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Hadrian's Divinity: Overcompensating in Athens

Brandon Schultz

“You don’t give me good advice, my friends...when you don’t allow me to believe the man who possesses thirty legions to be more learned than anyone else!” once remarked the prominent rhetorician Favorinus after his friends chided him for conceding to Hadrian.¹ Keen to flex his intellectual prowess, Hadrian had criticized a word Favorinus used, and rather than defend himself against this charge—as his friends wished—Favorinus simply capitulated, acknowledging Hadrian’s unimpeachably supreme status in the process. In fact, in his remark to his friends, Favorinus highlighted how Hadrian’s military power granted him primacy in most matters—even those outside the typical purview of military and political affairs. Serving as emperor from 117 to 138 CE,² Hadrian relished and, most importantly, maximized his preeminence to overhaul the Roman Empire. However, despite his worldly supremacy, the realm of the divine continued to outrank him. While Roman emperors traditionally enjoyed a deified status after death, leaders like Hadrian needed to maintain divisions between their mortal rule and the trappings of full divinity in order to avoid dreaded monarchical associations—a fact that clashed with Hadrian’s Hellenistic obsessions. Fortunately, Hadrian found the ideal outlet for his Hellenism and divine pretensions in the Greek city of Athens. With his massive building programs throughout the empire, Hadrian managed to replicate the grandeur of the Hellenistic leaders he admired, and particularly in Athens, his building programs allowed him to pursue his divine self-styling while simultaneously spreading and consolidating Roman influence. Specifically, Hadrian’s divine pretensions and hunger

¹ Aelius Spartinaus, “Hadrian,” in *Lives of the Later Caesars*, trans. Anthony Birley (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 74.

² *Ibid.*, 61-83.

for supremacy led him to renovate Athens, spread his own ruler cult, and strengthen the entire Roman empire.

Hadrian's Hellenism

Crucially, Hadrian's fascination with Greek studies and Hellenistic beliefs informed his divine pretensions and construction pursuits as emperor. As a young boy, Hadrian, according to biographer Aelius Spartianus, "immersed himself rather enthusiastically in Greek studies—in fact he was so attracted in this direction that some people used to call him 'little Greek.'"³ Hadrian's passion for Greek culture became such a defining feature of his character that he earned a memorable nickname to commemorate his interest in the subject. Before his military and political career even properly began, he zealously studied and absorbed information regarding the Hellenistic period, where influential Greek culture reigned dominant and people worshipped their rulers. Tracing the effects of this early enchantment with Hellenism in the relics from Hadrian's rule, historian and archaeologist Anthony Richard Birley noted that

a bronze statue of Hadrian, slightly over life size, has been found [in Syria Palestina]...the torso may, indeed, have been reused and could once have belonged to a statue of a Hellenistic king—it would have been peculiarly appropriate if the head replaced by that of Hadrian had been that of Antiochus Epiphanes.⁴

Rather than simply imitate Hellenistic design, this large construction apparently relied on the actual figure from an older statue of a king from that period, so the addition of Hadrian's face to the project literalized Hadrian's obsession with and desire to replicate Hellenistic culture. Moreover, Birley's speculation that

³ Ibid, 57.

⁴ Anthony Richard Birley, *Hadrian: The Restless Emperor*, (London: Psychology Press, 1997), 276.

the initial statue depicted Antiochus Epiphanes, who sought to unite an Asiatic empire on a foundation of Greek ideals,⁵ further illuminated Hadrian's similar aspirations. Ultimately, Hadrian exhibited a fierce devotion to Hellenistic stylings that continued through the constructions of his imperial reign.

Of course, Hadrian's Hellenism not only satisfied his stylistic preferences—it also encapsulated his sweeping vision for both the empire and his rule. As historian W. Den Boer asserted in his analysis of Hadrian's Hellenistic inspirations, Hadrian's "passion [for imitation] was not just arbitrary; it was consciously made to serve his ideal of consolidation of ideas and customs, forms and contents, and of welding together the nations of the unified empire which he ruled."⁶ For Den Boer, Hadrian emulated—and, in some cases, reused—Hellenistic art because it reflected his dreams of unifying the empire in the style of the older kings and the Greek cultures he studied and admired. By imposing a cohesive approach to design and thought throughout the empire, Hadrian could fulfill his almost divine aspiration to mold the vast empire in accordance with his own Hellenistic vision.

