



Summary :

The cults of Rome, the Populus and the Senate were widespread in Asia Minor cities. Not only the cult itself, but also its political, social and cultural significance are very interesting to investigate.

Date

Roman period

Geographical Location

Asia Minor

1. Introduction

Rome is the only pagan deity surviving in Christian years as a pictorial image of the eternal city rather than as a goddess.¹

Nothing is reported in Roman tradition about Rome as a goddess or a heroine. The goddess Rome is a Hellenistic creation, a diplomatic invention of Asia Minor cities aiming to face the political situation of that time. Therefore, the establishment of the cult is mainly a political rather than a religious event, which may only be appreciated as part of the history of these cities and their relations with the Roman administration in the Late Hellenistic period.²

2. The Cult of Rome

As Hellenistic rulers were becoming gradually weaker, Rome emerged as the new power and the cities of Asia Minor relied their expectations for their liberation and independence on it. Its [personification](#) was the only way in which the Greeks, who were used to honour a monarch, could perceive a sovereign power whose delegates, the various Roman officials sent to Asia Minor, changed every year. The construction of temples, the establishment of priesthood and festivals (Romaia) as well as the devotional epithets used in honour of the deified personification of Rome served as a religious confirmation of the trust, friendship and alliance between the Greek cities of Asia Minor and the most powerful city of the Late Hellenistic period.³

The first temple dedicated to Rome was built in [Smyrna](#) in 195 BC⁴ and the city started to be regularly worshipped in several cities and [koina](#) of Asia Minor after [Antioch III](#) of Syria was defeated in the [battle of Magnesia](#) (190-189 BC) and the [Peace of Apamea](#) was signed (188 BC). Although the city of [Rhodes](#) had also been worshipped in the 3rd c. BC, the cult of Rome was quite similar to the cult of Hellenistic sovereigns. The fact that the city replaced them as a political deity was in perfect harmony with the religious attitude of the Greek-speaking populations of Asia after the [conquests of Alexander the Great](#), since any form of beneficial and protective political power could be worshipped. The phrase "Rome Goddess Benefactor" usually inscribed on the pedestals of honorary statues of the personified city or included in panegyrics and paeans to the city is indicative of this attitude.⁵

In the cities of the Attalid Kingdom, Rome was regularly worshipped after 133 BC, when the last sovereign, [Attalus III](#), bequeathed his state to the Romans. The peaceful annexation of the Attalid Kingdom to the Roman administration as well as the formation of the [province of Asia](#) in 129 BC was the reason for the establishment of the cult of Rome in several Attalid cities.⁶

It is obvious that the establishment of the cult of Rome was the result of political events and indicated the positive and friendly attitude of the Greeks.⁷

3. The Cult of Rome and the Populus

Apart from Rome, honours were also conferred to the Roman Populus, which is called a friend and ally of Asia Minor cities. Because



they are mentioned separately in various honorary decrees it becomes clear that the two personifications are not identical. This is also proved by their pictorial representations. Coins usually depict Rome as a female war deity and the Populus as a beardless young man.⁸

4. The Cult of Rome and the Emperor

When the Greek citizens of the provinces of Asia and [Bithynia](#) offered in 29 BC to build a temple in honour of the only ruler of the world, after his victory at Actium (31 BC), [Octavian Augustus](#) gave his permission to the cities of [Pergamon](#) and [Nicomedia](#) under the condition that he would be jointly worshipped with Rome. In this way, Augustus carefully avoided any possible negative criticism and the displeasure of the [senate](#), while he also provided the heterogeneous populations of Asia Minor with a common devotional symbol.⁹ In several cities, particularly in [Lydia](#), the eponymous archons (*prytaneis* and *stephanephoroi*) became priests of Rome and the emperor, a practice introduced by the priests of Hellenistic sovereigns ([Ephesus](#), [Sardis](#), Pergamon, [Priene](#)).¹⁰

Throughout the 1st c. AD, when most of the evidence is dated anyway, the cult of Rome was systematically associated with the [cult of the emperor](#). The cult flourished in the years of [Hadrian](#) (117-138), who introduced it into Rome. This cult survived until the 3rd c. AD.¹¹

5. The Cult of the Roman Senate

The evidence about the cult of the Roman senate was previously dated to the Hellenistic period, but according to later research it is now dated to the Imperial years. In [Tiberius'](#) years, a provincial temple dedicated to the emperor, Livia and the Roman Senate was built in Smyrna. It was built to express the gratitude of the cities of the province of Asia Minor for the approved conviction against two Roman officials, who had been brought before the court accused of profiteering while performing their duties. The fact that the deified senate or the Sacred Senate was depicted in coins, like Rome as a female figure and was incorporated into the cult of the cities, shows that it represented the Roman power and confirmed the continuity of its domination in Asia Minor.¹²

