The study of inscriptions, i.e., epigraphy, is critical for anyone seeking to understand the Roman world, whether they are studying history, archaeology, literature, religion, or are working in a field that intersects with the Roman world from c. 500 BCE to 500 CE and beyond. The Oxford Handbook of Roman Epigraphy is the most comprehensive collection of scholarship available on the study and history of Roman epigraphy. A major goal of this volume is to show why inscriptions matter, as well as to demonstrate to students and scholars how to utilize epigraphic sources in their research. Thus, rather than comprise simply a collection of inscriptions, the thirty-five chapters in this volume, written by an international team of distinguished scholars in Roman history, classics, and epigraphy, cover the history of the discipline, Roman epigraphic culture, and the value of inscriptions for understanding disparate aspects of Roman culture, such as Roman public life, religion in its many forms, public spectacle, slavery, the lives of women, law and legal institutions, the military, linguistic and cultural issues, and life in the provinces. Students and scholars alike will find the Handbook an essential tool for expanding their knowledge of the Roman world.

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The Oxford Handbook of Roman Epigraphy

• Offers a guide to how to read and study inscriptions, rather than just a simple reproduction of them
• Includes over 150 detailed drawings and black and white photographs

Contributors

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THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

ROMAN EPIGRAPHY
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ROMAN EPIGRAPHY

Edited by

CHRISTER BRUUN

and

JONATHAN EDMONDSON

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CHAPTER 10

THE ROMAN EMPEROR AND
THE IMPERIAL FAMILY

FRÉDÉRIC HURLET

The foundation of the Principate under Augustus coincided with the expansion of Roman epigraphic culture (Ch. 8). Given the sheer number of surviving inscriptions, imperial epigraphy provides all sorts of information about the power of the Roman emperor: its nature, its juridical basis, its modes of self-representation, and the means whereby the emperor controlled the Empire and communicated with its communities. These texts also provide evidence for the central place that the imperial family occupied in Roman society and the consensus of support that the emperors enjoyed in Rome and throughout the Empire.

The central place occupied by the emperor and accepted by his subjects explains why his name and the names of members of his family occur on so many different types of inscribed monuments: imperial statue bases; plaques affixed to public monuments of all kinds (temples, altars, basilicas, curiae, baths, theatres, amphitheatres, arches, bridges, etc.); calendars (fasti); milestones and various types of boundary-marker; dedications offered to divinities for the well-being (pro salute) of the emperor; epitaphs found in emperors’ mausolea; laws; resolutions of the Senate (senatus consulta); imperial edicts and letters. The centrality of the emperor is also reflected in the organization of the standard epigraphic corpora such as the CIL, which after treating religious dedications (tituli sacri) include a section on the imperial family (tituli imperatorum domusque eorum), though relevant texts can be found in other sections too.

The grammatical case in which the name of the emperor or member of the imperial family appears is crucial for determining the inscription’s function. If the name appears in the nominative, this means that the emperor was responsible for the act described: for example, the construction of a building, such as the city gate of Laus Pompeia (Lodi) paid for by the emperor Tiberius and his son Drusus Caesar (CIL V 6358): Ti. Caesar Aug(usti) f(ilius) / Augustus / Drusus Caesar Aug(usti) f(ilius) / portam f(aciendam) c(uraverunt).

1 Horster 2001; Saastamoinen 2010: 137–142.
the name appears in the dative, he is being honoured by an individual, institution, or community on the monument on which the inscription was cut, such as on the famous Arch of Titus in Rome, set up by the Senate and People of Rome to honour Titus after his deification in 81 CE: *senatus / populusque Romanus / divo Tito divi Vespasiani f(ilio) / Vespasiano Augusto* (CIL VI 945 + 31211 = ILS 265; Fig. 10.1).

Occasionally an emperor’s name appears in the ablative, which means that it is being used as a dating mechanism, but there is also an honorific element present in the text, as in a dedication from Augusta Emerita (Mérida) in Lusitania set up by two brothers in 58 to a local divinity (*EphEp* VIII 23): *Nerone Claudio Caesare III co(n)s(ule) / Vitulus et Proculus Valeri fratres / Tarmest(ini) Lacipaea<e> votum solver(unt) l(ibentes) m(erito)*. When necessary, the genitive was used in an honorific sense in phrases such as *in honorem* (CIL XIII 6800 = ILS 419, Mogontiacum; CIL III 321 = ILS 5883, Amastris) or *pro salute* (CIL VI 36775 = ILS 484, Rome; CIL X 1562 = ILS 344, Puteoli) or more actively in expressions such as *iusu Imp(eratoris) Caesaris Augusti* (*AE* 1927, 139 from Samnium), *ex permissu* (ILS 345, Carthage), or *ex indulgentia* (*AE* 1903, 94, Mauretania Caesariensis).

One key inscription, the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* (“The Accomplishments of the Deified Augustus”)—described by Theodor Mommsen as the “queen of inscriptions”—defies easy categorization.² It is neither a funerary inscription nor an account

justifying Augustus’ actions. Rather, it is a *sui generis* document, a type of autobiography that takes the form of a “political balance-sheet of a constitutional nature.”

Augustus wrote with a view to posterity both to justify the changes that had occurred and to impose a new type of political regime on his own successors and the Roman people. On his death in 14 CE, the *Res Gestae* were engraved on bronze plaques and set up in Rome in front of his own mausoleum. The original has disappeared, but the text was distributed across the Empire and is known thanks to three copies that all come from the province of Galatia. The best preserved is that from Ancyra (Ankara), inscribed on the walls of the Temple of Roma and Augustus in a bilingual Greek

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3 Thus Scheid 2007: liii-lxii (“un bilan politique à portée constitutionelle”).

