harker 2008, 9-24; Van der Horst 2003.

23 These qualifications of the imperial letter as ἱερωτάτη καὶ εὐεργετικωτάτη and the emperor as θεός not only underline the ideology of the ruler as benefactor, but also evoke divine associations. For the ideology of administrators as benefactors (often combined with the notion of 'saviour'), cf. Nock 1951; Chalon 1964, 50, 98; Herklotz 2007, 261-263 (Augustan period); Catalaÿ, F. de, Lorber, C.C. 2011 (for Hellenistic rulers on coins). Μεγαλειότης as an equivalent of *maiestas* had a sacral association, cf. Gizewski 2014. This was applied to representatives of the Roman government. For references to the emperor, see BGU VII 1563, ll. 23-24 (Arsinoites, 1st-2nd c.); to the Roman empire P.Giss. I 40, 5 and 11 (Apollonopolites Heptakomias, ca. 215).

audiences and ambiances. However, it might well be that the Romans and Greeks did not experience a discrepancy and that the problem only arises from our anachronistic and supposedly rationalistic urge for absolute clarity. An explanation for the apparent discrepancy may be the conceptual difference in thinking about θεοί by Greeks and Romans.²⁴ According to Pfeiffer, the prefect did use the word θεός, because this matched the Greek (= Alexandrians') practice of referring to a ruler (in this case the emperor) as a god, in other words the Roman magistrate adapted his language to his audience's conceptions.²⁵

Claudius' letter displays several levels of divine discourse. First, the letter itself reflects discourse as practical communication, connected to divinity here through the honours that are proposed. Considering the use of words, the vocabulary used had divine evocations, revealing yet another level of discourse and adding an extra dimension to the totality of the text. The use of the word θεός for the emperor does not demonstrate that he was considered a god, but it suggests that the prefect perceived it as proper Greek to refer to an emperor.²⁶ Consequently, it underlines the hierarchical superiority and the legitimacy of Claudius' position. Moreover, this linguistic reference would correspond quite well to the divine honours offered to Claudius that constitute one topic of his imperial reply. Strategically, the divine measures referred to reflect discourse as (intended) action or negotiation. The requests by the Alexandrian Greeks have provoked the emperor to respond and show how both parties find each other. In this, there appears to be a discrepancy between Roman and Greek attitudes towards divine worship of the ruler, on the

24 Price 1984.

25 Pfeiffer 2010, 75-76. As a parallel, Pfeiffer points to the divergency in translation of the Latin text in the *Kalendae* inscription from Priene, OGIS II 458. The Latin text has *principis nostri natalis* ("birthday of our *princeps*"), whereas the Greek translates this as ἡ τοῦ θειοτάτου Καίσαρος γενεθλίου ἡμέρα ("the birthday of the most divine Caesar"). This example demonstrates a divergence between Greek and Latin phraseology, according to which the translation of one into the other language adheres to its own cultural diction (however, here the parallel is not exact, as the Greek uses an adjective, not a substantive as in the papyrological letter. Perhaps a closer parallel can be found in BGU XI 2056, 3 (Alexandria 212), but only the Greek version has been preserved. This document announces the *abolitio memoriae* of Geta, decreed by a prefect who refers to Caracalla as θεοεισιτάτο[υ] βασι[λέως(?)). A papyrological parallel for a prefect referring to the living emperor as god may be found in SB XII 11236, 2-4 (Oxyrhynchites or Arsinoites, date in *HGV* is given as 120 or "after 138") where the prefect announces a decision of Hadrian Σεβαστὸς about the installation of a high priest: ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν καὶ θεός[ς] ἐνφανέστατος Αὐτοκράτωρ Καίσαρ Τραϊανὸς Ἀδριανὸς. There are only a few papyrological examples where the emperor (or his wife) is qualified as θεός/θεά. These cases are mostly related to Augustus, and very often in contexts where priests are involved or in oaths (see below). Furthermore, Tiberius and Claudius are stated as θεός in an oath formula in P. Vindob. Salomons 3 (Soknopaiou Nesos, 36 CE) and P. Vind. Tandem 10 (Herakleopolites?, 54 CE) respectively. The latter document contains declarations under oath (sworn in ii, lines 6-7 by θεὸν Τιβέριον Κλαύδιον Καίσαρ-]ρα] Αὐτοκράτωρ; in iii, lines 34-36 sworn by Τιβέριον Κλαύδιον Καίσαρ Σεβαστὸν Γερμανικὸν Αὐτοκράτορα) to appoint supervisors for imperial estates. The imperial estates are designated in fr. iii, lines 38-42 as οὐσία τῆς θεᾶς καὶ κυρίας Ἀγριππίνης Σεβαστῆς καὶ τῶν Ἑρμιᾶν οὐσίας τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ κ[υρίου] Τιβερίου Κλαυδίου Καίσαρος Σεβ[α]στοῦ Γερμανικοῦ Αὐτοκράτορος. The receiver of the oath is mentioned in iii 32-34: Gaius Julius lo[...], who as a priest and Alexandrian magistrate is the operator of the land. E.g. P.Oxy. XXV 2435 *recto*. Cf. SB I 3824 for Germanicus. Otherwise the qualification is only encountered in papyri in references to deified emperors, e.g. in P.Oxy. VII 1021 (Oxyrhynchus, 54CE). See De Jong 2006, 169-173.

26 Cf. Pfeiffer 2010, 88, arguing that neither the emperor nor the Alexandrians considered him a god, but that the proposed honours should be considered political negotiation.

Roman side probably strengthened by the political situation. The ultimate power for concrete action clearly lies with the emperor, whose consent or disagreement put in motion or prevented subsequent honorific actions of the Alexandrian Greeks.

Another example of divine discourse may be seen in the text that has been identified as the acclamation of Vespasian.²⁷ The words preserved indeed hint at a crowd being present in the hippodrome of Alexandria, exaltedly welcoming the emperor:

[-ca.?-]το[-ca.?-]	...
Τιβέριου Ἀλεξάνδρου -ca.?-]	Tiberius Alexander
τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις -ca.?-]	...the Romans
στον κ[-ca.?-]	...
5 [-ca.?-]σαντων[...]οἰς συνη[-ca.?-]	...
[-ca.?-]σ τησάτων	...
[-ca.?-]	...
[-ca.?-]υς ὁ αὐτοκράτωρ μ[-ca.?-]	Imperator
[-ca.?- εἰς] τὴν πόλιν τῶν ὄχλων -ca.?-]	In(to) the city, while the masses
10 [-ca.?- κ]ατ' ὅλον τὸν ἵπποδρόμον [-ca.?-]	Over the whole hippodrome
[-ca.?-]ρηι ὑγιαίνων κύριε Καίσαρ -ca.?-]	Being healthy, lord Caesar
[-ca.?- Ούεσπ]ασιανὸς εἷς σωτὴρ καὶ εὐεργέτης	Vespasian, the one saviour and benefactor
[-ca.?- Ἀμμων]οῦ υἱὸς ὁ ἀνατέλλων εἰ -ca.?-]	Son of Ammon/the sun who is rising
[-ca.?-]α φύλαξον ἡμῖν αὐτ[ὸν -ca.?-]	Guard him for us
15 [-ca.?- κύριε Σεβαστέ ε. ιεν σαρ[-ca.?-]	Lord Augustus, benefactor, the new Sarapis
[-ca.?-]α Ἀμμωνος υἱὸς κ. απλ[-ca.?-]	Son of Ammon
[-ca.?- εὐ]χαριστοῦμεν Τιβερῶνι [Ἀλεξάνδρωι -	We thank Tiberius Alexander
[-ca.?-] Τιβέριος ηπ[.]πισε[-ca.?-]	Tiberius
[-ca.?-] θεὸς Καίσαρ ε[.] υγια[iv -ca.?-]	God Caesar
20 [-ca.?-] θεὸς Καίσαρ Ούεσπασιανὸς -ca.?-]	God Caesar Vespasian
[-ca.?-]ς κύριε Σεβαστέ ο[-ca.?-]	Lord Augustus

Lines 2 and 18 in all probability mention the prefect Tiberius Julius Alexander, while the terms αὐτοκράτωρ ('emperor', l. 8), Caesar (l. 11) with the addition θεός ('god', ll. 19 and 20) undoubtedly go with Vespasian (lines 12 and 20). Except as a saviour and benefactor (l. 12), he is hailed as the 'son of Ammon' (perhaps in l. 13, certainly in 16).²⁸ Recently, Harker argued that it was connected to the *Acta Alexandrinorum* literature, which he uses as a collective term for literary texts relating dramatic encounters of Alexandrian citizens with Roman emperors and documentary texts relating to all kinds of Alexandrian administration and Roman-Alexandrian interactions.²⁹ The text preserving the acclamation of Vespasian

27 SB XVI 12255= P.Fouad I 8 = CPJ II 418a (unknown provenance, end of first century CE). For a discussion of the text, see Harker 2008, 209 with further bibliography; Belayche 2010, 159-162. Greek papyri, with diacritical layout, have been taken from the edition available online through the Papyrological Navigator: <http://papyri.info/>.

