

## AUGUSTUS AND THE CULT OF THE EMPEROR

### *Augusto y el culto al emperador*

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ABSTRACT: Faced with the worship of the ruler in the Greek east, Augustus could do little more than regulate a practice that had already existed over three centuries. His problem in Rome, in contrast, was to adapt the cult of the ruler required by contemporary practice to the usage of the Republic in such a way as to distance himself from Caesar, whose indiscretion had produced his untimely death. The system he hit upon was to emphasize Republican forms, key abstractions, and the worship of state gods closely connected with his rule: in other words to establish the cult of the emperor by other than direct means. In the Latin west in contrast he was free to shape the ruler cult as he chose. His principal contribution here was to establish regional centres at Lugdunum and elsewhere for the worship of Roma and Augustus, a prescription originally laid down for non-Romans in the Greek east. Sharply to be distinguished from this is the altar of Augustus at Tarraco reported by Quintilian. This can only be municipal, not the foundation monument of the provincial cult of Hispania citerior, which began only after the emperor's death and deification.

*Keywords:* imperial cult, emperor worship, Augustus, Rome, Latin west, Greek east, Tarraco.

RESUMEN: Frente a la adoración al gobernante en el oriente griego, Augusto no pudo más que regular una práctica que existía desde hacía más de tres siglos. Su principal problema en Roma fue adaptar el culto al gobernante a la práctica contemporánea de la República y distanciarse de César, cuya imprudencia había desembocado en su asesinato. El método elegido fue el refuerzo de las formas republicanas, abstracciones claves, y la adoración a los dioses estatales estrechamente relacionados con su gobierno: en otras palabras, establecer el culto al emperador mediante otros medios. Por el contrario, en el occidente latino, era libre de dar forma al culto al gobernante. Su principal contribución en esta parte fue establecer centros regionales en *Lugdunum* y en otros lugares para el culto a Roma y al propio Augusto, una receta originariamente establecida para los no romanos en el este griego. Marcadamente diferenciado de esta práctica es el altar de Augusto en Tarraco, recogido por Quintiliano. Este solo puede ser considerado una manifestación municipal y no el monumento fundacional del culto provincial de Hispania Citerior, que comenzaría únicamente tras la muerte y la deificación del emperador.

*Palabras clave:* culto imperial, adoración al emperador, Augusto, Roma, occidente latino, oriente griego, Tarraco.

## 1

The Victory of Actium brought Octavian face to face with the cult of the ruler, a practice that already spanned the centuries from the era of the Greek city states down to the collapse of the Hellenistic kingdoms<sup>1</sup>. In the winter of 30/29 B.C. embassies from Asia and Bithinia approached him—on their own initiative, as the sources show—with a request to offer the *isotheoi timai* customarily bestowed on a victor who had brought peace and salvation from ruin (*CD* 51.20.6-7). The guidelines Octavian laid down for permissible ruler cult were nevertheless entirely of his own contrivance. Resident Romans might worship Roma and Divus Iulius, whereas non-Roman provincials were permitted to pay cult to the emperor provided that Dea Roma shared in the worship (Suet., *Aug.* 52; Tac., *Ann.* 4.37). Compliant with this ruling, sacred precincts were to be built at Ephesus and Nicaea for Roma and Divus Iulius, at Pergamum and Nicomedia for Roma and Octavian. The distinction between Roman and non-Roman was nevertheless too finely drawn to last and the cult of Roma and Divus Iulius has left few vestiges in the East with no evident trace in the west. The directive for non-Roman provincials, in contrast, was to be of crucial

1. FISHWICK 2002: 3-4.

importance in the later development of ruler cult in the west, especially at the provincial level.

2

In Rome itself Augustus faced a different set of challenges. Actium might have given him mastery of the Roman world but he would have to find some sort of accommodation with those who had supported Caesar and longed for the old Republic<sup>2</sup>. Caesar's ideas could be followed in part but the new ruler badly needed to distance himself from the murdered dictator and to find an appropriate basis for the status he now enjoyed. Contemporary practice required that the loyalty of the subject should be grounded in a cult of the kind accorded Hellenistic rulers, yet, if he was to escape the fate of Caesar, this would have to be one that did not brand him as a monarch. For one who professed to be *princeps* in a restored Republic whatever religious honours he allowed would have to chime with the observances of the Republic and be consistent with the constitutional settlement of 28/27 B.C.

