

DESCENDANTS OF GODS: LEGENDARY GENEALOGIES IN THE
ROMAN EMPIRE

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Many late Republican notables were heirs to gods and heroes. The triumvirs are illustrative. According to ancient tradition, Mark Anthony descended through Anton from Hercules, Octavian (or rather Caesar) through Aeneas from Venus and, interestingly, Lepidus from the Vestal Aemilia, who was condemned for unchastity.¹ Sextus Pompey followed suit and: “assumed a certain additional glory and pride by representing himself to be son of Neptune, since his father had once ruled the whole sea”.² In doing so, the late Republican dynasts were in no way exceptional. The great patrician family of the Aemilii, through the Trojan royal house, placed their origins with Jupiter, whilst the Caecilii were deemed to descend from Caeculus, a son of Vulcan who also founded Praeneste. The theme is explored in a splendid 1974 article of Peter Wiseman, who rightfully concludes: “with a god in the family tree, who needed consuls?”³ After Augustus came to power, however, the trend is much less well attested. What happened to the notion of divine (or at least heroic) ancestry during the empire? What was the impact of empire on this phenomenon?

The impact of empire, in these instances, may be correlated to the impact of emperors. Not all of them seem to have been partial to fame acquired in republican times. Thus, according to Suetonius, Caligula destroyed the statues of Republican heroes so utterly that “they could not be set up again with their inscriptions entire” and:

¹ Mark Antony: Plutarch, *Antony* 4.1-4.3; 60.3, with U. Huttner, ‘Marcus Antonius und Herakles’, in: C. Schubert/ K. Brodersen (eds.), *Rom und der Griechische Osten. Festschrift für Hatto H. Schmitt zum 65. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart 1995), 103-112; 104, n.7. Octavian: Suetonius, *Divus Iulius* 6.1; Appian, *Bella Civilia* 3.16; 3.19, with O. Hekster, ‘Hercules, Omphale, and Octavian’s “anti-propaganda”’, *Bulletin Antieke Beschaving* 79 (2004), 159-160. Lepidus: Livy, *Periochae* 63.4; Dio, 87.3.

² Dio, 48.19.2: δόξαν τέ καὶ φρόνημα ὡς καὶ τοῦ Ποσειδῶνος παῖς ὢν ὅτι πάσης ποτὲ ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ τῆς θαλάσσης ἤρξε, προσέθετο. Cf. Dio, 38.31.5; P. Zanker, *Augustus und die Macht der Bilder* (München 1987), 52-61. Sextus’ preference for Neptune is well attested in coinage.

³ Caecilii: Cato, *Fragment* 59P; Servius, *Aeneid* 7.678; Festus (Paulus), 38L; Aemilii: Silius Italicus *Punica* 8.294-8.296; T.P. Wiseman, ‘Legendary Genealogies in Late-Republican Rome’, *Greece & Rome* 21 (1974), 153-164; 153; 164 (quote); T.P. Wiseman, ‘Domi Nobiles and the Roman Cultural Elite’, in: M. Cébeillac-Gervasoni (ed.), *Les «Bourgeoisies» municipales italiennes aux IIe et Ier siècles av. J.-C.* (Paris – Naples 1983), 298-306; 304.

He took from all the noblest of the city the ancient devices of their families, from Torquatus his collar, from Cincinnatus his lock of hair, from Gnaeus Pompeius the surname *Magnus* belonging to his ancient race.

*Uetera familiarum insignia nobilissimo cuique ademit, Torquato torquem, Cincinnato crinem, Cn. Pompeio stirpis antiquae Magni cognomen.*⁴

So far, so Caligula. After all, the same emperor is said to have considered destroying the poems of Homer and removing books and busts of Virgil and Livy from libraries.⁵ Descent, however, may have been of particular importance. Thus, he allegedly boasted of incestuous descent from Augustus in order to deny any link to Agrippa, whose origin was deemed to be too humble. In like vein, he reacted irate when listening to “some kings, who had come to Rome to pay their respects to him, disputing at dinner about the nobility of their descent”.⁶ Even if all of the above statements were but literary commonplaces and inventions of Suetonius, the emphasis on descent could still be telling. Yet, at least in one instance, there is supporting evidence.