Exposing a darker interpretation of these plans for the Roman Empire, classical scholar Francis R. Walton pointed to historian W. Weber, who concluded that Hadrian's "despotic striving towards the divine in all the world, the self-enhancement of his mysterious power, its setting forth for show in the image of the highest god of the Greeks and Romans, tokens of his intoxicating illusionism."⁷ While Weber's debatable characterization of Hadrian's Hellenistically inspired actions portrayed the emperor as primarily narcissistic and tyrannical, it most notably highlighted the divine pretensions evident in Hadrian's religiously infused building

⁵ Phillips Barry, "Antiochus IV, Epiphanes," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 29, no. 2 (1910): 126.

⁶ W. Den Boer, "Religion and Literature in Hadrian's Policy," *Mnemosyne* 8, no. 2 (1955): 141.

⁷ Francis R. Walton, "Religious Thought in the Age of Hadrian," *Numen* 4, no. 3 (1957): 165-66.

projects and designs. In pursuing upgrades inspired by his Hellenism, Hadrian displayed a belief that he, like a deity, could consolidate the empire with a shared culture that virtuously strove toward self-improvement and the divine, prompting him to seek construction opportunities to express his divine self-stylings.

Roman Emperors: Walking the Line Between Ruler and God

However, Hadrian's efforts to operate like the divine in his building projects conflicted with the nature of the imperial office and the post-death deification process. In his historical account of Severus's death in his *History of the Empire*, Herodian described this process: "it is normal Roman practice to deify emperors who die leaving behind them children as their successors. The name they give to this ceremony is apotheosis."⁸ Traditionally, Roman emperors—assuming a decent rule—became deified upon death, and intriguingly, the Romans called this process apotheosis. This name indicated that emperors only achieved their highest status after death, when they could finally receive worship and godlike treatment from the people. Further describing the deification ceremony, Herodian related that "then from the highest and topmost storey an eagle is released, as if from a battlement, and soars up into the sky with the flames, taking the soul of the emperor from earth to heaven, the Romans believe. After that he is worshipped with the rest of the gods."⁹ Evidently, an emperor's deification ceremony featured enrapturing pyrotechnics and potent symbolism, with the eagle representing the movement of the emperor's soul from the mortal realm to that of the divine. The nature of this tradition also cemented the idea that emperors achieved their divine statuses only after their deaths. For an emperor like Hadrian, who enjoyed his primacy and also enthusiastically studied the divinely worshipped Hellenistic rulers, this unfortunate relationship between death and deification

⁸ Herodian, *History of the Empire, Volume I: Books 1-4*, trans. C. R. Whittaker (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 375.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 383.

inhibited his divine pretensions. To accomplish his sweeping vision for the empire, Hadrian needed to leverage the godlike power of his office while living.

Unfortunately for Hadrian, the Roman people maintained a high level of distrust for rulers who associated themselves too closely with the gods. Detailing this phenomenon, Paul Zanker, an expert in Roman art and archaeology, explained that “for the Romans, the gods were used like poetic epithets, an intellectualized formulation of virtues, not, as in Hellenistic art, as the direct realization of the divinely inspired ruler.”¹⁰ In terms of imagery, emperors needed to appear as virtuous and mortal citizens—not gods on earth—and Hellenistic art clashed with these values, encouraging ruler cults and portraying rulers as possessing divine characteristics. For Romans devoted to avoiding the tyranny of a self-deified autocrat, rulers with overt connections to the gods, such as those created through Hellenistic art, posed a threat. For example, in his description of Caligula’s decline, historian Suetonius noted a dangerous transformation in the emperor’s public appearance, revealing that Caligula “even dressed up as Venus, and long before his expedition he wore the uniform of a triumphant general, often embellished with the breastplate which he had stolen from the tomb of Alexander the Great.”¹¹ Beyond posing as a deity, Caligula also wore Alexander the Great’s armor, recalling the divinity of both Alexander and the later Hellenistic rulers. These public actions exposed Caligula’s divine self-stylings, encouraging rebellions against him and exacerbating his downfall. Emperors who overplayed their Hellenism and divine pretensions repudiated tradition and thus met violent fates, so inspired rulers like Hadrian needed to carefully implement their visions.

¹⁰ Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Chicago: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 235.

¹¹ Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, *The Twelve Caesars*, trans. Robert Graves (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), 173.