The compromise he hit upon was to devise a policy which prohibited the direct worship of himself in Rome yet left room for honours that to all appearances put him on a par with Hellenistic monarchs. Hence a series of *isotheoi timai* some of which had earlier been conferred on Caesar: state festivals and the celebration of his *natalis*, the achievements of his career, his victories and *adventus* on return to Rome, above all a title that respected his Julian pedigree, a problem solved by the name Augustus, which recalled the triumph of Octavian at Alexandria on August 1st. Already in 30 B.C. the senate had decreed that offerings to his *genius* should be made at both public and private banquets (*CD* 15.19.7), but the main change came in 7 B.C. when in reviving the cult of the *Lares Compitales* Augustus set his own image between the dancing *Lares* at the crossroads, a combination henceforth known as the *Lares Augusti* —an unobjectionable medium, therefore, for the indirect worship of himself at street level. The arrangement is confirmed by Ovid:

*Mille lares Geniumque ducis qui tradidit illos,  
urbs habet et vici numina trina collunt* (*Fasti* 5, 145-146).

This interpretation has nevertheless been attacked in a recent book which argues that the *Lares* at the crossroads have been replaced by the

2. FISHWICK 1987: 83-92.

emperor's household *Lares*, so that cult was now paid to the *Lares* of Augustus and the *Genius Augusti*: that is, the emperor's ancestors and the Spirit of Augustus himself<sup>3</sup>. No evidence is presented to justify this transformation, which is sprung upon the reader without warning. It looks most implausible especially when such a combination seems nowhere recorded as *Lares Augusti et Genius Augusti*. One occasionally finds *Genius Augusti et Lares* (*CIL* 3, 5158) but by far the commonest form is *Lares Augusti*, which has always been taken to include the *Lares Compitales* with the *Genius Augusti* as confirmed by Ovid. In practice it seems most unlikely that in Italy and across the western empire the cult of the *Lares Augusti* can have celebrated the household gods of Augustus in Rome<sup>4</sup>.

A further aspect of the same policy was to promote the cult of abstractions linked with the emperor. In parading the blessings conferred by his rule abstractions played an important role in keeping the image of Augustus before the attention of the public. First and foremost were his personal qualities as inscribed on the shield he received in 27 B.C. Other abstractions, more properly blessings rather than virtues, began their career in the period immediately following: *Victoria Augusta*, *Pax Augusta*, *Concordia Augusta*, perhaps also Augustan *Salus*, *Fortuna* and *Felicitas*<sup>5</sup>. The final step was to accord the emperor *numen*, the quality appropriate to a god and a distinction never given a man before in Roman religious practice. The dedication of the *Ara Numinis Augusti* seems to have occurred ca. A.D. 6 though the relevant inscription is broken at the crucial point. It cannot at all events have originated in Narbo Martius and be as early as A.D. 11 as I. Gradel has recently claimed<sup>6</sup>, since an inscription at Lepcis Magna (*IRT* 324a) records a dedication to the imperial *numen* between 1st July A.D. 11 and 30th June A.D. 12<sup>7</sup> — so more or less contemporaneously. With the possession of *numen* the emperor came close to the full divinity foreshadowed in the title *Divi filius*, but it is important to stress that, though possessing *numen*, Augustus never became a *numen* himself<sup>8</sup>, a fine distinction that must have often escaped those who set up dedications to his *numen*. Significantly the attribution of *numen* followed on the heels of the title *pater patriae*, a major step in the direction

3. BEARD - NORTH - PRICE 1998: 1, 184-186; cf. 2, 207: 8.6a.

4. FISHWICK 2009: 141.

5. On Imperial gods and abstractions see FISHWICK 1991: 446-454, 455-474.

6. GRADEL 2002: 240-250.

7. FISHWICK 2005: 247.

8. FISHWICK 2005: 241 with n. 7; Id. 2007: 254-255.

of monarchy and away from the concept of *princeps*. The development evidently reflects the fact that by now Augustus felt politically secure.