Caligula’s decision to take the cognomen *magnus* away from Gnaeus Pompeius (following the emperor’s statement that “it was not safe for him that anyone should be called *magnus*”) seems to be corroborated by epigraphic evidence.⁷ In the early 40’s, when Pompeius was a Salian priest, he still used his cognomen, whereas in the Arval acts of 44 A.D., *magnus* was used as *praenomen*. By the time of Pompeius’ death, however, he was again allowed his cognomen *magnus*, as it read on his epitaph.⁸ The reappearance of the *cognomen* links up with Claudius’ allowing Gnaeus Pompeius to return his name to its former glory, unsurprisingly, since Pompeius had become the emperor’s son in law.⁹

⁴ Suetonius, *Gaius Caligula* 34.1; Suetonius, *Gaius Caligula* 35.1.

⁵ Suetonius, *Gaius Caligula* 34.2.

⁶ Suetonius, *Gaius Caligula* 22.1; Suetonius, *Gaius Caligula* 23.1.

⁷ Caligula’s statement: Dio 60.5.8-9, with A. A. Barrett, *Caligula. The Corruption of Power* (London 1989), 237-238; P. Kragelund, ‘The Emperors, the Licinii Crassi and Pompey’, in: J.M. Højte (ed.), *Images of Ancestors* (Aarhus 2002), 188-191; 193.

⁸ Cognomen (Salian Priest): *ILS* 9339; *praenomen*; *CIL* 6.2032, 44; *cognomen* (epitaph) *CIL* 6.31722. On the altar of Gn. Pompeius Magnus in the tomb of the Licinii Crassi: F. van Keuren et. al., ‘Unpublished Documents to shed New Light on the Licinian Tomb, discovered in 1884-1885’, *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 48 (2003), 53-139; 54; 102 figs; 32-33; Museo Naz. Rom. 78163. On the changes of Pompeius’ name, see especially H. Solin, ‘Namenwechsel und besondere Vornamen römischer Senatoren’, *Philologus* 133 (1989), 252-259; 256; Kragelund 2002, op.cit. (n.4), 193.

⁹ Suetonius, *Divus Claudius* 27.2; Dio, 60.5.9. B. Levick, *Claudius* (London 1990), 58.

A more general history of the Licinii Crassi, of whom Gnaeus Pompeius formed part, may illustrate different emperors' attitudes to important Republican descent. The Licinii Crassi, after all, could claim descent from both Pompey and Marcus Licinius Crassus – images of both of whom seem to have been present in their family tomb.¹⁰ Indeed, emphasis on this high-brow descent seems to have been stressed in public life.¹¹ This kind of prominence made Caligula uneasy, but was highly attractive to Claudius whose power base weak at the beginning of his reign, and who resorted to intermarriage schemes to boost his status. Claudius' choices of his sons-in-law indicate the importance he gave to high brow descent: alongside Gnaeus Pompeius was Lucius Junius Silanus Torquatus, who was a member of the Junii, of impeccable Republican prominence and also related to Augustus and Marcus Aemilius Lepidus. These in-laws were, for a while, given all sorts of honours and a high profile.¹² In A.D. 42, however, after a failed revolt, Claudius (or perhaps Messalina) felt threatened – Magnus and his parents were executed overnight, the first in fact stabbed to death, allegedly in bed with his (favourite) male lover.¹³ Surprisingly, no *damnatio memoriae* followed and the prestige of the family was undiminished.

This same kind of mixture between fear and respect of families with ancestral claims can already be detected in Tiberius reign. One seems to have been more likely to fall victim to a trial for high treason (*de maiestate*), when one had “a house filled with ancestor masks (*imagines*)”.¹⁴ Indeed, having Pompey amongst ones ancestors could be a risk, as the A.D. 16 trial against M. Scribonius Libod Drusus and the A.D. 20 trial against Aemilia Lepida made clear.¹⁵ But even famous ancestors who led to ones downfall could still be emphasised to demand respect. Thus, famously, Aemilia Lepida, who was great-granddaughter of Sulla as well as of Pompey, entered her forebear's theatre, still named after him and:

¹⁰ Kragelund 2002, op.cit. (n.4). On the tomb: D. Boschung, 'Überlegungen zum Liciniergrab', *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 101 (1986), 257-287.

¹¹ Kragelund 2002, op.cit. (n.4), 191. Cf. H. I. Flower, *Ancestor Masks and Aristocratic Power in Roman Culture* (Oxford 1996), 257-258.

¹² W. Eck, 'Pompeius Magnus', *RE* S 15 (1978), 328. On Claudius' relation to the aristocracy of Rome, see Levick 1990, op.cit. (n.6), 93-103.

