

# The Buildings and the Images of the Imperial Cult



## I. Beginnings

What is the imperial cult?

The beginnings:

- a) Initial phase of heterogeneity
- b) Regional differences and peculiarities

**5 points** to remember:

1. Rome and the East
2. A ruler needs
3. Greeks and Jewish/Christians
4. „human“ and „divine“
5. Today's idea of separating cultural-religious sphere and political sphere



## the end of republic and beginning of the principate

Phenomena:

1. Building and consecrating **altars and temples**



The temple of Vespasian and Titus, Forum Romanum



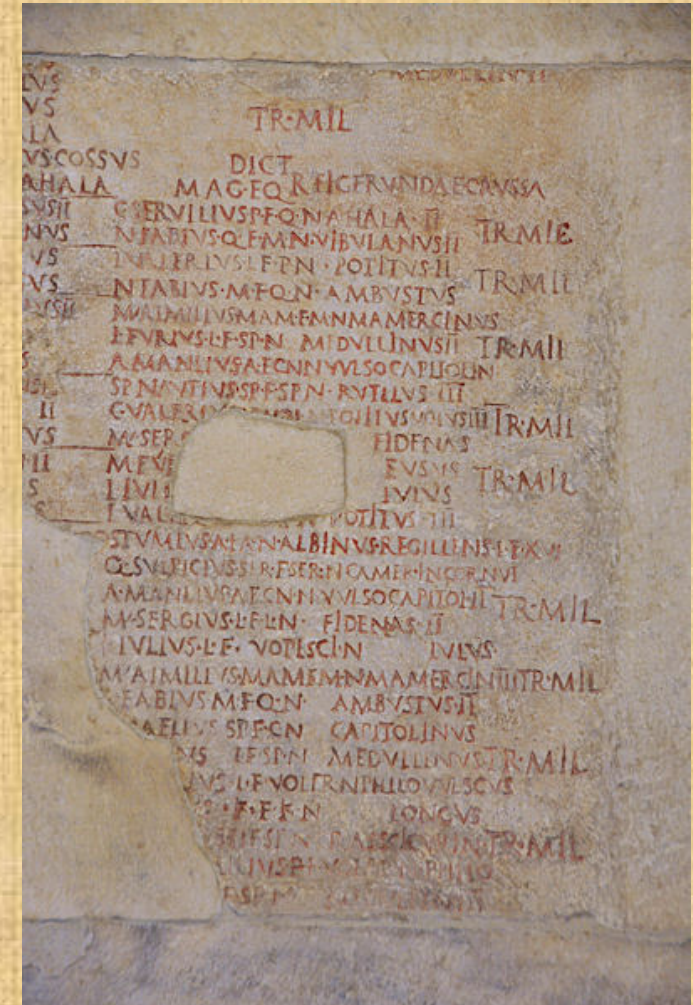
Ara Pacis, Rome

2. Establishing of **priests**

3. **Emphassising** the characteristic feautres and achievements

4. Setting **public holidays**

5. **Rituals and traditions** previously reserved for deities



Fasti capitolini, The Capitoline Museum, Rome



6. Likening emperors to dieties



Claudius as Jupiter, marble, Vatican Museums, Rome



Commodus as Hercules, marble, The Capitoline Museum, Rome

Preliminary steps to the imperial cult:

1. Egypt
2. Hellenistic world
3. Greek cities
4. Roman republic



Coronation of King Ptolemy VIII  
conducted by the goddess  
Nechbet, right, and the goddess Uto  
or Wadjet, left, Temple of  
Horus, Edfu, Luxor, Nile Valley, Egypt



## 1. EGYPT

- the ruler cult
- the „divine essence“ of the ruler
- difference: divinity was a public matter for centuries
- Starting point – a close relationship between Ptolemaic monarchy and Egyptian cults
- from the cult of the deceased