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FIG. 10.2 Section of the Latin version of the *Res Gestae*, from the interior wall of the Temple of Roma and Augustus, Ancyra (Ankara), showing chapter 1 and part of chapter 2.
and Latin version (see Figs. 10.2–3); the two other copies were discovered in Pisidia at Antioch and Apollonia respectively.4

The text opens by describing his rise to power (RG 1–2; cf. 34–35):

annos undeviginti natus exercitum privato consilio et privata impensa / comparavi per quem rem publicam [a do]minatione factionis oppressam / in libertatem vindici

4 For Sardis VII.1, 201 as a possible fragment of the Greek version of the Res Gestae from Sardis (province of Asia), Thonemann 2012.
At the age of 19 on my own responsibility and at my own expense, I raised an army with which I successfully championed the liberty of the Republic when it was oppressed by the tyranny of a faction. For that reason, the Senate passed decrees in my honour, enrolling me in its order in the consulship of Gaius Pansa and Aulus Hirtius [43 BCE], assigning me the right to give my opinion among the former consuls and giving me imperium.

The inscription then develops three main themes, outlining all political and religious positions and honours Augustus accepted or declined (RG 4–14); the expenditures incurred to assist the Roman state and the Roman people (RG 15–24); his achievements as pacificer and conqueror (RG 31, 25–33). Twice in the text Augustus refers to himself as princeps (RG 13 and 32:3: me principe), a title that served to describe his position and that of his successors.

**Imperial Titulature: The Emperor’s Name and Powers**

The emperor was designated by a formula that combined his names, titles, and powers according to various criteria determined by the nature of the inscription, its date, and the place where it was carved. His name followed the rules that applied to the standard onomastics of any Roman citizen (Appendix III). It comprised four main elements: praenomen, nomen (gentilicium), cognomen, and filiation. Augustus played a decisive role in establishing the naming system used by all subsequent emperors (see Table 10.1). After a long evolution, from 27 BCE onwards he was known officially as Imperator Caesar Divi filius Augustus, often abbreviated as Imp(erator) Caesar Divi f(ilius) Aug(ustus). The emperor’s nomenclature continued to develop until the end of antiquity, with various elements added to distinguish the numerous emperors that came to power, but the basic system adopted by Augustus remained unchanged. “Imperator,” normally abbreviated as IMP., should be understood as his praenomen. After Augustus it was taken by almost all emperors except Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius, who all continued to use the praenomina they had been given at birth. “Caesar,” often abbreviated as CAES., functioned as the emperor’s nomen. It was Julius Caesar’s cognomen and as such was inherited by the man who had been posthumously adopted as his son. All emperors included it as their gentilical name after “Imperator,” although some added other elements to distinguish them from their predecessors; for example, Imp. Caesar Nerva Traianus Hadrianus Augustus, to differentiate Hadrian from his predecessor Trajan (Imp. Caesar Nerva Traianus Augustus). “Augustus” served as a cognomen. It was bestowed on Augustus in 27 BCE as a mark of his sacred character and was adopted without exception by all subsequent emperors.

---

Other cognomina such as Pius, Felix, and Invictus were added in later periods, from Antoninus Pius and especially from Commodus onwards, clearly for political reasons. This is apparent in a dedication from Alexandria set up in 194 CE by veterans of the Legio II Traiana to Septimius Severus, who in line 2 is styled “L. Septimius Severus Pertinax” soon after his accession, emphasizing his supposed connection with his predecessor Pertinax (CIL III 6580 = ILS 2304; Fig. 10.4).

Filiation assumed political importance for an emperor in situating his power in a clear historical and institutional continuity. It was even more beneficial if the emperor’s father had been deified after death, so that he could style himself Divi f(ilius) (“son of the Deified”), such as Imp. Caesar Divi f. Augustus or Imp. T. Caesar Vespasianus Augustus divi Vespasiani f. On occasion, certain emperors were not content simply to include their father’s name, but went back several generations, even inventing fictive genealogies to connect themselves to an emperor from a previous dynasty, as occurred with the Severans. In such cases, the names of the ruling emperor’s grandfather,
great-grandfather, great-great-grandfather, etc., were included in official inscriptions. This occurs, for instance, on a milestone found near Corduba in Baetica, which presents Nero as follows (CIL II 4719 = ILS 225): Nero Claudius divi Claudii filius / Germanici Caesaris n(epos) divi / Aug(usti) abn(epos) Ti(berii) Caesaris pron(epos) /… (“Nero Claudius son of the Deified Claudius, grandson of Germanicus, great-great grandson of the Deified Augustus, great-grandson of Tiberius Caesar…”).

An emperor’s name was completed by adding his main titles and imperial powers, with all these elements combining to form his imperial titulature. These in turn provide key evidence for the three main foundations of an emperor’s power: (a) his tribunicia potestas (tribunician power) underlined his civil power; (b) the various salutations as Imperator an emperor received following victories won by himself or his delegate commanders (legati) emphasized his military power; and (c) the reference to his position as pontifex maximus addressed his religious power. Following Augustus’ receipt of tribunician power in 23 BCE, tribunicia potestas was bestowed on each emperor on an ongoing basis with a formal annual renewal. This was expressed with a numeral on inscriptions in the form trib[nicia] pot[estate] XII (“with tribunician power for the twelfth time”). Hence inscriptions in which such expressions occur can be dated precisely to one particular twelve-month period. Although the counting began on the day on which the emperor was granted tribunician power by the voting assemblies (comitia; hence the day was called his dies comitialis), the date of its annual renewal evolved...
over time. Initially, during the first century CE it took place on the anniversary of the emperor’s dies comitialis or dies imperii (i.e., the date on which he had been acclaimed by his troops); then it occurred on 10 December, to bring the renewal into line with the traditional date on which the tribunes of the plebs entered office. Unfortunately it is not clear precisely when this solution was adopted and the “tribunician day” for the reigns of emperors from Nerva to Antoninus Pius still remains an unresolved problem.6