Despite the public's animosity toward rulers with divine pretensions, Hadrian and the other emperors, as rulers, benefited from some divine associations, distinguishing themselves amongst the population. As historian P. A. Brunt noted in his discussion of the emperor's divinity, "the assertion that he was divine did not, however, exclude the possibility that he was also inspired, protected or chosen to rule by the gods, or by Jupiter in particular."¹² Naturally, given the tremendous power of the imperial office in Roman society, the emperor relied on some form of religious authority in order to rule, so he enjoyed implicit benefits from divine approval. That said, the emperor could also intentionally leverage these associations to boost his own power—a technique Augustus perfected. When Phraates returned the standards to avoid conflict with Rome, Augustus, according to Dio, "took great pride in the settlement" and "gave orders that sacrifices should be voted in honour of his success and that a temple for Mars Ultor, in which the standards were to be dedicated, should be built on the Capitol in imitation of that of Jupiter Feretrius."¹³ Strategically, Augustus transformed the celebration of the recovered standards into an opportunity to praise his rule and appreciate his associations with the gods. In addition to housing the standards in a new temple, Augustus ensured that the public associated their religiously significant retrieval to his abilities as a ruler, so that when people thought or witnessed the standards, they would also consider Augustus's divine achievement in reclaiming them. This strategy boosted Augustus's power and influence, demonstrating to Hadrian how rulers could meticulously manipulate divine associations to maximize their authority—a technique he would employ in his Eastern building programs to further unite the empire under his divinely styled rule.

¹² P.A. Brunt, "Divine Elements in the Imperial Office," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 69 (1979): 169.

¹³ Cassius Dio, *The Roman History: The Reign of Augustus*, trans. Ian Scott-Kilvert (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 162.

Like Augustus, Hadrian recognized the inherent divinity of the imperial office. Analyzing the godliness of the emperor, archaeologist and Ancient Rome specialist Paul Veyne revealed that “the word ‘god’ did not have the same meaning in pagan antiquity as for Christians; to pagans it meant a being on a higher plane than mortals, but not transcendent like the giant Being of the monotheisms...Therefore calling a man a god was hyperbole but not nonsense.”¹⁴ According to Veyne, in antiquity, the term god could simply refer to someone elevated above mortals, and since the emperor clearly enjoyed a higher authority and status than most mortals, the ancient definition of god seemed fitting. In the mold of Augustus before him, Hadrian understood the tremendous power of his position, thus he grappled with the fact that, practically, he functioned as a godlike figure in Roman society, especially in terms of concentration of power. This followed the advice given to Augustus that Dio attributed to Maecenas: “while any distinctions which you grant to others do honour to them, nothing that is voted to you can give you a higher rank than you already possess, and it would be hard to dissociate a suspicion of falsity from the very act of bestowing it.”¹⁵ The emperor enjoyed the highest status available to mortals, so—as Maecenas cautioned—an emperor groveling for further distinctions would appear petty and needlessly indulgent. This advice helped Augustus expand his concept of the imperial office, prompting him to maintain the necessary divisions between the mortal and divine realms while simultaneously wielding an unprecedented, virtually godlike amount of power. In this regard, both Hadrian and Augustus learned to embrace the natural supremacy of their position to fulfill their visions for bettering the empire. Consequently, by leveraging the full authority of his monumental office, Hadrian could dramatically transform the empire with a power akin to that of a deity.

¹⁴ Paul Veyne, “What Was a Roman Emperor? Emperor, Therefore a God,” *Diogenes* 50, no. 3 (2003): 15.

¹⁵ Dio, *The Roman History: The Reign of Augustus*, 119.

Building Programs as Coded Expressions of Divinity

Although his nuanced understanding of the imperial office led him to leverage the implicit authority of his position, Hadrian still sought to pursue his Hellenistic plans for the empire and his reign, prompting him, like Augustus, to enact several large-scale building programs. As Walton noted, “Augustus, too, as is well known, in his attempt to revive Roman religion had relied heavily on the psychological effect of restoring the ruined temples of the long-neglected gods. Here Hadrian carried on the policy established by Augustus.”¹⁶ Charting the similarities between the two emperors, Walton highlighted how Hadrian adopted Augustus’s policy of spreading Roman influence through the restoration of ruins. By revitalizing and embracing the deities of older time periods and foreign lands, Augustus and Hadrian ingratiated themselves, and the Roman empire, with new communities, thus boosting Rome’s prominence and clout. According to classical scholar Mary T. Boatwright, a core component of Hadrian’s building programs involved his work on remodeling distinguished Hellenistic temples, which gained sufficient donations because they related “to the Roman proclivity for large-scale projects...and to Hadrian’s own architectural interests,” leading to designs that “plainly [recalled] temples planned by Hermogenes and other Hellenistic architects.”¹⁷ For Hadrian in particular, these building programs offered the ideal opportunity for him to pursue and propagate his Hellenistic interests throughout the empire. Moreover, through the act of commissioning new construction in a decidedly Hellenistic mold, Hadrian managed to work toward satisfying his vision of consolidating the empire under his own personal stylistic preferences and ideals. Befitting his singular status, Hadrian—through his building programs—literally shaped the empire’s landscape.

