

Buthrotum's sacred topography and the imperial cult, I: the west courtyard and pavement inscription

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The sacred topography of cities throughout the empire was transformed under Augustus.¹ The remodeling of sacred spaces and buildings, the proliferation of sacred images and references to Augustus, and the redefinition of local cults within an imperial system — in effect, the emergence of the imperial cult — all affected provincial centers, where political and divine powers were expressed through art and monumental architecture. The imperial cult was a complex phenomenon, involving an interplay between imperial expectations and local initiatives. It was reinforced through a variety of media, from a new iconography of coinage to a new epigraphy of “monumental writing” across the Mediterranean. The imperial message promised a golden age of peace through divine intervention, cultural rectitude through *pietas*, and prosperity through the beneficence of the emperor. Colonies founded by Caesar and Augustus in the provinces responded fervently and competitively to the Augustan message, while aiming to enhance their already-considerable imperial favor. Although all colonial enterprises occurred through negotiations between natives and colonists, as new foundations colonies had the freedom to reconstruct and to redefine their cities on a scale that was unimaginable elsewhere. The imperial cult was a driving mechanism behind transformations that provided colonies with direct lines of communication to the emperor through embassies and imperial clientage. Colonial cities regularly instituted festivals, processions and associations, and they built statues, shrines, temples and other monuments in honor of the emperor. Civic observances of the imperial cult took place in a variety of places and buildings at and near the forum.² As a result, the sacred topography of colonies is an important topic when one considers their urban landscape.

This article is the first of two to examine the sacred topography of *Buthrotum* in Epirus (Butrint in southern Albania). The results follow from fieldwork conducted by the Butrint Foundation (BF) and the Roman Forum Excavations (RFE) Project between 2004 and 2014 (fig. 1). The bipartite study offers a comprehensive re-evaluation of the urban center while presenting new archaeological findings. Part I focuses on the sacred spaces at the W end of the urban center, which includes the west courtyard and its associated buildings; Part II will treat the sanctuary of Asklepios and the forum (figs. 2-3).

The colony was founded in 44 B.C. through the agency of Julius Caesar. As in the case of the contemporary colonies at Corinth and Carthage, colonists consisted of Roman citizens

¹ S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and power: the Roman imperial cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge 1984) 136-46; S. E. Alcock, *Graecia capta: the landscapes of Roman Greece* (Cambridge 1993) 181-99; I. Gradel, *Emperor worship and Roman religion* (Oxford 2002) 73-103; B. Burrell, *Neokoroi: Greek cities and Roman emperors* (Leiden 2004); V. Evangelidis, “The architecture of the imperial cult in the agoras of the Greek cities,” *Egnatia* 12 (2008) 125-44; F. Camia and M. Kantiréa, “The imperial cult in the Peloponnese,” in A. D. Rizakis and C. E. Lepenioti (edd.), *Roman Peloponnes III: society, economy and culture under the Roman Empire* (Meletémata 63, 2010) 375-406; A. J. S. Spawforth, *Greece and the Augustan cultural revolution* (Cambridge 2012) 159-69; M. Koortbojian, *The divinization of Caesar and Augustus* (Cambridge 2013).

² Price *ibid.* 136-37; H. Hänlein-Schäfer, *Veneratio Augusti: Eine Studie zu den Tempeln der ersten römischen Kaisers* (Rome 1985) 26-47.