In practice the special status of Augustus at the pinnacle of human kind had already been foreshadowed by his close association with a select group of deities. Eventually most gods would be related to the emperor by the epithet *Augustus*, an indication that the divinity operated in the sphere of the emperor as his helper or protector<sup>9</sup>, but Augustus mainly emphasized the deities that had legitimized his rule or played a role in his rise to power<sup>10</sup>. Prime examples are the completion of the *Forum Iulium* and the dedication of the temple of *Divus Iulius* on the site of Caesar's cremation or the dedication of the temple of Mars Ultor in 2 B.C., a clear sign that Augustus intended to promote Mars to a position alongside Jupiter. Apollo too was assigned a major role as the god who had brought about a new order, a contribution recognized in a ceremony at the temple of Apollo on completion of the Secular Games of 17 B.C. and by the emphasis on Apollo more than Jupiter in the *carmen saeculare* sung both on the Capitol and on the Palatine. Yet although Jupiter sank in importance in comparison with Apollo or Mars, Augustus did consecrate three temples to him and in poetry, iconography, gems and coins Augustus is represented as the terrestrial image of Jupiter, who along with Apollo had brought him victory at Actium. The link with Mercury in contrast is conspicuously downplayed in official propaganda, though inscriptions and poetry continue to reflect the god's significance in private thinking.

The proximity of Augustus to the gods was further enhanced by his succession to the post of *pontifex maximus* following the death of Lepidus in 12 B.C. With this culminating religious honour of his career, Augustus could now deal with the gods, so the office was a significant step towards the sacralization of his person. Henceforth the head pontificate was a function marked by a place in his titulature and the *princeps* was the focal point of a state religion in which a growing number of imperial anniversaries were observed in the calendar and many occasions celebrated by *supplicationes*. Associated games and banquets focused attention on the person of the ruler and the same purpose was served by the enlargement and redirection of public *vota pro salute rei publicae*. Vows for the *salus* of the *princeps* were first decreed for Octavian in 30 B.C. and subsequently performed annually in Rome by consuls and doubtless all priesthoods, while in the provinces governors performed a similar

9. See above, n. 5.

10. FISHWICK 1987: 87-90.

ceremony in the presence of local officials and priests<sup>11</sup>. The day was eventually detached from 1st January, when vows for the state still continued, and *ca.* A.D. 38 the 3rd January became a day of universal prayer on behalf of the emperor and his house.

The central elements of the policy Augustus had devised consequently stand out sharply and clearly. With its emphasis on Republican forms, key abstractions and the worship of state gods closely related to the ruler what all this amounted to was the cult of the emperor by other than direct means. In life it was sufficient that as head of state he should be sacralized by his priesthoods and festivals, superhumanized by his title *Divi filius* and the name Augustus, above all by the attribution of *numen*. Officially divinity was something Augustus would attain after death yet unofficially he was evidently open to the attribution of divinity already in his lifetime. Aside from the imagery of the *Gemma Augustea* unofficial policy was most obviously reflected in the charismatic language of the court poets, whose compositions give the impression that such poetic licence was condoned by a patron ready to look the other way should they depart from an inspired reticence. Outside of Rome, on the other hand, whether in Italy or in the provinces, the subjects of Augustus were free to worship as they pleased, at least at the municipal or street level. From the rich variety of cult forms that are attested it seems clear that the regime adopted a general attitude of *laissez-faire* and that communities and individuals paid divine honours, built temples or founded cults at will—even if these overstepped the boundaries that the emperor had originally laid down. In Spain alone municipal temples to Augustus already existed in the emperor's lifetime at Carthago Nova, Barcino, Augusta Emerita, and Eborac<sup>12</sup>. The collective worship of a province was another matter and prudence required that provincial cults should adhere to the official guidelines. But cults at this level do not begin until after Augustus's death and deification when they first appear in Hither Spain and Lusitania. During his lifetime the foundations established in the west can best be regarded as more properly regional rather than provincial centres.