28 Coles, Geissen, Koenen 1973, 235 suggest reading in l. 13: ὁ ἥλιος ὁ ἀνατέλλων. In l. 16 they restore: τῆ ἀληθείᾳ ὁ Ἀμμωνος υἱὸς. Nock 1957, 118 suggests reading in l. 15: Σάρ[απ]ις ὁ νέος. See Harker 2008, 209 for editions of and emendations to the text.

29 Harker 2008, 1-2; lb., 60-63 and 209 for SB XVI 12255.

probably reports a real event.³⁰ Even if the acclamation was a piece of literature, the scene that is sketched reflects what acclamation would have been like: a crowd shouting honours and good wishes to a high official in a dynamic setting of verbal and physical interaction.³¹ In this case, the divine discourse culminates in the statement by the Greek-speaking crowd present in the hippodrome that Vespasian was the son of Ammon, which logically implied that the emperor was a god himself. According to Pfeiffer, the phrase ‘son of Ammon’ is part of a Greek tradition commemorating Alexander the Great’s welcoming by the oracle at Siwa. This acclamation could therefore serve as a double legitimation of Vespasian as emperor, by connecting him both to Alexander and to the god Ammon, appealing to both the Greek and Egyptian communities.³²

Although literary historiographical accounts do not relate Vespasian’s imperial acclamation in Alexandria, they do describe Vespasian’s visit to Alexandria as an important event in his securing of the imperial position.³³ In his biography on Vespasian, Suetonius remarks that Vespasian, after having been acknowledged as emperor by troops and the prefect of Egypt Tiberius Julius Alexander, went to Egypt for more than its strategic importance: “He [Vespasian] lacked authority (*auctoritas*) and, as it were, a certain sovereignty (*maiestas*) as he was an unexpected and, moreover, a new emperor (*princeps*). These indeed were added.”³⁴ This is followed by the description of miracle healings and another miraculous event, which enforced Vespasian’s position and gave him the standing necessary to enter Rome as emperor. The success of the healing acts counted as divine assent of Vespasian and the successful staging and communication of these events according to Pfeiffer

30 Harker 2008, 61-63.

31 So far, exact parallels for imperial acclamations are lacking. For a theatrical setting in which the god Apollo announces the imperial accession of Hadrian to the present people, see P.Giss. 3 (Apollonopolis, after 117 CE). For an Alexandrian reputation in the staging of acclamations, cf. Suetonius, *Nero* 20.3. For acclamations of local magistrates as Okeanos in third- and fourth-century papyri, especially in P.Oxy. I 41 (Oxyrhynchus, early 4th c.) cf. Kruse 2006. Kruse convincingly argues that these acclamations should be considered “a dramatic production of the ritualised speech of the crowd...”, but his proposal to translate the vocative Ὀκεανέ simply as “Bravo”, “Long live”, “Hurrah” etc.’ (p. 308) is not convincing. First, because in Kruse’s translation of the Greek the uniformity in the acclamation present in the Greek is not reflected, consequently the repetitive effect is lost in the translation. Moreover, I think the association with Okeanos/Nile in Greek (or Greek-Egyptian) perception adds another dimension to this epithet, making it more than merely “a stereotypically used acclamation, with which one expresses approval”. (Kruse 2006, 308). Even if the epithet was used mechanically, it was the word Ὀκεανέ that was chosen to be used instead of a whole range of other possibilities. For a comparison with the use of honorific epithets encountered in P.Oxy. I 41 for local magistrates in Greek inscriptions, cf. Blume 1989.

32 For the Greek rather than Egyptian background of the connection with Ammon and the Greek origin of the comparison of Vespasian with the rising sun, see Pfeiffer 2011, 109-111.

33 Pfeiffer 2011, 112-119. Stories about two miraculous healings by Vespasian are attested with slight differences by Tacitus, *Histories* 4.81, Suetonius, *Vespasianus* 7.2-3 and Cassius Dio 65.8. However, it is difficult to relate these to Vespasian and the Alexandrian audience. Probably the intended effect would be legitimation of his imperial position.

34 Suetonius, *Vespasianus* 7.2: *Auctoritas et quasi maiestas quaedam, ut scilicet inopinato et adhuc novo principii, deerat: haec quoque accessit.* The translation provided above is my own.

are due to imperial propaganda.³⁵ As for the perception of these stories, Pfeiffer distinguishes between the perception of Vespasian’s actions by the senatorial authors (and by extension, the senatorial circle) in Rome on the one hand, and by the *plebs Alexandrina* on the other.³⁶ I agree with his analysis, but I think this gains even more weight by connecting the intended audience of the account of the events with the agency of the Alexandrians involved in the healing scenes: on the one hand they are passive/instrumental, on the other they have an active role. Whereas the intended audience must of course be looked for in Rome, the importance of the population of Alexandria in the descriptions was mainly as an instrument for conferring (divine) legitimacy to the new emperor. As the centre of imperial power, Rome was the place from where power was exerted and where influential senators (who were potential rivals) had to be won over to Vespasian’s case. The literary accounts confirm that Vespasian needed divine support with an eye to his acceptance in Rome.³⁷ Suetonius was of the opinion that Vespasian succeeded in this thanks to the miraculous incidents at Alexandria, as Suetonius’ structuring and phrasing of the events suggest.³⁸ Tacitus shares this opinion, as can be derived from his remarks that “...many wonders occurred which seemed to point him out as the object of the favour of heaven and of the partiality of the Gods” and that this even continued to be witnessed: “Persons actually present attest both facts, even now when nothing is to be gained by falsehood.” In other words, the fact that people, when they would no longer risk imperial revenge for statements that could damage the imperial image, stuck to their testimonies is taken by Tacitus as proof of the reality of the events.³⁹ Tacitus also describes how Vespasian himself initially hesitated to try and cure the people presenting themselves to him. After deliberation with experts about the possibilities of successful healing, Vespasian concluded that he should give it a try, as he could only gain from it: “at any rate, all the glory of a successful remedy would be Caesar’s, while the ridicule of failure would fall on the sufferers”. Again, the main point is the effect for Vespasian of an act

35 Pfeiffer 2010, 112-115.

36 Pfeiffer 2010, 115-116, argues that to the senatorial authors, Vespasian acted *through* the deity Sarapis, instead of acting as a deity himself. How the Alexandrians perceived the healing acts is less clear. They may have perceived this as acts of a deity, but not necessarily: in the Hellenized east, people were familiar with thaumaturges, who were not considered to be gods.

37 See Pfeiffer 2010, 111-115, and the table comparing the accounts of Suetonius, Tacitus and Cassius Dio.

38 Suetonius, *Vespasianus* 7.2: *...haec quoque accessi* (“...these indeed were added.”) and 8.1: *Talis tantaque cum fama in urbem reversus...* (“Returning to Rome under such auspices and attended by so great renown...”). Interestingly, Suetonius, *Vespasianus* 19.2 mentions that Alexandrians insultingly referred to this emperor: *Alexandrini Cybiosacten eum vocare perseveraverunt, cognomine unius e regibus suis turpissimarum sordium* (“The Alexandrians persisted in calling him Cybiosactes (‘seller of pickled tuna’), the surname of one of their kings who was scandalously stingy.”). However, this Alexandrian criticism is not relevant for my point here as it postdates Vespasian’s imperial accession, and has a different function in Suetonius’ account, namely to illustrate Vespasian’s character. For the tensions in Alexandria in response to the tax increase, see Pfeiffer 2010, 121-123.

39 Tacitus, *Histories* 4.81: “Persons actually present attest both facts, even now when nothing is to be gained by falsehood.”

in which some Alexandrians functioned mainly instrumentally and were described in a disparaging way.⁴⁰ The miracles are also mentioned by Cassius Dio, who describes them matter-of-factly as a sign of divine magnification, before continuing his account with the description of the relationship between the Alexandrians and Vespasian that grew tense during his emperorship. This latter point, however, has nothing to do with the events around the acclamation.⁴¹

So, (part of) the Alexandrian population played a role in the healing actions: the people healed were instrumental and the rest were present as spectators.⁴² A more clearly active role – as an audience participating in the acclamation of an emperor – for the Alexandrian population can be derived from the papyrus discussed above. The Alexandrian population would have no concrete power to make a Roman emperor, but the Roman prefect of Egypt was able to facilitate Vespasian in his bid for power.⁴³ By staging the acclamation in the hippodrome, he used the Alexandrian population as an instrument to create acceptance for Vespasian. This is significant for his own loyalty and his active contribution in propagating the new emperor.

The papyrus is not only valuable for its political aspect or the practice of acclamation, which had been practised as an important power-confirming ritual in both Hellenistic royal contexts and Roman late republican and imperial contexts.⁴⁴ As a verbal presentation of this event, this papyrus document contains more than one message. First, in the communicative sense the text can be read as an account of a historical event. The verbal presentation of the emperor as “son of Ammon”, and perhaps as a “new Sarapis”, hence as a god, has ideological implications. This links the communicative aspect of this dialogue between the emperor and the crowd to its strategic implications, as it reflects the power relations in which the status of the emperor is acknowledged by the Alexandrian population and mentions the prefect whose support would prove fundamental for Vespasian. The context of the papyrus is restricted in the sense that it was written by someone interested in the event who was probably based in Egypt. Whether this acclamation would

40 *Ib.*: “...this nation [= people of Alexandria], devoted as it is to many superstitions... ” Probably this is also implied in the remark: “the ridicule of failure would fall on the sufferers”.

