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CHAPTER 3.1

EUERGETISM

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INTRODUCTION

C3.1P1 By the early 3rd century AD, a culture of public giving touched virtually every corner of the Greek-speaking world under Roman rule. A statue-base from Philadelphia in the upper Hermos valley of Asia Minor, from around this time, commemorated the career of an Aurelius Hermippos:

C3.1P2 With good fortune. The sacred tribe of the wool-workers (honoured) as their benefactor, and benefactor of the fatherland in all respects, Aurelius Hermippos, *xystarchēs*, priest of Artemis, (a man) famous, fatherland-loving, and of the first rank in every way, who served as high priest with distinction and at much expense, providing a spear-hunt, which featured a fight to the death between a gladiator and a beast, as approved by the imperial authorities; he held the first archonship luminously, and carried out other offices and liturgies, both on his own behalf, and on that of his children, Neiketos and Hermippos. He had formerly dedicated 50,000 denarii to the city towards a grain fund, and 10,000 denarii towards the repair of the theatre’s awnings; he also made contributions of money to his dearest fatherland: 500,000 denarii for a grain fund, 50,000 denarii (for distributions) to the most excellent council, 10,000 denarii (for distributions) to the most solemn council of the *gerousia*, and for the seven tribes who set up statues worth more than 1,000 denarii.

C3.1P3 (TAM V.3, 1490; transl. by the author)

C3.1P4 The transactions recorded here, and indeed the whole monument itself, embody the phenomenon known as ‘euergetism’: beneficent service, and often personal expense, on behalf of a community, that was thought worthy of honorific memorialization and exemplification. Thousands of honorific and dedicatory inscriptions across the eastern Mediterranean now provide silent testimony to this once vibrant cultural practice. The term ‘euergetism’ is a neologism, originating in the philanthropic activities of the late-19th-century Greek state (Anastassiadis 2011), although emerging as a scholarly topic only in the late 20th century. Based on *euergetēs*, or ‘benefactor’, euergetism is ‘benefactorism’, a term intended to characterize acts of giving, but also more broadly a mentality of generosity, where manifested in public service: Hermippos’ euergetism encompassed games, building works, and distributions, but was also rooted in the virtuous tenure of public offices and liturgies.

Euergetism was one of the long-standing features of the Greek city-state, even if its most spectacular and visible instantiations come from the Imperial period. It was also about honour-worthiness, and Hermippos' receipt of a statue, which would have stood atop this base, was also a core part of the phenomenon. This chapter will concentrate, however, on services and benefactions (for honours, see Heller in this volume), and on those of the civic elite, in the period spanning the 1st to 3rd centuries AD. Although imperial rulers and their representatives were also benefactors, the focus here on local notables will serve to delineate some of the distinctive features of euergetism in the Roman Imperial East. The first of the three sections surveys the historiographical and historical background, while the second and third draw some general points on the usefulness of studying benefaction culture within the local and imperial frameworks of power that shaped it in this period.

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HISTORIOGRAPHY AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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Why do we study euergetism, and why the euergetism of the Greek East under Rome? Two approaches have prevailed. One has been to conceive of civic giving as the subject of political sociology, with the aim of clarifying the mentality and motivations underpinning it. The first major study was that of P. Veyne (1976, 1990), whose wide-ranging examination of conspicuous consumption over the Hellenistic and Roman period, from the late 4th century BC to 3rd century AD, argued that the elite made gifts simply because they could, as a way of affirming their superior social status. This took symbolic action and role-playing seriously, but also downplayed the agency of the recipients of benefaction. Somewhat in contrast, the work of A. Zuiderhoek (2009) has emphasized this agency, in stressing that the granting of honours for benefactions delineated elite status within a perceived conception of social hierarchy (see also Zuiderhoek 2007 and 2008). As such, benefactions derived not only from a sense of superiority but also from a need to legitimate inequality and wealth within civic society.