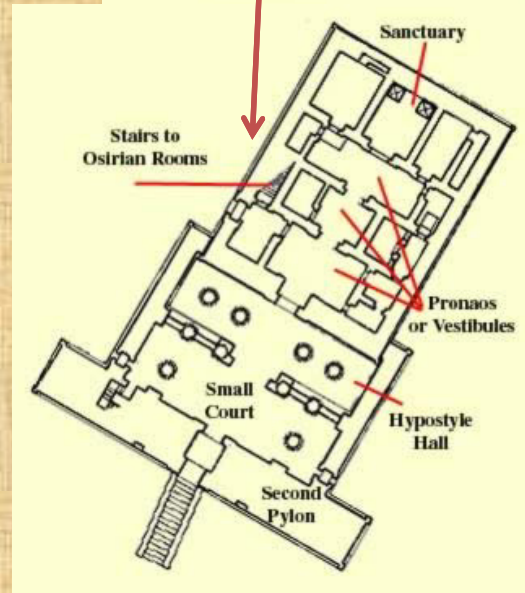
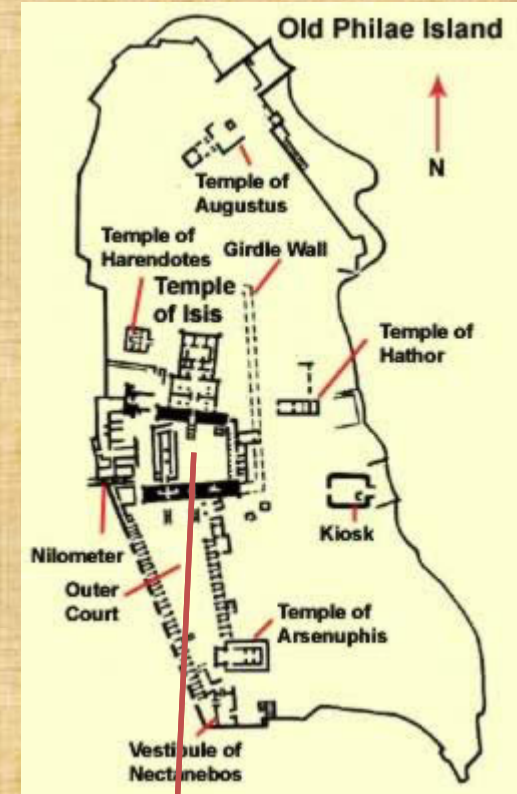
Gold octodrachm – reverse capita iugata of Ptolemy II and Arsinoe – legend “of the siblings – ἀδελφῶν”, obverse – capita iugata of Ptolemy I Soter and his wife Berenice I – “of the gods - θεῶν”

## Temple of Isis on the isle of Philae

- the **cult centre of Isis** during the Ptolemaic Period
- dedicated to Isis and Osiris
- **reliefs and inscriptions**



Temple of Isis, the island of Philae







Ptolemy II in Pharaonic costume offering to Isis (also Augustus depicted in the Pharaonic costume in front of Isis and Harpocrates).

- Octavian-Augustus and Ptolemic predecessors names

## 2. HELLENISTIC WORLD

- hellenistic cults
- **religion**
- **politics**
- **ruler cult**

Hellenistic rulers – cults of benefactors, saviours from dangers and founders of cities

- heroic honours
- switch to divine honours

Crucial conditions: AUTOCRATIC RULE  
EXTERNAL TO THE POLIS  
AT LEAST A BIT GREEK

**Why not earlier?**



**Examples of cult:**

**Macedonia** – cults of Macedonians before and after Alexander – rare

Macedonian towns

**Philip**

**Alexander the Great**



Alexander the Great, Alexandria, Egypt, 2<sup>nd</sup> / 1<sup>st</sup> century BC

## **Antigonus I Monophtalmus (Antigonus the One-eyed) and his son Demetrius Poliorcetes (the Besieger)**

- the end of the 4th century BC , by Athens

- a) power to offer protection to Athens
- b) vengeance against those who had attacked them