¹³ Suetonius, *Divus Claudius* 27.2; 29; Kragelund 2002, op.cit. (n.4), 193-195.

¹⁴ Tacitus, *Annales* 2.27.2; with Flower 1996, op.cit. (n.8), 247.

¹⁵ P. Grenade, 'Le mythe de Pompée et les Pompéiens sous les Césars', *Revue des Études Anciennes* 52 (1950), 28-63; Kragelund 2002, op.cit. (n.4), 197-198.

as she appealed with piteous wailings to her ancestors and to that very Pompey, the public buildings and statues of whom stood there before their eyes, she roused such sympathy that people burst into tears ...

(lamentatione flebili maiores suos ciens ipsumque Pompeium, cuius ea monimenta et adstantes imagines visebantur, tantum misericordiae permovit ut effusi in lacrimas ...).¹⁶

Notwithstanding the crowd's arousal, Lepida was exiled. But hers was an exile in style, befitting one with such honourable lineage.

Under Julio-Claudian rule, lineage continued to matter. Hence, Claudius' aside to the senate in A.D. 48:

Behold all these young men whom I am looking at. We should no more regret that they are senators than Pericus, a man of the highest lineage and my friend, is sorry to read the name Allobrogicus among the masks of his ancestors.

*(Tot ecce insignes iuvenes, quot intueor, non magis sunt paenitendi senatores, quam paenitet Persicum, nobilissimum virum, amicum meum, inter imagines maiorum suorum Allobrogici nomen legere.)*¹⁷

Hence, also, Seneca's repeated complaints about ancestral boasts in senatorial *domus*. Why would he emphasise that: "an *atrium* full of smoke stained masks does not make a man 'noble' (*Non facit nobilem atrium plenum fumosis imaginibus*)", if common opinion did not assume that this was so?¹⁸

Augustus could be used as example in this, as in almost every aspect of imperial ideology. After all, he had moved the statues that Caligula destroyed so wholeheartedly from the Capitol to the Campus Martius to give them more room.¹⁹ Augustus also gave special attention to the great men of old in his Forum, where bronze statues of the *principes viri* and accompanying *elogia* were given pride of place. Then again, these Republican greats were linked to Augustus' Julian ancestry – perhaps even to the extent that the *summi viri* who could not claim kinship with Augustus were segregated from the others.²⁰ Again, it appears that Republican honour was venerated and (hence) incorporated in imperial lineage.

¹⁶ Tacitus, *Annales* 3.23

¹⁷ *CIL* 13.1668.2.25; Flower 1996, op.cit. (n.8), 259; 291 T26 (with translation).

¹⁸ Seneca, *Epistulae* 44.5; Flower 1996, op.cit. (n.8), 315 T75 (with translation). Cf. Seneca, *Dialogi* 12.12.6-7 (= T72); Seneca, *De Clementia* 1.9.10 (= T73); Seneca, *De Beneficiis* 3.28.2 (= T74), Seneca, *Epistulae* 76.12 (= T76). On *De Beneficiis* and social conduct: M. Griffin, 'De beneficiis and Roman society', *Journal of Roman Studies* 93 (2003), 92-113.

¹⁹ Suetonius, *Gaius Caligula* 24.1

²⁰ Ovid, *Fasti* 5.563-5.566; Dio, 55.10.3; Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 9.11.10. The *elogia* have recently been republished (with new fragments) by G. Alföldy – L. Chioffi (*CIL* 6.8.3, nos. 40931 ff).

Indeed, one of Galba's main claims when coming to power was his impressive ancestry, coupled with numismatic emphasis on republican ideals.²¹ According to Suetonius, his inscriptions consistently traced lineage to his great-grandfather Quintus Catulus Capitolinus and, when he became emperor, "he even displayed a family tree in his *atrium*".²² Tacitus makes Mucianus argue that it was logical for Vespasian to "defer to Galba's *imagines*" but that following this ruler's death, Vespasian was entitled to put himself forward for the throne.²³ When appointing an heir, Galba once more showed his preference for tradition by adopting Lucius Calpurnicus Piso Frugi Licianus – progeny of an old line.²⁴

Galba's ancestry, however, was not limited to mere mortals. From his father's side, he claimed descent from Jupiter himself, whilst his maternal line traced back to Pasiphaë, Minos' daughter.²⁵ This, then, brings us back to the political religiosity with which this article started.

