Hadrian was a dedicated philhellene who admired Greek culture and did his best to be accepted and admired by the Greeks. He visited Greece three times when he was emperor (AD 124/5, 128/9 and 131/2) and he was especially fond of Athens. Pausanias writes that “the Emperor Hadrian generosity to his subjects was bestowed most of all on Athens” whilst Cassius Dio tells about Hadrian’s generosity in a passage referring to his stay: “He granted the Athenians large sums of money, an annual dole of grain, and the whole of Cephallenia”. The philhellenic emperor did all he could to raise Athens to a special position in the Roman Empire and hoped to restore the city to the greatness of its distant past.

Prior to becoming Emperor, the Athenians gave him Athenian citizenship and elected him *archon eponymous*, their chief official, in AD 112. The city of Athens honoured him with a bronze statue in the Theatre of Dionysus in Athens.

Statue base of Hadrian set in the Theatre of Dionysus on the south slope of the Acropolis, the bilingual epigraphic inscription commemorates Hadrian’s election as archon of Athens in 112/3 AD
by the Athenians. The lengthy inscription provides our most important record of Hadrian’s career up to then. \(\text{ILS 308/CIL III 550}\).

As emperor, Hadrian returned to Greece in early autumn AD 124, in time to be initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries and again in late summer 128 together with Antinous. In March of 125, he presided as \textit{agonothetes} (superintendent of the sacred games) at the Greater Dionysia, the ancient dramatic festival held in Athens in honour of Dionysus. It is said that twelve statues of Hadrian were set up in the Theatre of Dionysus by the twelve tribes of Athens, one statue by each tribe. A new era began upon Hadrian’s first visit as emperor and a thirteenth tribe called “\textit{Hadrianis}” was added. The inscriptions on the bases of four of these statues have been found in the theatre.

\begin{center}
\textit{Statue base of Hadrian set up in the Theatre of Dionysus in 124/5 AD (IG II\textsuperscript{2} 3287A)}
\end{center}
The Theatre of Dionysus

The theatre of Dionysos Eleuthereus on the south slope of the Acropolis of Athens was first built in the 6th century BC. It is the oldest Greek theatre but was modified and expanded over the centuries. The invasion of the Romans under Sulla in 86 BC caused severe damage to the building. Restoration work was subsequently carried out in the 1st century AD during the reign of Emperor Nero when a new two-storey skene was created in the place of the old one. However, according to A. Karivieri in *Greek Romans and Roman Greeks*, it was Hadrian who built the monumental *scaenae frons* with reliefs depicting the life of Dionysus we see today. A. Karivieri gives a summary of Hadrian’s benefactions to Athens as well as the emperor’s association with Zeus, Theseus, and in particular Dionysus through the iconographic program of the *scaenae frons* of the Theatre of Dionysus. Hadrian assimilated himself with Dionysus in these reliefs. He was the new Dionysus (*neos Dionysos*), the new founder of Athens.
Hadrianic reliefs from the stage front (scaenae frons) of the Theatre of Dionysus on the South Slope of the Acropolis.

Detail of the Hadrianic reliefs from the stage front (scaenae frons) of the Theatre of Dionysus depicting Dionysus giving the gift of vine and wine to Icarius as a reward for Icarius’ generous hospitality.
Detail of the Hadrianic reliefs from the stage front (scaenae frons) of the Theatre of Dionysus depicting the enthronement of Dionysus.
Detail of the Hadrianic reliefs from the stage front (scaenae frons) of the Theatre of Dionysus depicting a crouching figure of Silenus in the attitude of Atlas.
Detail of the Hadrianic reliefs from the stage front (scaenae frons) of the Theatre of Dionysus depicting the Birth of Dionysus; Zeus is shown seated while Hermes stands before him holding the new-born infant in his arms.
The Theatre of Dionysus on the south slope of the Acropolis.
Many of Hadrian’s benefactions to Athens have been dated to his 3rd visit in AD 131/2. Hadrian added a new quarter to the city of Athens; it was located to the east of the old city. Ancient authors, like the Greek traveller Pausanias, give a first-hand account of Hadrian’s benefactions to Athens.

