

**scripta 15.3: Tacitus comments on the emperor as a god**

*This text is taken from Tacitus, Annals 3.36. Tacitus highlights how the position of emperor had started to blur the boundaries between human and divine and thus cement the idea that the imperial family brought with it a power which was beyond the reach of other Roman citizens. It had long been established in Roman custom that individuals could seek refuge in temples and appeal to the power of the gods to protect them from human aggression. This passage highlights that Roman citizens had taken to clinging to statues of the imperial family in a similar way in order to escape punishment.*

*The passage describes events that took place in AD 21. At the start of this year, the emperor Tiberius had decided to leave Rome for a temporary retreat in Campania. In his absence, his son Drusus held power in Rome.*

The basest individuals had taken on the lawlessness of stirring up - with impunity - complaints against their betters by holding onto a statue of **Caesar**. This extended even to freedmen and slaves who, while attacking their patron or master verbally or physically, began to strike fear into others. Therefore Gaius Cestius, a senator, said that although the imperial family were indeed equal to the gods, everyone should remember that prayers were not heard by the gods if they were not lawful, and that it was not a good thing that bad men, wanting divine support for their shameful actions, were taking refuge in the Capitol or in the other temples of the city. He spoke about the example of Annia Rufilla who, in the forum, on the steps of the senate-house, even though she had been found guilty of fraud, directed threats at Cestius himself because she had positioned herself right in front of a statue of the emperor. Other senators started to shout out about examples not dissimilar to this and indeed even worse; they kept begging Drusus to set an example of punishment until he ordered that Annia Rufilla be held under public guard.

- 1) Tacitus writes that Romans are seeking protection by holding onto a statue of the emperor. Explain how he suggests that this has become a problem.
- 2) What does Gaius Cestius say to try and stop the practice that anyone could be protected from punishment if they held onto a statue of the emperor?
- 3) Explain in your own words what Annia Rufilla had done and why Cestius thinks this is so shocking.
- 4) What impression do you get from this text of political life in Rome at this time?