41 Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 65.8.2: “Yet, though Heaven was thus magnifying him, the Alexandrians, far from delighting in his presence, detested him so heartily that they were for ever mocking and reviling him. For they had expected to receive from him some great reward because they had been the first to make him emperor, but instead of securing anything they had additional contributions levied upon them.” Just as in Suetonius, *Vesp.* 19.2, Vespasian is described as avaricious, a qualification that can only have been introduced after his imperial rule had been going on for some time. Furthermore, in this chapter Dio describes Vespasian’s relationship with the Alexandrians as tense.

42 Note, however, that being present as a watching spectator may also be perceived as an active role. Here, I use the ‘watching’ of the spectators in opposition to the acting (healing) emperor on the one hand, and in opposition to the active participation by the spectators appearing in the papyrus SB XVI 12255 on the other.

43 Jördens 2009, 38. According to Suetonius, Tiberius Julius Alexander had already acknowledged Vespasian as emperor: Suetonius, *Vespasianus* 6.

44 The acclamation would have been familiar enough to both the Alexandrians and the Romans, even if these different groups may have experienced the ritual differently. For acclamations in the Hellenistic world, cf. Chaniotis 2005. For Roman acclamations, cf. Ando 2000, 199-205.

have been communicated in Rome remains an open question. One would expect that the Roman historiographers would recount such an important ritual moment, which would – just like the healing acts – reinforce Vespasian’s position. But the fact that they remain silent suggests that the acclamation of Vespasian was firstly of interest for an audience in Egypt, rather than in Rome, where people were more interested in other aspects of Vespasian’s stay in Egypt. Perhaps the acclamation as son of Ammon, hence as a god, might have raised eyebrows in Rome, although alleged descent of prominent men or families from gods was not unknown there – but was a different matter.⁴⁵ Indeed, Vespasian’s stay in Alexandria appears in a different form, for a different audience, and differently value-laden in its connection of Vespasian with divinity, in the Roman historiographical accounts.

Another case is presented by the emperor Commodus, who first associated and then identified himself with the demigod Hercules.⁴⁶ His description in historiographical sources has put him in line with emperors like Gaius, Nero and Domitian, who all had a reputation for cruel and mad behaviour. The third-century historiographer Cassius Dio, who had witnessed the emperor’s Herculization, relates that Commodus exuberant behaviour was publicly expressed in his taking on the name Hercules, having a golden statue made of himself, naming the months after himself and addressing the senate in the following way: “The Emperor Caesar Lucius Aelius Aurelius Commodus Augustus Pius Felix Sarmaticus Germanicus Maximus Britannicus, Pacifier of the Whole Earth, Invincible, the Roman Hercules, Pontifex Maximus, Holder of the Tribunician Authority for the eighteenth time, Imperator for the eighth time, Consul for the seventh time, Father of his Country, to consuls, praetors, tribunes, and the fortunate Commodian senate, Greeting.”⁴⁷

Most of these titles were not uncommon.⁴⁸ However, the elements eliciting senatorial disgust were probably the unusual elements that identified Commodus as pacifier of the world and the Roman Hercules and call the senate ‘Commodian’. The introduction of these new titles may well be connected to the rebirth of Rome after it had been destroyed by a fire, and of Commodus as Hercules Romanus.⁴⁹ The new titlature recorded by Dio is confirmed by coins, inscriptions and papyri and was probably introduced in the second half of the year 192.⁵⁰ Evidence for

45 However, these at least were Roman gods. For example, Julius Caesar as a descendant of Venus Genetrix, cf. Weinstock 1971, 80-90. In the imperial period, the association of emperors with gods was frequent. However, identification with gods or as a god is typical for emperors who later received negative reputations, e.g. Caligula, Domitian, Commodus.

46 Hekster 2002, especially based on the imagery on coins and in statues and historiographical accounts. Pfeiffer 2010, 178-182, argues that Commodus’ divine presentation in Egypt was not at all excessive.

47 Cassius Dio, *Epitome* 73.15.

48 Kneissl 1969, 110-120, 185; Hekster 2002; Von Saldern 2004. Commodus was the first to use *Pius* and *Felix*. That it was not yet institutionalized appears from their occasional reversal in papyri, cf. Sijpesteijn 1988, 123-124; Peachin 1990, 1-2.

49 Von Saldern 2004; Kneissl 1969, 119-120.

50 Hekster 2002, 104-107 (coins).

this identification of Commodus with Hercules is hardly found in Egypt, apart from four attestations of the title in date formulas in papyri dated to the year 33 of Commodus' reign.⁵¹ The evidence of these documents does not contradict the assumption that the scribe used these official titles as a result of official prescription: the only document with the Roman Hercules formula dated exactly (11 October 192) is PSI IX 1036, a lease contract of temple land from Oxyrhynchus. There are more dated documents after that, but these all have an abbreviated version of the imperial titulature⁵² or only refer to "the year 33". The four instances of imperial titles containing the Roman Hercules formula reflect that in his 33th year of rule the emperor Commodus presented himself as the god Hercules. This context differs from the other examples discussed, where there was a direct interaction between emperor and subjects. In the case of Commodus, his Herculean title was most likely adopted by scribes in reaction to official prescriptions, not due to the personal initiative of the scribe or the person on whose behalf he was writing. As such, they responded to their ruler's wishes by complying with their directives. It is impossible to say anything about the scribes' personal attitudes or views on this, but the available papyrological evidence seems rather consistent in the possible types of titles. This would support the view that throughout the whole province the same scribal practice was adhered to, paying attention – through provincial mediation – to central demands. The Roman Hercules dating formula can be read on several levels; in the communicative sense it can be seen as a pragmatic tool to date the document. Strategically, the use of this official formula on the one hand confirms the acceptance by scribes of Commodus as emperor, whose name and titles constitute structural, authenticating elements of official documents. On the other hand, it shows Commodian ideology, in which Commodus identified himself with Hercules.

This example of Commodus' titulature demonstrates that imperial titulature can also be read as discourse. Although imperial titles are frequently encountered in papyri, they are much less often taken into detailed consideration. The next part of this paper will explore how titles set a good stage for conveying messages of divinity in variable and changing settings.

51 Pfeiffer 2010, 180-181. The formula in papyri runs: Αὐτοκράτορος Καίσαρος Λουκίου Αἰλίου Αὐρηλίου Κομόδου εὐσεβοῦς εὐτυχοῦς σεβαστοῦ Ἀρμενιακοῦ Μηδικοῦ Παρθικοῦ Σαρματικοῦ Γερμανικοῦ μεγίστου Βρετανικοῦ εἰρηνοποιοῦ τοῦ κόσμου εὐτυχοῦς ἀνικῆτου Ῥωμαίου Ἡρακλέους. P.Oxy. XXXI 2611, 27-30, career of an athlete (Oxyrhynchus, 192-193); PSI IX 1036, 25-29, a lease contract of temple land (Oxyrhynchus, 192); SB XVI 12239, 11-13, fragmentary petition by priests (Soknopaiou Nesos, 192-193); SB XX 14390, 2-8 opening of a document (Herakleopolites, 192-193).

52 The abbreviated formula is: (ἔτους) λγ Λουκίου Αἰλίου Αὐρηλίου Κομμόδου Καίσαρος τοῦ κυρίου, e.g. in P.Tebt. II 353, dated 10 Nov. For the abbreviation of secondary (or tertiary) regnal formulas with the titles *kyrios*, see Packman 1992, 62-63.

Imperial Divinity Expressed in Titulature in Greek Papyri from the Roman Period⁵³

As soon as Octavian had become the single most powerful man in Rome and of the Roman empire, the singularity of his position was underlined among other things by his assumption of a name that reflected his military (*Imperator*), dynastic (*Caesar; Divi filius*), and divine (*Divi filius; Augustus*) position. This format was followed by later imperial successors and developed into one of the distinctions of emperorship. Imperial titulature has both a static and a dynamic aspect to it, as 'basic' elements were combined with 'new' or variable elements. That is, in the course of time certain elements would be the frame of the titulature, which was elaborated with new elements, such as epithets.⁵⁴ Hence, titulature expressed the structural imperial elements, but also gave room to each emperor's individuality. So, titles identified the emperor as individual, as legitimate ruler and informed about his qualities. Indeed, imperial titles can be considered a specific form of imperial discourse, functioning as a vehicle for the communication of programmatic statements.

The imperial titulature in papyrus texts from the first three centuries CE have their own idiosyncrasies, but also follow patterns that are recognized in coins and inscriptions. They comprise one or more of the following constituents: the terms indicating the imperial position, the ruling emperor's personal name(s), honorific epithets, victory titles, dynastic reference to (fore)fathers or predecessors, or designated emperors, and republican offices. In the course of time, a development to a more elaborate series of titles can be discerned, resulting among other things from the competitive wish or need for succeeding emperors to surpass their predecessors. In most papyri the function of imperial titulature was to provide the document with a date. However, it is also used in oath formulas, in references to activities or possessions of the emperor, or to announce an emperor in a letter or edict. Greek papyri from Roman Egypt referred to the regnal year of the emperor, different from the consular dating used in Rome. This was a continuation of the pharaonic and Ptolemaic dating system, but adapted to the Roman political situation.⁵⁵ The form of the Roman date formulas might vary from the short xth

53 The following discussion is based on De Jong 2006, 84-135 and Appendix 3, where a full discussion of the attestations, context, meaning, connotation and origin of epithets in imperial titulature in Greek papyri from the third century and further bibliographical references are given. De Jong 2011 and 2014 also discuss (aspects) of imperial titulature, but from different angles and for different purposes.