The Temple of Olympian Zeus

Among his most ambitious projects was the completion of the vast Temple of Olympian Zeus, a project begun over six hundred years earlier by the Athenian tyrant Peisistratos but soon abandoned when the tyranny was overthrown. Only the platform and some elements of the columns had been completed by this point, and the temple remained in this state for 336 years. It was not until 174 BC that the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes revived the project with new designs by the Roman...
architect Cosssutius.

The new temple followed its predecessor’s plan but used the Corinthian order and Pentelic marble instead of poros stone. However, the project ground to a halt again in 164 BC with the death of Antiochus. The temple was still only half-finished by this stage.
Temple of Olympian Zeus, Corinthian columns and capitals detail.
Serious damage was inflicted on the temple by Sulla’s sack of Athens in 86 BC. While looting the city, Sulla seized some of the incomplete columns and transported them back to Rome, where they were re-used in the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill. Further work was carried out during Augustus’ reign, but it was not until the accession of Hadrian in the 2nd century AD that the project was finally completed about 638 years after it had begun. Hadrian attended its dedication ceremony in the winter of AD 131.

Temple of Olympian Zeus.
Today, only fifteen of the 104 massive 17.25 meters high columns (57 ft) remain standing. A sixteenth column from the Temple of Zeus was torn down by the Voevode of Athens in 1759 and was left where it fell. According to Pausanias the *cella* housed a colossal chryselephantine (ivory and gold) statue of Zeus which “[exceeded] all other statues in size except the Colossi of Rhodes and Rome” (1.18.6). Pausanias also tells about a colossal statue of Hadrian erected by the Athenians behind the temple.
Hadrian was therefore associated with Zeus and received the epithet “Olympios” (Ἁδριανὸν Ὀλύμπιον). While the temple was originally dedicated to Zeus, in effect it became a centre for the imperial cult. Zeus and Hadrian who were worshipped here as symbomoi theoi (sharing the same altar) and the enclosure was adorned by a large number of statues and dedications. More than 50 bases for Hadrian have been found in Athens, 30 of these in the Olympieion alone.
A large number of statue bases erected for Hadrian and dedicated by Greek cities are preserved in the Olympieion (Temple of Olympian Zeus), Athens.
ΑΥΤΟ ΚΩΝΤΟΡΑ ΠΑΠΑΝΟ
ΑΔΡΙΑΝΟ ΝΙΚΑΙ ΣΑΡΑΣ
ΒΑΣΙΛΟ ΟΥΜΠΙΩΝ
ΚΟΡΟΤΙΣ ΑΕ ΣΩΝ
ΚΙΝΤΖΟΝ ΜΝ ΡΟΤΤΟ
ΛΕΟΝ ΧΟΥΛΗ ΚΑΙΟ
ΔΗΜΟΣ ΔΙΑ ΠΡΕΣ ΒΕΥ
ΤΩΝ ΓΑΙΟΥ ΝΙΝΝΙΟΥ
ΚΑΙ ΑΘΗ ΝΙ ΝΟΣ ΚΙ
ΧΕΝΤΟΣ ΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΛΥΚΙ
ΣΚΟΥ ΣΠΕΡΕΟΣ ΚΑ
ΑΤΤΙΚΟΥ
Statue base preserved in the Olympieion (Temple of Olympian Zeus) dedicated to Hadrian in 131/32 AD during the inauguration of the Temple (IG II² 3307).

In addition to statue pedestals, small altars bearing dedicatory inscriptions to Hadrian were also set up in the Olympieion. These altars took different forms but all had the same brief dedicatory inscription: “To the Saviour and Founder Emperor Hadrian, the Olympian”. This dedication was orchestrated in the year AD 131/2 when Hadrian inaugurated the Olympieion, founded the Panhellenion and established the Panhellenia Games.
Small altar dedicated to Hadrian with a swallow hole on the upper side and with the inscription: To Saviour and Founder Emperor Hadrian Olympos, AD 132.
Small altar dedicated to Hadrian with wheat ears in relief and with the inscription: To Saviour and Founder Emperor Hadrian Olympos, AD 132.
The Roman Bath House

To the north of the Olympeion are preserved the ruins of a large bath complex built at the time of Hadrian, between AD 124 and 131, with superb mosaic floors, coloured marble slabs (opus sectile), and marble revetment on the walls. In the north wing were the entrance, a nymphaeum with a small fountain, waiting rooms, changing rooms, while the bathing facilities stood in the south wing.