An emperor’s salutation as Imperator was followed by the number of acclamations that he had received at that time. This, therefore, provides a further dating mechanism, though less precise than the reference to his tribunician power, since the number of victories any emperor could win depended upon the military situation. While Augustus won twenty-one salutations as Imperator, Hadrian and Antoninus Pius only received two salutations each. Furthermore, we do not know for sure in all cases the precise dates on which emperors were granted such salutations.7

Other powers were sometimes included in the emperor’s titles: the consulate, which certain emperors exercised more frequently than others; the title pater patriae (“father of the fatherland”); the proconsulate. As for the latter, in an edict of Augustus from N. Spain dated to 15 BCE, he describes himself as operating as proconsul (AE 1999, 915 = 2000, 760):8 Imp(erator) Caesar Divi fil(ius) Aug(ustus) trib(unicia) pot(estate) / VIII[I] et pro co(n)s(ule) dicit… Until this discovery, the proconsulate as an imperial title was not attested epigraphically until Claudius’ reign, but Augustus had borne it from 23 BCE onwards after resigning the consulship. These elements, however, do not always appear in the titulature of every emperor. They are combined on the basis of criteria, the details of which escape us, with one power or title privileged over another. An example of an emperor’s typical titulature is provided by the inscription on the arch dedicated to Trajan by the Senate and People of Rome at Beneventum in Samnium (CIL IX 1558 = ILS 296):

Imp(eratori) Caesari divi Nervae filio / Nervae Traiano Optimo Aug(usto) / Germanico Dacico pontif(ici) max(imo) trib(unicia) / potest(ate) XVIII imp(eratori) / VII co(n)s(uli) VI p(atri) p(atriae) / fortissimo principi senatus p(opulus)q(ue) R(omanus)

The fact that Trajan was holding tribunician power for the eighteenth time dates the inscription to the period between 10 December 113 and 9 December 114. He held his sixth consulship in January 112; so this can provide only a terminus post quem. However, the reference to his seventh imperatorial salutation, which he gained in the autumn of 114 (possibly in September), combined with the tribunician power, helps to narrow the chronological window between autumn and 9 December of that year.9

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6 Eck 2002.
7 Details in Kienast 1996.
9 Trajan’s titulature: Kienast 1996: 123.
In this text “Germanicus” and “Dacicus” are examples of another standard feature of imperial titulature: i.e., titles derived from the names of peoples over which the emperor had won military victories. In sum, inscriptions allow us to see the accretion of emperors’ powers and titles in a much more detailed way than is possible from literary or numismatic sources.

In addition to these official titles, emperors were sometimes honoured with unofficial titles in various types of dedication. So, for example, the phrase optimus princeps, which was adopted as an official title only by Trajan, can be found during much of the first century in texts honouring earlier emperors (CIL VI 93: [pro salute Ti(beri) Caesaris / Augusti optimi ac iustissimi principis). Other such epithets include indulgentissimus, fortissimus, and felicissimus, as well as the somewhat more boastful super omnes retro principes.

**The Imperial Family and Dynastic Succession**

Epigraphy clarifies many aspects of the dynastic nature of the emperor’s power. First, it provides evidence for the evolution of a series of expressions used to identify the imperial family. The earliest term employed was gens Iulia, of which Augustus was the head as Julius Caesar’s adopted son (CIL XII 4333 = ILS 112, Narbo, lines 6–8: Imp(eratori) Caesar / Divi filio Augusto…[his full titulature follows] /…coniugi, libera genti eius). Since this term excluded some key relatives such as Agrippa (who was a Vipsanius), he then developed the idea of the gens Augusta (AE 1914, 87 = ILAfir 353, Carthage; AE 1922, 1, Corinth). However, Augustus then came to favour the term domus in the sense of household, which included not only members of his gens, but also his more distant relatives. The term domus Augusta, attested in Ovid (Pont. 2.2.74) in 13 CE, is used in two official documents of 19–20 CE: the Tabula Siarensis, recording decisions about the funerary honours for Germanicus in 19 CE (RS 37, fr. I, lines 10–11; fr. II, col. b, lines 22–23) and the SC de Cn. Pisone patre of 20 CE, which condemned Piso following his activities in Syria in 19/20 (CIL II 5, 900 = AE 1996, 885, lines 31–32: neglecta maiestate domus Aug(ustae); Fig. 15.2). After Augustus’ deification in 14 CE, the term domus divina came into use (AE 1988, 552, Lucus Feroniae, 33 CE). A deceased member of the imperial domus could be deified and henceforth referred to as divus or diva on inscriptions (see Table 10.2).

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10 For more detail, Kneissl 1969, using epigraphic, papyrological, and numismatic material.
13 Full text with commentary: Eck, Caballos, and Fernández 1996. See further Chs. 15, 17.
14 For the formula domus divina under Tiberius, probably soon after Sejanus’ fall, cf. CIL XIII 4635. For the use of the formula in honorem d(omus) d(ivinae), Raepsaet-Charlier 1975.
Consecratio, which involved the establishment of rituals, priests, and a temple in the honour of the deified emperor, was usually voted on by the Senate, and the process is referred to occasionally in inscriptions, as in the Fasti Ostienses under the years 112 (Trajan’s sister, Marciana) and 140 (Faustina the Elder). The presence of the epithet

Table 10.2. Divi and divae: deified emperors and members of the imperial family in three periods: 42 BCE–66 CE, 112–180, 306–361