### **Essential feature of divinity for Greeks**

The hellenistic ruler **never declared himself divine**

Marble bust of Demetrius I Poliorcetes. Roman copy from 1st century AD of a Greek original from 3rd century BC





**Antiochus III, Syria**

-liberation of Iasos 197 BC

- Laodice III

**Teos**

**Kings are gods not heroes**

Distinction: funeral

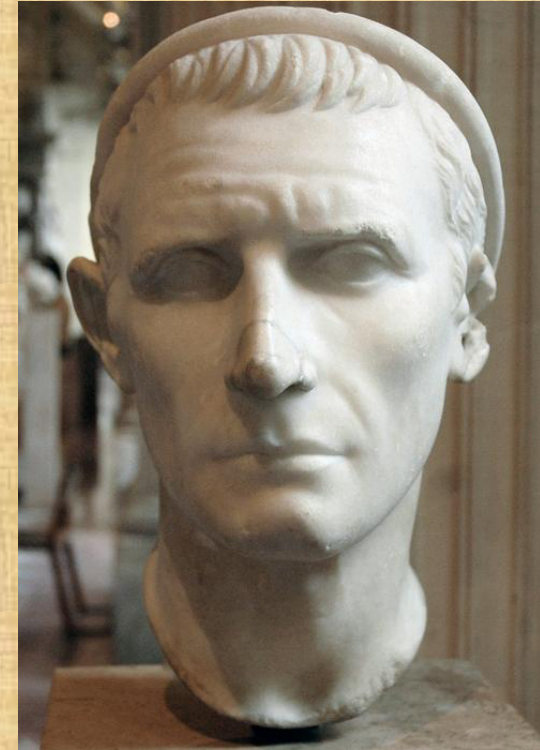
*thysia*

*enhagisma*

„heroic honours“ – Alexander the Great

Heroes

Ruler cult



Antiochus III, Louvre

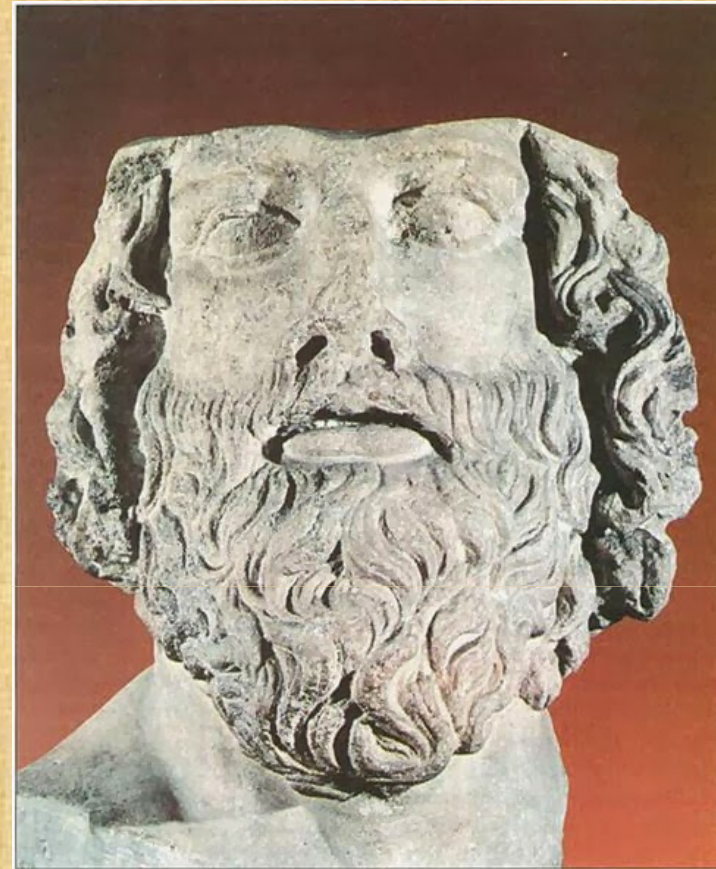
### 3. GREEK CITIES

**Lysander** – Spartan general, 5<sup>th</sup> /4<sup>th</sup> century BC

- cult on Samos

- a) altar
- b) sacrifices
- c) cultic songs
- d) the festival of Hera the Lysandreaia

- no reference to a cult statue or to a shrine.



