

## THE IMPERIAL CULT IN ROMAN RELIGIOUS ASSOCIATIONS

Przemysław Wojciechowski

Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń

**Abstract:** The imperial cult was a local phenomenon. Religious colleges, like other social groups, included various forms of the emperor cult in the rituals they practised at their own discretion. Most frequently, the collegial imperial cult took the form of ceremonies organised to celebrate anniversaries connected with the emperor. They could be accompanied by foundations of statues or even temples dedicated to the emperor or members of his family. The imperial cult played a special role in the case of corporations, which embraced it as their axis of activity and the main element of their identity. Associations of *cultores Larum et imaginum Augusti*, regardless of their genesis, were an important element of the very complex phenomenon of imperial cult in the western part of the Roman Empire. Testimonies left behind by their members enable us, to a large extent, to verify the 19<sup>th</sup>-century vision of the imperial cult, which mainly interpreted it in the context of “religion of loyalty.”

**Key words:** imperial Rome, imperial cult, Roman associations, inscriptions.

“Der römischer Kaiser war Gottheit,” wrote Manfred Klauss in the opening sentence of the book *Kaiser und Gott*, published in 1999.<sup>1</sup> The German historian’s subsequent assertions are just as unequivocal: emperors (starting from Augustus) were gods while still living, both in the eastern and the western parts of the Roman Empire, not excluding Italy and Rome. This opinion, which at the end of the last century was still quite controversial among historians, has gained many supporters in the last decade, partly due to the book published by Ittai Gradel.<sup>2</sup> It follows from Gradel’s research that on a private level, the imperial cult (also of the living emperors) was spread all over the empire, including Rome itself. Without going into the nuances of the long and ongoing debate about the nature of the imperial cult in Rome,<sup>3</sup> I would like to focus only on those aspects that are directly connected with the corporate context.

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<sup>1</sup> Clauss 1999, 17.

<sup>2</sup> Gradel 2002.

<sup>3</sup> A competent round-up of the progress and most important conclusions following from this debate: Olszewski 2010.

Starting with the broad definition of what is commonly called “the imperial cult,” as proposed by Peter Herz in the late 1980s,<sup>4</sup> we can without doubt state that practices connected with the cult were a vital element of religious life in all types of private Roman corporations. The statues of emperors found in the seats of Roman colleges, numerous inscriptions dedicated *pro salute* of emperors and members of their families, and mentions of festivals organised by corporations on the emperor’s birthdays or anniversaries of accession leave no doubt in this regard.<sup>5</sup> In older literature on the subject, there were attempts to include many of these activities in the sphere of political rather than religious activities, and the imperial cult was regarded as one of the forms of demonstrating loyalty towards the ruler.<sup>6</sup> This is a simplified and outdated vision of the enormously complex phenomenon of the imperial cult.

The numerous collegiate dedications containing the phrase *pro salute imperatoris*, just as other manifestations of the imperial cult, can naturally be interpreted as an expression of loyalty and willingness to ingratiate oneself to the emperor, but this raises the question about the point of such a demonstration. The suggestion that corporations wanted to win the emperor’s favour, which they could then use when trying to obtain new privileges or to confirm the already granted ones, seems unconvincing to say the least. Firstly, the expectation that information about such an act of loyalty would reach the emperor (or his entourage) had no rational basis. Secondly, it is not difficult to see that such reasoning is founded on the modern imperative of separating religious life from public life. In the case of the imperial cult it is particularly easy to question the “earnestness” of the cult practices connected with it, pushing them beyond the lines of “genuine” religiousness. However, even the most banal forms of worshipping the emperor or members of his family could have had religious meaning (regardless of whether their significance is clear to us). I would like to draw attention to two inscriptions dedicated by the Roman *collegium Herculis*. They were both created *pro salute* of Antoninus Pius and M. Aurelius on the order of Iovis Dolichenus (*iussu numinis Iovis Dolicheni*).<sup>7</sup> In my opinion, it would be difficult to conclude that this was a routine propaganda move devoid of religious content. Identifying divine intervention as the impulse for founding an altar or other objects connected with cults is not unusual in Roman epigraphy, but we certainly cannot say that it was a mechanically employed model, which was meaningless to the donator of the inscription. Perhaps it is also not a coincidence that members of the associations I have researched used the phrase *pro salute* only in dedications to emperors and members of their families.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Herz proposes a very broad definition of the imperial cult, which includes such acts as founding altars to the emperor, identifying him with gods, or making the ruler the addressee of rites also performed for other deities. Herz 1988, 118–120; cf. also Olszewski 2010, 369–370.