## 3

Whereas the original impetus to establish ruler cult came from the east, in the west regional and later provincial cults were installed by the

11. For official functions performed by provincial governors, notably by Pliny in Bithynia, see FISHWICK 2009: 134.

12. ALFÖLDY 2002: 184, n. 6 with refs.

central administration in Rome. It is important to realize that the situation in the west was radically different from that in the east as with few exceptions there existed no pre-Roman belief in the divinity of the ruler, no trace of Roma whatsoever. What must be realized from the outset, therefore, is that in implanting imperial cult in the west the Romans faced very different circumstances from those that pre-existed in the East<sup>13</sup>. No ready-made framework on the lines of the eastern *koina* or assemblies existed as yet in the west, though a comparable organization was to emerge in the Roman inspired western *conclia*. Nor are there more than minimal traces in the Latin provinces of a pre-Roman belief in the divinity of the ruler, living or dead. The story in Tacitus (*Hist.* 2.61) of Maricc, the chieftain of the *Boii* who called himself a god, is an isolated episode and hardly evidence for the worship of the ruler in the Celtic world. Again, there is no early trace of Roma in the west, hence the evident lack of enthusiasm for the goddess on the part of western provincials. While it is true that the context of the cult differed in different parts of the west according to the degree of Romanization, recent analysis has claimed that the regulations Octavian laid down in the east were at work in the west also. In particular Beard, North and Price have argued that the distinctive forms of cult allowed Roman and non-Roman in the east were likewise observed in the west<sup>14</sup>. The notion that what Dio says of Octavian's regulations in the east can simply be transferred to the west is without foundation in the epigraphical sources, no account of which appears to be taken in concocting this theory. In point of fact the distinction between Roman and non-Roman and the different forms of cult they were allowed is non-existent in the west. More radically still, the authors argue that in the Latin provinces «recently Romanized or very 'unRoman' areas» established cults of the emperor, like those in the Greek east, to the living emperor<sup>15</sup>, a claim that implies spontaneous foundation in line with the Oxford theory of initiative from the periphery rather than the centre. A few lines later, however, they contradict themselves by reverting to the standard view that cults in barbarian areas were established by Roman commanders, notably Drusus, the stepson of Augustus<sup>16</sup>.

13. FISHWICK 1987: 92-93; Id. 2002a: 4.

14. FISHWICK 2009: 131-132 *ad* BEARD - NORTH - PRICE 1998: 1, 349. For the contrary view that there is no distinction between the cult offered by Roman and non-Roman in the Latin west see FISHWICK 2002a: 229-238.

15. BEARD - NORTH - PRICE 1, 352.

16. FISHWICK 2009: 132-133.

The most puzzling example of these early regional cults occurs in north-west Spain<sup>17</sup>, where the whereabouts of the *Arae Sestianae* are variously reported — most reliably perhaps, by Pliny, resident *procurator* of Hither Sain, who suggests either Cape Finsterre or Monte Louro, a region significant for Roman annexation of the region. These *arae Sestianae* are exceptional in that from the little information that has survived of their existence the altars evidently took their names from L. Sentius Quirinalis Albinianus, who on the majority view served as governor of Hispania Ulterior between 22 and 19 B.C. Only the *Arae Flaviae*, evidently set up to Vespasian, Titus and Domitian in the region of the Decumates Agri in south-west Germany, were similarly to give the name of an individual. The date of these Sestian altars now looks to have been firmly established between 22 and 19 B.C. in light of a bronze tablet recently found at Bembibre in north-west Spain, which in referring to the situation in 15 B.C. places the governorship of Sentius between 22 and 19 B.C. Analogy, in the lack of positive evidence, suggests that these altars will have served the cult of Roma and Augustus much as at the federal altar by Lugdunum (below). It is possible but by no means certain that these Sestian altars were planned in light of the three *conventus* of *Lucus Augusti* and *Bracara Augusta* in *Callaecia* and *Asturica Augusta* in *Asturia*, all of which were created under Augustus. The three altars would in that case have served the peoples of these three regions. In any event the old suggestion that the altars celebrated the victories of Augustus looks excluded by the fact that in that case they would surely have been set up to *Victoria* or *Victoria Augusti*, a hypothesis for which there is no support in the sources.