Impressive mortal ancestry was potentially threatening to the ruling emperor. How about divine or heroic claims? What had happened to the divine descendants? Galba's assertion is an interesting case. It can be reasonably suggested that his divine claim was consistent with a second century B.C. coin, minted by a Sulpician moneyer, which perhaps implied descent from the Alban kings.²⁶ This seems to imply continuity of some sort. Galba was the last of the patrician Sulpicii, so it need not surprise that the ancestral claim was not repeated in later times. But, interestingly, there is no

Cf. L. Chioffi, *Gli elogia augustei del Foro Romano* (Rome 1996). On the sculptural display of the Forum, see now M. Spannagel, *Exemplaria Principis. Untersuchungen zu Entstehung und Ausstattung des Augustusforums* (Heidelberg 1999), especially 288-299 on the placement of the *principes viri* who were linked to the gens Iulia, and those who were not. Cf. P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor 1988), 210-215; V. Kockel, 'Forum Augustum', *LTUR* 2, 289-295; J. Poucet, 'La fonction fondatrice dans la tradition sur les rois de Rome', in: M. Coudry – T. Späth (eds.), *L'invention des grands hommes de la Rome antique. Die Konstruktion der grossen Männer Altroms* (Paris 2001), 195-219.

²¹ A. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Galba's *Aequitas*', *Numismatic Chronicle* 141 (1981), 20-39; at 37-38; id., 'Image and Authority in the Coinage of Augustus', *Journal of Roman Studies* 76 (1986), 66-87; at 70; O. Hekster, 'Coins and Messages. Audience Targeting on Coins of Different Denominations?', in: L. de Blois (et. al.), *Representation and Perception of Roman Imperial Power* (Amsterdam, 2003) [= *Impact of Empire* 3], 20-35.

²² Suetonius, *Galba* 2. Cf. on his lineage Suetonius, *Galba* 3; Dio, 64.1; Tacitus, *Historiae* 1.49; Plutarch, *Galba* 3.1. Epigraphic evidence does not support Suetonius' claim.

²³ Tacitus, *Historiae* 2.76.2; with Flowers 1996, op.cit. (n.8), 262; 321 (T94).

²⁴ Tacitus, *Historiae* 1.14-1.19; 1.88; Suetonius, *Galba* 12. The prosopography is set out by Boschung 1986, op.cit. (n.7), 260-263.

²⁵ Suetonius, *Galba* 2.

²⁶ Wiseman 1974, op.cit. (n.3), 153, with n.5 for references.

evidence that any of the Sulpicii made the claim to descent from Jupiter during the Julio-Claudian reign. Nor, in fact, does there seem to be evidence for any descendant of the great families using the divine claims which in the late republic were connected to that family, in imperial times.

Partly, this may result from a less flexible system of minting. With moneymen no longer at real liberty to put iconographical claims forward, evidence for ideological assertions of senatorial families is much harder to trace. It may simply be evidence that changed under the empire, not practice. Some literature indicates that the practice of creating legendary genealogies was at least well *remembered* in imperial times. Plutarch, in his life of *Numa Pompilius* mentions how:

Others will have it that he left also four sons, namely, Pompo, Pinus, Calpus, and Mamercus, every one of whom had issue, and from them descended the noble and illustrious families of Pomponii, Pinarii, Calpurnii, and Mamerci, which for this reason took also the surname of Rex, or King. But there is a ... set of writers who say that these pedigrees are but a piece of flattery used by writers who, to gain favour with these great families, made them fictitious genealogies from the lineage of Numa.²⁷

The passage implies awareness of legendary genealogies, though it may be that Plutarch, in the imperial epoch, is writing about Republican objections. One should, in this context, note Asclepiades of Myrlea, “who about 100 B.C. divided history into three categories, the true, the seeming-true and the false”. The latter category incorporated only one kind of history – genealogy.²⁸

Seneca is much more unequivocal about the practice in the imperial age: “Do not be deceived by them when they often enumerate their ancestors, and wherever there is no famous name, there they slip in a god”.²⁹ For the statement to make sense as advice to the young Nero, the claims of divine ancestry must have continued.

Still, they cannot be systematically traced. There are some glimpses, though. Silius Italicus in his eighth book of the *Punica* explicitly draws the distinction between the useless consul Varro, whose “birth was obscure: the name of his ancestors never heard” *atque illi sine luce genus surdumque*

²⁷ Plutarch, *Numa* 21.4. Cf. Wiseman 1974, op.cit. (n.3), 158.

²⁸ Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos* 1.252-1.253; Wiseman 1974, op.cit. (n.3), 158.