<sup>5</sup> The epigraphic material on the imperial cult in Roman professional and religious corporations collected by Waltzing (1895–1900, VI, 585–602; 660–661) has not been seriously analysed so far. Opinions about it, expressed both by historians researching religious life during the empire and by historians of Roman colleges, are generally superficial and laconic (see mainly Ausbüttel 1982, 54–55; Price 1984, 50, 85, 88, 90, 105, 118, 190–191). Liu 2009, 255–259 discusses the subject further.

<sup>6</sup> A bibliography of older publications: Harland 1996, 320, footnote 4.

<sup>7</sup> AE 1940, 70 and 71.

<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting that Liu made similar observations when analysing dedications made by colleges of the *centonarii* (Liu 2009, 258–259).

The role that the imperial cult played in the religious life of private corporations seems quite clear, at least in reference to the deified emperors and members of the imperial family or the emperor's favourites. This type of cult did not differ at all from rites connected with other divine cults. We have no reason to believe that the *cultores Dianae et Antinoi* differentiated between the divinity of their patrons in any way. Likewise, the way in which the *curator* of the association of worshippers of Asclepius and Hygieia, C. Quintius Abascantus, addresses "divine Trajan" is no different from analogous phrases known from sacred inscriptions.<sup>9</sup> What is problematic, however, is interpreting the role of living emperors in the religious life of corporations. Even if we accept, as Price does, that "the emperor stood at the focal point between human and divine,"<sup>10</sup> there is no reason to doubt that it was the emperor who was perceived as one of the main guarantees of the prosperity of the whole empire.<sup>11</sup> Sacrifices made on his behalf, which accompanied the dedication of an altar or the erection of the emperor's statue, were certainly an important moment in the religious life of an association. Keeping in mind that the ontological dispute over whether the emperor was a human or a god is a problem only for modern historiography, I will risk the statement that for the members of the associations in question the emperor was closer to the world of gods than men. Philip Harland's examples convince me that, at least in the eastern part of the empire, emperors and members of their family were worshipped as gods by corporations (or at least in the same manner as gods).<sup>12</sup> For members of the association of the worshippers of Demeter in Ephesus, the wife of the Emperor Tiberius became the protective deity of the corporation, worshipped as Demeter Karpophoros.<sup>13</sup> The same college worshipped the sons of Drusus as gods; they were believed to be the new Dioscuri (IEph. 4337). Another example that is just as evocative is documented by the inscription set up by the College of Physicians, whose members sacrificed to Asclepius and the *Sebastoi*.<sup>14</sup> It is particularly significant that the physicians treat their patron deity and the emperors (*Sebastoi*) in an identical way. This goes against Prince's thesis, according to which in the sphere of sacrificial rites, emperors were treated differently from "true" gods (sacrifices were supposedly made not to the emperors but on behalf of their prosperity).<sup>15</sup> The latter type of sacrifice is, indeed, clearly dominant; as we can see, however, we cannot presume that it was the rule. It would also be contradicted by the information, preserved in some epigraphic material from Asia Minor, about the mysteries organised by the local associations

<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, we do not know what object Abascantus founded. It was most likely a statue of the deified emperor, which Abascantus left in his will to the *cultoribus Aesculapii et Hygiae* at Augusta Taurinorum (CIL V 6970).

<sup>10</sup> Price 1984, 233.

<sup>11</sup> Plin., *Ep.* 10, 35: *Sollemnia vota pro incolumitate tua, qua publica salus continetur.*

<sup>12</sup> Harland uses the phrase "the emperors functioned as gods" (Harland 1996, 323), and a slightly less categorical one, "the emperors could function as gods within social and religious life at the local level" (1996, 330). Harland's research, which initially only concerned corporations attested in Ephesus, later covered the whole of Asia Minor (Harland 1996; Harland 2003).

<sup>13</sup> IEph. 213; Harland 1996, 329.

<sup>14</sup> IEph. 719; Harland 1996, 330.