The key event in the Augustan extension of the ruler cult in the west was the establishment of an altar that served as the focal point of the federal centre a kilometre or so upstream from the colony of Lugdunum<sup>18</sup>. In common with other foundations of the period the federal centre, based on its well-known altar, served a region rather than a province, in this case the administrative units of Lugdunensis, Aquitania and Belgica. As these extensive districts were not called *Tres Galliae* until the Flavian period, the foundation is best conceived as the nub of a supra-regional cult. The principal features of the altar with its attendant Victories are familiar from coins<sup>19</sup> as is the historical context of its foundation, an attempt by Drusus to counter local discontent over the census. As Dio confirms, the

17. FISHWICK 2002a: 6-9; Id. 2005: 212. For recent discussion see FERNÁNDEZ OCHOA - CERDÁN 2002.

18. FISHWICK 2002a: 9-19.

19. FISHWICK 1987: 104-130; Id. 1986.



initiative came from the Roman side, its purpose presumably served by the prospect of the formation of a council chaired by the holder of the priesthood of the Three Gauls and attended by delegates from the three regions, who now had a central meeting place to air their grievances, praise or blame the provincial governor, and compete for the prestigious post of high priest. The number of delegates is uncertain as some of the sixty-four Gallic tribes appear to have sent more than one delegate but a number between one and three hundred seems a reasonable estimate<sup>20</sup>. Like future chairmen of the council, the first priest to be elected, C. Iulius Vercondaridubnus, was a Roman citizen as his *tria nomina* show. In addition we have an inscription attesting a *conventus* of Roman citizens... [*c/ives Romani in Tri[b]us Provinci(i)s Galli(i)s [c]onsistentes* (ILTG 221: A.D. 220/12)<sup>21</sup> but, though literally true, it is a distortion to say that two groups of people attended the annual or occasional special meetings of the *concilium*. By far the greatest number of those who attended consisted of the delegates of the Gallic tribes, whereas the *conventus* of Roman citizens mentioned in the inscription was a tiny group by comparison. The date of dedication of the altar is generally taken to have been 12 B.C.<sup>22</sup>, from which time delegates to the *concilium* under the presidency of the High Priest paid cult to Roma and Augustus *ad aram* just as Octavian had originally prescribed in the east. As luck would have it, epigraphical testimony to the federal cult has survived in abundance with the names of over forty high priests preserved in inscriptions<sup>23</sup>.

Probably in 12-9 B.C., when Drusus was campaigning in the area, he founded a further altar by modern Cologne. The date of institution suggests a monument on the lines of that by Lugdunum though no evidence has survived to throw light on the cult it served. Nevertheless the fact that a *sacerdos* served at the altar strongly suggests that, like the foundation at Lugdunum, worship will have been paid to Roma and Augustus. While its exact location is uncertain the name of the monument, Ara Ubiorum, links it with the Ubii, the strategic position of whom suggests that the altar was planned as the cult centre of a future Roman province of Germany and, for the immediate present, as a focus of local loyalties located beside legionary headquarters. If so, the Ara Ubiorum takes its place alongside similar regional centres in a vast area of loose organization. The

20. FISHWICK 2009: 134-135.

21. FISHWICK 2009: 154, n. 24, contradicting the statement of BEARD - NORTH - PRICE 1998, 353, n. 116, that the inscription has been curiously ignored in recent years.

22. FISHWICK 1996.

23. FISHWICK 2002b: 60-71.

principal event known in connection with the altar is that the Roman citizen Segimundus tore his fillets and joined the rebels alongside his brother Arminius when the Germanies revolted in A.D. 9 (Tac., *Ann.* 1.58.12). On the collapse of the mutiny in A.D. 14 his pro-Roman father Segestes secured from Germanicus the pardon of his son, though Segimundus had to appear in Germanicus' triumph of A.D. 17. Otherwise nothing is known of any arrangements of the cult or of a body of representatives that met at least annually on the model of the *concilium* at Lugdunum<sup>24</sup>.

