

**ONE QUESTION, SEVERAL ANSWERS:
THE INTRODUCTION OF THE IMPERIAL CULT IN PISIDIA
Abstract**

In this paper, the concept of Romanization is applied to specific religious developments within the ancient region of Pisidia (SW-Turkey) which can be traced back to patterns of Roman rule. In other words: what did the coming of Rome entail for religious life in Pisidia?

Roman deities, priests and ceremonies were not systematically exported to conquered territories and for the most part “native” religious traditions persisted under Roman domination. The components of religious life in Pisidia thus continued to be modelled on the Hellenic tradition. Nonetheless, Roman imperial power did influence the religion of the provincial territories. One phenomenon in particular discerned in the material evidence of religious life can be related to Roman rule, namely the cult of the emperors.

It has often been stated that the diffusion of the cult of Augustus throughout the Greek East was very rapid, indeed almost instantaneous. Yet, except for two instances dating to the early imperial period, all other imperial sanctuaries in Pisidia appear to have been built from the first half of the 2nd century AD onwards, almost a century after the incorporation of the region into the empire of Augustus. Why was there such an interval in time? In order to assess this chronological discrepancy, this paper presents a closer look at the different manners in which the imperial cult became established in the Pisidian cities, and the mechanisms behind them.

Firstly, there is the case of the colonies. Their establishment in Pisidia was part of a grand scheme devised by Augustus in order to organise the region and subdue it once and for all. Together with the role they played in the political submission and the development of the region, the Roman settlements also had an ideological importance for its incorporation into the empire and were highly significant in the introduction of the imperial cult.

Augustus not only founded colonies, he also introduced *coloni* or Roman settlers into the constitution of a city. Beside these colonists, there were also other Italian communities present in Pisidia, namely the associations of traders or *negotiatores*. The current evidence suggests that these communities may well have been at the

root of the relatively early presence of the imperial cult. Together with the cult of the goddess Roma, the worship of the emperor will have provided the Roman settlers with a means to establish their corporate identity within a predominantly Greek environment. That said, although the incentive was most probably provided by the Roman enclaves present in those cities, the actual establishment of the imperial cult as a civic cult can not have been their doing. Rather, this appears to have been the result of enterprises by the local nobility.

In cities without such Roman communities, the elite opted for a more gradual introduction of the cult. The most obvious way to achieve this was through the association with one of their ancestral deities, something which manifested itself in two important elements of worship, namely the sanctuaries and the religious festivals. Grafted on an existing core the imperial cult thus worked itself into the religious system of the cities. After this formative period during the 1st century AD, it came to play an increasingly important role in the religious landscape of Pisidia from the early 2nd century onwards.

This overview of the introduction of the imperial cult in Pisidia demonstrates that there was no massive and coherent religious response to the incorporation into the empire, but rather a piecemeal bricolage of new and traditional elements, with radically different approaches, even by neighbouring cities. The response to annexation was the result of many local factors, and was thus highly variable across space.

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