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Another approach to euergetism has been to historicize it, by paying closer attention to chronological specificities. For Veyne and Zuiderhoek the euergetism of the Roman East bulks large, and indeed forms the whole subject of the latter's study. More attention to historical development had already been paid by P. Gauthier (1985), who posited an inflation in the quality of benefactions and honours in the late Hellenistic period, thereby adding significant nuance to Veyne's conception of an elite-dominated, chronologically undifferentiated, post-Classical *polis* (see, however, Quaß 1993, who downplays change over time). More generally, euergetism has increasingly been analysed within a broader history of gift-giving in antiquity, and seen as part of a continuum, spanning honours rewarding athletic achievement in the Archaic period to the transformation of civic gift-exchange in Late Antiquity (Domingo-Gygax 2009; Satlow 2013; Domingo-Gygax and Zuiderhoek 2020). The historicization of euergetism over the *longue durée* undoubtedly has its methodological problems, in potentially subsuming all such behaviour within an overarching and undifferentiated rubric of 'gift-exchange reciprocity'; it does nonetheless challenge us to think harder about the distinctiveness of public giving in the Imperial-era *polis*, as part of a longer history of dynamic interactions between the civic elite and their communities, and not only as a quirk of the Roman Imperial age.

C3.1P7 A deeper history of euergetism should trace its antecedents to the liturgical systems of *poleis* in the Classical era, as best exemplified in the system of rewards encouraging private elite contributions at Athens in the 4th century BC (Domingo-Gygax 2016). Such systems of enforced elite contribution and participation came to be well established in the Greek world (cf. Arist. *Pol.* 6.1321a). Benefactions by foreign citizens, in extraordinary political services, also gain in prominence from the late 5th century BC onwards, encouraging the regularization of honours for such benefactors, in official guest-friendship (*proxenia*) and other privileges, often including the title of benefactor (*euergetēs*) (Mack 2015). The onset of the Hellenistic period in the late 4th century accentuated these earlier trends. The late 4th to early 2nd centuries BC were a prosperous period for the euergetism of foreign citizens, and the creation of honorific links between cities, while imperializing kings and dynasts acted as benefactors on a large scale without precedent in the preceding Achaemenid Persian period, in making donations to international sanctuaries, defining the political destinies of whole communities, and receiving homage in the form of cult (Bringmann and Steuben 1995–2000). At the same time, the civic elite, some of whom socialized with royal courts, became more imposing figures in the lives of their local communities, with some contributing large sums to public works and services (e.g. *I.Ilion* 1; *IOSPE* I² 32). On the whole, however, the benefactions of citizens to their home-communities, and their corresponding honours, were less visible and monumentally impressive before the 2nd century BC—few statues were granted to local citizens, for instance. They were also mainly initiated by moments of crisis—war, political emergency, grain shortages, or financial need (Forster 2018: 51–187).

C3.1P8 More significant groundwork for later Imperial-era euergetism was laid, however, in the crucial period following Rome's entry into the eastern Mediterranean, as Hellenistic royal power gradually faded away over the 2nd and 1st centuries BC. At this time commemorative practices undergo a subtle but unmistakable change, as the deeds of foreign citizens are recorded in honorific inscriptions with less frequency, while those of local citizens, on the other hand, are increasingly given more epigraphic attention. Roman imperialism placed greater demands on the abilities and resources of elite citizens. An emblematic example is Menippos, a leading Kolophonian of the late 2nd century BC, whose long career, recorded in a decree carved on the base of a monumental columnal statue at Klaros, spanned military service under the Romans during their war against Aristonikos, embassies to the Senate, holding the *agōnothesia* of the festival of Apollo Klarios, and making other donations to civic finances (*SEG* 39, 1244). The humbling of the Hellenistic monarchies meant that elite citizens like Menippos now played greater roles as political mediators for their communities before Roman authorities, and as promoters and affirmers of local identity and tradition, beyond mere crisis-events alone, in the face of the increasing unipolarity of Roman power. A number of other similar figures are attested across Asia Minor, Greece, Macedonia, the Black Sea coast, and even Kyrenaika (Forster 2018: 189–379; *SEG* 26, 1817; 28, 1540).