54 Hammond 1957; Id. 1959; Syme 1958; Peachin 1990; Kienast 1996².

55 Bagnall 2009, 182-183.

year of “NN the lord” to the use of an elaborate series of titles.⁵⁶ Regarding the rationale behind the use of specific titular formulas, we do not exactly know how scribes were informed about the correct imperial titles or how they were supposed to employ these. It is conceivable that this information was communicated by the prefect, who passed it on to the *strategoí* of the nomes, who in their turn informed the local communities of which the scribes were part. This titlature could then be labelled ‘official’ (as it originated from the authorities) and would provide the format for individual scribes. The variation in titles used consequently depended on a combination of factors, such as the needs of a document (documents with an official/legal character might be required to use ‘correct’ titlature), practical factors (time, space) and scribal choices or preferences. Nevertheless, titles are in many cases conventional enough for patterns, innovations and exceptions to be distinguished.

Divine discourse is encountered semantically in several elements that build the titlature. One could think of the element Σεβαστός (Augustus), or of the epithet Εύσεβής (Pius), that both have sacral connotations. In the third century, moreover, some dozen new epithets turn up in Greek papyri. Semantically, some of these epithets can also be categorized as expressions of imperial divinity.

Four of these are used in the titlature of designated emperors: γενναιότατος, ἐπιφανέστατος, ἱερώτατος, and σεβασμιώτατος. In a fundamental discussion of these epithets, Fritz Mitthof has pointed out that they all rendered the Latin

honorific epithet *nobilissimus*.⁵⁷ It is noticeable that one and the same Latin term was rendered by four different Greek words, and that the epithet was not used standardly for all designated emperors. After having used Greek epithets ‘at will’ – as it seems – for more than half a century from Valerian (260 CE) onwards, ἐπιφανέστατος seems to have become the fixed term. According to Mitthof, this was the result of interference by the central authorities in Rome with provincial practices. Indeed, these epithets were all used in date formulas. Therefore, in spite of their divergence from the standard Roman imperial titlature, I follow Mitthof’s conclusion in considering these new epithets ‘official’, noting that this official nature is not an impediment for variability of phrasing.

As indicators of the designated successor to the throne, these epithets functioned as structural elements in documents, which not only dated texts, but also communicated the identity of the emperor-to-be. Strategically, they conveyed a dynastic message, which also implied stability of the line of rulers. Moreover, taking into account the meaning of the epithets, we may assume that to a Greek-speaking audience they further evoked divine or sacral connotations: ἐπιφανέστατος, ἱερώτατος, and σεβασμιώτατος would be perfectly fit to provide a *Caesar* (by the third century this term indicated the designated emperor) with a divine aura. The word ἐπιφανής, for instance, related to ἐπιφάνεια, conveys the capacity of gods

⁵⁶ Bureth 1964, 6-7 states that a simplified title only came into use under the reign of Nero; *autokrator* became a structural part of the titles since Vespasian. The compilation of imperial titles in Greek papyri from Roman Egypt by Bureth is outdated. Moreover, the function and context of the titles are not analysed. Several factors could contribute to the choice of a particular title. It is likely that abbreviated titlature or short titles are used in documents that were written in great numbers, such as tax receipts. As tax receipts were also frequently written on *ostraca*, restricted space and saving time may be reasons to abbreviate or use short titles. Other factors influencing the formula used may have been the type of document, intended use or audience and the scribe’s personal choice.

⁵⁷ Mitthof 1993. For the employment of *nobilissimus* in Latin imperial titlature, see Instinsky 1952, 98-103; Pflaum 1970, 159-164; Noreña 2013. De Jong 2006, Appendix 3, gives the papyrological attestations of the Greek epithets rendering Latin *nobilissimus* in the titles of the *Caesares*. This table only indicates which epithet was used for which *Caesar*.

Greek epithet (NB: all in Latin as <i>nobilissimus</i>)	Attestation for	Employed in
γενναιότατος ('most noble')	Gordian III Marcus Julius Philippus	date/oath
γενναιότατος καὶ ἐπιφανέστατος	Marcus Julius Philippus	date/oath
ἐπιφανέστατος ('most notable', 'most manifest')	Licinius Cornelius Valerianus Carinus and Numerianus Numerianus	date/oath
ἱερώτατος ('most sacred')	Geta Maximus Gordian III Valerianus	date/oath
σεβασμιώτατος ('most august')	Herennius Decius Herennius Decius and Hostilianus	date/oath

to be present to show their power. As a royal epithet it had also been used for Hellenistic kings.⁵⁸

To sum up, the distinction between the central Roman presentation of the designated emperor as *nobilissimus*, reflecting imperial self-presentation in the centre of power, and its varying Greek interpretation in the peripheral province of Egypt, shows the freedom of interpretation of imperial ruler presentation in a Roman province. This is closely connected with the ideology of ruler charisma, which in the Greek epithets is especially expressed in divine terms. As the designated emperor was guarded and approved by the gods, his position was legitimized and implied the promise of imperial dynastic continuity.

Interestingly, in third-century Greek papyri some further new epithets (other than the four discussed above) occur in references to the emperor(s).⁵⁹ Divine discourse is again semantically present, especially in three epithets: ἀνίκητος, θειότατος, and θεοφιλέστατος. Given its use in date formulas, ἀνίκητος may well have

58 Chaniotis 2003; Catalaÿ, F. de, Lorber, C.C. 2011, 434-455 (on coins of Hellenistic rulers). However, Price 1984, 86-87 and Chaniotis 2010, 129-130, also point to its non-cultic application. In the case of the epithet as part of the imperial titulature, I would argue that a divine association was at least possible and even probable, as it alternated with terms that were unambiguously connected to the divine sphere.

59 De Jong 2006, 98-130. Epithets appearing in references to emperors for the first time in the third century: ἀήττητος, αἰώνιος, ἀνίκητος, θειότατος, εὐμενέστατος, θεοφιλέστατος, μεγαλοδώρατος, μέγας. De Jong 2006, Appendix 3, gives their papyrological attestations. The following table presents the new 'divine' epithets in imperial titulature in the third century.

Epithet	Attestation for	Employed in reference to	Notes
ἀνίκητος ('un-conquered')	Aurelianus	Date, CE 272 and 273	Lat. invictus
θειότατος ('most divine')	Septimius Severus Septimius Severus and Caracalla Caracalla Valerianus and Gallienus	Official communication and petitions (address formula, imperial providence/administrator, emperors ordering)	Part of imperial titulature from 6th c. CE
θεοφιλέστατος ('dearest to the gods', 'most godloving')	Elagabalus Maximinus Thrax Decius	Correspondence between officials and petition: (imperial order/emperor/imperial statue)	In Byzantine period honorific title for members of the clergy

been an official epithet.⁶⁰ Concerning θειότατος⁶¹ and θεοφιλέστατος,⁶², however, these epithets were only rarely used and appear outside the usual date or oath formulas. This could suggest that their employment should most likely be ascribed to individual scribes or to the author of the documents in question.⁶³ What I mean by 'author' here is the initiator of the document, on whose demand the document was written by a scribe. Interestingly, the initiators of most of the documents in which the epithet θειότατος is used, are provincial or nome administrators (*procurator*, prefect, strategos). The same observation can be made for the less frequent attestation of the epithet θεοφιλέστατος. This is used once in a petition addressed to the prefect⁶⁴ and once (or perhaps in two instances) in a letter circulating in a higher administrative context.⁶⁵ The choice to use one of these epithets did not depend on official prescriptions by the emperor himself, but on factors that lay with the initiator of the document or with the scribe, and which we can only guess at. Perhaps it was intended to express loyalty or piety or it just reflects a customary manner of speaking of the time, or – especially in petitions – it may have reinforced the claim by using powerful terms in a show of scribal inventiveness. Whatever the case (or combination of cases), the epithets were clearly considered appropriate.

Apart from the question by whom these epithets were invented, one may also ask who would have noticed such terminology, in other words, who was the audience? If we consider the documents themselves, we see that they are all addressed to nome administrators (*strategoï*), except for one petition in which emperors are addressed.⁶⁶ So, if these documents reached their addressees, they would have noticed the epithets. Whether or how this would be perceived by the addressee

60 Having in the first place a military connotation, this epithet is used for Aurelianus and may be linked to that emperor's special connection with Sol Invictus, so that the epithet's military resonance is extended to divine association by its connection to Sol. Actually, the fact that this epithet appears in the date formula of four documents with 'official' contents might indicate that it had official status (contrary to the conclusion of De Jong 2006, p. 109). P.Oslo III 96, ll. 10-15 (unknown, 272), P.Oxy. VII 1036, ll. 37-41 (Oxyrhynchus, 272), P.Agon 8, ll. 23-25 (Oxyrhynchus, 273), P.Ups.Frid. 6, ll. 17-19 (Oxyrhynchus, 273). For the use of the title invictus on coins and in inscriptions, cf. Watson 1999, 173-174. The occasion for Aurelianus's use of this title is probably connected with his defeat of Zenobia and his taking of Palmyra.