<sup>15</sup> Price believes that "language sometimes assimilated the emperor to a god, but ritual held back" (1984, 213), which in turn leads him to the already known conclusion that in religious life, the emperor was positioned between humans and gods.

in honour of gods and emperors.<sup>16</sup> Harland's assertion that in the context of his research "the emperors could function as gods" seems fully justified. It does, naturally, raise the question whether the same could be said about the role of emperors in the religious life of the Italian *cultores deorum*.

The living emperor appeared in the religious life of these associations mainly as the addressee of dedications of the *pro salute* type; setting up his statue in the college seat was also a frequent opportunity to honour the ruler. In both cases, there is a religious aspect to such activities. It seems that the fact that the colleges celebrated the emperor's birthday and/or the anniversary of his ascendancy to power can also be interpreted in this vein. It is worth noting that of the four extant corporate calendars, no fewer than three include information about feasts organised by colleges on the *dies natalis* or *dies imperii* of successive emperors, and sometimes also members of their families.<sup>17</sup> The fourth case is special because the college in question was an association of worshippers of Diana and Antinous of Lanuvium, which celebrated the birthday not of the emperor himself, but of his deified favourite.<sup>18</sup> Since the colleges whose calendars have survived include both religious and professional corporations, it can be assumed that celebrating the birthday or the *dies imperii* of the current emperor was a common practice in all types of associations. Although the surviving inscriptions include only information about feasts and giveaways organised on these occasions, it is difficult to imagine that they were not accompanied by sacrifices made on behalf of the prosperity of the emperor or, as in Asia Minor, the emperor himself. Unfortunately, we will not find direct testimonies of such activities in the available source material.

Italic inscriptions, however, provide information about another, original form of imperial worship: associations whose members called themselves *cultores Larum et imaginum Augusti*.<sup>19</sup> This type of college is relatively well documented in sources, since we have a collection of at least 15 inscriptions that can be connected with the activities of the *cultores* of the imperial Lares and images, and a slightly smaller group of testimonies confirming the existence of colleges devoted to the cult of the *domus divinae*.<sup>20</sup> It may therefore be surprising that, before the publication of Gradel's book, they were almost entirely overlooked in studies on the imperial cult.<sup>21</sup> Although not all elements of Gradel's examination of the origin and function of this category of associations seem

<sup>16</sup> There is a fundamentally important inscription including a letter from an association of Demetriasts in Ephesus to the proconsul of the province of Asia (IEph 213), in which they write about the mysteries and sacrifices to Demeter Karpophoros and Thesmophoros and to the Sebastoi gods, organised annually in their city. The organisers of the mysteries (*mystai*) were probably members of the aforementioned college of worshippers of Demeter (Harland 1996, 331–332).

<sup>17</sup> CIL VI 10324, 33885; X 444; XIV 2112; see Ausbüttel 1982, 52–54.

<sup>18</sup> CIL XIV 2112.

<sup>19</sup> This category of associations includes colleges, whose names could take different forms. In the materials from Rome and Italy, we find: *cultores Larum et imaginum Augusti* (CIL VI 307), *cultores Larum et imaginum domus Augustae* (CIL VI 958), *cultores Larum Augustorum* (CIL VI 1038, IX 3960), *cultores domus divinae Augustae* (CIL V 253), *collegium magnum Larum et imaginum domini invicti Antonini Pii* (CIL VI 671).

<sup>20</sup> Waltzing 1895–1900, IV 184–185, 190–191.

<sup>21</sup> F. Bömer included the colleges of the *cultores Larum et imaginum Augusti* in the group of funerary associations (Bömer 1981, 50–51). Santoro (1983) published an extensive article about this group of associations; see also Wojciechowski 2005, 132.

convincing to me, his findings certainly present an opportunity to re-examine the imperial cult in the social context that is of interest to us.