C3.1P9 In the late Hellenistic period, citizens continued to operate within the institutional frameworks of the *polis*, as ambassadors, public secretaries, or *agoranomoi* (e.g. *I.Mylasa* 109; *IG* V.1, 1432; *IG* IV, 2). Nonetheless, it is also possible to detect a growing penchant for articulating the dominance of the elite, in benefactions that challenged conventions of civic sociability, and were increasingly monumental (Hamon 2007). The costly sacrifices and distributions demanded by offices and liturgies like the *stephanēphoria*, *agōnothesia*, or *prytaneia* were made open not only to citizens but other non-citizen groups as well, such as resident Romans, freedmen, and sometimes even slaves (e.g. *I.Priene B–M* 68; *IG* VII, 190; see

Strubbe 2001). Moreover, large-scale building works commandeered by wealthy individuals, like Menippos' door to Apollo's temple, become more common (e.g. *IGR* IV, 293 (gymnasium at Pergamon); *I.Histria* 54, ll. 41–2 (*agoranomion* at Histria)). The social background of local benefactors also widens, to include women like Epie of Thasos (*SEG* 18, 343), and non-citizen Romans like L. Vaccius Labeo at Kyme (*I.Kyme* 19), as eliteness, and not citizen status alone, increasingly shaped political participation. The fruits of these developments can be observed at Megalopolis in the late 1st century BC, where a Euphrosynos (son of a Titus, a resident Roman) served as ambassador to Rome and built a Roman-style *macellum*, while his wife Epigone held priesthoods, built temples, workshops, a peristyled walkway alongside her husband, and feasted the civic population (*IG* V.2, 268).

C3.1P10 In the accomplishments of this Megalopolitan power-couple we find the core features of euergetism over the following three centuries of the Imperial period—a continuing attachment to the civic framework, but also a concern to etch personal statements of monumentality into it, in particular through building works and the sponsoring of distributions and festivals (for collections of evidence, see Barresi 2003, Pont 2010, and Quaß 1993). At the same time, private generosity became more totalizing, in seemingly infiltrating all corners of public life: the provision of boats to cross the Melas river in Cilicia (Robert 1966: 44–52), or the minting of coinage (*IGR* IV, 769), for instance. The evidentiary wealth of the Imperial period also allows for the telling of numerous local stories, in the banquets held by the *agōnothetēs* Epaminondas of Akraiphia at the Ptoia festival, in a context of economic difficulty (*IG* VII, 2712), or the Vedii Antonini's sustained engagement with Ephesian society over the 2nd century AD (Kalinowski 2021). Beyond the questions of what euergetism was for, or how it changed over time as part of ancient Mediterranean gift-exchange culture, then, it is crucial also to be cognizant of the micro-historical dynamics and local textures at play. There is obviously no room here for a full treatment of these aspects. Instead, the rest of this chapter will discuss the two interlocking frameworks of power within which any such micro-analysis must be conducted, because they were acutely associated with euergetism in the Imperial period: the relations and interactions between the elite and non-elite, and those between these local communities and the Roman imperial order at large.

C3.1S3**ELITE BENEFICENCE AND CIVIC ENTANGLEMENTS**

C3.1P11 Euergetism in the Imperial period became a system of government (Gauthier 1985: 72), but only in the sense that it becomes the most visible aspect of civic government in our evidence; it did not *replace* government. Instead, we find a continuing dynamic of interaction between leading citizens and their non-elite cohabitants, with euergetism serving as the medium by which elite wealth became both more public and civic, while simultaneously shaping the rules around political participation in the *polis*, to a greater extent than before. Our opening statue-base of Hermippos of Philadelphia embodies this paradox, because the assertiveness of the inscription inclines us to see his achievements simply as expressions of elite will. Closer reading suggests, however, that his donations were the product of negotiation with the wider civic community. The fact that it lists two separate contributions to the grain fund, rather than simply listing them together, for instance, may reflect ongoing discussion about the amounts that were appropriate for such gifts. Moreover, Hermippos' benefactions were

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