61 Referring to Septimius Severus in SB XVIII 13175 iv, l. 19 (provenance unknown, 194) and P.Achmim 8, l. 14 (Koptos, 197) to Septimius Severus and Caracalla in P.Oxy. IX 1185v., l. 21 (Oxyrhynchus, ca. 200), SB XII 10884, l. 6 (200-201), P.Oxy. XLVII 3364, l. 11 (Oxyrhynchus, 209), SB I 4284, l. 6 (Alexandria, 209); to Caracalla in BGU XI 2056, l. 3 (Alexandria 212); to Valerianus and Gallienus in P.Oxy. XLVII 3366 ii, l. 61a (Oxyrhynchus, 253-260).

62 Referring to Heliogabalus in P.Bub. I 4, 48, 6 (Bubastis, 221); to Maximus, son of Maximinus Thrax in SB I 421, l. 4 (Memphis, 236); to Decius in Stud.Pal. XX 54 ii, l. 11 = CPR I 20 (Hermopolis Magna, 250).

63 This goes for the epithets with only one attestation: αἰώνιος, εὐμενέστατος, μεγαλοδώρατος. Other epithets are with more attestations for the same emperor(s) are ἀήττητος and μέγας. The epithet ἀήττητος is especially employed in references to Septimius Severus and Caracalla, who presented themselves as emperors with military capability. See De Jong 2007.

64 Stud.Pal. XX 54 ii, l. 11 = CPR I 20 (Hermopolis Magna, 250). Probably also P.Bub. I 4, 48, 6 (Bubastis, 221).

65 SB I 421, l. 4 (Memphis, 236).

66 P.Oxy. XLVII 3366 ii, l. 61a (Oxyrhynchus, 253-260).

is a different question, and one that cannot be answered. Also, it is doubtful that an unambiguous answer could be given, as different addressees will have had individual perceptions and reactions.

Yet, as an eye-opener, it may be useful to consider the use of honorific epithets in inscriptions and the question who would have invented the epithets and who would possibly have been their receptor or audience. In his study of imperial ideology in coinage and inscriptions in the Western Roman Empire, Carlos Noreña proposes several possibilities for the source of ideological terms used in honorific inscriptions dedicated to the emperor.⁶⁷ One option would be that a dedicant invented an epithet himself. Another option was that dedicants found inspiration in the language used by the authorities through official channels, such as coins or decrees. Yet another possibility would be that high-placed locals, who were in contact with the highest imperial circles, for instance through embassies, had learned the appropriate language for communicating with these powerful people and passed their knowledge from experience on to the local level. Or the appropriate language was taken over from the provincial administrators who represented the central government and also had first-hand knowledge. As none of these possibilities can be irrefutably proved or disproved, the safest course is probably to assume that each epithet was the result of one or more of these forms of dynamic interaction between, and processes on, different administrative levels.⁶⁸ The main point, however, is the resulting ‘convergence of language’ between the imperial and local level, making a strong case for appropriation of imperial ideals by leading local persons, regardless of their exact motives.⁶⁹ Could this model also apply to the employment of epithets encountered in papyri? Did individual authors use words with which they were familiar through their involvement in, or knowledge of, imperial administration? It seems that a comparison of the new epithets appearing in Greek papyri in the third century with Latin legends on coins and Latin honorific inscriptions is skewed.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, in both cases we are dealing

67 Noreña 2011, 266-270, also addressing the question of audience. Noreña’s study is based on a comparison of imperial ideals advertised on coins minted in Rome and their appearance in local honorific inscriptions in the Western empire between 69-235 CE. He argues that the recurrence of official ideology in these inscriptions demonstrates that local elites appropriated the imperial ideological language to such a degree that it is justified to qualify its effect as ideological unification between state and local elite, in which each party had concurring, but also individual interests.

68 Noreña 2011, 268.

69 According to Noreña, the motive was rather to consolidate or promote their own local position than to express loyalty towards the emperor. However, cf. A.M. Riggsby’s cautioning against too rigorous a dismissal of the ‘loyalist’ motive (and his remark that Noreña himself relativizes his view) in his review on Noreña: <http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2012/2012-11-52.html> (consulted December 2015).

70 The various differences relate to the nature of the sources. Coins and inscriptions have a far more public character than papyrus documents. Second, the language of the sources: Noreña’s study is based on sources in Latin, whereas this contribution is based on Greek papyri, and on a set of different epithets. Moreover, a comparison of expressions in Greek papyri with imperial ideological terms as encountered on coins is difficult, as Egypt had a closed monetary system until the latter part of the third century. Searching <http://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/intro/whatisrpc/>, I have found no attestations of the new imperial epithets used in Greek papyri in Egypt’s provincial coinage.

with communications originating within a broader imperial discursive framework. That is, the people speaking through inscriptions and in the documentary papyri discussed here, had learnt the proper way to do so. It is fair enough to assume that the epithets *θειότατος* and *θεοφιλέστατος* did not come from nowhere, but were familiar enough to be employed by imperial administrators in Greek references to the emperor. These imperial administrators belonged to the group of men educated in the use of adequate language to refer to the emperor. This fits Noreña’s assumption about the imperial administrators with ‘empirical’ knowledge. Besides this, that they were able to adapt to locally current linguistic expressions and/or their audience’s expectations was already demonstrated in the announcement of the letter of “our god Caesar” by the prefect Lucius Aemilius Rectus. Whatever the case, the effect and purpose of the epithets may have been to show to fellow administrators that one knew how to refer to the emperor, whose special position in this case was provided with a divine echo. In this way the higher officials who showed off by using appropriate language would underline their own position as intimates of the imperial administration.

One further point of notice is that most of the epithets discussed are superlative adjectives. In a discussion of Greek religious inscriptions in the Roman East from the imperial period, Angelos Chaniotis has pointed to the typical practice of using superlatives as epithets for deities that simultaneously served three purposes: to identify the specific god, to express a quality ascribed to that god, and to express the god’s unicity and preponderance over other gods.⁷¹ As Chaniotis argues, the last point results from the omnipresent competition between rival communities to single out their own god. They did so, he postulates, by means of superlative epithets to designate deities in “acclamatory hyperbole”.⁷² This was not a prerogative for deities, but could be applied to kings and emperors too.⁷³ The number of epithets encountered in the papyri under scope is much more restricted than of those in the inscriptions discussed by Chaniotis in their application to emperors or deities respectively. No doubt, again the nature of the sources is an important factor for this divergence. Nevertheless, some convergence can be detected in the fact that most epithets encountered in papyri are also attested in inscriptions and both papyrological and epigraphic epithets are in the superlative form. This elaboration may be explained as one of the developments of imperial titles by which each

71 Chaniotis 2010, 129-130. On p. 119, these inscriptions of religious contexts are specified as dedications, praises of gods, records of acclamations, etc. I would like to thank Nicole Belayche for alerting me to this tendency to use superlative epithets in the imperial period and their possible connection to acclamations.

72 Chaniotis 2010, 130-138, and especially footnote 80 for a list of examples of acclamatory epithets. On p. 135, he states: “Acclamations and ‘acclamatory epithets’ became in the imperial period an important medium for the conceptualization of divine presence and efficacy.” On pp. 136-138 Chaniotis argues that similar (or identical) language was used for reasons of competition: epithets may have been interpreted differently by different groups. Individual epithets underlining a quality of the deity implied that other (competing) deities lacked these.

73 Chaniotis 2010, 129-130.

emperor's elevation should be effectuated.⁷⁴ If the linguistic competition identified by Chaniotis in the epigraphic epithets for gods can be regarded as a sign of the time, the question is whether or how this relates to the development of imperial titulature. Again, the epigraphic religious epithets diverge from the papyrological epithets found in imperial titulature Greek, and the nature and function of the inscriptions also differ from those of the papyrological documents. But again there may be a discursive convergence in the mechanism of using superlative divine epithets. If this is accepted, the introduction of new divine epithets in imperial titulature in papyri can be taken as an indication that Greek imperial language in third-century Egypt shared an empire-wide trend in using elevating language. Perhaps this can be considered competitive behaviour, but it certainly shows that the authors of the documents concerned knew how to present themselves as initiated into the imperial language.⁷⁵

Emperors as Gods in Oaths

A specific function of imperial titles is also found in oath formulas.⁷⁶ The function of oaths is to affirm truth or the truthfulness of what is declared, often by swearing by a deity or by the ruler.⁷⁷ In Roman Egypt, the employment of the Roman emperor as the object of the oath can be seen as another example of divine discourse, as this employment is understood as equating an emperor with a god.⁷⁸ As the object of the oath, the emperor becomes the guardian of its truthfulness. A gradual development can be discerned from the practice of swearing oaths by the emperor directly into a standardized formula where the emperor's *τύχη* (Lat. *genius*) was the object of the oath.⁷⁹ This might point to administrative interference in the formulation of oaths.