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<tr>
<th>Deity</th>
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<tr>
<td>Divus Iulius</td>
<td>42 BCE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divus Augustus</td>
<td>14 (17 September)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diva Iulia Drusilla (sister of Caligula)</td>
<td>38 (23 September?) (annulled in 41, 24 Jan.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diva Augusta (Livia)</td>
<td>42 (17 January)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divus Claudius</td>
<td>64 (after 13 October); possibly revoked in 55; restored under Vespasian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diva Claudia (daughter of Nero and Poppaea)</td>
<td>63 (April/May)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diva Poppaea Augusta</td>
<td>65 (early summer)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diva Marciana Augusta (sister of Trajan)</td>
<td>112 (29 August)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divus Traianus pater (father of Trajan)</td>
<td>perhaps 113</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divus Traianus Parthicus</td>
<td>117 (voted); 118, summer (deification)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diva Matidia Augusta (daughter of Marciana, sister of Trajan)</td>
<td>119</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diva Plotina (wife of Trajan)</td>
<td>123</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diva Sabina Augusta (wife of Hadrian)</td>
<td>?? 136–138 (uncertain date of death, but deification likely carried out by Hadrian)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divus Hadrianus</td>
<td>138 (after 10 July)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Diva Faustina (wife of Antoninus Pius)</td>
<td>140</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Divus Antoninus Augustus Pius</td>
<td>161 (after 7 March)</td>
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<td>Divus Verus (Lucius Verus)</td>
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<td>Diva Augustus Faustina Pia (wife of Marcus Aurelius)</td>
<td>176</td>
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<td>Divus Marcus Antoninus Pius (Marcus Aurelius)</td>
<td>180 (after 17 March)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Divus Constantius (Pius)</td>
<td>after death on 25 July 306</td>
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<tr>
<td>Divus (Galerius / Iovius) Maximianus (junior) (i.e., Galerius)</td>
<td>after May 311; ?annulled by Constantine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divus (M. Aurelius Valerius) Maximianus Senior</td>
<td>under Maxentius (306–312); annulled under Constantine (? end of 311); renewed in 317/318.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Diocletian)</td>
<td>after his death on?13 Dec. 313</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divus Constantinus Augustus / Divus Augustus Pius Constantinus /Divus Constantinus Maximus</td>
<td>after his death on 22 May 337</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divus Constans (son of Constantine)</td>
<td>on his death in Jan. 350 he suffered damnatio memoriae under Magnentius (ILLS 729, 1235–36); later consecrated (ILLS 1244)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divus Constantius (son of Constantine)</td>
<td>after 3 Nov. 361</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Kienast 1996.

Consecratio, which involved the establishment of rituals, priests, and a temple in the honour of the deified emperor, was usually voted on by the Senate, and the process is referred to occasionally in inscriptions, as in the Fasti Ostienses under the years 112 (Trajan’s sister, Marciana) and 140 (Faustina the Elder). The presence of the epithet

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divus proves that the emperor or member of the imperial family was deified. Sometimes it is missing, even though we know the individual had been consecrated.\textsuperscript{16} On the other hand, the memory of an emperor or empress could be condemned following a procedure involving a series of \textit{post mortem} sanctions that is customarily referred to as \textit{damnatio memoriae} by modern scholars.\textsuperscript{17} The carrying out of such decisions, involving the complete or partial erasure of the emperor's titulature, is confirmed by examples on surviving monuments where parts of the text has been chiselled away. It was not voted for in the case of Tiberius or Caligula, but it was put into effect with Nero, Domitian, and Commodus (for the latter just temporarily), but without excessive enthusiasm. \textit{Damnatio memoriae} was applied more systematically in the case of Geta, son of Septimius Severus,\textsuperscript{18} and it is frequently attested in the third and fourth centuries, which must be connected with the unstable political conditions of this period. It was possible for a section of an inscription that had been removed to be re-inscribed with a different text. One of the most famous examples occurs in the dedication on the Arch of Septimius Severus in the Roman Forum, on which Geta's name and imperial titulature were ingeniously replaced in line 4 by the expression \textit{optimis fortissimisque principibus}, referring to Septimus Severus and Caracalla (“to our best and bravest \textit{principes}”), so as not to leave a conspicuous gap in the inscription (\textit{CIL VI 1033 = 31230 = ILS 425}; Fig. 10.5).

\section*{Members of the Imperial Family}

Epigraphy sometimes provides unique information on the internal organisation of the imperial \textit{domus} and its evolution. Dedications to male and female members of the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Chastagnol 1984.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Bodel 1999; Flower 2006; Benoist 2007, 2008.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Mastino 1978-79.
\end{itemize}
imperial family have been found in great numbers across the entire Empire. Their sheer quantity testifies to the fact that Italians and provincials alike viewed and represented Roman imperial power as a dynasty towards which they felt the need to manifest their loyalty. Members of the domus Augusta were honoured by the erection of statues or other monuments that no longer survive except for their inscriptions. The relative most often honoured was the emperor’s son, perceived as the designated successor. He was in fact the “son of the Augustus” (Augusti filius, abbreviated as Aug. f.), a status which was always noted on inscriptions and which could also be developed to include the complete names of his father as well as one or more of his titles. So, for example, on a dedication to Lucius Verus, the adopted son of Antoninus Pius, prior to his accession, from Vina in Africa Proconsularis (AE 1992, 1803), we find:

L(ucio) Aelio Aurelio / Commodo co(n)s(uli), / Imp(eratoris) Caes(aris) T(iti) Aeli Ha/drian Antoni/ni Aug(usti) Pii p(atris p(atris) filio…

To Lucius Aelius Aurelius Commodus, consul, son of the Emperor Caesar Titus Aelius Hadrian Antoninus Augustus Pius, father of the fatherland ….

