Communal dining in the Roman West : private munificence towards cities and associations in the first three centuries AD

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Chapter 1

Roman dining in context: from commensality to private munificence

1.1 Introduction

Modern anthropologists, philosophers and historians agree that 'dining' is more than just a form of 'eating'. As Yuval Lurie puts it in his monograph *Cultural Beings*, 'eating is a natural activity through which living creatures nourish themselves by taking food into their bodies. Dining is a cultural custom through which human beings eat in a refined, rule-governed manner'.[1] Consequently, eating is a biological instinct inherent in living beings, whereas dining is a product of human society. People across various cultures have created different dining habits. Nevertheless, there seems at least one common practice: humans tend to eat together.

Commensality has long been identified as a fundamental social activity. Eating with family members, friends, fellow members of an association or other people from the community is what human beings have done since ancient times. From the time of the Sumerian cities to that of the Greek *poleis*, from early-dynastic Egypt to China under the Qin-Han dynasties, the practice of sharing food and drink was ubiquitous in the ancient world, as shown by the Greek *deipnon* or symposium, by Chinese family banquets, by the Hellenistic royal banquets and by the Sumerian and Egyptian temple feasts.[2] Richard S. Ascough states that, 'people eat because they have to do so; people eat with other people because they choose to do so'.[3]

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[1] Lurie (2000), 37.

[2] Ancient dining practice was long treated as a trivial matter. During the past few decades, there has been an upsurge of interest in this subject. I can only mention some works here. On the ancient Greek *symposion*, see, for example, Murray (1983a); Murray (1983b); Murray (1990); Schmitt-Pantel (1990); Wecowski (2014) and papers in Slater (1991). On Greek city banquets see Schmitt-Pantel (1992); Schmitt-Pantel (1997). On Hellenistic royal meals, see Nielsen and Sigismund Nielsen (1998), 102-133. For a brief account of extravagant dining habits in the cities of Han China, see Loewe (1968), 140. For a comparison of gender relations between Ancient China and Greece in the context of banquets, see Zhou (2010). On feasting in the Ancient Near East: Bottéro (1994); Pollock (2003); Schmandt-Besserat (2001); Smith (2003); Burkert (1991).

Previous studies of Roman commensality

The subject of Roman dining practices was first raised in the Renaissance, when scholars combed through ancient literary materials and systematized their findings.[4] During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Roman eating habits were considered a part of Roman 'private life' or 'daily life' and were often referred to as such in the handbooks.[5] These contributions were primarily based on literary sources and these suffered from at least two deficiencies: a natural tendency to focus on the upper classes and the inherent difficulty of expanding the research scope beyond eating and dining as a daily habit in order to fill the stomach.[6]

More than a century ago, various issues pertaining to commensality began to be explored by social scientists. As early as the nineteenth century, in his study of sacrificial meals, William Robertson Smith points out that, 'those who eat and drink together are by this very act tied to one another by a bond of friendship and mutual obligation'.[7] In the twentieth century the subject of commensality continued to attract attention, particularly because of the way in which it illuminated and created boundaries between groups and established social bonds.[8]

In the field of Roman history, it was not until the late twentieth century that studies of dining shifted towards thorough and more nuanced analyses. A distinguishing feature of the literature of this period is that it paid close attention to the 'functions' of Roman dining activities. John H. D'Arms launched a discussion about the social functions of Roman communal meals in an article published in 1984. He raised issues about the mechanisms of *hospitium* and reciprocity embedded in social dining, the societal needs met by feasting, the role of public feasting in promoting social harmony and exerting social control, and also the co-existence of equality and hierarchy in private *convivia*.[9] In his subsequent research on public feasting in private

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See Alcock (2006), 181-225 for ancient eating habits in general. Feasting, as an important type of dining activities, has been paid attention by sociologists, archaeologists, ethnographers and anthropologists, see, for example, Hayden (2014); Bray (2003); Dietler and Hayden (2001); Kerner, Chou and Warmind (2015).

[3] Ascough (2008), 34-35.

[4] For example, Pedro Chacón (Petrus Ciacconius Toletanus) was known for his exploration of the dining customs of the ancient Romans, see Chacón (1588) and a second edition with appendix by Fulvio Orsini, Chacón (1590); this edition was completed by the dissertation of Girolamo Mercuriale (Hieronymus Mercurialis), see Chacón, Orsini and Mercuriale (1664) and Chacón, Orsini and Mercuriale (1689); see also Bacci (1596); Stucki (1582).

[5] Becker (1844), 123-141, 355-382; Marquardt (1886), 289-330; Friedländer (1908), Vol. 2, 146-164; Blümner (1911), 385-419; Carcopino (1940), 287-300; Balsdon (1969), 32-55.

[6] Dunbabin (2003a), 5, also mentions that such studies were 'in a largely synchronic form that took little account of variations over time'.

[7] Smith (1889/1927), 265 (reference is to the third edition, 1927).

[8] E.g. Mauss (1954); Lévi-Strauss (1964); Douglas (1966); Simmel (1910/1997).