Under the Ptolemies, royal oaths became the prescribed oaths for the conclusion of legal procedures. They were sworn by the current rulers and over the centuries

were elaborated by the enumeration of all predecessors and some deities.⁸⁰ In the early Roman period, the oath formula changed: the Roman emperor replaced the Ptolemaic king in the oath formula. Before the mid-first century CE, the emperor was the direct object of the oath, sometimes referring to him as Zeus Eleutherios. The most straightforward case is presented by a number of oath formulas dating to the reign of Augustus, with the following formulation: "I swear by Caesar Imperator, son of a god, Zeus Eleutherios Augustus."⁸¹ Augustus' qualification as Zeus Eleutherios is encountered in Greek inscriptions and papyri from Egypt.⁸² The designation Zeus Eleutherios was an appropriate designation for Augustus, who had liberated Egypt from the rule of Cleopatra and Marc Antony.⁸³ Pfeiffer suggests that "...eine offizielle Förderung dieser Gleichsetzung des Kaisers bestanden hat...".⁸⁴ A comparison of the dated papyri indeed suggests that there would have been some degree of provincial coordination in the formulation of the oath, although it does not seem to have been an immediate innovation.⁸⁵ Oath formulas dated to the initial years of Augustus' sole reign lack the qualification of Zeus Eleutherios.⁸⁶ The earliest dated

⁷⁴ For the increase of imperial titulature, cf. Bureth 1964; Kneissl 1969, 181-185, discusses developments in the employment of victory titles; Peachin 1990.

⁷⁵ This can be further corroborated by the introduction of honorific epithets for cities in Egypt in the third century. See, for example, Hagedorn. Cf. also the general increase in the use of epithets for designating individuals and institutions, for which see Hornickel 1930. In a way, the development of imperial titles *per se* can also be considered competition between emperors (especially in the way they positioned themselves in relation to their predecessors).

⁷⁶ As well as the use of epithets with divine connotations that came to be used in the third century.

⁷⁷ Seidl 1929, 12-18, 45-52; Thür 2014.

⁷⁸ Seidl 1933; Packman 1994; De Jong 2006, 70-73; Pfeiffer 2010, 302-304; De Jong 2011, 633-637.

⁷⁹ As the divine aspect of the emperor, his *τύχη* would be suitable as the object of the oath. This would equal the Roman type of oath with *genius*: Seidl 1933, 26-32; Pfeiffer 291-292, 302-304.

⁸⁰ E.g. BGU VIII 1735 (Herakleopolis, 98 BCE), ll. 3-7: ὀμνῶ βασιλ[έα] Πτολεμαῖον τὸν καὶ Ἀλέξανδρον θεὸν Φιλομήτορα καὶ βασ[ιλισσαν] Βερενίκην τ[ὴν] ἀδελφὴν θεὰν Φιλάδε[λ]φον [κ]αὶ θεὰν Εὐέργετιν καὶ θεὸν Εὐε[ργέτην] καὶ θεὸν Νέον [Φιλο]π[ά]τορα καὶ θεὸν Φιλομήτορα καὶ θεὸν Εὐπάτορα καὶ θεὸν Ἐπιφανῆ καὶ θεοὺς Φιλο[π]άτορας καὶ θεοῦς Ἀδελφ[οῦς] καὶ θεοῦς Σωτήρας καὶ τὸν Σάρα[πιν] καὶ τὴν Ἴσιν καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους θεοὺς πάντας καὶ πάσας ("I swear by king Ptolemy alias Alexander, motherloving god and queen Berenike his sister, brotherloving goddess and the goddess Benefactor and god new fatherloving and god motherloving and god Eupater and god manifest and fatherloving gods and Sibling gods and Saviour gods and Sarapis and Isis and all other gods and goddesses."). For the Ptolemaic royal oath, see Pfeiffer 2008, chapter 5.2.5. For the Ptolemaic and Roman oath, see Seidl 1929 and 1933.

⁸¹ The examples for this formula are listed in Appendix (2). Also Herklotz 2007, 350-355; Pfeiffer 2010, 55-57; 302-304.

⁸² Pfeiffer 2010, 55-57 speculates it was brought to Egypt from the Greek East, but without further explanation of how and when; Herklotz 2007, 256-261, discusses the term in the Greek classical world and its absence in Ptolemaic royal titles. Herklotz 2007, 258, footnote 58 lists the attestations of the epithet in Greek papyri and inscriptions from Egypt.

⁸³ Herklotz 2007, 258. Pfeiffer 2010, 56-57.

⁸⁴ Pfeiffer 2010, 57.

⁸⁵ See the Appendix for an overview of the oath formulas referring to Augustus used. Notice the difference in chronology between type (1) without Zeus Eleutherios and type (2) with Zeus Eleutherios. The earliest dated document referring to Augustus as Zeus Eleutherios is dated 5-4 BCE. The rest of the documents containing that formula are all written at a later date. The only document that cannot be dated to an exact year is P.Rein. II 99, 2-4. The earliest attestation of Augustus' designation as Zeus Eleutherios is dated to 13/12 BCE (I. Portes 24 from Dendera), cf. Herklotz 2007, 258-260 and note 58 and Herklotz 2012, 13-14. In three Egyptian documents (two funerary stelai of a Memphite priests and priestess and one graffito), the earliest of which is dated 23 BCE, the term "he who has set free" appears. This is the year that the Memphite high priest of Ptah, Psenamun, buried his predecessor Imuthes-Petubastis. Interestingly, this Psenamun received the title "prophet of Caesar". So, it is tempting to consider that Augustus' designation in Greek as Zeus Eleutherios may have been inspired by its occurrence in the Egyptian priestly monuments.

⁸⁶ BGU XVI 2589 (Herakleopolites, 28 BCE); BGU XVI 2592 (Herakleopolites, 28 BCE); BGU II 543, 2-3 (Hawara (Arsinoites), 27 BCE); BGU XVI 2590, 5-6 (Herakleopolites, 25 BCE).

oath using Zeus Eleutherios is P.Oslo I 26, from the year 5-4 BCE.⁸⁷ Later oaths in texts from the reign of Augustus all follow the same pattern. That the formula was applied throughout Egypt cannot be proved with certainty, but a picture emerges on the basis of the preserved oath formulas that come from different nomes: apart from the Oxyrhynchite nome, the Herakleopolite and Arsinoite nomes are represented. The absence of the qualification of an emperor as Zeus Eleutherios in oath formulas for later emperors confirms its special connection to Augustus.⁸⁸

The second case of using the emperor as a divinity to guard over the oath by making him the oath's object directly, is attested during the first and second centuries CE for emperors up to Antoninus Pius.⁸⁹ In none of these cases was the emperor associated with a specific god.

At some point in the first century CE, a new type of imperial oath was introduced, in which the emperor's τύχη was the object of the oath.⁹⁰ This might have resulted from interference by Roman authorities, but the procedure is far from clear. In any case, it did not lead to the disappearance of the oath by the emperor directly: for more than a century both oath types (with and without τύχη) are attested, until the τύχη type oath eventually became the standard oath type in the late second century. A remaining question is how this hybrid situation should be understood. Seidl, followed by Pfeiffer, explains the introduction of the τύχη oath as an act by the Roman government to offer the provincial inhabitants the opportunity "zu dieser vornehmeren Schwurformel zugelassen zu werden". The τύχη oath then became "...ein Mittelding...das sowohl den Römern als auch den Griechen und Ägyptern zugänglich sein sollte".⁹¹ The introduction of the τύχη oath may then be understood as a way to assimilate to Roman practice for those who wanted. If this is true, the transformation of this oath practice is an indicator of the slowness of the process with which complete uniformity in the use of oaths was achieved: only much later does the τύχη type appear to have become the only imperial oath formula used.⁹² Other factors that remain invisible may also have had an effect, such as scribal training that would have been increasingly influenced by Roman practices.

87 The dated documents using the Zeus Eleutherios oath formula in chronological order are: P.Oslo I 26, 38 (Oxyrhynchus, 5-4 BCE); W.Chr. 111 = CPR I 224, 1-2 (Soknopaiou Nesos, 6 CE); P.Oxy. II 253, 16-18 (Oxyrhynchus, 19 CE); P.Oxy. II 240, 3-4 (Oxyrhynchus, 37 CE). Undated is P.Rein. II 99, 2-4 (Oxyrhynchus, 30 BCE -14 CE).

88 That they could not be associated with Zeus Eleutherios is clear, as Egypt was liberated by Augustus and became part of the Roman empire after that: Herklotz 2007, 259.

89 Packman 1991, with examples for each emperor. An example of an oath sworn by Domitian is the declaration of a boy's credentials for his upcoming *epikrisis*, P.Oxy. II 257 (Oxyrhynchus, 94-95 CE), ll. 38-40: ὄμν[ύω] Αὐτοκράτορα Καίσαρα Δομι[τιανόν] Σεβαστὸν Γερμανικόν ("I swear by Emperor Caesar Domitianus Augustus Germanicus").

90 Packman 1994; Pfeiffer 2010, 303-304. The earliest τύχη oaths date to the reign of Vespasian: PSI XIV 1433 (Oxyrhynchus, 69 CE?), P.Oxy. XLIX 3508 (Oxyrhynchus, 70).