Lysander



Divine cult of individual citizens – the end of the 2nd century BC

**Diodorus Pasparos at Pergamum**

-city lost its freedom – Mithridatic War against Rome (88-85 BC)

-Diodorus – went to Rome

-series of divine honours

- *isotheoi timai*



Diodoros Pasparos – the cult statue from his sanctuary



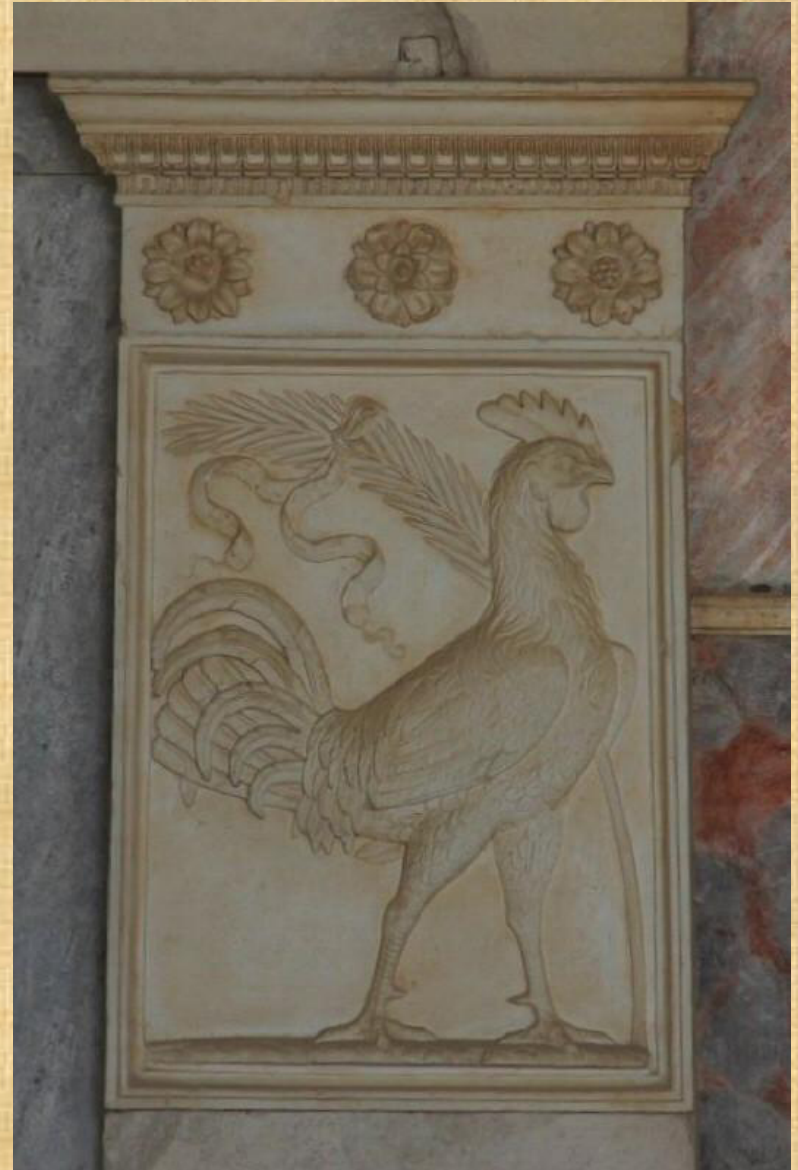


Heroon of Diadoros Paspáros – the cult room and odeon, Pergamon





Heroon of Diadoros Paspáros – the cult room and odeon, Pergamon – marble panels



## 4. ROME

I Public sphere

*The regal period*

e.g. Romulus

**Servius Tullius**

**Army leaders – triumph**



A triumph – in the regal period awarded to: Romulus (?), Ancus Marcius, Tarquinius Priscus, Servius Tullius, Tarquinius Superbus and some generals (*Fasti triumphales*)