The bathhouse was used until at least the end of the 7th century AD, as is attested by the coins found on its floor with the octagonal room probably used as a baptistery in association with the basilica that was built nearby.
Pausanias lists more Hadrianic buildings near the Olympieion; a Temple of Kronos and Rhea and a ground sacred to Olympian Earth, Gaia (1.18.7).

Also mentioned by Pausanias are other Hadrianic constructions in Athens; a gymnasium with one hundred columns of Libyan marble (from Simitthu in Tunisia), a Temple of Hera Panhellenia and Zeus Panhellenios, a new library and a Pantheon, a “sanctuary common to all the gods”. The latter has been partially excavated on Odos Adrianou, some fifty meters east of the Library and the Roman Agora. However, it is also believed to be the Panhellenion, a meeting place of the deputies of city-states, work of Hadrian as well.
The partially restored Hadrianic Pantheon, a three-aisled basilica near the Library of Hadrian and the Roman Agora.
The Library of Hadrian

One of the most impressive and luxurious buildings built by Hadrian is the so-called Library of Hadrian. Pausanias describes it as “a hundred columns of Phrygian marble, with walls built just like the columns, and pavilions with gilded roof work and alabaster, decorated with statues and paintings. Books are kept in them” (1.18.9).
The west facade of the Library of Hadrian with columns of green Karystos marble.

The complex -which measured about 120 metres long and 78 metres wide (400 x 260ft)- consisted of a square, enclosed garden with an ornamental pool in the middle surrounded by porticoes and a series of rooms at the eastern end which housed a library of papyri and lecture rooms.
The west façade in Pentelic marble with columns of Karystos marble of the Library of Hadrian.

The entrance on the west side was richly decorated with Corinthian columns and a four-column propylon. The complex functioned as a library as well as a cultural centre.
The library of Hadrian was seriously damaged during the sack of Athens in AD 267 by the Germanic Heruli tribe and was subsequently incorporated into the Late Roman fortification wall (post-Herulian city-wall).
Re-erected Corinthian columns of the propylon of Pentelic marble.

In the 5th century, a church was built in the centre of the courtyard. During the Ottoman occupation it became the seat of the Voevode of Athens (Ottoman Governor) and in 1835 it was incorporated into the barracks built by King Otto of Greece.

View of the interior peristyle with the 5th century AD remains of the “tetraconch” building (perhaps the earliest church in Athens), The Library of Hadrian.

The library proper was the central room behind the east colonnade with rows of niches holding wooden cases with shelves for the scrolls.
The Library of Hadrian, the eastern end of the peristyle court with the remains of several rooms, the room (with the scaffolding) would have been the “library” proper, where ancient scrolls were stored.
The Library of Hadrian, the eastern end of the peristyle court.
Head of Hadrian wearing a wreath of laurel leaves, discovered in 1988 to the South of the Roman Agora, between AD 128/129 or 131/132, Library
A short distance to the south of the Library are located the remains of the Roman Agora, the centre of commercial activity of the city during Roman times. All the commercial activities, including the trade of oil, were transferred there. The building was almost square in shape with an internal colonnade that accommodated the shops. It had two entries: the Eastern was of Ionic order and a western one of Doric order that is known as “The Gate of Archigetis Athena”. The court of the Roman Agora was paved with slabs during the reign of Hadrian, and various repairs were done on the entire internal peristyle. This restoration and ornamentation of the Agora should be connected with Hadrian’s new constructions at the so-called Library of Hadrian and Pantheon.
A decree of Hadrian regulating the sale of olive oil, an important branch of Attic commerce, is engraved on the north jamb of the doorway of the Gate of Athena Archegetis which served as the main entrance to the Roman Market. The decree states that oil producers shall deliver 1/3 of their production in taxes. Its aim was also to reassure that the city would always have a sufficient amount of olive oil for sale. The top line reads KE NO ΘE AΔPIANOY: “chief points from the law-giving of Hadrian”.

\[\text{Image of the decree} \]
Decree of Hadrian regulating the sale of olive oil, an important branch of Attic commerce, is engraved on the north jamb of the doorway of the Gate of Athena Archegetis.
Decree of Hadrian regulating the sale of olive oil, an important branch of Attic commerce, is engraved on the north jamb of the doorway of the Gate of Athena Archegetis.
The colonnade on the east side of the courtyard of the Roman Agora.