91 Seidl 1933, 30, quoted by Pfeiffer 2010, 304.

92 Or at least the only type that has been preserved in the documentary record.

Be this as it may, oaths are illustrative for divine discourse. On a communicative level, an oath was an instrument to guarantee the truth of a statement. In a strategic respect, swearing an oath created a moral obligation on the oath-taker and instantly made clear the (power) relation between oath-taker, oath-recipient and the established and accepted authority of the power guarding the oath. Moreover, swearing an oath by the emperor implied recognizing his divine status. The specific identification of Augustus with Zeus Eleutherios probably even added to paralleling the emperor as the highest authority to the most powerful of the gods, while at the same time he was presented as a liberator from the civil war with Marc Antony in the East, and in Egypt specifically as liberator from the Ptolemies. The succeeding emperors did not share this explicit equation to Zeus, but still served as oath guardians. It is probable that in the formulation of the oath, Roman authorities played a role. This is at least suggested by the overall standard form of the oath formula in the course of the imperial period. In yet another respect swearing an oath mattered to subjects. In documents, oaths come to us as written words, but it should not be forgotten that their actual significance was in their performative ritual.⁹³ People who swore oaths did so on specific occasions, in specific places, and under supervision by officials and witnesses. Speaking out an oath thus implied vivifying abstract formulas which for an oath-swearing subject may have had the effect of establishing or actualizing a link between himself and the oath-guarding emperor.

Son of a God: Imperial Deification

So far, the focus has been on living emperors, but even dead emperors appear in papyri. They are referred to in documents relating to a past situation or event. But they might also be present in imperial communications of general importance, such as a decree, or in the following Greek translation of a Latin judicial verdict given by the emperor Antoninus Pius, whose titles are restored in lines 7-10⁹⁴:

[. . . . Αὐτοκράτωρ]
Καῖσαρ θεοῦ Ἀδριαν[οῦ υἱ]ὸς θεοῦ Τραι[ανοῦ Παρθικοῦ]
υἱωνὸς θεοῦ Νέρ[ουα] ἔκγονος Τίτ[ου] Αἴλιος Ἀδριανὸς]
Ἀντωνεῖνος Σεβ[αστ]ῆς Εὐσεβῆς...

"Imperator Caesar, son of god Hadrianus, grandson of god Trajanus Parthicus, descendent of god Nerva, Titus Aelius Hadrianus Antoninus Augustus Pius"

Regrettably, the contents of the document are largely lost. However, the part that is preserved contains a clear statement serving the emperor's dynastic and

93 However, for the possibility that there would only be a written oath, without a verbal statement, see Seidl 1929, 3-4; Id. 1933, 127-135.

94 P.Oxy. XLVII 3361 = SB XXVI 16670 (Oxyrhynchus, 154-161). Bringmann 1999.

divine legitimation. Antoninus Pius is referred to as “son of god (= deified, Lat. *divus*) Hadrian”, “grandson of god Trajan” and “descendant of god Nerva”.⁹⁵ The first point to notice is that this enumeration of predecessors evokes the suggestion of a real family line. Dynastic legitimation was an important branch of imperial discourse. As imperial continuity was perceived to benefit from dynastic succession, emperors cared to position themselves in relation to their predecessor. Thinking in family lines was deeply rooted in Roman society, and it is not surprising that imperial succession is one of the areas in which this is manifested.⁹⁶ The practice of adoption in Roman society was an important instrument to continue family lines.⁹⁷ The practice of adopting emperors in the second century may be considered not a strategy to guide imperial succession in the right direction, but rather a consequence of the fact that the ruling emperors concerned lacked natural sons to succeed them.⁹⁸ This is illustrated by the fact that, as soon as a male successor arose, as in the case of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus, it was self-evident that he would be the successor to the throne. His whole education was intended to prepare him for this role.⁹⁹ An adoptive son counted as a natural son, which may be recognized in various presentations of the emperor as the son of his adoptive father.¹⁰⁰

The second point of notice is that all ancestors of Antoninus Pius that are listed were deified, that is, they had received official recognition of divine status in the Roman context.¹⁰¹ The Latin term for this was *divus*, which was translated in Greek as θεός.¹⁰² Having deified ancestors would undoubtedly add to the perceived legitimacy of an emperor. That ruling emperors could and did link themselves to their deified ancestors is a well-known practice from public media, such as coins and inscriptions. But the memory of deified emperors was also preserved in documents originating in Egypt’s provincial administrative context. In P.Mich. XIV 676 (Oxyrhynchus, 272 CE), for example, a request is made for official confirmation of the status of a boy named Marcus Aurelius Thonis who had turned fourteen.

95 Note that the Greek term θεός is commonly translated as ‘deified’, as it is the Greek rendition of the Latin term *divus*. See Price 1984 for a discussion of this Latin and Greek terminology, which come from diverging conceptual systems and therefore has divergent connotations for their users. To remain as close as possible to the Greek, I translate θεός as ‘god’ here.

96 For the importance of family, ancestors and successors, see Flower 1996; Lindsay 2009. For the dynastic principle in imperial succession, see Lintott 1994; Ando 2000, 34-40; Hekster 2001; Id. 2002, 16-30; Peppard 2011, 50-85.

97 E.g. Corbier 199; Lindsay 2009 and 2011.

98 Cf. Hekster 2001.

99 Hekster 2002, 16-39.

100 A papyrological example in which Hadrian is presented as the son of Trajan is P.Giss. 3 (Apollonopolis Heptakomias, after 117).

101 Epigraphic evidence attests that Septimius Severus himself created a link with Pertinax, had himself adopted in the Antonine family, and referred to predecessors down to Nerva, cf. Ando 2000, 39-40, 182-188. On divine sonship, see Peppard 2011. On imperial consecration, see Price 1987; Gradel 2002, 261-371.

102 Price 1984 and *supra*, note 93; Mason 1974.

[- -] Marcus Aurelius Thonis, his mother being Thermouthion, being 14 years old in the present 3rd year, with no scar, apprentice [- -]. Therefore, having come for his examination, I declare that the great-grandfather of the grandfather of him who is coming forward, Apollonios, was selected at the selection of those from the Gymnasium, which took place in the 5th year of god Vespasian (τὴν γενομένην τῷ ε (ἔτει) θε[οῦ Ο]ύεσ[πασσιανοῦ] τῶν [ἐκ τοῦ γυμ]νασίου ἐπίκ[ρισιν] in the Broadstreet quarter in accordance with the proofs produced by him and that the great-grandfather of his father, Dionysios(?), also known as [- -], coming forward was selected in the 4th year of god Trajan in the said quarter and that his great-grandfather Diogenes coming forward was selected in the 11th year of god Aelius Antoninus in the said quarter and that his grandfather Amous - - - coming forward was selected in the 21st year of god Commodus in the said quarter and his father Kopreus coming forward was selected in the 5th(?) year of the reign after god Severus Antoninus upon the aforesaid proofs in the Lycians’ Camp quarter and that the great-grandfather of the great-grandfather of the mother of him (Thonis) who is coming forward, Sarapion, the son of Theoninos, belongs in the category of those selected in the 3rd year and in the 4th(?) year of Nero by Curtius Paulinus, tribunus militum, in the Myrobalanus quarter, and that the great-grandfather of her grandfather, Theon, coming forward was selected in the 4th year of Domitian in the said quarter and that the great-grandfather of her father, Sarapion, coming forward was selected in the 15th year of god Trajan in the said quarter and that her great-grandfather Euphellis coming forward was selected in the 21st year of god Aelius Antoninus in the said quarter and that her grandfather Anti- - - coming forward was selected in the 32nd year of god Commodus in the Myrobalanus quarter and that her father, Sarapion, coming forward was selected in the 4th year of god Alexander [...]¹⁰³

The acknowledgment by the authorities that the boy belonged to the group of people who were of the gymnasial class implied not only public recognition of one’s social standing, but also privileges, such as paying a reduced poll tax rate. In order to obtain the status confirmation, the boy’s parents (or, as in this case the father had passed away, his guardian) needed to prove that he had the right credentials. Apparently, people were expected to come up with the relevant documents that would prove their own background. The boy’s family history is related on the paternal and maternal side to six and eight generations back respectively. The document itself is dated to 272 CE, whereas reference is made to the status check (*epikrasis*) of Apollonios, the great-grandfather of the grandfather of Thonis in the paternal line.¹⁰⁴ This ancestor was admitted in the official registers of the gymnasial class during the reign of Vespasian, who is referred to as deified here, just like other past

103 Translation from edition <http://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.mich;14;676>. However, I have adapted the conventional translation of θεός as “the deified” to “god”, cf. note 95.