The presence of a dynasty contributed to the strong visibility of the female members of the imperial domus throughout the Empire. A large number of dedications were set up to them, especially to the emperor’s mother, wife, or daughter, and sometimes even his sister. Their prominence may be explained primarily by the existence of an imperial court, the aula Caesaris, in which female relatives had access to the emperor and thus played an important role. From a functional standpoint, they appeared first and foremost as guarantors of the dynasty’s continuity. Hence Augustus’ only daughter, Julia, is described as a θεὰ καλλίτεκνος (“a goddess who has beautiful children”) on inscriptions from Priene (I.Priene 225) and Euromos (AE 1993, 1521), where she was honoured for having given birth to five children, two of whom—Gaius and Lucius—would have succeeded Augustus if they had not died so young in 2 and 4 CE. This continued throughout the imperial period, especially in the second century, as illustrated on a statue base from Ephesus honouring Matidia the Younger (CIL III 7123 = ILS 327 = I.Ephesos 283):


For Matidia, granddaughter of the Deified Marciana Augusta, daughter of the Deified Matidia Augusta, sister of the Deified Sabina Augusta, maternal aunt of the emperor Antoninus Augustus Pius. The council and community of Ephesus (set this up); Sucessus freedman procurator, was in charge of the work.

Except for the mention of the reigning emperor Antoninus Pius, Matidia is represented as part of an all-female network of divae. Such women were valued because they filled a fundamental role as the transmitters of dynastic legitimacy based on consanguinity,

as Tacitus reminds us when he describes Agrippina the Elder as “the only blood of Augustus” (*Ann. 3.4.2: solum Augusti sanguinem*).

The title *Augusta* first appeared in 14 CE when it was granted to Livia, but not all empresses bore it. According to literary sources, another title, *mater castrorum* (“mother of the camp”), was bestowed in 174 on Faustina, wife of Marcus Aurelius, then on Crispina, wife of Commodus (the title is only securely attested on coins; cf. *IRT* 2), before becoming standard in inscriptions from Julia Domna, wife of Septimius Severus, onwards (*CIL VI 225 = ILS 2186*). The latter asked to be given the title *mater castrorum senatus et patriae* (“mother of the camp, the Senate, and the fatherland”) and this is attested epigraphically (*CIL II 2661 = ILS 1157; CIL III 7836 = IDR III 3, 318*). Placing all dedications to members of the *domus Augusta* in a chronological sequence allows us to follow the multiple transformations that the successive imperial dynasties underwent, as the force of events required them to restructure themselves in the face of births, divorces, and deaths within the dynasty.

Among the members of the *domus Augusta*, a special place must be reserved for those who were associated in power with the emperor and who have sometimes been interpreted as his “co-rulers.” Three fragmentary texts from Italy throw interesting light on this, listing a number of emperors and family members who exercised tribunician power (*Inscr.It. X.5, 95–100*; cf. *Suppl.It. 8, Brixia*, p. 164–166, Brixia; *AE 1988, 564*, Luna; *AE 1998, 278a, litus Laurentinum*). Being associated with the emperor through the holding of various powers was linked to the question of the succession, a delicate issue, since the hereditary principle of dynastic rule was never enshrined in law. It was understood as an expedient to secure continuity in the transmission of power, with the “co-ruler” continuing to hold the main imperial powers after an emperor’s death. Apart from his status as the emperor’s colleague, the individual marked out to succeed him acquired a rank, that of being a Caesar, a considerable development of the dynastic model. At least under the Julio-Claudians, the term “Caesar” was used only as the family name (*nomen*) of the emperor. It later became the official title given to designated successors, at a date that is still debated. Perhaps the first to bear what we call the *dignatio Caesaris* (“rank of Caesar”) was L. Calpurnius Piso following his adoption by Galba in 69; some scholars prefer Titus when his official name became T. Caesar Vespasianus in the same year, while others argue that it did not occur until L. Ceionius Commodus was adopted by Hadrian in 136 becoming L. Aelius Caesar (*CIL III 4366 = ILS 319*, Arrabona; *ILS 328*, Umbria). His original *gens* can be inferred from the name of daughter, Ceonia Plautia (*CIL VIII 14852 = ILS 330*, Tuccabor). From the Severan period onwards, a “Caesar” is usually described in inscriptions as *nobilissimus* (“most noble”): for instance, P. Licinius Cornelius Saloninus Valerianus, the younger


22 Cecconi 1997.
son of Gallienus (CIL VI 40704). Also attested is the grant of the honorific title princeps iuventutis (“prince of the youth”) to certain heirs apparent.  

The sharing of imperial powers was represented in a more egalitarian manner from the joint reign of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus onwards. For the first time in Roman imperial history, from 161 to 169 these two rulers each bore the cognomen Augustus, as is clear from the dedication on the triumphal arch at Oea (Tripoli, Libya; CIL VIII 24 = 10999 = IRT 232): Imper(ator) C[aes(ar)] M(arco)] Aurelio Antonino Aug(usto) p(atri) p(atriae) et Imper(ator) Caes(ar)] L(ucio) Aurelio Vero Arminiano Aug(usto). The evolution was complete by 238 when Pupienus and Balbinus shared for the first time the position of pontifex maximus (AE 1912, 158; 1993, 1778, both from Sitifis). The system changed again with the establishment of the Tetrarchy, which from 293 onwards comprised two Augusti (Diocletian and Maximian) and two Caesars (Constantius Chlorus and Galerius), as illustrated on a milestone from near Verona (CIL V 8016) and in the Latin preamble to Diocletian’s Edict of Maximum Prices (Ch. 18). The seizure of power by Constantine and the birth of the Constantinian dynasty put an end to this collegial arrangement.

