

## The Imperial Cult: Some Key Texts

### 1. Hymn of Athens to Demetrios Poliorcetes, 291 BC

The highest and dearest of the gods has come to our city! Here, time has brought together Demeter and Demetrius. She comes to celebrate the solemn mysteries of her daughter, but he, as befits the god, is here in gladness, fair and smiling. He seems to be something miraculous, surrounded by his friends, and he himself in their midst: his companions are the stars, just as he is the sun. O son of the most might god Poseidon and of Aphrodite, hail! For other gods are either far away, or do not have ears, or do not exist, or do not listen to us: but you we can see, you are present, not in wood and stone, but in actuality! And so we pray to you. First bring peace, dearest one! For you have the power.... [save us from the Aetolians!]

### 2. Imperial Cult Honours at Gytheion

Letter of Tiberius. Tiberius Caesar, son of the god Augustus, Augustus, pontifex maximus, holding the tribunician power for the sixteenth time, to the Gytheian ephors and the city, greetings. When he was sent by you to me and my mother as an envoy, Decimus Turrianus Nikanor delivered your letter to me, to which has been attached the items voted into law by you to show your piety for my father and your esteem for us. For these things I praise you and believe it fitting that in general all men and in particular your city should hold in reserve—because of the great size of the benefits of my father to all the world—the honours that are appropriate for gods; I myself am content with more moderate honours, as befit men. My mother will give you her answer when she learns from you what decision you have made about honours for her.

### 3. Cult in Italy

Caesar (Augustus), meanwhile, besides attending to the general business, gave permission for the dedication of sacred precincts in Ephesus and in Nicaea to Rome and to Caesar, his father, whom he named the hero Julius. These cities had at that time attained chief place in Asia and in Bithynia respectively. He commanded that the Romans resident in these cities should pay honour to these two divinities; but he permitted the aliens, whom he styled Hellenes, to consecrate precincts to himself, the Asians to have theirs in Pergamum and the Bithynians theirs in Nicomedia. This practice, beginning under him, has been continued under other emperors, not only in the case of the Hellenic nations but also in that of all the others, in so far as they are subject to the Romans. For in the capital itself and in Italy generally no emperor, however worthy of renown he has been, has dared to do this; still, even there various divine honours are bestowed after their death upon such emperors as have ruled uprightly, and, in fact, shrines are built to them. (Dio 51.20.7-8)