²⁹ Seneca, *De Beneficiis* 3.28.2: “Non est, quod te isti decipiant, qui, cum maiores suos saepe recensent, ubicumque nomen illustre defecit, illo deum infulciunt.”

*parentum nomen*³⁰ and on the other hand the much more wonderful Lucius Aemilius Paulus:

yet his race was akin to the gods, and he was related to the lords of heaven through his ancestors. For through Amulius, the founder of his line, he could trace descent from Assaracus, and through Assaracus to Jupiter

(*sed genus admotum superis summumque per altos/ attingebat auos caelum: numerare parentem/ Assaracum retro praestabat Amulius auctor/ Assaracusque Iouem*).³¹

The reference did not refer to contemporary politics. After all, the Aemilii had demised under the Julio-Claudians.³² Silius, too, withdrew from politics in his later life. He did not even go to the new emperor to congratulate him on his accession, which did not do him any harm, since ‘without aiming for power, no one resented him’.³³ Silius did include Galba’s claim of divine descent in the *Punica* – but wrongly made it paternal, rather than maternal.³⁴ In one passage, however, there might be a glimpse of how mythological ancestry could be used under the emperors:

Young Pedianus dressed in Polydamantean arms/ Waged war ferociously and proclaimed himself/ of Trojan seeds and origin and of Antenor’s stock,/ as famous for his family and the holy Timavus/ and a name blessed for his glory on Euganean shores

(*Polydamanteis iuuenis Pedianus in armis/ bella agitabat atrox Troianaque semina et ortus/ atque Antenorea sese de stirpe ferebat,/ haud leuior generis fama sacroque Timauo/ gloria et Euganeis dilectum nomen in oris*).³⁵

This name of this Paduan Pedianus is the same as the cognomen the well-known literary critic of Silius’ time, Quintus Asconius Pedianus.³⁶ Some lines below, Silius’ Pedianus is described further: “nor was any other youth/ more famed in war, or any youth more famed in verse”.³⁷ Here, then, it seems that Silius is heaping praise on someone whose praise was important

³⁰ Silius Italicus, *Punica* 8.246-8.247.

³¹ Silius Italicus, *Punica* 8.293-8.296.

³² T. P. Wiseman, *Roman Drama and Roman History* (Exeter 1998), 106-120 on the demise of Aemilii.

³³ Pliny, *Epistulae* 3.7.4. Not going to the emperor: Pliny, *Epistulae* 3.7.6; M. Wilson, ‘Flavian Variant: History. Silius’ *Punica*’, in: A. J. Boyle (ed.), *Roman Epic* (London – New York 1933), 218-236; 233.

³⁴ Silius Italicus, *Punica* 8.470f, with Wiseman, 156 n.4.

³⁵ Silius Italicus, *Punica* 12.212-12.216.

³⁶ M. Leigh, ‘Oblique Politics: Epic of the Imperial Period’, in: O. Taplin (ed.), *Literature in the Roman World* (Oxford 2000) 184-207; 197.

³⁷ Silius Italicus, *Punica* 12.221-12.222.

to him, by giving him a namesake with mythological ancestry. It may well be relevant that the glimpses that can be detected refer to a past emperor, an aristocratic family that was no longer politically relevant and a literary critic. None of these 'divine' claims were politically employed. It may also be noticeable that Julia Babilla, who scratched her poems on the statue of Ammon, traced her ancestry back to her grandfathers, not to any divinity.³⁸

Indeed, there are indications that politically, divine ancestry had run its course. When Vespasian came to power, an apparent attempt to make the new emperor part of the old aristocratic context failed rather dramatically. Suetonius alludes to an exceptional (and seemingly unexpected) reaction by Vespasian to those who wanted to boost his descent:

[12] In other matters he was *civilis* and *clemens* from the very beginning of his reign until its end, never trying to conceal his former lowly condition, but often even parading it. Indeed, when certain men tried to trace the origin of the Flavian family to the founders of Reate and a companion of Hercules, whose tomb still stands on the Via Salaria, he laughed at them for their pains

([12] *Ceteris in rebus statim ab initio principatus usque ad exitum civilis et clemens, mediocritatem pristinam neque dissimulavit umquam ac frequenter etiam prae se tulit. Quin et conantis quosdam originem Flavii generis ad conditores Reatinos comitemque Herculis, cuius monumentum exstat Salaria via, referre irrisit ultro*).³⁹

It seems that some people wanted to give the new emperor the chance to enhance his ancestors' prestige and that Vespasian did not think that this was necessary, nor a good idea.