THE EMPEROR’S POWERS

The Senate and popular assemblies played an important role in accessions by voting an emperor his full array of powers. Part of this process is revealed by inscriptions. The Senate passed senatus consulta investing the emperor with his powers. While no inscription survives in which the content of such a senatus consultum is recorded, the so-called lex de imperio Vespasiani (discussed further below) most likely derives from such a resolution. However, one epigraphic source survives, the so-called Acts of the Arval Brethren, that records the proceedings of religious ceremonies linked to the grant of imperial powers and which provides evidence for imperial investitures. These documents do not celebrate all the stages involved, but they shed light on the role played by the Senate and the people. They reveal that the senate-chamber (curia) was the scene of two distinct institutional acts: (1) the acclamation of the emperor by the Senate, as is attested for Caligula on 18 March 37 (CFA 13); and (2) the conferral by the Senate of the emperor’s imperium. They also attest that the popular voting assemblies (comitia) provided the final act in granting the emperor his powers. Even if their role diminished as the imperial period progressed, they continued to pass laws, the most important ones being those that ratified the senatus consulta investing an emperor with his powers. A good example of the process is provided by the Arval Acts for 69 (CIL VI 2051 = ILS 241 = CFA 40), illustrating the sequence of events in the granting of Vitellius’ powers in this admittedly unusual year of civil war (see Table 10.3):

23 Beringer 1954.
From the reign of Domitian onwards the Arval Acts no longer mention any ceremonies linked to such investitures, but this silence does not mean that the procedures simply disappeared. The Arval Brethren probably no longer referred to these formulas because they did not celebrate them anymore. On the other hand, everything suggests that the Senate continued to vote senatus consulta investing the emperor with his powers.

The only law on the investiture of an emperor’s powers to have survived is the document now known as the lex de imperio Vespasiani (CIL VI 930 + 31207 = ILS 244 = FIRA I 15 = RS 39). Inscribed on a large bronze plaque now displayed in the Capitoline Museum in Rome, it records eight clauses of this statute plus a sanction-clause, while the earlier clauses were inscribed on one or more other plaques now lost. It provides fundamental evidence for the nature, juridical basis, and evolution of the emperor’s powers, as the following extract (lines 22–28) illustrates:

\[
\begin{align*}
\end{align*}
\]

and that in whichever statutes or plebiscites it is written down, that the Deified Augustus, or Tiberius Iulius Caesar Augustus, or Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus should not be bound, the emperor Caesar Vespasian should be released from those statutes and plebiscites; and that whatever it was appropriate for the Deified Augustus, or Tiberius Iulius Caesar Augustus, or Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus to do according to any statute or rogatio, it be lawful for the emperor Caesar Vespasian Augustus to do all those things.

Numerous questions concerning the document still remain unanswered, especially whether the grant of powers to Vespasian followed an already established pattern (i.e.,

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was a tralatician process) or whether it constituted a special case.\textsuperscript{26} Did the statute confer the full set of imperial powers on Vespasian or just one of the main powers: his imperium or tribunician power? Was it a series of complementary prerogatives or just one of the two main imperial powers and a series of complementary prerogatives?

Despite such uncertainties it was clearly a statute passed by the Roman assembly. The participation of the populus Romanus was not limited to imperial investitures. The senatus consultum adopted after the trial of Cn. Calpurnius Piso in 20 CE (lines 34–36) shows that the process of granting imperial powers also applied to members of the emperor’s family who were, like Germanicus, sent on special missions within the Empire and to its borders. Moreover, a strict hierarchy of powers is attested here for the first time: the imperium of proconsuls was inferior to that of Germanicus, whose imperium was in turn subordinate to that of the emperor.\textsuperscript{27} The practical application of the emperor’s powers is well illustrated in constitutions issued by the emperors: edicts, rescripts, and instructions (mandata). Each of these types is attested in unequal proportions in the surviving epigraphic record (Ch. 14).

Another very public demonstration of the emperor’s authority were the oaths of allegiance sworn by the main elements in the Roman state: the Senate, equestrian order, plebs, and army. The communities of Italy and the provinces also expressed their universal consent in the emperor’s power when they swore their oaths of allegiance to the emperor in public ceremonies across the Empire.\textsuperscript{28} This practice originated with the allegedly spontaneous pledge of allegiance sworn to Octavian by “all of Italy” in 32 BCE (cf. RG 25.2: iuravit in mea verba tota Italia sponte sua). The texts of such oaths were sometimes inscribed. For example, soon after Caligula’s accession on 18 March 37 the citizens of Aritium in the province of Lusitania swore the following oath on 11 May (CIL II 172 = ILS 190):\textsuperscript{29}

\begin{quote}
\textit{…iusiurandum Aritiensium. ex mei animi sententia, ut ego iis inimicus / ero quos C(aio) Caesari Germanico inimicos esse / cognovero, et si quis periculum ei salutiq(ue) eius / inflict[t] inful[er][t]s[e], armis bello interncivo / terra mariq[ue] persequim non desinam, quoad / poenas ei persolverit, <neque me> nequ[e] liberos meos / eius salute cariores habebo, eosq[ue] qui in / eum hostili animo fuerint mihi hostes esse / ducam…} \\
\end{quote}

Oath of the Aritiensians. It is in accordance with my soul and conscience that I will be an enemy of those who I come to learn are enemies of Gaius Caesar Germanicus, and if anyone attempts or has attempted to endanger him or his safety, I will not cease from pursuing him with armed might in a war without mercy on land and sea until he has paid the penalty. I will not hold myself or my children more precious than his safety. I will treat as my enemy those who have hostile intentions against him.

\textsuperscript{27} Ferrary 2009: 110–121.
\textsuperscript{28} Hurlet 2002.
\textsuperscript{29} Other examples: AE 1988, 723 (Conobaria, Baetica, 5 BCE); IGR III 137 = OGIS 532 = ILS 8781 (Gangra, Paphlagonia, 3 BCE); SEG 18, 578 = AE 1962, 248 (Palaipaphos, Cyprus, 14 CE);
Such oaths of loyalty to the emperor disappear from view in the epigraphic record after Caligula’s reign for reasons that are unclear, but there is no doubt that the practice continued and the ties that bound the provincials to the emperor went deep.