104 On *epikrasis* see Nelson 1979.

and deified emperors. In the maternal line the ancestry goes further even back to the selection of Sarapion during Nero's reign, who is not qualified as θεός.¹⁰⁵

Documents like these in the first place serve a pragmatic purpose for the family concerned and for the state as they communicate the proof and guarantee of the family's members' social status. Another message conveyed by the text is that of dynastic lineage, both in the private, familial, and in the public, imperial, sphere. The imperial dynasty functions, so to speak, as a chronological beacon for the family's history. As to the question whether and for whom it would be meaningful that these emperors from past times were specified as deified, it is hard to say. The papyri show that the qualification θεός was not always added when deified emperors were referred to. Unless this is to be explained by scribal inattentiveness, it may be supposed that there were no strict rules for the use of θεός when deified emperors were referred to.¹⁰⁶ The choice to have the divine line of emperors as a personal family beacon may have further served to underline the social order, of which the emperor in the end was the guarantor. But this may be making too much of it. It is more likely that the scribe was just doing his job, and by adhering to the proper language he underlined his own scribal authority. The strong imperial context for the document and the procedure are further reinforced by the presence of the imperial τύχη oath and the imperial titulature to date the document. Still on another level, deified emperors can be understood in the context of emperor worship and, as described above, for imperial legitimation, as having a deified predecessor would reinforce an emperor's prestige.¹⁰⁷

Conclusion

In this paper I discussed some differentiated ways of how, by whom and in what contexts Roman emperors were connected to gods in Greek papyri, which is manifest in the use of 'divine language'. The focus was on divine discourse in documentary papyri. The questions whether and by whom the emperor was *considered* a god or not have not been addressed, as they are less relevant than the fact that he could be *designated* as one in words by groups, scribes, administrators and in his own communications. By looking at various documentary examples in which emperors are embedded in divine terminology, which most frequently happens in titular dating and oath formulas, and analysing their divine statements, it was my aim to demonstrate that the use of divine language was relevant on several levels.

¹⁰⁵ Just as Nero (line 12), Domitian (line 14) is not qualified as a θεός. Heliogabalus is completely ignored: the year that dates his reign is circumscribed as "in the fifth year after the reign of the god Severus Antoninus (= Caracalla)". These emperors were not deified. In the case of Domitian and Heliogabalus, their memories were condemned. For this practice in papyri, see De Jong 2006 and 2008.

¹⁰⁶ De Jong 2006, 169-173.

¹⁰⁷ The imperial example is, of course, provided by Augustus, who deified his 'father' Caesar and who presented himself as *divi filius*. For the cult of *divi*, see Gradel 2002.

First, there is the communicative value of texts: considering the contents of a documents, a practical message is communicated. Next, texts can be considered for their strategic value. Except for practical messages, documentary texts can also be studied for underlying messages, through choices of specific value-laden words or formulas. By considering these not only in themselves, but also in a wider imperial context, they gain significance not only as pillars of imperial language, but of emperorship itself. Rather than being merely verbal recorders of messages, texts can be considered media that actively contribute to ordering political and social relations: behind the structures of texts, there is a dynamic world of formulas, rituals, and behaviour, in which the people to whom the documents mattered participated. The emperor was the ultimate embodiment of power, authority, and cohesion of empire and this is reflected in his recurrence in documentary texts, where he sometimes features in a historical dialogue with subjects and more often in a different dialogue with subjects, for instance when his titulature is used in dating or oath formulas. Also in itself, imperial titulature can be understood as both a product of, and a constructive element contributing to, the confirmation and reinforcement of the imperial power position. Apart from its practical functions, titulature was an institutionalized, yet personal, vehicle for communication and legitimation of an individual emperor's power position.

In conclusion, what I hoped to have shown is that reading the documentary papyri not only as communicative, but also as strategic messages is helpful in establishing how power was communicated and received, how both emperors and subjects participated in this, and how divine discourse had in all this a crucial role to play.

Appendix: Oath Formulas in Papyri from the Reign of Augustus¹⁰⁸

Listed below are all oath formulas in which the oath is sworn to Augustus. These are selected to indicate the variety of formulas in the earliest period, before Augustus was referred to as 'Zeus Eleutherios' in the oath. In P.Oxy. XII 1453 and BGU XVI 2590, he is qualified as θεόν (god). In P.Oxy. XII 1453, he is furthermore stated as coming ἐκ θεοῦ ('from a god'). In the other documents, the expression is Θεοῦ Υἱὸν ('son of a god'), which translates *divi filius*, referring to the consecration of his adoptive father Julius Caesar.

(1) Earliest oaths without Zeus Eleutherios: varying formulas

P.Oxy. XII 1453, 10-11 (Oxyrhynchus, 30-29 BCE). Oath by temple lighters.

Oath: ὁμ[ν]ύομεν Καίσαρος θεὸν ἐκ θεοῦ.

¹⁰⁸ The Greek, with diacritical layout, has been taken from the editions as they are made available online through the PN. Corrections of the Greek formulations (if applicable) will be found in the editions of the texts.

Date in line 20: α (ἔτους) Καίσαρος

BGU XVI 2589, 4 (Herakleopolites, 28 BCE). Declaration of cessation of land.

Oath: ὀμνύω(ι) Καισαρον Αὐτοκράτορα Θεοῦ Υἱόν.

Date in line 11: (ἔτους) β Καίσαρος

BGU II 543, 2-3 (Hawara (Arsinoites), 27 BCE). Contract of sale under oath.

Oath: ὀμνυμι Καίσαρα Αὐτοκράτορα Θεοῦ υἱόν.

Date in line 18: ἔτους τρίτου Καίσαρος

BGU XVI 2590, 5-6 (Herakleopolites, 25 BCE). Declaration of village elders under oath for maintenance of village dikes.

Oath: ὀμνύομεν Θεὸν Αὐτοκράτορα Καίσαρα Θεοῦ Υἱόν. Date in line 18: (Kaisaros washed out.

Possibly *hasta of kappa*).

Date preserved in ii, line 17, without Kaisaros.

P.Tebt 2 382, 20-22 (Ptolemais Euergetis, Arsinoites, 30-27 BCE). Declaration under oath of division of land.

Oath: ὀμνύο Καίσαραν θεοῦ υἱόν Αὐτοκράτορα.

BGU XVI 2592, 3-4 (Herakleopolites, 27 BCE-14 CE). Declaration under oath concerning the building of a house.

Oath: ὀμνυμι Καίσαρα Αὐτοκράτορα Θεοῦ Υἱόν Σεβαστόν.

Date in line 12-13 (?):[Καίσαρ]ος

(2) *Oaths with Zeus Eleutherios: standardized formula*

P.Oslo I 26, 38-39 (Oxyrhynchus, 5-4 BCE). Oath on handing in a *hypomnema*.

Oath: ὀμνύωι Καισαρ Αὐτοκράτορα Θεοῦ υἱόν Δία Ἐλευθέριον Σεβαστ[όν].

Reference to year in line 9-10: ἐν τῷ ἐνεστῶτι κς (ἔτει) Καίσαρος

W.Chr. 111 = CPR I 224, 1-2 (Soknopaiou Nesos, 6 CE). Copy of a contract between Macedonian *katoikoi*.

Oath: ὀμνυ[μι] [Καίσαρα] Αὐτοκράτορα θεοῦ υἱόν Δία Ἐλευθέριον [Σεβαστόν]

Date in line 1: (ἔτους) λε Καίσαρος

P.Amst. I 28, 1-2 (Oxyrhynchites?, 3 BCE). Declaration about patrimonial goods.

Oath: ὀμνύω Καίσαρα Αὐτοκράτορα θεοῦ υἱόν Δί[α] ἔλεϋθέριον Σεβαστόν. Also reference to the year 28.

Date in line 7: (ἔτους) κη Καίσαρος

BGU XVI 2591, 2-3 (Herakleopolites, 2 BCE). Sale of a house under oath.

Oath: ὀμνύω Καίσαρα Αὐτοκράτορα Θεοῦ Υἱόν Δία Ἐλευθέριον Σεβαστόν.

Date in line 9: (ἔτους) κη Καίσαρος

SB XX 14440, 14-15 (Theadelphia, 12 CE). Census declaration.

Oath: ὀμνύω Καίσαρα [Α]ὐτοκράτορα Ἐλεϋθέριον θεοῦ <υἱόν> Δία Σεβαστόν.

Date in line 26: (ἔτους) μα Καίσαρος

P.Rein. II 99, 2-4 (Oxyrhynchus, 30 BCE -14 CE). Declaration of lease of land under oath. Oath:

ὀμνύω Καί[σαρα][Αὐτοκράτορα θεοῦ] υἱόν Δία Ἐλευθέριον[ν][Σεβαστόν].

Date in line 9 partly lost : ἔτος Κ[αίσαρος]

(3) *Oaths from the reign of Tiberius referring to Augustus as Zeus Eleutherios*

P.Oxy. II 253, 16-18 (Oxyrhynchus, 19 CE). Declaration under oath of anachoresis.

Oath: ὀμνύω Τιβέριον Καίσαρα Σεβαστόν Αὐτοκράτορα θεοῦ Διὸς Ἐλευθερίου Σεβαστοῦ υἱόν.

Date in line 24: (ἔτους) ε Τιβερίου Καίσαρος Σεβαστοῦ

P.Oxy. II 240, 3-4 (Oxyrhynchus, 37 CE). Oath by komogrammateus sworn by Tiberius, who is referred to as son of Zeus Eleutherios.

Oath: [ὀμνύω Τιβέριον Καίσαρα \Νέον/ Σεβαστόν Αὐτοκράτορα [θεοῦ Διὸς Ἐλευθε]ρ[ίου] Σεβαστοῦ υἱόν.

Date in line 9-10: (ἔτους) κη Τιβερίου Καίσαρος Σεβαστοῦ

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Abbreviations of papyrological editions are according to the checklist, available online: John F. Oates, Roger S. Bagnall, Sarah J. Clackson, Alexandra A. O'Brien, Joshua D. Sosin, Terry G. Wilfong, and Klaas A. Worp, *Checklist of Greek, Latin, Demotic and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets*, <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/papyrus/texts/clist.html>, September, 2014.

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