Perhaps, since the beginning of the Empire, gods had lost some of their status. Galba's divine descent had not sufficiently strengthened his hold on power. One important aspect of rule, *civilitas*, did not sit well with any form of divine claim, though refusing such claims would show a ruler as the perfect *civilis princeps*.⁴⁰ In that context, Suetonius' emphasis on Vespasian's *civilitas* and *clementia* in the direct framework of the emperor's

³⁸ She, in fact, celebrated both paternal and maternal ancestry: Tiberius Claudius Balbillus and Antiochus IV. A. Bernand/ E. Bernand (eds.), *Les inscriptions grecques et latines du Colosse de Memnon* (Cairo 1960), no. 29; J. Balmer, *Classical Women Poets* (Newcastle 1996), no. 95. Both the themes of ancestry and of human relations to gods are discussed in Statius' *Thebaid*, but not in relation to divine ancestry: N.W. Bernstein, 'Ancestors, Status, and Self-Presentation in Statius' *Thebaid*', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 133 (2003), 353-379.

³⁹ Suetonius, *Divus Vespasianus* 12.1-12.2.

⁴⁰ See on this notion the justly famous A. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Civilis Princeps: Between Citizen and King', *Journal of Roman Studies* 72 (1982), 32-48.

refusal to accept superior mythological ancestry may be noteworthy.⁴¹ Rather than stressing divine claims, Vespasian put himself forward as a ‘new Augustus’, illustrated by the *Templum Pacis* and the ‘Augustan’ titulature and legends on his coin types.⁴²

Not all Flavians were alike. Domitian is said to have claimed descent of a somewhat surprising divine ancestor. Philostrates’ life of Apollonius, tells how Domitian imprisoned a magistrate from Tarentum who refused to mention Minerva as his mother in a public prayer.⁴³ The notion is, however, not backed up through further evidence – importantly, epigraphic evidence does not support it at all. It may well result from deliberate or accidental misreading of the special attention that Domitian gave the goddess; probably as a divine *comes*, but not, it seems, as an ancestor.⁴⁴ Why would he? The important divinities whose ancestry was there for all to see were the divine Vespasian and Titus. Celebrated in Domitian’s arch of Titus, and in the *Templum Gentis Flaviae*, they were the real divinities to whom Domitian owed his status.⁴⁵ The mechanisms of competition had changed alongside the changes in the highest magistracy.

There were now new gods whose ancestry counted, a new *domus divina* of which one wanted to form part. During the Julio-Claudian dynasty, effectively only the divine Augustus counted as an ancestor who could provide relevant status. Either one tried to emphasise familial links to Augustus or one disbanded the notion altogether. Interesting, in this light, is once again Galba, who played all ancestral cards. He stemmed from an

⁴¹ Also Dio, 65.10.1; οὐχ ὡς αὐτοκράτωρ ἀλλ’ ὡς ιδιώτης (not as an emperor, but as a private citizen). Cf. Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 33.41; Eutropius, 7.19; B.W. Jones (ed.), *Suetonius. Vespasian* (Bristol 2000), 78.

⁴² B. Levick, *Vespasian* (London 1999), 73; B.W. Jones, *The Emperor Titus* (London 1984), 121. Cf. C. F. Norēna, ‘Medium and Message in Vespasian’s *Templum Pacis*’, *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 48 (2003), 25-43. Titus followed a similar policy, minting coins that showed the ‘good’ Julio-Claudian rulers, and emphasising (up to the point of credibility) his friendship with Britannicus; Suetonius, *Divus Titus* 2; Jones, *Titus*, 121 with n.42.

⁴³ Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 7.24.

⁴⁴ On Domitian and Minerva: Suetonius, *Domitianus* 5; 15.3; Martial, 5.53.1-5.53.2; 9.3.10; Dio, 67.1; 67.16; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 10.1.91; *ILS* 1998; *CIL* 6.953; B. W. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (London – New York 1992), 100; *RIC* 5.1.322, with J.L. Girard, ‘Domitien et Minerve: une prédilection impériale’, *ANRW* II.17.1 (1981), 233-245; 243; I. Carradice, ‘Coinage and Finance in the Reign of Domitian. AD 81-96’, *BAR Int. Series* 178 (1983), 21-22; 55 n.59; 159-160. On the notion of a divine *comes*, see still A. D. Nock, ‘The Emperors’ Divine comes’, *Journal of Roman Studies* 37 (1947), 102-116. Now also L. Possenti, ‘Le divinità comites’, *Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Università di Macerata* 28 (1995), 141-170.