**Inscriptions as a Vehicle of Imperial Ideology**

Inscriptions became so widespread that they provide much information on the non-institutional bases of the emperor’s power. They allowed the emperor to disseminate the image he wanted to present of himself and permitted his subjects to express their own, often idealized, vision of what their leader should be like and how he ought to act. The language used was normally stereotypical but is still very revealing about the links between centre and periphery. For his part, the emperor considered himself, wanted to be considered, and was indeed considered a benefactor, in fact the leading benefactor of all.30 This is emphasized on many inscriptions set up by the emperor mentioning a *beneficium* granted to a community or individual: for example, in an edict of 46, Claudius twice speaks of the “benefit” (*beneficium*) he had bestowed on various Alpine peoples by granting them Roman citizenship (*CIL V* 5050 = *ILS* 206 = *FIRA* I 71, line 30: *permane re bene<e>ficio meo*; line 34: *quod beneficium is ita tribuo*). In a letter to Munigua regarding a dispute between this city in Baetica and a farmer of the municipal *vectigalia* (local taxes), dated to 79 CE, the emperor Titus granted the people of Munigua a remission of 50,000 sesterces and speaks of the “generosity” (*indulgentia*) he thus displayed, using the term *indulgentia* in a fiscal sense to refer to the remission of taxes rather than in its usual moral sense (*AE* 1962, 288, lines 6–9).31 Rome’s subjects reciprocated by thanking and praising the emperor for the favours that he had bestowed. This is how we should interpret the famous “archive wall” in the theatre at Aphrodisias, where imperial decisions taken since the triumviral period and conveyed in imperial letters (*epistulae*) were inscribed as means of publicizing the privileges obtained by this city, the most important of which was its “freedom.”32

Rulers and subjects spoke a common language, which contributed not just to the smooth functioning of the imperial system, but also to its longevity. The image of the emperor’s power was enhanced by inscriptions commemorating an imperial *beneficium*, but this does not mean that all individuals and communities benefited equally from the emperor’s generosity. When the emperor refused a particular request,

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*CIL XI* 5998 (Sestinum, Umbria, date uncertain); *IGRR IV* 251 = *SIG*³ 797 (Assos, the Troad, 37 CE); Herrmann 1968: 125–126, no. 6 (Samos, 6/5 BCE). In general, Herrmann 1968.


which is bound to have occurred quite frequently, the petitioner(s) did not bother to display an unfavourable rescript and even less to praise the emperor who had made this decision. Whenever an emperor rejected a request, the result was usually silence. An exception is the rescript whereby Augustus denied a request from the Samians for the status of a free city. This was inscribed not at Samos, but at Aphrodisias, because the people of Aphrodisias felt it valuable to publicize a text that singled out their own good services to Octavian during the civil wars, which had led to their community’s receipt of this privilege (Aphrodisias & Rome 13 = SEG 32, 833 = Oliver, Gk. Const. 1).33

Inscriptions were also the preferred medium for publicizing various qualities that the emperor displayed or claimed and for the public recognition of these same virtues. Once again Augustus set the precedent. From 27 or 26 BCE onwards he had four of his cardinal virtues publicly acknowledged by having them inscribed, at the Senate’s request, on a golden shield placed in the senate-house (the curia Iulia) next to the Altar of Victory (RG 34.2). Among a number of copies, the most famous is the one from Arelate (Arles) in Gallia Narbonensis (AE 1952, 165 + 1955, 82; Fig. 10.6; cf. CIL VI 40365; IX 5811 = ILS 82):

\[
\text{senatus / populusque Romanus / Imp(eratori) Caesari Divi f(ilio) Augusto / co(n)s(uli)
VIII dedit clupeum / virtutis clementiae / iustitiae pietatis erga / deos patriamque}
\]

33 Eck 1998.
The Senate and People of Rome offered a shield commemorating his military courage, clemency, sense of justice, and piety towards the gods and the fatherland to the emperor Augustus, son of the Deified (Julius Caesar), consul for the eighth time.

These same four virtues appear quite frequently on inscriptions.

**Virtus: The Emperor’s Military Courage**

The image of the emperor as a victorious military leader remained in force throughout the imperial period. It was increasingly emphasized as the Empire expanded under Trajan and Septimus Severus or when its frontiers were threatened in the third century. The emperor’s military virtues were underlined in his names and titles, especially the *praenomen* “Imperator,” as we have seen (p. 182), and the honorific *cognomina* derived from the name of the people or peoples that he had conquered: Germanicus, Britannicus, Dacicus, Arabicus, Parthicus, Adiabenicus, etc. These virtues formed an essential component of the visibility of the emperor’s power in the public space of Rome and every city of the Empire. For instance, the Arch of Septimius Severus in the Roman Forum (Fig. 10.5) praises the new dynasty “for having restored the state (*res publica*) and expanded the Empire of the Roman people thanks to their remarkable virtues at home and abroad” (*CIL VI 1033 = 31230 = 36881 = ILS 425: ob rem publicam restitutam imperiumque populi Romani propagatum insignibus virtutibus eorum domi forisque*).

Also important were the marble calendars (*fasti*) that proliferated in Italy from the reign of Augustus to that of Claudius—about forty are preserved—but which became rarer afterwards. (One late and exceptionally rich example, dating to the years 224–227, is not an inscription, but written on papyrus: the *Feriale Duranum*, the calendar of the Palmyrene archers at Dura Europus.) These *fasti* selectively record the imperial holidays that their writers judged the most important and which glorified the emperor’s *virtus* (cf. *Inscr.It. XIII.2*). The *fasti* from Amiternum (*Inscr. It. XIII.2, 25*), dating to the Tiberian period, celebrate the anniversaries of Julius Caesar’s victories at Ilerda and Zela in 49 and 47 BCE respectively on 2 August, and Pharsalus (9 August 48 BCE), as well as Octavian’s victories at Naucratis (3 September 36 BCE), Actium (2 September 31 BCE), and Alexandria (1 August 30 BCE); they also commemorate Germanicus’ triumph on 26 May 17 CE and Drusus’ ovation on 28 May 20 CE.

