By exploiting the theme of kinship between Rome and Venus in the aftermath of the Mithridatic War, Sulla also managed to make it part of his own political discourse, which was a global one, and went beyond the boundaries of the Greek East. There is not much direct evidence for Sulla’s use of religion after his return to Italy. It seems quite clear, however, that he gave to several of his actions the trademark of those of the ‘new founder’ of Rome after more than decade of turmoil and civil war. The theme was of course related to the kinship with Venus, although it had a largely independent development.

That the theme of the ‘refoundation’ of Rome was so prominent in Sulla’s agenda must have been known to some quarters of the Greek world too, as the behaviour of the Athenian elite seems to suggest. Sulla came back to Athens on his way back to Italy, in 84 BC. He took several important initiatives during his stay in the city, and he received considerable honours too. Athens had betrayed Rome, of course, and Sulla showed his generosity by sparing it from destruction. His attitude towards the city could not be as positive as the attitude he adopted towards the cities that he had declared free. However, he showed he was prepared to deal with the pro-Roman elites in a relatively amicable way. That is what he did in Athens, by spending some time in the city and accepting pledges of loyalty from the local elite. Of course, he could afford to behave as if he was in perfect control of the situation, with a victorious army protecting him during his stay and with plenty of time to rest from the hardship of war. No doubt Sulla found some time to enjoy himself during his second stay in Athens—but he acted with a political agenda too. Even after the Mithridatic War and the complete submission of the Greek world to Rome, Athens was not, and could not be, a city like all the others.

First and foremost, Athens was still a major cultural centre. Even Sulla was keen to exploit the opportunities it offered. According to Plutarch, during his stay in town he laid his hands on the library of Apellicon of Teos, a former supporter of Athenion, who owned many
works of Aristotle and Theophrastus.1 Moreover, in Plutarch’s words, he was “initiated” (μυηθείς). Although K. Clinton has rightly noticed that Plutarch is not explicit here about the initiation received by Sulla, it is likely that he actually refers to the most prominent Athenian mysteries, those of Eleusis.2 Sulla’s interest in, or respect for, Athenian culture, however, still went hand in hand with more ruthless attitudes. Pliny the Elder records that he used some columns from the temple of Olympian Zeus in the reconstruction on the Capitol.3 It is unlikely that the columns of the Olympieion that were already in place were dismantled. Moreover, the temple had been left unfinished after Antiochus IV’s death in 164 BC, and it was accomplished only under Hadrian. Pliny probably means that Sulla took to Rome some columns that were designed to be used in the construction of the temple.4

Some inscriptional evidence shows that the Athenians paid tribute to Sulla with a statue (IG 2.4.103 = SEG 24.214) and, more importantly, by creating new civic games in his honour, called Sylleia. The chronology of these games is far from certain. It is safe to assume that they were discontinued some time after Sulla’s death. However, they were almost certainly still held in 79/78 BC, under the archonship of Apollodorus, who is mentioned in an inscription praising the ephebes who served in the games, and they can hardly have been abolished before the prominent Sullan C. Scribonius Curio, who played such an important part of the reconquest of Athens, was proconsul of Macedonia between 75 and 72.5 A. Raubitschek has demonstrated that the holding of the

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2 Clinton 1989, 1503; moreover, I see no serious reason to suggest that the text is corrupt.
3 Plin. 36.5.45: columns demum utebantur in templis, nec lauitiae causa—nondum enim ista intellegebantur—sed quia firmiores aliter statui non poterant, sic est inchoatum Athenis templum Iouis Olympii, ex quo Sulla Capitolinis aedibus aduecerat columnas (“[marble] columns were used in temples, surely not as ornaments, since ornaments were not appreciated, but because people were not able to build stronger columns. Thus they feature in the unfinished temple of Jupiter Olympus at Athens, from which Sulla brought columns to be used for the temple on the Capitol”).
4 Cf. Boethius 1962, 91; Gjerstad 1962, 39–40; Abramson 1974a, 8–23; Abramson 1974b. I find no reason to doubt that the columns were used in Rome: contra, Heilmeyer 1970, 34 and Gros 1990, 844. On the history of the Olympieion, see Travlos 1971, 402–403. Cf. Wycherley 1964, 170–171 (with earlier bibliography), speculating that Sulla did not carry columns, but smaller decorative elements, such as capitals.