*The republican period*

the cult of important individuals (imperatores):

**a) Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus**

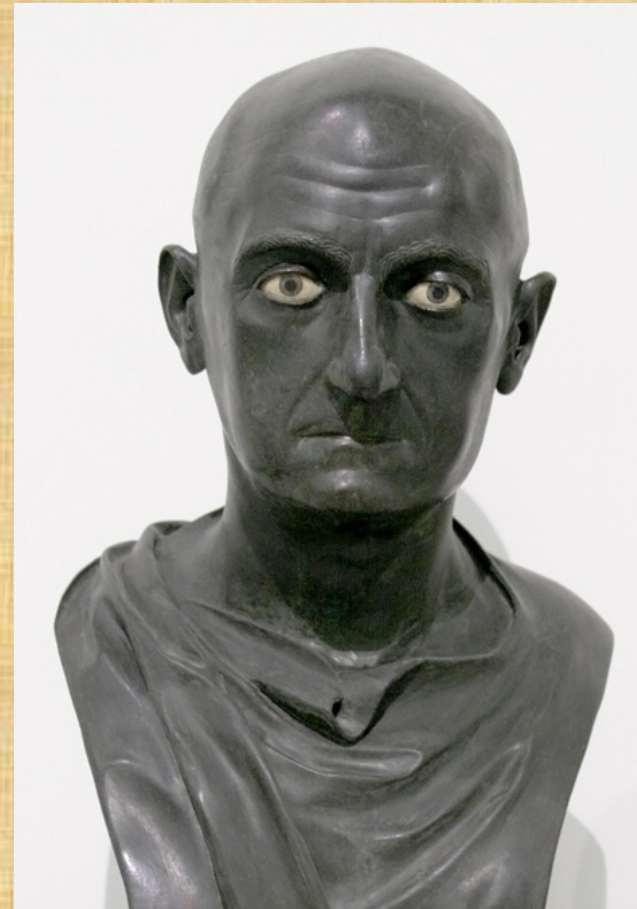
Apotheosis

**b) Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus**

- statues
- sacrifices

**c) Marius Gratidianus**

85 BC - statues



Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus, bronze,  
Naples, National Archaeological Museum

**d) Pompey**

-honours - the Greek cities in Asia Minor

- Miletopolis

- his dominion is „universal“

- Ilion

- in the East



Pompey the Great, marble bust, Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen



## e) Julius Caesar

- divine honours

### three main phases of the Senate's honours:

1. after the battle of Thapsus
2. the battle of Munda “
3. the last months of Caesar's life