Gradel's main contention is that associations of worshippers of the emperor's *Lares et imaginum* originated in the sphere of household cults. His starting point is the statement of Tacitus who, when relating the case of Falanius, mentions that the *cultores Augusti* could be found in every household at the time.<sup>22</sup> This assertion is in contrast with the lack of any epigraphic or archaeological evidence of the activities of those *cultores*. This, however, is understandable if we take into account the household character of the cult they practised. This sphere of religious life was almost beyond the reach of epigraphy.<sup>23</sup> Traces of the cult of classical household gods such as the Lares or Genius of the head of the family, so difficult to find in epigraphic evidence, certainly do not reflect the actual popularity of religious practices connected with household cults. On the other hand, we have testimonies which indicate that some forms of corporate cult functioned even on the level of household religion. Members of a household organised themselves into groups (and called themselves *cultores*) in order to worship the Lares of the patron or head of the family together.<sup>24</sup> A tomb built by the *cultores Larum Marcellini*<sup>25</sup> was found at Saepinum, while an inscription dedicated to *M. Nonio M. f. Fab(ia) Arrio Paulino Apro c(larissimo) i(uveni) XVvir(o) sacr(is) fac(iundis)* by the *cultores Larum eius* comes from Brixia.<sup>26</sup> In the same township, the *cultores* belonging to the *collegium Larum* founded an inscription with a dedication to their female patron of unknown name.<sup>27</sup> Another interesting instance can be found in the inscription donated by T. Suedius Primigenius, which reads that one Sex. Fullonius Iustus and his son Severus donated a sizeable burial place to the *cultoribus Larum suorum*.<sup>28</sup> Private *cultores Larum* could have created large organisations with multilevel structures, as attested by a college associating the *cultores Larum* of the influential Roman *Volusii* family. The *cultores* were divided into *decuriae*; Hymnus Volusianus, who was the head of one of them, was the donator of a tomb to himself and his wife (Scantia Prisca).<sup>29</sup> According to Gradel, both the model of organisation and the terminology known from religious groups functioning within the *domus* were adopted by the *cultores* into religious colleges functioning outside the sphere of household cults.

The thesis that Roman religious colleges originated from collective forms of household cult is debatable, to say the least. It is founded on the assumption that the *cultores deorum* were mainly slaves and freedmen. Research on the social structure of members of Roman religious and professional corporations does not support such an assertion. Preserved in the form of inscriptions, the member lists of the Roman *sodalitium dii Silvani*

<sup>22</sup> Tac., *Ann.*, 1, 73, 2: *cultores Augusti, qui per omnis domos in modum collegiorum habebantur.*

<sup>23</sup> Wojciechowski 2007, 91–93.

<sup>24</sup> The cult of Genius is considerably less well documented. From the whole of Italy, we know of only one inscription which mentions the *cultores Geni(i)* of a private individual (CIL IX 6320).

<sup>25</sup> CIL IX 2481.

<sup>26</sup> CIL V 4340.

<sup>27</sup> CIL V 4432.

<sup>28</sup> CIL XI 8098. A bequest made to the *collegium Larum* is also mentioned by one Marcellina of Brixia. In this case, the funds donated by her were to be used to organise commemorative celebrations (CIL V 4440).

<sup>29</sup> CIL VI 10267: *Hymnus Caesaris Aug(usti) / Volusianus / Hermaphili Hymni lib(erti) fil(ii) / decurio Larum Volusianorum / Scantiae Priscae coniugi / carissimae et sibi.*

*Pollentis* and *familia Silvani* from Trebula Mutuesca are indeed dominated by freedmen and slaves,<sup>30</sup> but these two testimonies can hardly be considered a sufficient foundation to form conclusions about all religious colleges. If, however, we narrow down the field of our analysis to the group of colleges which Gradel describes as “imperial cult associations” (the term includes all associations of worshippers of Lares, emperor’s images, and *domus Augusta*), then the thesis about their household genesis becomes likelier. Traces of such origin can be seen in terms such as *imagines*, *Lares*, *cultores*, or *domus*, which appear in the names of these associations. The majority of colleges in this category are clearly connected with the *domus imperatoria*, and imperial freedmen are frequently their members. On the other hand, there is no lack of examples illustrating the activities of groups of worshippers of the emperor’s Lares outside the *familia Caesaris*, even in broad terms (see below).