¹⁶ Walton, “Religious Thought in the Age of Hadrian,” 167.

¹⁷ Mary T. Boatwright, *Hadrian and the Cities of the Roman Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 129.

Naturally, Hadrian's building programs and Hellenistic ideals converged at Athens, where the emperor found himself directly interacting with a principal site of the culture he so greatly admired. Describing Hadrian's storied relationship with the Greek city, Birley reported that "Hadrian liked Athens," and "Athens, in turn, liked Hadrian. He was invited to become an Athenian citizen, and, when the offer was accepted, was made a member of the deme Besa."¹⁸ Apparently, the Athenians reciprocated Hadrian's enthusiasm for their culture with citizenship and neighborhood membership. Furthermore, in Athens in 112 CE, "Hadrian was then elected *archon eponymus*—in other words, was to hold the ancient chief magistracy, and the Athenian year would take his name."¹⁹ So, by the time Hadrian became emperor, he had already fostered noteworthy connections with Athens. In fact, the prestigious honorifics he received, such as the chief magistracy position, indicated that Hadrian actually improved the quality of life for the Athenians, making them especially susceptible to his later building program.

Pointing to another reason why the city marked the ideal site for Hadrian's Hellenistic building efforts, archaeological scholar T. Leslie Shear Jr. referenced Athens's pre-Hadrian depression, asserting that "when Hadrian's extensive building program at Athens is set against the background of century-long depression...the enormous outlay of imperial funds for lavish buildings takes on its proper proportion as a truly staggering reversal in the city's fortunes."²⁰ Given Athens's painfully long depression, Hadrian's grand decision to utilize the empire's funds to rejuvenate the city certainly enhanced his status among the Athenian community. Like the Hellenistic kings that intrigued him, Hadrian mobilized his considerable economic power to rebuild and renovate the depressed Athens in hopes of restoring the city to its

¹⁸ Birley, *Hadrian*, 63-64.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

²⁰ T. Leslie Shear Jr., "Athens: From City-State to Provincial Town," *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens* 50, no. 4 (1981): 372-73.

former glory. Through this construction, Hadrian managed to both enhance the empire's influence in the eastern territories and entertain divine pretensions by realizing his Hellenistic aspirations.

One crucial aspect of Hadrian's building program in Athens involved the measured introduction of Roman design elements into the Greek cityscape. Noting the emperor's devotion to Greek culture, Shear reflected that Hadrian's "architects adorned the city with the most Roman of Athenian buildings...There is here at work the eclectic spirit which could fuse together disparate elements of the two classical cultures and through that fusion could produce the distinctive cultural amalgam of the High Empire."²¹ Despite Hadrian's Hellenistic obsessions, Shear found that the emperor's building programs bore significant evidence of unquestionably Roman design. Of course, Hadrian's ability to blend the distinct cultures of his empire and his favorite subject of study accorded with his Hellenistically inspired ideals of consolidating and unifying the land he controlled. By blending cultural designs, Hadrian spread Roman influence while respecting the original culture, further ingratiating himself in Athens.

In addition to the mixture of styles, the building program also emphasized the decadence of Hellenistic art. The geographer Pausanias, who visited the city during his travels, described how "Hadrian constructed other buildings also for the Athenians...most famous of all, a hundred pillars of Phrygian marble...And there are rooms there adorned with a gilded roof and with alabaster stone, as well as with statues and paintings. In them are kept books."²² Through this account, Pausanias provided a basis for comprehending the scope and grandeur of the building program in Athens; his description of the fine, luxury materials that composed this library and other buildings captured the likely costliness of the project. Ostensibly, Athens allowed Hadrian to indulge his Hellenistic self-stylings as an unequaled and massively influential

²¹ Ibid., 377.

²² Pausanias, *Description of Greece, Volume I: Books 1-2*, trans. W. H. S. Jones (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1918), 93.

ruler through the construction of extravagant edifices and public facilities. Through these lavish Athenian building programs, the powerful Hadrian, like a deity, dramatically altered life in Athens while implementing the unifying effect of his Hellenistic vision, bringing the empire further under his control.