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1. Mellor, R., *The Goddess Roma* (ANRW II.17.2), (Berlin – New York 1981), p. 1017.
 2. Mellor, R., *ΘΕΑ ΡΩΜΗ. The Worship of the Goddess Roma in the Greek World* (Hypomnemata 42), (Göttingen 1975), pp. 51-52
 3. Mellor, R., *ΘΕΑ ΡΩΜΗ. The Worship of the Goddess Roma in the Greek World* (Hypomnemata 42), (Göttingen 1975), pp. 111-198; Mellor, R., *The Goddess Roma* (ANRW II.17.2), (Berlin – New York 1981), pp. 958-969.
 4. Fayer, C., *Il Culto della Dea Roma. Origine e Diffusione nell'Impero* (Pescara 1976), pp. 31-32.
 5. Fayer, C., *Il Culto della Dea Roma. Origine e Diffusione nell'Impero* (Pescara 1976), pp. 13-15; Mellor, R., *ΘΕΑ ΡΩΜΗ. The Worship of the Goddess Roma in the Greek World* (Hypomnemata 42), (Göttingen 1975), pp. 27-59, 74-92; Mellor, R., *The Goddess Roma* (ANRW II.17.2, Berlin – New York 1981), pp. 957-958.
 6. Mellor, R., *ΘΕΑ ΡΩΜΗ. The Worship of the Goddess Roma in the Greek World* (Hypomnemata 42), (Göttingen 1975), pp. 70-74.
 7. Mellor, R., *ΘΕΑ ΡΩΜΗ. The Worship of the Goddess Roma in the Greek World* (Hypomnemata 42), (Göttingen 1975), pp. 13-26.
 8. None of the Hellenistic statues of Rome in Asia Minor has survived. The earliest known statue is in Delos. Mellor, R., *ΘΕΑ ΡΩΜΗ. The Worship of the Goddess Roma in the Greek World* (Hypomnemata 42), (Göttingen 1975), pp. 145-154. The goddess depicted as a warrior is known from coins of Bithynian cities minted in the years of the proconsul Gaius Papirius Carbo (62-59 BC), according to which a statue of Olympia depicting the city *αποκαθίσταται* (ΣτΜ: τι εννοεί: is identified/is restored;). Tuchelt, K., *Frühe Denkmäler Roms in Kleinasien. Beiträge zur archäologischen*



Überlieferung aus der Zeit der Republik und des Augustus I: Roma und Promagistrate (MDAI (I), Beiheft 23), (Tübingen 1979), pp. 33-44. In the Imperial period it is usually depicted as Athena or Amazon, Mellor, R., *The Goddess Roma* (ANRW II.17.2), (Berlin – New York 1981), pp. 1011-1017.

9. Tuchelt, K., *Frühe Denkmäler Roms in Kleinasien. Beiträge zur archäologischen Überlieferung aus der Zeit der Republik und des Augustus I: Roma und Promagistrate* (MDAI (I) Beiheft 23), (Tübingen 1979), pp. 29-33; Mellor, R., *The Goddess Roma* (ANRW II.17.2), (Berlin – New York 1981), pp. 976-984. According to some researchers, the common cult of Rome and the proconsul of Asia P. Servilius Isauricus (46-44 BC) in Ephesus, which is a unique example of connecting the cult of Rome with a Roman official, served as a precedent for Augustus, see Fayer, C., *Il culto della dea Roma. Origine e diffusione nell'Impero* (Pescara 1976), pp. 15-16.

10. Unlike Hellenistic rulers, the emperors were never considered founders of these cities. Mellor, R., *ΘΕΑ ΡΩΜΗ. The Worship of the Goddess Roma in the Greek World* (Hypomnemata 42), (Göttingen 1975), pp. 181-194.

11. Mellor, R., *The Goddess Roma* (ANRW II.17.2), (Berlin – New York 1981), p. 997.

12. Kienast, D., "Der heilige Senat. Senatskult und 'kaiserlicher' Senat", *Chiron* 15 (1985), pp. 253-283, fig. I-IV.

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	Price S. , <i>Rituals and Power. The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor</i> , 2, Cambridge 1998
	Tuchelt K. , <i>Frühe Denkmäler Roms in Kleinasien. Beiträge zur archäologischen Überlieferungen aus der Zeit der Republik und des Augustus. Teil I. Roma und Promagistrate</i> , Tübingen 1979, MDAI (I) Beiheft 23
	Fayer C. , <i>Il culto della dea Roma. Origine e diffusione nell'Impero</i> , Pescara 1976
	Kienast D. , "Der heilige Senat. Senatskult und 'kaiserlicher' Senat", <i>Chiron</i> , 15 , 1985, 253-283
	Mellor R. , <i>ΘΕΑ ΡΩΜΗ. The Worship of the Goddess Roma in the Greek World</i> , Göttingen 1975, Hypomnemata 42
	Mellor R. , "The Goddess Roma", Haase, W. (ed.), <i>ANRW II.17.2</i> , Berlin-New York 1981, 950-1030
	Talbert R.J.A. , <i>The Senate of Imperial Rome</i> , Princeton 1984

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	The Canadian Epigraphic mission of Xanthos (Letoon) http://www.hst.ulaval.ca/xanthos/eng/inscription_letoon_eng.php?id=183

Glossary :

	koinon, the The term koinon pertains to every confederacy of ancient cities.
	senate, the The top political body of the Roman state. During the early Republic, it was represented by the council of the consuls, the top archons of the roman state. Later on, its power and responsibilities increased. As a result, it became the main governmental body of Rome. However, during the Imperial period, the responsibilities of the senate were restricted.