According to Gradel, the *cultores Augusti* left the sphere of household cults even before the end of the 1st century, since in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century the *cultorum Augusti* colleges were rare enough in the households of the Roman elite to be noted by Tacitus.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the majority of epigraphic evidence connected with the activities of various organisations associating the *cultores* of the emperor’s Lares and images can be dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> and early 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries. However, on this basis it is difficult to conclude that this was the prime period of this category of colleges, since the increased number of inscriptions in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and early 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries is a phenomenon typical of all types of epigraphic activity.<sup>32</sup> For the same reason, it is impossible to estimate the popularity of the *cultores Larum et imaginum Augusti* corporations that in the 1<sup>st</sup> century were already outside the *domus imperatoria*. Although the interpretation of the inscription, which Gradel believes to be evidence that this type of corporation already existed at the time of the first Augustus, seems doubtful to say the least,<sup>33</sup> there are traces of activities of the type of association in question in the first century AD. One of the most interesting testimonies is an inscription dated to 15 October 68, which says that the *cultores imaginum domus aug(ustae)* received a rather unusual gift – *signum Libertatis restitutae Ser(vii) Galbae*.<sup>34</sup> The founders of the inscription were the managers of the college (*curatores*). An onomastic study of their names leads us to conclude that they were freedmen, and not imperial ones. It is worth noting that the *gentilia* of two pairs of the five *curatores* were the same. It is on this basis that Gradel points to the sphere of household cults as the genesis of the college in question.<sup>35</sup> This interpretation seems to go too far, since it was not unusual for two or more freedmen with a common patron to belong to one college. We encounter the

<sup>30</sup> CIL VI 647; AE 1929, 00161 = AE 1930, 131 = AE 1937, 177 = AE 1956, 234 = AE 1983, 317 = AE 2002, 397 = AE 2006, 7.

<sup>31</sup> Gradel 2002, 217.

<sup>32</sup> For the phenomenon of increased epigraphic activity at the time see Wojciechowski 2007, 89–90.

<sup>33</sup> CIL X 1238: *d. d. [--] Augusto | sacrum | restituerunt | laurinienses | pecunia sua | cultores | d. d.* It should be noted that the word *Augusto* may have been preceded by a theonym, since this part of the inscription is damaged. The deity’s name used together with the nickname *Augustus* is well known from epigraphic texts, unlike a direct dedication to the emperor. The acronym *d.d* at the end of the inscription can be interpreted as *d(omus) d(ivinae)*, see Gradel (2002, 219), but it is also possible to read it as *d(onom) d(ederunt)* or *d(ecreto) d(ecurionum)*.

<sup>34</sup> CIL VI 481.

<sup>35</sup> Gradel 2002, 220.

same phenomenon in associations which certainly did not originate in household cults. However, it seems important that the founders of the inscriptions were *curatores anni sucundi*, which means that the corporation must have been created even under Nero, and it was his *imagines* that were the original object of the corporate cult. The events of 68, which brought about a change in emperor, put the college in the position of having to adjust to the new situation. It seems that the unusual foundation of the *curatores* of this college should be interpreted with this context in mind. With the proverbial eagerness of neophytes, they tried to embrace the ideological programme of the new emperor, who was to free the empire from the tyrant's rule. Unfortunately, we do not know how the *curatores anni tertii* responded to the new dynasty's ascendancy to power. What we do know is that under the Flavii, other colleges connected with the imperial cult were formed. We can read about one of them on the tombstone of an imperial freedman, T. Flavius Trophimus.<sup>36</sup> The inscription on the tomb is dedicated to the deceased, referred to as the *constitutor college numinis dominorum quod est sup templo divi Claudii*. The collegi "under the temple of divine Claudius" most likely associated the owners of numerous *tabernae*, whose ruins survived in the temple's foundations.<sup>37</sup> Although the college was set up by an imperial freedman, it was certainly established outside the *domus Augusta*, since this type of corporation must have been created earlier within the imperial *domus*. Trophimus was the founder of one of probably many groups active in Rome which worshipped the emperor's images, Lares, or, as in this case, *numen*. Similar organisations were also created outside the capital, as attested by an inscription dedicated to the college of worshippers of the emperor's images and Lares at Lucus Marsorum on Lake Fucine.<sup>38</sup> Onesimus, an imperial freedman who was a *procurator*, is the founder of the inscription. The involvement of freedmen from the *familia Caesaris* in both cited cases may be accidental, but it would seem that the colleges of imperial cult active within the imperial *domus* inspired the founders of similar organisations in the capital and elsewhere.