The Arch of Hadrian

A monumental gateway resembling – in some respects – a Roman triumphal arch was erected in AD 131 to honour Hadrian for his many benefactions to the city, on the occasion of the dedication of the Temple of Olympian Zeus. It is not certain who commissioned the arch, although it is probable that the citizens of Athens or another Greek group were responsible for its construction and design. There were two inscriptions carved on the architrave, facing in opposite directions, naming both Theseus and Hadrian as founders of Athens. The arch was placed strategically so that people coming from the Agora went through the arch and could read the text on the west and the text on the east when returning from the Olympieion.
The inscription on the eastern side of the arch (facing the Olympieion) states: “This is the city of Hadrian and not of Theseus”. The inscription on the western side of the arch (facing the Acropolis) states: This is Athens, the ancient [or former?] city of Theseus.” (IG II² 5185)
Some scholars have traditionally interpreted the inscriptions as meaning that the arch stood at the boundaries of “old Athens” (to the west) and “new Athens” or “Hadrianoupolis” (to the southeast). Other scholars have proposed that the inscriptions, rather than dividing Athens into an old city of
Theseus and a new city of Hadrian (Hadrianopolis), claim the entire city as a re-foundation by the emperor, suggesting that the inscription should be read “This is Athens the former city of Theseus”.

_Arch of Hadrian, northwest side (towards the Acropolis)._  

**The Greek Agora**

In the Greek Agora, the civic heart of Athens stands a headless statue of Hadrian, originally placed on a rectangular pedestal in front of the Hadrianic Nymphaeum. A striking scene is depicted on the cuirass; Athena standing on the back of the she-wolf suckling Romulus and Remus, an allegory for Hadrian’s vision of the Athenian cultural heritage nourished by Roman rule. Athena is flanked by two winged Victories emphasizing the importance of Athens. This statue shows Hadrian’s relation to both Athens and Rome. In addition, around 30 altars have been reported as found near the Agora and the Temple of Hephaestus/Theseion.
Statue of Hadrian, Ancient Agora of Athens.
The Aqueduct

To respond to the city’s fundamental need for water, Hadrian commissioned the building of a new aqueduct. Its construction started in AD 125 and was completed fifteen years later in 140, during the reign of Antoninus Pius. The aqueduct consisted primarily of an underground tunnel at a length of over twenty-five kilometres.
It was designed not only to transfer water towards the city but also to collect it through a number of smaller catchment works along the way. It continued to supply Athens with water until the twentieth century. Archaeological remains may still be found, notably two water bridges in Nea Ionia, underground shafts at the Olympic Village and the water reservoir located on Lycabettus Hill in the city of Athens. A dedicatory inscription on the architrave mentioned that Antoninus Pius completed and inaugurated the aqueduct. The left side of the inscribed architrave is kept today in the National Garden.
The remains of the facade of Hadrian’s reservoir located on Lycabettus Hill.
Fragment of a lintel with dedicatory inscription originating from Hadrian’s reservoir on Lycabettus hill. It can be found in the National Garden (CIL III 549). “Emperor Caesar Titus Aelius Hadrianus Antonius Augustus Pius, consul for the third time, year two of his tribunician power, father of the fatherland, completed and dedicated the aqueduct which was begun in New Athens by his father, the divine Hadrian”.

In Monastiraki metro station, we can admire the archaeological ruins found during the construction work. These are the remains of a stream of the river Eridanos and various settlements dating from the 8th century BC (Geometric period) to the 19th century. In the late Classical period of Athens, the river bed (2.60 m wide) was secured by walls of large blocks of conglomerate. Under Hadrian, the river was roofed over by a brick vault, covered with earth and converted into a sewer. The river’s constant flow and unstable route through the centre of the densely populated city were the main reasons that led to its canalization.
Exposed section of the Eridanos river which was bricked over during Hadrian’s reign, Excavations of Monastikari Square.

Hadrian certainly left his mark all over the country, especially in Athens, which benefited greatly from its imperial patron. As a whole, Hadrian’s gifts to Athens served to unite Greece solidly under Roman control while reaffirming the city as a centre of culture and education.
Portrait bust of Emperor Hadrian wearing the corona civica, found in Athens, National Archaeological Museum of Athens.
Location of Hadrianic buildings:

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