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34 Kneissl 1969; cf. Kienast 1996, based not just on epigraphic evidence, but also on literary, papyrological, and numismatic sources.

35 *Feriale Duranum*: Fink et al. 1940; Fink 1971: no. 117.

36 Imperial ideology in these calendars: Fraschetti 1990: 5–41; Rüpke 1995, 2011.
Clementia, Iustitia, and Pietas: The Emperor’s Civil Virtues

Although alluded to in the Res Gestae (RG 3.1–2) and mentioned explicitly in the SC de Pison e patre (line 90), the emperor’s clemency (clementia) is not often attested on inscriptions in the early Empire; it only starts to appear with some regularity in the late third and fourth centuries CE (cf. AE 1914, 145, Ostia; 1988, 1021, Ephesus; CIL X 7239, Lilybaeum; XVII.2, 690, Nida, Germania Superior). Jurisdiction was another essential component of authority in the ancient world, and the Roman emperor served as, and was perceived across the Empire as, the supreme judge. Numerous imperial dedications were, therefore, inscribed on the pedestals of imperial statues placed in basilicas, as, for example, at Lucus Feroniae near Rome, Velleia in N. Italy, and Cuicul in Africa Proconsularis. They were set up near to the tribunal and the aedes Augusti in accordance with the scheme recommended by Vitruvius (5.1.4–10). Justice at the local level was thus symbolically placed under the protection of the majesty of the emperor. In the SC de Pison e patre (lines 90–92; cf. Fig. 15.2), iustitia is associated with clemency (clementia) and magnanimity (animi magnitudo) as the imperial virtues that Germanicus had inherited from his ancestors, in particular Augustus and Tiberius.

Imperial piety (pietas) was defined primarily as the respect the emperor was required to show the gods. It was expressed through imperial regulations: for example, the Nazareth edict laying down capital punishment as the penalty for anyone found guilty of violating burials (FIRA I 69 = SEG 20, 452). Apart from sacrifice, one of the most important ways of showing respect for the gods was the taking of the auspices. This constituted an essential element in the granting of powers at Rome and at the same time served as a means of communication with the gods. The first taking of the auspices by Octavian at Spoletium (Spoleto) on 7 January 43 BCE, when he was first granted imperium, was treated as a ritual act of great significance when it was commemorated on the altar of Narbo (Narbonne) in 12 BCE (CIL XII 4333 = ILS 112 = FIRA III 73). Things evolved quite rapidly to a situation where with regard to the auspices the emperor was given superiority over magistrates and promagistrates, as the dedication on the now lost Arch of Tiberius in the Roman Forum makes clear when it says that Varus’ eagles were recaptured “under Germanicus’ leadership acting under Tiberius’ auspices.” (The inscription is known from Tac. Ann. 2.41.1: ductu Germanici, auspiciis Tiberii.) References in inscriptions to imperial auspices may be interpreted in two ways. First, they emphasize the supreme authority exercised by the emperor in all areas, as on the arch honouring the Severans from the colony of Vaga in Africa Proconsularis (CIL VIII 14395; cf. CIL VIII 21663 = ILS 5963, Mauretania Caesariensis; AE 1999, 1576, Miletus). In some cases such inscriptions include technical language regarding the
ritual act of observing the birds, emphasizing the fact that those designated as generals by the emperor operated while on campaign under auspices that were in fact those of the emperor, as on a dedication from Lepcis Magna commemorating a victory over the Gaetulians in 6/8 CE (AE 1940, 68 = IRT 301).\(^{40}\) Consulting the will of the gods through the taking of the auspices was considered a means of underlining the emperor’s piety and at the same time his legitimacy.

Imperial piety also took the form of the respect that the emperor showed towards his own family, in particular those who had been deified. It was advertised in his name by the lineage included in the emperor’s filiation, as well as in the very long genealogies that under the Severans traced the emperor’s ancestry back three or more generations, as, for example, when the *colonia* of Formiae represented Septimius Severus as *filius* of Divus Marcus Aurelius, *frater* of Divus Commodus, *nephos* of Divus Antoninus Pius, *pronepos* of Divus Hadrianus, *ab nepos* of Divus Traianus Parthicus, and *adanepos* of Divus Nerva (CIL X 6079 = ILS 420). *Pietas* was also expressed in imperial edicts and other measures in which the emperor underlined his respect for a decision taken by one or more of his predecessors. In a letter to the magistrates and decurions of Falerio (Falerone) (CIL IX 5420 = FIRA I 75), Domitian confirms a privilege granted by the Deified Augustus, who is described as “a very attentive and very benevolent emperor in regards towards his own quartani [i.e., the name given to the citizens of Falerii linking the foundation of this colony under Augustus to the veterans of the Legio IV (Quarta)]” (*diligentissimus et indulgentissimus erga quartanos suos princeps*). Such epigraphic references to familial piety should be viewed as a communication strategy, to insert the emperor into a historical continuity and to use a previous emperor’s decision as a precedent and means of justification. In addition, the emperor’s *pietas* could be divinized, as at Cuicul (Africa Proconsularis), where a dedication was set up and paid for by this city in honour of the *pietas* of Antoninus Pius (AE 1916, 17).

Occasionally, however, a ruling emperor showed a lack of *pietas* by using inscriptions to criticize a predecessor for political reasons, as Claudius did when he blamed Caligula for the fact that the water supply of the Aqua Virgo had been impaired during the latter’s reign (CIL VI 1252 = ILS 205: *arcus ductus aquae Virginis disturbatos per C. Caesarem*). From the reign of Marcus Aurelius onwards, attention was drawn to emperors’ virtues by the claim that they were superior to all predecessors (*super omnes retro principes*): for example, in a dedication to Licinius (emperor 308–324) set up at Tarraco by Valerius Julianus, the governor of Hispania Tarraconensis (CIL II 4105 = II²/14, 939).

**Bibliography**


\(^{40}\) Hurlet 2000.