Two other centres of similar kind have left a trace in the sources<sup>25</sup>. A notice in the sixth century source Cassiodorus reports that in 9 B.C. Drusus consecrated a temple among the Lingones. The entry may draw upon the text of Livy but a temple would be out of line with other foundations of Drusus. Given Livy's inaccuracy, however, and the fact that his testimony could have been contaminated in the sources, this may be a reference to another altar established by Drusus while in the region of Lugdunum and Cologne. If so, it represents a further regional centre founded under Augustus presumably designed to pay cult to Roma and Augustus as elsewhere. Given the state of the sources, however, the possibility that Drusus established a regional altar among the Lingones is at best an attractive hypothesis. Similar inaccuracy surrounds Dio's statement the L. Domitius Ahenobarbus planted an altar on the east bank of the Elbe ca. 2 B.C. (55.10a.2) If so, the foundation will have been similar to those installed by Drusus in the general area. In recent years much has been made of an account in Velleius Paterculus of how a barbarian crossed the Elbe in a dug-out canoe and was given permission to gaze at Tiberius and to touch his hand (*Hist. Rom.* 2.107)<sup>26</sup>. The chief's purported reference to the worship of Caesar's divinity in his absence might conceivably relate to the cult of Augustus at the altar but the whole story is of dubious value and its authority looks patently overvalued doubtless because the passage had been missed before<sup>27</sup>. Whatever the worth of Velleius's account, an altar on the Elbe would nevertheless be in keeping with the pattern set by other foundations of Augustus, each of which was intended as the nucleus of a regional cult.

24. LIERTZ 1998: 65 with nn. 22-23 has suggested that Segimundus may have been informally appointed priest when the German chieftains (including Arminius) met the Roman commander Varus in A.D. 9 (Tac., *Ann.* 1.58; cf. 55.3).

25. FISHWICK 2002: 22-23.

26. BEARD - NORTH - PRICE 1998: 1, 352-353.

27. FISHWICK 2009: 149.

To sum up, Augustus's contribution in the Latin West was limited to the establishment of various regional centres. Whereas in the east he was content to seek an accommodation with ruler cult spontaneously offered in line with long established practice, in the west he was free to innovate and to shape the cult of the emperor as he pleased. Similarly in Rome he cautiously introduced forms of worship that, while unavoidable, were designed to cause the least offence within leading circles of the capital. Only once he was dead and deified did official provincial cult begin in the provinces, in particular in Hispania Citerior and Lusitania<sup>28</sup>. The development of these, however, goes well beyond the boundaries of the present outline of how Augustus came to terms with the cult of the Roman emperor.

#### APPENDIX

##### AN ALTAR OF AUGUSTUS AT TARRACO

Quintilian records that, when the inhabitants of Tarraco reported a palm tree had miraculously grown from the altar devoted to the emperor in the city, Augustus acidly replied «*apparet quam saepe accendatis*» (*De institutione oratoria*, 6.3.77), Whatever the status of the episode — a wildly exaggerated tale of a growth sprouting among the altar stones or simply a *topos* akin to similar anecdotes of contrived miracles in different contexts elsewhere<sup>29</sup>— it is at all events clear that on the evidence of Quintilian an altar to Augustus stood at Tarraco during his lifetime. While both the erection of the altar and the miracle of the palm tree are of uncertain date, a palm springing from the altar is commemorated on a series of *dupondii* and bronze *semisses* issued by Tarraco under Tiberius<sup>30</sup>. Both the literary and numismatic surces jointly confirm, then, the existence of an altar to Augustus at Tarraco some time before A.D. 14.

The altar has generally been recognized as municipal. For one thing the miracle was reported by the inhabitants of Tarraco, for another a copy of a decree of the city of Mytilene was on display at Tarraco as at other coastal cities honouring Augustus with *isotheoi timai* and promising

28. FISHWICK 2002a: 41-60.

29. FISHWICK 1982: 226-227.

30. On the numismatic evidence see most recently MAR - RUIZ DE ARBULO - VIVÓ - BELTRÁN-CABALLERO 2012: 345-346; cf. FISHWICK 1982: 225-226 with refs.

further honours if anything else could be found that would make him more of a god (*OGIS* 456 = *IGRR* 4.3.9)<sup>31</sup>. The presence of the decree, it has been argued, could have inspired the elite of the colony to establish a comparable monument to Augustus at Tarraco. Even so, both R. Étienne and G. Alföldy placed the altar on the acropolis of Tarraco within the enclave reserved for provincial purposes<sup>32</sup>, a view rejected by D. Fishwick, who argued that, if the altar was municipal, it should rather have stood a kilometre to the south by the colonial forum<sup>33</sup>. This interpretation won general acceptance and has held the field for the last thirty years.

