

Worshipping the emperor(s): a new temple of the imperial cult at Eretria and the ancient destruction of its statues

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Introduction

In Greece, as in the E Mediterranean as a whole, the ruler-cult was well established during the Hellenistic period, but whereas in the Attalid, Seleucid and Ptolemaic kingdoms the same dynasty had ruled for centuries and the cult of the living ruler and the dynastic cult were stable institutions, the ruler-cult in Greece, though at first part of the Macedonian kingdom, was affected by the series of rulers of different dynasties who followed one another in rapid succession.¹ This led to a large number of dedications for and offerings by Hellenistic rulers in Greece. Roman Republican leaders and figures were also subject to specific honours in Greece from an early stage.² Compared to the excesses of rulers such as Demetrios Poliorketes, the well-organized and at first rather modest cult for the Roman emperors must have seemed a distinct improvement.³ After the behaviour of previous Roman leaders the Greeks were probably relieved at Augustus's attitude towards cultic honours, and it is no surprise that the imperial cult was widely diffused in Greece, as literary sources and inscriptions show. Almost every city must have had one or more places for the worship of the emperors and their families, but archaeological evidence for the cult has remained rather slim and the only two attested Sebasteia or Kaisareia (at Gytheion and Messene) are known only from inscriptions.⁴ The Metroon at Olympia is the only specific building in which an imperial cult is attested on good archaeological evidence.⁵ Statues of an emperor and perhaps a personification of Roma found at Thessaloniki point to a Sebasteion there.⁶ Athens must have had more than one building where the emperor was worshipped.⁷ At Beroia a provincial sanctuary for the imperial cult of Macedonia has been posited.⁸ Yet even at the Roman colony of Corinth, the location of the temple for the imperial cult is far from clear, all of which underlines the interest of a building at Eretria which we identify with the municipal temple for the imperial cult.⁹

- 1 On the special conditions for the Hellenistic ruler cult in Greece, see R. Mellor, *ΘΕΑ ΡΩΜΗ. The worship of the goddess Roma in the Greek world* (Göttingen 1975) 97-107; C. Habicht, *Gottmenschentum und griechische Städte* (Zetemata 14, 1970); F. Walbank, *Chiron* 17 (1987) 365-82.
- 2 Mellor *ibid.* For parallels in Asia Minor see K. Tuchelt, *Frühe Denkmäler Roms in Kleinasien* (Tübingen 1979); for dedications of Hellenistic kings to Greek sanctuaries see K. Bringmann and H. v. Steuben (edd.), *Schenkungen hellenistischer Herrscher an griechische Städte und Heiligtümer I* (Berlin 1995); B. Hintzen-Bohlen, *Herrscherrepräsentation im Hellenismus* (Cologne 1992).
- 3 On the initial differences between Greek and Roman understanding of how to worship a Roman emperor, see S. R. F. Price, "Gods and emperors. The Greek language of the Roman imperial cult," *JHS* 104 (1984) 79-95; on Demetrios see Walbank (*supra* n.1) 370 f.
- 4 See Hänlein-Schäfer 1985, 160 ff.; cf. Trummer 1980, 157-65. P. Themelis has proposed identifying the N part of the sanctuary of Asklepios with the Sebasteion of Messene (*Prakt* 1991, 102 f.). For further epigraphic evidence see C. Hoët-van Cauwenberghé, *ZPE* 125 (1999) 177-81.
- 5 Paus. 5.20.9: 'A temple of no great size in the Doric style they have called down to the present day Metroön, keeping its ancient name. No image lies in it of the Mother of the Gods, but there stand in it statues of Roman emperors' (Loeb transl.). Excavations revealed several statues of members of the imperial family and some inscriptions (Hitzl 1991; C. Böhme, *Princeps und Polis* (Munich 1995) 94-96; Trummer 1980, 167-73).
- 6 Karanastasi 1995, 210 n.6; D. Pandermalis, *Klio* 65 (1983) 161 f.
- 7 For the small monopteros in front of the Parthenon see Hänlein-Schäfer 1985, 156 ff.; P. Baldassarri, *ΣΕΒΑΣΤΩΙ ΣΩΤΗΡΙ* (Rome 1998) 45-63. Generally on the imperial cult at Athens see M. C. Hoff, "The politics and architecture of the Athenian imperial cult," in Small 1996, 185-200.
- 8 L. Brocas-Deflassieux, *Beroia, cité de Macédoine* (Beroia 1999) 78-82 with refs.
- 9 For Corinth see M. E. H. Walbank, *JRA* 10 (1997) 95-103; *ead.* in Small 1996, 201-13. For a good intro-