The gradual disappearance of organised forms of the imperial cult from households, supposedly a consequence of the *cultores Augusti* "going over" from the household sphere to the public one,<sup>39</sup> certainly did not apply to the *domus imperatoria*. We have a testimony which shows that even in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century new groups of worshippers of the imperial *Lares et imaginum* were set up in these circles. An inscription from Ostia informs us that in 205, Callistus (an imperial freedman acting as *procurator*) gave consent to a group of slaves working on the emperor's estate (*praedia Rusticeliani*) to organise celebrations connected with the imperial cult on a site assigned by him.<sup>40</sup> The inscription, placed on a marble tablet, is exceptionally long, and tells us that the college, referred to as the *cultores Larum et imaginum dominorum nostrorum invictissimorum Augustorum*,

<sup>36</sup> CIL VI 10251a.

<sup>37</sup> Gradel 2002, 220–221.

<sup>38</sup> CIL IX 3887. Members of this association are referred to as *cultores Fucini*. It should be noted that the interpretation of this inscription is not unequivocal due to its grammar (*imagines* and *Lares* in dative rather than genitive).

<sup>39</sup> This hypothesis is based solely on a mention made by Tacitus (see above). There is no epigraphic evidence to prove the existence of this type of groups of *cultores*; it is even less possible to ascertain that they disappeared in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

<sup>40</sup> CIL XIV 4570.

was led by an imperial slave called Maximianus, who was a *villicus praediorum*. It was probably on his initiative that the inscription was lengthened to include a copy of the letter in which Callistus informs Maximianus that he consents to the request of the *cultores larum Augustorum* and agrees to their religious celebrations, and entrusts Maximianus with ensuring that they run according to plan. This extraordinary inscriptional evidence is important mainly for two reasons. Firstly, it shows the mechanism by which the corporations of interest to us were formed. It was a grassroots initiative of imperial slaves working in one house. Secondly, we learn a lot about the organisation of the college. Unlike regular *cultores deorum* associations, the structure of this corporation is a mirror reflection of the “professional” hierarchy of the milieu in which the group in question was established. The *villicus* who oversaw the work of slaves on the imperial estate on a daily basis was also in charge of the *cultores Larum*. The activities of the *cultores* also required the authorisation of the *procurator* of the estate. It is worth noting that Callistus, the imperial *procurator praediorum Rusticelianorum*, not only consented to the college, but also tried to make his answer as official as possible, unsuccessfully copying the style of imperial documents. It also seems that Callistus had a rather clear idea of what the activities of the *cultores Larum* involved. Most likely, organisations of this kind were not rare in his environment.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, the fact that Callistus’ letter was the most significant document the *cultores Larum* could cite means that their activities did not go beyond the borders of the *praedia Rusticeliani*. In terms of organisation, this type of group of worshippers of the imperial Lares is clearly different not only from “regular” religious associations, but also from the *cultores Larum et imaginum Augusti* functioning in the public sphere. The inscriptions founded by these *collegia* do not mention solutions typical of corporate life, based on municipal models. In place of collegial officials there are various managers (*villici, actores*), and the highest authorising agency is not the Roman senate but an imperial freedman with the rank of *procurator* at best. Groups of worshippers of the imperial Lares functioning in private households either did not leave any epigraphic evidence or, according to Gradel, faded out in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, giving way to public colleges of the imperial cult.

Such colleges did not differ from the rest of religious associations in terms of either organisation or function. They were headed by officials elected by their members (*quinquennales, curatores*).<sup>42</sup> Examining the testimonies they left behind, we also encounter phenomena (such as *immunitas*)<sup>43</sup> and forms of activities characteristic of the corporate life. The *cultores Larum Augusti* appear as founders of inscriptions, statues and temples.<sup>44</sup> Their involvement in funerary activities is also attested.<sup>45</sup> What at first glance differentiates “imperial cult colleges” from other religious associations is the fact that they consistently emphasise that the objects of their worship are the images, Lares, or *numen* of the emperor, while the colleges worshipping traditional gods refer to them directly

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. CIL VI 455: *collegium Larum praedio[rum] ...*; CIL VI 1038: *cultores Larum Aug(ustorum) rationis patrimonii*.

<sup>42</sup> CIL VI 307, 471; XIV 367.

<sup>43</sup> CIL XIV 367.

<sup>44</sup> CIL VI 471 (*signum*), VI 6771 (*aram marmoream*), VI 692 (*templum, aram*); sometimes the object of dedication is not specified (CIL VI 958: *solo private sua pecunia fecerunt*; VI 1038: *donum dedit*).