Julius Caesar, bronze, Altes Museum, Berlin

## Cassius Dio, Roman History, book XLIV (the list of honours granted to Julius Caesar by the Senate)

The privileges that were granted him, in addition to all those mentioned, were as follows in number and nature; for I shall name them all together, even if they were not all proposed or passed at one time. 2 First, then, they voted that he should **always ride**, even in the city itself, **wearing the triumphal dress**, and should **sit in his chair** of state everywhere except at the games; for at those he received the privilege of watching the contests from the tribunes' benches in company with those who were tribunes at the time. 3 And they gave him the **right to offer spolia opima**, as they are called, at the temple of Jupiter Feretrius, as if he had slain some hostile general with his own hand, and **to have lictors** who always carried laurel, and **after the Feriae Latinae to ride from the Alban Mount into the city on horseback**. 4 In addition to these remarkable privileges they named him **father of his country**, stamped **this title on the coinage**, voted to **celebrate his birthday by public sacrifice**, ordered that he should have a **statue in the cities** and in **all the temples of Rome**, 5 and they set up **two also on the rostra**, one representing him as the saviour of the citizens and the other as the deliverer of the city from siege, and wearing the crowns customary for such achievements. They also resolved **to build a temple of Concordia Nova**, on the ground that it was through his efforts that they enjoyed peace, and to celebrate an annual festival in her honour. 5 When he had accepted these, they assigned to him the charge **of filling the Pontine marshes, cutting a canal** through the Peloponnesian isthmus, **and constructing a new senate-house**, since that of Hostilius, although repaired, had been demolished. 2 The reason assigned for its destruction was that a temple of Felicitas was to be built there, which Lepidus, indeed, brought to completion while master of the horse; but their real purpose was that the name of Sulla should not be preserved on it, and that another **senate-house**, newly constructed, might be **named the Julian**, even as they had called the **month in which he was born July**, and **one of the tribes**, selected by lot, **the Julian**. 3 And they voted that Caesar should be **sole censor for life** and should enjoy **the immunities granted to the tribunes**, so that if any one insulted him by deed or word, that man should be an outlaw and accursed, and further **that Caesar's son**, should he beget or even adopt one, should be **appointed high priest**. 61 As he seemed to like all this, a gilded chair was granted him, and a garb that the kings had once used, and **body-guard of knights and senators**; furthermore they decided that **prayers** should be offered for him **publicly every year**, that they should swear by Caesar's Fortune, and should regard as valid all his future acts. 2 Next they bestowed upon him a quadrennial festival, as to a hero, and a third priestly college, which they called the Julian, as overseers of the Lupercalia, and one special day of his own each time in connection with all gladiatorial combats both in Rome and the rest of Italy. 3 When he showed himself pleased with these honours also, they accordingly voted that his **golden chair and his crown** set with precious gems and overlaid with gold should **be carried into the theatres in the same manner as those of the gods**, and that on the occasion of the games in the Circus his chariot should be brought in. And finally they **addressed him outright as Jupiter Julius** and ordered a **temple to be consecrated to him** and to his Clemency, electing **Antony as their priest like some flamen Dialis**.



## The death of Julius Caesar and the process of his deification:

March 44 BC

- a) The corpse
- b) Marc Anthony
- c) Caesar's wounds
- d) Cremated





## The Temple of Divus Iulius

- dedicated: August 18<sup>th</sup> , 29 BC - erected by Augustus
- podium (opus cementicum)
- ionic, composite or corinthian style?
- destroyed





**The events after Caesar's death:**

July 44 BC

September 44 BC

Beginning 42 BC

40 BC



Marcus Antonius, marble, Vatican Museums, Rome

## II Private sphere

Divine honours – in the private sphere - „*paterfamilias*“

„*paterfamilias*“

Sources



Lararium, Pompeii



The object of worship: *Genius* (*paterfamilias*), Juno (the life force of women)

*Genius*

**earliest sources**

**rituals**

**representation**



House of the Vetii: decoration

*Lararium*

*Lares*

14-12 BC - the worship of the Genius  
formally declared







Lararia, Pompeii





Lararium of the House of Menander, Pompeii





Lararium from Pompeii, National Archaeological Museum, Naples



The emperor cult is the practice of assimilating emperor and deity

In the Hellenistic world in 307 BC the hymn sung in honour of Demetrius Poliorctes is the earliest attestation of the ruler as a "present god".

The great leap from the cult of the deceased ancestors to the veneration of living men takes place in Egypt, where the ruler cult is the strongest in the 14<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, when the living siblings Ptolemy II and his sister/wife Arsinoe II were deified.

In the Greek cities the divine cult of individual citizens can be found towards the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, one of the earliest cases is the cult of Diodorus Paspasros at Pergamon.

Also in the Roman world, in private/public relations, it had been usual for a long time to address a man with emphatic epithets and to honour him: this is the case of the relation patronus/clients, the patron is the benefactor of his clients

The object of worship in the household was the Genius of the paterfamilias. The worshippers were freedmen and slaves.

The development of intersections between the ideology of patronage and of Hellenistic kingship.