In a recent book on the architecture and urbanization of Tarraco R. Mar, J. Ruiz de Arbulo, D. Vivó and J. A. Beltrán-Caballero have now reopened discussion of the status and location of the altar of Augustus<sup>34</sup>. They state in the first place that «...se inició en *Tarraco* el culto a su figura con la erección de un monumental altar dedicado a su persona, convirtiéndose así en una de la primeras ciudades en iniciar el culto imperial<sup>35</sup>». But whereas the altar has always been taken to be a municipal monument, the authors propose an entirely new interpretation: «En realidad, desde nuestro punto de vista, podría tratarse de una manifestación precoz de la *organización* del culto imperial por parte de la nueva administración provincial<sup>36</sup>. In other words the altar marked the beginnings of the provincial cult of Hispania citerior and, as such, will have stood within the provincial precinct in the upper part of the city – most probably, it is suggested, on the middle level of the triple tiered enclosure.

Numerous considerations tell decisively against this hypothesis. For one thing in the initial phase of the cult in the Latin west various altars were established by military personnel, notably Drusus (above, pp. 54-56). These foundations, even including the federal centre by Lugdunum, the focus of the vast area of Gallia Comata, were intended to serve as the hub of regional cults not provincial. None of these altars, moreover, was located within the principal city of the province as, on the authors's hypothesis, would have been the case at Tarraco. A further difficulty arises from the cult which these regional altars served. As noted above

31. FISHWICK 1982: 223.

32. ÉTIENNE 1958: 369; ALFÖLDY 1978: 602, cf. 600; FISHWICK 1982: 224 with refs., noting that before the latter part of Tiberius' reign excavations suggest the area may have been the site of a military encampment.

33. FISHWICK 1982: 224-225. For a simplified plan of Tarraco see FISHWICK 1996: 167, fig. 2.

34. I am greatly indebted to the authors for kindly sending me by g-mail a copy of their text.

35. MAR *et al.* 2012: 344.

36. O.C., *ibid.*

(p. 48), Augustus had given instructions that non-Roman provincials might worship himself provided that Dea Roma shared in the cult. One would expect this regulation to have been observed at all of these early foundations, a point surely confirmed by the numerous epigraphical records of provincial priests of Roma and Augustus at Lugdunum, once Gallia Comata became Tres Galliae in the Flavian period and its provincial cult took shape<sup>37</sup>; earlier than that we are limited to the occasional mention of a *sacerdos*, as among the Ubii, for example (Tac., *Ann.* 1.57.3). Similarly at Tarraco Roma is mentioned among the very numerous honorific inscriptions of provincial priests of Hither Spain<sup>38</sup> and likewise has her place in the records of the city municipal cult<sup>39</sup>. Yet from everything that we know of the altar mentioned by Quintilian and illustrated on coins the monument was dedicated to Augustus alone and had no relation to Roma whatsoever. A further practical problem is that the suggested site of the altar —on the middle tier of the provincial enclave— was precisely where honorific statues to provincial priests were erected once the provincial cult of Hispania citerior got under way<sup>40</sup>. What then happened to the altar of Augustus, no word of which occurs among these priestly memorials?

It follows that these various considerations tell overwhelmingly in favour of the view that the altar of Augustus at Tarraco was municipal rather than provincial<sup>41</sup>. Its proposed placement by the colonial forum in a decidedly municipal context remains far likelier than that it stood in the provincial enclosure allegedly marking the beginning of the provincial cult of Hither Spain. On the contrary everything suggests that construction of the altar will have been based on a decision of the local *curia* and consequently has no bearing whatsoever on the way Augustus handled the delicate problem of the cult of the emperor whether in Rome or elsewhere in the empire.

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37. FISHWICK 2002b: 60-71.

38. FISHWICK 2002b: 104-123.

39. Fishwick 1987: 177.

40. FISHWICK 2002b: 74-82.

41. See now FISHWICK 2015.

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