⁴⁵ Cf. P. J. E. Davies, *Death and the Emperor. Roman Imperial Funerary Monuments from Augustus to Marcus Aurelius* (Austin 2000), 19-27.

important Republican family, made public – as we have seen – his lineage back to Jupiter himself, but also put Livia’s portrait on his coinage, and styled himself ‘Lucius Livius Galba’.⁴⁶ Galba’s claims to the throne, however, were transitory. It seems that when the emperorship further developed itself, divine ancestry other than dynastic divine claims lost impetus as a political tool.

The attention in our sources to the presence and absence of ancestor masks of the divine members of the ruling house in funerary processions emphasises the point. Caesar’s mask was publicly prevented from being used at such occasions as gods could not have *imagines*. Indeed, during Augustus’ funerary pomp, Caesar’s *imago* was absent – though Romulus was put on display. Likewise, the *divus Augustus* was prevented from having an *imago*.⁴⁷ Hence, in Drusus’ funeral of A.D. 23

The most arresting feature of the funeral was the parade of ancestral images, while Aeneas, author of the whole Julian line, with the whole dynasty of Alban kings, and Romulus, the founder of the city, followed by the Sabine nobles, by Attus Clausus, and by the rest of the Claudian effigies, filed in long procession past the spectator

(funus imaginum pompa maxime inlustre fuit, cum origo Iuliae gentis Aeneas omnesque Albanorum reges et conditor urbis Romulus, post Sabina nobilitas, Attus Clausus ceteraque Claudiorum effigies longo ordine spectarentur).⁴⁸

Imagines of Caesar and Augustus were conspicuously absent. Vespasian’s mask, however, may have been carried along in his own funerary procession. According to Suetonius:

At his [Vespasian’s] funeral, Favor, a leading mime, who wore his mask and according to custom imitated the actions and words of the deceased during his lifetime, having asked the procurator in a loud voice how much his funerary procession would cost, hearing the reply ‘10 million sesterces’ cried out: ‘Give me a hundred thousand and fling me into the Tiber’

(et in funere Favor archimimus personam eius ferens imitansque, ut est mos, facta ac dicta vivi, interrogatis palam procuratoribus, quanti funus et pompa constaret, ut audiit, sestertio centiens, exclamavit, centum sibi sestertia darent, ac se vel in Tiberim proicerent).⁴⁹

⁴⁶ *BMCRE* I, nos. 201-2, Pl. 58.4; *SEG* 15.873 = M. McCrum – A. G. Woodhead, *Select Documents of the Principates of the Flavian Emperors* (Cambridge 1961), no. 328.

⁴⁷ Dio, 47.19.2; Dio, 56.34; Flowers 1996, op.cit. (n.8), 291-293 (= T27-29), with discussion and further references.

⁴⁸ Tacitus, *Annales* 4.9.2.

⁴⁹ Suetonius, *Divus Vespasianus* 19.2.

It is not clear, however, whether Vespasian's *imago* was carried along in Titus' funeral procession. Yet, whatever the exact context of these statements, or indeed their trustworthiness, it is evident that the notions of divinity, ancestry and public display became closely linked to the imperial household. With continuing 'sacralisation' of emperorship over the centuries, this must have become, if anything, more pronounced in the later empire.

Based on the above evidence, then, it appears that divine genealogies no longer served an ostensibly political use for senatorial families during the *principate*. Perhaps other evidence can be employed to support the notion.

Firstly, the iconography on sarcophagi. As Hennig Wrede expertly analysed years ago, during the empire the concept of *consecratio in forma deorum* arose. Individuals, in death, characterised themselves through divine attributes. Importantly, the vast majority of these depictions concern *libertini*, their wives and children. Hennig herself already noted that it was must have been easier for those who could not take up a magistracy to make divine associations publicly visible.⁵⁰ This notion is further strengthened by her recent book on senatorial sarcophagi, which seem to emphasise senatorial – rather than divine – virtues.⁵¹ A parallel to this may be Werner Eck's observation on senatorial self-representation in the Augustan period; with Augustus and his family incorporating relevant ancestry and gods, it became difficult for non-imperial families to do so. As a result, the inscription of a *cursus honorum* – the qualifications in life – became the new model.⁵²

Secondly, the private display of art in the senatorial *domus*. Pliny talks at some length about the difference between contemporary displays of art, and the way the *atria* of old used to look: "family trees traced their lines to ancient portraits. The *tablina* (archive rooms) were filled with ledgers of records and deeds done by office holders".⁵³ In his time, on the other hand,

⁵⁰ H. Wrede, *Consecratio in Formam Deorum. Vergöttlichte Privatpersonen in der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Mainz 1981), 159; 163.