<sup>45</sup> At Alba Fucens, members of this corporation founded a tomb of one T. Bodius Rufus (CIL IX 3960).



in their names.<sup>46</sup> Since in both cases we are dealing with a cult, I do not believe that we should “desacralise” the *cultorum Augusti* colleges,<sup>47</sup> especially because the cult took on similar forms in both categories of associations. On the one hand, statues of patron gods of colleges were the object of cult for their members regardless of the type of corporation, and on the other hand we can cite testimonies indicating that the *cultores Larum et imaginum Augusti* erected temples dedicated directly to the emperor or his Genius. It is most likely a temple that the Roman *cultores Larum et imaginum domus Augustae* refer to when they say that they dedicated a building to Trajan, erected on their own land and for their own money.<sup>48</sup> There is another Roman inscription, in which the *cultores domus divinae* mention the restoration of a temple and its furnishings dedicated to the [*Genio Imp(eratoris) Hadriani*] *Aug(usti)*.<sup>49</sup> The first of the cited testimonies is particularly important, as it puts a question mark over the view, well established in historiography, that the living emperor was not the object of cult in Rome itself. On the level of state cult this was indeed the case, but in the case of private cult (collegial cult belongs in this category), evidently the geographic criterion fails.

The imperial cult, as all Roman religion, was a local phenomenon. In the words of Lechosław Olszewski, “there was no one universal ‘imperial cult’ in the Roman Empire. Each city, each province, each social group included the ruler and his family, or other persons or institutions, in their rites at their own discretion.”<sup>50</sup> This is equally true of colleges. Depending on the association, the imperial cult took more or less spectacular forms. Usually they were celebrations commemorating anniversaries connected with the ruler, which could be accompanied by founding statues or even dedicating temples. The imperial cult played a special role in the case of corporations, which embraced it as their axis of activity and the main element of their identity. Associations of *cultores Larum et imaginum Augusti*, regardless of their genesis, were an important element of the very complex phenomenon of imperial cult in the western part of the Roman Empire. Testimonies left behind by their members enable us, to a large extent, to verify the 19<sup>th</sup>-

<sup>46</sup> This type of cult organisation may also have been copied outside the sphere of imperial cult. An inscription from Aesernia talks about a donation of a burial place to the *collegium cultorum statuarum et clipeorum L. Abulli Dextri* (CIL IX 2654). This is the only evidence of the existence of *cultores* of images of private persons. The similarity of the language indicates that the *cultores* of the images of L. Abullius Dexter may have been inspired by the votaries of imperial images. This is all the more likely considering the fact that Dexter belonged to the elite of the local aristocracy (see CIL IX 2655; Gradel 2002, 215–216).

<sup>47</sup> Therefore it is difficult to agree with the interpretation proposed by Santero, who saw the *cultores imaginum Augusti* as a sort of custodians of imperial images (Santero 1983, 118–125). Cf. Wojciechowski 2005, 132.

<sup>48</sup> CIL VI 958: *Imp(eratori) Caesari divi Nervae f(ilio) Nervae Traiano Aug(usto) Germ(anico) Dacico pontif(ici) max(imo) trib(unicia) pot(estate) XII imp(eratori) VI co(n)s(uli) V p(atri) p(atriciae) propagatori / orbis terrarum locupletatori civium cultores Larum et imaginum domus Augustae solo privato sua pecunia fecerunt.*

<sup>49</sup> CILVI253: [*Genio Imp(eratoris) Hadriani*] *Aug(usti) p(atri) p(atriciae) / sacr(um) / [cultores] domus divinae Aug(ustae) / [---]s Fortunatus C(aius) Iulius Zosimus / [---]s Macedo Q(uintus) Maesius Euenus cur(atores) an(ni) I / [aedem cum p]orticus sua pec(unia) reficiunda curaverunt idemq(ue) / [ob] dedicati onem eius panem vinum sportulas dederunt VIII K(alendas) Octob(res) / [L(ucio) Nonio] Torquato Asprenate L(ucio) Sergio Paullo co(n)s(ulibus).*

<sup>50</sup> Olszewski 2010, 370.

century vision of the imperial cult, which mainly interpreted it in the context of “religion of loyalty.”

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