Building Hadrian's Godhood in Athens

Beyond the conspicuous luxury of his buildings like the library, Hadrian's emphasis on revitalizing religious constructions contributed to his growing influence as a practical god in the Eastern, Hellenistically inspired regions of the empire. In particular, the Arch of Hadrian, another critical piece of construction, revealed the emperor's deepening religious relationship with the city. On the subject of the Arch's inscriptions, historian Alison Adams asserted that "on the architrave of the east and west facades...the usual translation is: on the west—(a) This is Athens the ancient city of Theseus; and on the east—(b) This is the city of Hadrian and not of Theseus."²³ According to Adams, the Arch's inscriptions simultaneously honored Athens's original dedication to Theseus and commemorated Hadrian's newfound ownership of the city. Most notably, the inscriptions also placed the mortal Hadrian beside the classical hero Theseus, further solidifying Hadrian's proximity to the divine. Moreover, in her analysis of the significance of the Arch's inscriptions, Boatwright suggested that since "east of the arch no new Hadrianic "city" or city quarter has been discerned, and west of the arch the "ancient" city bore Hadrian's imprint," then "the inscriptions make a fallacious distinction: Hadrian's Athens is inseparable from what came before."²⁴ Supporting Adams' interpretation of the meaning of the Arch's inscriptions, Boatwright further illuminated the comprehensive scope of Hadrian's building program, for he rebuilt the city while respecting the original design, making his Athens

²³ Alison Adams, "The Arch of Hadrian at Athens," *Bulletin of the Classical Studies* 36, no. 55 (1989): 10.

²⁴ Boatwright, *Hadrian and the Cities of the Roman Empire*, 147.

“inseparable” from its predecessor. Once again, Hadrian—in his divine-like striving toward unity—preserved as much of the original culture as possible while imposing his own sensibilities through the building program.

Despite the Arch of Hadrian’s evidence of the emperor’s Hellenistic achievement, the Olympieion, a massive temple for Zeus, was perhaps the most religiously potent project for Hadrian in the entire Athens building program. According to classical archaeologist R. E. Wycherley, construction on the temple began roughly 650 years before Hadrian,²⁵ who began finishing the remaining work around 124/5 CE and finally dedicated the entire construct in 131/2 CE.²⁶ Due to this extremely lengthy construction period, Hadrian’s completion of the project signified a long-unrealized goal for the Athenians, enhancing his already imposing stature in the city. During his visit to the site, Pausanias described the temple and its statue as “one worth seeing, which in size exceeds all other statues save the colossi at Rhodes and Rome, and is made of ivory and gold with an artistic skill which is remarkable when the size is taken into account.”²⁷ The immense temple impressed even the well-traveled Pausanias with its sheer size and rich materials, and Pausanias also recorded Hadrian’s noticeable connection to the temple, reporting that “before the entrance...stand statues of Hadrian, two of Thasian stone, two of Egyptian.”²⁸ Evidently, Hadrian’s contribution to the Olympieion merited commemorative statues of fine material to honor the Roman emperor and the impetus he provided to finally finish the project. In response to these figures and other dedications, Wycherley argued that “the Athenian response, shown by innumerable dedications on this site and elsewhere, was not mere sycophancy. Many Athenians must have felt a truly pious pride

²⁵ R. E. Wycherley, “The Olympieion at Athens,” *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 5, no. 3 (1964): 161.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 173.

²⁷ Pausanias, *Description of Greece, Volume I: Books 1-2*, 89.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

and pleasure in seeing the age-old debt to Zeus at last so fully and handsomely paid.”²⁹ Avoiding more obligatory and passionless dedications, Hadrian seemingly won the hearts of the Athenians through his building project—especially at the Olympieion—prompting the Athenians to celebrate him with a sincere affection.