⁵¹ H. Wrede, *Senatorische Sarkophage Roms. Der Beitrag des Senatorenstandes zur römischen Kunst der hohen und späten Kaiserzeit* (Mainz am Rhein 2001).

⁵² W. Eck, 'Senatorial Self Representation', in: F. Millar – E. Segal (eds.), *Caesar Augustus. Seven Aspects* (Oxford 1984), 129-167; 150-151. Perhaps the absence of divine representations in the above mentioned tomb of the Licinii Crassi ought to be seen in this light. Of course, these examples somewhat cross boundaries between divine ancestry and personal divinity; which is a different subject altogether, although the developments might well run parallel.

⁵³ Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 35.6-35.7; Flowers 1996, op.cit (n.8), 302-306 (= T54); S. Carey, *Pliny's Catalogue of Culture. Art and Empire in the Natural History* (Oxford 2003), 141-156; esp. 142-143;

people “leave behind portraits of their money, not themselves (*itaque nullius effigie vivente imagines pecuniae, non suas, relincunt*)”.⁵⁴ Perhaps this was simply the standard complaint that everything was better of old, but it is noticeable how in many imperial villas “the gallery of imperial personages extended over several generations or dynasties... graphically portraying the distinguished lineage of a patron long connected with the imperial circle”.⁵⁵ In this context, too, the imperial household had become the divine core on which to focus genealogy, or at least vicinity. The well-known late antique practice of emphasising, and even fabricating, relationships with ‘Rome’s most fashionable *gentes*’, or indeed the notion of ‘appropriation of ancient aristocratic prestige’ through buying *domus* for reputed ancestral links, demonstrates, of course, that at least the perception of ancestry continued to matter.⁵⁶ Ammianus, in his digression on Rome’s elite scolds how “some plume themselves on what they consider distinguished forenames ... or trace their descent from ... some ... high-sounding family”.⁵⁷ But the impact of empire, through the centrality and divinity of the roman emperor, had made emphasis on divine genealogies a practice of the remote past. With an emperor to impress, who needed gods?⁵⁸

ORT, MONAT JAHR

148-149. Cf. Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 35.12, in which Appius Servilius wanted his ancestral portraits “to be in full view on an elevated spot (*in excelso spectari*)”.

⁵⁴ Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 35.4.

⁵⁵ B. Bergmann, ‘Sculptural Collecting and Display in the Private Realm’, in: E. Gazda (ed.), *Roman Art in the Private Sphere. New Perspectives on the Architecture and Decor of the Domus, Villa and Insula* (Ann Arbor 1994), 51-88; 77.

⁵⁶ J. Hillner, ‘*Domus*, Family and Inheritance. The Senatorial Family House in Late Antique Rome’, *JRS* 93 (2003), 129-145; 130-131; 139 with nn. 18-19; G. S. Nathan, *The Family in Late Antiquity* (Oxford 1997), 31; 167. Cf. F. Jacques, ‘l’ordine senatorio attraverso la crisi del III secolo’, in: A. Giardini (ed), *Società romana e impero tardoantico I* (1986), 1-225 and especially C. Settapani, *Continuité gentilice et continuité familiale dans les familles sénatoriales romaines à l’époque impériale. Mythe et réalité* (Oxford 2000). Cf. also the claims of descent by Cappadocian churchfathers: R. van Dam, *Becoming Christian. The Conversion of Roman Cappadocia* (Philadelphia 2003), 76-80.

⁵⁷ Ammianus 28.4.6-28.4.7. Cf. the earlier practice as illustrated by Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 35.8 in which Messala proclaims after being attacked that a bust of another family was placed amongst those his of *gens* that: “even to falsely claim the portraits of famous men as one’s own revealed a certain love for their virtues”, with Carey 2003, op.cit (n.40), 144.

⁵⁸ This is the first publication of a larger project, eventually to appear as *Emperors and Ancestors: Lineage and Roman Imperial Ideology*. I hope to address some obvious omissions from this paper, such as the use of lineage by Greek-speaking elites, at a later stage. My gratitude goes to the participants of the workshop at Münster and to Peter Wiseman for their comments on the original paper. Needless to say, they are not responsible for any remaining flaws.