

COLE, Spencer
Cicero, Ennius, and the Advent of Ruler Cult at Rome

The late Republic, long considered a period of decline and disuse in Roman religion, is now being reexamined as a phase of consequential innovation and experimentation. As political revolutions were transforming Rome, Cicero and Varro were developing the first systematic analyses of Roman religion and demarcating religion as a distinct field of inquiry. Since critical religious discourse was in its formative stage at this relatively late point in Roman history, the writings of Cicero and his contemporaries were in a privileged position to validate, establish, or occlude the vast range of practices that made up Roman religious life. It was during these pivotal decades that Cicero produced his seminal treatments of apotheosis. In this paper, I will examine how Cicero uses Ennius in his *De Re Publica* to present apotheosis as Roman tradition.

As Laelius notes in the *De Re Publica*, archaic Roman history was fragmentary even for republican Romans: *sed obscura est historia Romana* (2.33). Cicero's *De Re Publica* is itself one attempt to fill the void Laelius laments. The *De Re Publica*, like Varro's *Antiquitates Rerum Divinarum*, is not a passive curatorial gesture, but an act of Roman self-definition triggered by social crisis. Throughout the *De Re Publica*, Cicero calls on the cultural authority of Ennius to give his archaeology of early Rome, including his presentation of the apotheosis of Romulus, a patina of tradition. In the *Tusculan Disputations*, Cicero even posits Ennius as the conduit for early oral traditions about the divinity of Romulus: *Romulus in caelo cum dis agit aevom, ut famae adsentiens dixit Ennius* (1.28). Enlisting Ennius in the *De Re Publica* project was doubly advantageous—he could not only be summoned as the singer par excellence of the *mos maiorum* but he had also translated Euhemerus' work on the apotheosis of primitive kings for a Roman audience. In the late Republic, according to Cotta in the *De Natura Deorum*, Ennius was still considered the ranking Euhemerist at Rome: *quae ratio [apotheosis] maxime tractata ab Euhemero est, quem noster et interpretatus est et secutus praeter ceteros Ennius* (1.119).

In the surviving sections of his *De Re Publica*, Cicero appeals to Ennian precedent twelve times. Cicero has the interlocutor Scipio establish Ennius' *Annales* early in the first book as a sanctified source of republican archival information. Scipio cites Ennius alongside the *Annales Maximi* as authoritative in his own time (dramatic date 129BCE) and thus helps consolidate the poet's symbolic status as multi-purpose spokesman for old Rome. Evidence found in the *Annales* and the *Annales Maximi*, Scipio claims, enables us to pinpoint the day of Romulus' apotheosis (1.25). Scipio gives Ennius credentials that might impress some of Cicero's late republican audience by connecting Ennius to not only the *Annales Maximi* and the traditions of republican religion but also to currents of superstition-fighting Greek rationalism.

How Cicero shaped his account of Romulus' apotheosis, the primary Roman precedent for a mortal attaining divinity, was crucial for legitimizing or discrediting deification as Roman custom and therefore had major implications at a time when Roman statesmen like Pompey and Caesar were flirting with divine status. Later on in the first book of the

De Re Publica, Scipio quotes Ennius in a passage that enlarges on the divinity of Romulus (1.64) and offers crucial support for Scipio's account of Romulus' deification at the beginning of book 2. Since no Roman had been officially deified since Romulus (if at all), Cicero is using a hallowed voice of tradition to help sanction bold late republican innovation.