While the completion of the Olympieion greatly endeared Hadrian to the Athenians, the temple also possessed dramatic implications for Hadrian's own divinity and power. In his analysis of religion during Hadrian's reign, Walton acknowledged that “after completing the Olympieion at Athens [Hadrian] even assumed, or accepted, titles appropriate to Zeus, and was styled Olympios, Panhellenios, and Panionios.”³⁰ Removed from the shifty animosity toward divine rulers in Italy, Hadrian seemed to embrace a decidedly divine status in the wake of the Olympieion's dedication. Abandoning his pretenses to simply associate with the gods, Hadrian freely accepted the divine titles the people of Athens lavished upon him for rebuilding their city. In fact, after exploring the nature of Hadrian's other temples to Zeus, historian Barbara Burrell revealed that Hadrian “diverted worship offered to himself into cults of Zeus” and that he “was worshipped in those places neither with nor as Zeus: the enormous temples...were all dedicated to the worship of Hadrian himself, who showed no undue modesty in accepting such tributes.”³¹ According to Burrell, Hadrian attempted to disguise worship of himself—especially in the East, where such practices occurred with greater frequency—through the worship of Zeus. While Hadrian associated himself with Zeus throughout his reign, Burrell asserted that Hadrian relied on Zeus merely as a front for his own ruler cults to worship him as divine. This information matched Walton's description of how Hadrian accepted divine titles after the construction of the Olympieion, indicating that Hadrian's renovation of that temple also fit into his

²⁹ Wycherley, “The Olympieion at Athens,” 174-75.

³⁰ Walton, “Religious Thought in the Age of Hadrian,” 168.

³¹ Barbara Burrell, “Temples of Hadrian, not Zeus,” *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 43, no. 1 (2002): 31-32.

larger pattern of using temples dedicated to Zeus to satisfy his divine pretensions. Astoundingly, Wycherley also found evidence of this scheme, quoting Edward W. Bodnar, who claimed “so great was Hadrian’s achievement that the claim of Zeus to the building faded long before the emperor’s.”³² This detail further cements Hadrian’s exploitation of Zeus’s temples for himself. While Hadrian pursued Hellenistic designs in his building programs, he also craved the worship administered to divine kings, and away from the Italian peninsula in the comfort of his recently rebuilt Athens, Hadrian embraced his divine pretensions.

However, by transforming Athens into a Greek center for his own worship through the building program,³³ Hadrian also strengthened the empire. Classical scholar Anna S. Benjamin found that “under Hadrian the cult of the emperor in the Greek world was closely associated with the emperor’s program of Panhellenism...and Hadrian’s willingness to accept divine honors and his encouragement of Panhellenism have, among many complex motives, the common purpose of the consolidation of the empire.”³⁴ By pursuing self-aggrandizement through massive spending and construction projects, Hadrian elevated Athens, and—most notably—strengthened the Athenians’ connection to the empire by making himself a figure of intense admiration and even worship due to his public works. As a result of building programs including his work in Athens, Hadrian further bolstered the empire in accordance with his unifying, Hellenistically inspired ideals and divine longings.

Ultimately, Hadrian’s desire for supremacy and his divine pretensions led him to renovate Athens, spread his own ruler cult, and strengthen the empire. As the emperor, Hadrian already

³² Wycherley, “The Olympieion at Athens,” 174, note 48.

³³ John M. Camp, *The Archaeology of Athens*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 199.

³⁴ Anna S. Benjamin, “The Altars of Hadrian in Athens and Hadrian’s Panhellenic Program,” *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens* 32, no. 1 (1963): 57.

enjoyed tremendous, virtually unparalleled power, but, as his enthusiastic Greek studies revealed, other rulers, such as the Hellenistic kings, had benefited from superior, divine connections, which Hadrian could not fully leverage until after the deification process at his funeral. For Hadrian, these Hellenistic rulers served as models, informing his personal visions of unifying the empire under his consolidating ideals. Of course, Roman emperors needed to avoid overt displays of Hellenistic connections to the divine, but strategic rulers like Augustus—and Hadrian—learned to maximize the implicit authority and supremacy of the imperial office to enact their agendas while also benefiting from mere associations with the gods. In this mode, both Augustus and Hadrian relied on building projects to boost support for their rule and for the empire itself. With his enthusiasm for Hellenism, Hadrian's building project in Athens became particularly noteworthy. Rescuing the city from a century-long depression, Hadrian began spending lavish money on impressive and inspiring buildings made of fine materials. Crucially, these new constructions blended Roman styles with the original Greek designs, satisfying the native tastes while also expanding the Athenians' familiarity with the empire. Hadrian also staked his claim to the city with the Arch of Hadrian and the completion of the Olympieion. The Arch of Hadrian declared that Athens now belonged to Hadrian, and the Olympieion, a massive temple for Zeus, served as an immense source of pride for the Athenians and as an opportunity for them to shower Hadrian with adoration, divine titles, and even worship—which Hadrian accepted. In the East, Hadrian seemed to embrace his divine pretensions, spreading his ruler cult and thus further consolidating the empire under his reign.