[9] D'Arms (1984), 327-348. See also D'Arms (1990), 308-320.

settings, he has focused on Caesar's *horti trans Tiberim* and points out that public feasts were cleverly stage-managed by Caesar to 'promote his personal political aims … and bring further political advantage', 'setting a new standard for Roman *principes* … and for municipal magistrates'.[10] He builds on his argument by taking P. Lucilius Gamala's munificent feasts as examples to demonstrate that Caesar did indeed provide an exemplary role model for municipal notables.[11]

Similar arguments can be found in the work of Van Nijf, who views public commensality as a way by which existing hierarchical structures of society were reinforced and a means to define the status of various groups.[12] On the basis of his examination of commensal activities of *collegia*, he argues that 'banquets could either emphasise and magnify internal differences or gloss over them in order to represent the participants as equal'.[13]

In 2004 John F. Donahue provided the first comprehensive examination of public feasts in the Roman West during the Principate.[14] His investigation of Roman communal feasts sheds light on the functions which public meals could perform: 'to unite and to classify celebrants by social rank'.[15] Donahue's focus is on communal meals on any public occasion - whether sponsored by emperors, public resources or private money.

More recently Richard S. Ascough has paid attention to the social and political aspects of associational meals. He sees the two principal functions of association meals as the building of group identity and the integration of the association into the wider society.[16] Jinyu Liu, who focuses on the social and religious aspects of the collegial feasts, has also observed the hierarchical settings which became visible when *collegia* participated in public commensality.[17]

Roman commensality and power relations are, then, generally seen as closely related. D'Arms argues that a powerful host could display his wealth and strengthen his influence in existing hierarchies by providing a spectacle in the form of a lavish banquet. Importantly, the roles assumed by the hosts and guests during the course of such a spectacle/banquet defined and expressed their own ranks and status in the society.[18] These hierarchical structures are best observed at the banquets of which the host was either a king or an emperor. In his monograph on the banquets of Hellenistic kings and Roman emperors, Konrad Vössing shows that a royal Hellenistic banquet

[10] D'Arms (1998), esp. 42-43.
[11] D'Arms (2000a), 192-200.
[12] Van Nijf (1997), 149-188.
[13] Van Nijf (1997), 53.
[14] Donahue (2004a). For a new and expanded edition, see Donahue (2017).
[15] Donahue (2017), 1.
[16] Ascough (2012), 59-69.
[17] Liu (2009), 251-252.
[18] D'Arms (1999), 301-319.

served to affirm the superior position of the king and that, in a later era, Roman emperors would also ensure that their powerful position was reaffirmed in what were on the face of convivial occasions.[19] Behind the scenes of perhaps seemingly harmonious gatherings at which meals were shared, hierarchical power structures remained firmly intact.

Besides hosts and guests, the role of servants at *conviva* has also been investigated. D'Arms has examined the duties of dining-room slaves, as well as their rewards and punishments, during the Principate.[20] Dunbabin draws upon iconographical materials of the third and fourth century to explore the depictions of servants in contemporary art. She has noticed that the theme of waiting servants became popular in artistic culture in the later empire and argues that this trend reflected the aspiration of the elite to display their wealth, status and luxurious life-style in visual representations.[21] Carly Daniel-Hughes has discussed the relationship between the sex trade and the institution of slavery in the context of dining in the imperial period. In this author's view, dining-room slaves' sexual availability to the participants of banquets was 'an extension of slavery in the context of meal culture'.[22]

The display of gender and family relations in dining practices is another topic which has attracted scholarly attention. In the context of the Roman family, Keith Bradley observes that the Roman dinner was male-dominated. A man would prefer to have dinner with his male friends or male relatives rather than with his wife or children. In Bradley's view, this kind of family relationship indicates that friendship was valued more highly than relations between husband-wife or parents-children in Roman society.[23] In his monograph on Roman dining posture, Matthew Roller challenges the generally accepted view that free adult men reclined when they were dining; and that free adult women sat in the time of the Republic and reclined during the time of the Empire; free children sat and slaves stood. Although individuals of any gender, age or status could theoretically assume any posture, reclining, sitting and standing embodied different social values and their variations were related to gender, class and status.[24] Discussing association meals, Philip A. Harland indicates that the associations followed a set of banqueting values which had been devised to regulate behaviour and ensure order on such social occasions.[25]

Scholars have also expended effort on examining the evolution of dining practices through time. Aristocratic banquets in Archaic Italy, especially in early Rome and

[19] Vössing (2004).
[20] D'Arms (1991), 171-183.
[21] Dunbabin (2003b), 443-468.
[22] Daniel-Hughes (2012), 174.
[23] Bradley (1998), 51-52; H. S. Nielsen also discusses the Roman family by examining the presence of children at mealtimes, see Nielsen (1998), 56-63.
[24] Roller (2006).
[25] Harland (2012), 73-85.

Etruria, have been shown to have borne a close relationship to power structures, as demonstrated by A. Zaccaria Ruggiu. This scholar argues that the disappearance of the archaic banquet and the abolition of the monarchy were not unrelated. The revival of the custom in the second century BC was a consequence of Rome's new contact with Asiatic luxury.[26]

Dunbabin explores banquet scenes from visual materials to tease out clues about the evolution of banqueting images which emerged from 'contemporary practice and ideologies'.[27] Elke Stein-Hölkeskamp has studied the banquets of the upper classes from the time of Cicero to that of Pliny the Younger, showing the relationship between the changes in the Roman elites' banquets and the concomitant social and political changes in Roman society during this period.[28]

Although these recent discussions are unquestionably valuable and important, various limitations are discernible. First and foremost, it seems fair to say that public feasts and communal meals attended by members of associations have been paid much less attention than dining in private settings.[29] As we have seen, a partial exception must be made for a handful of studies which analyse privately sponsored public meals as a way of reinforcing existing hierarchical structures in society and of defining the status of various groups but have still paid very little attention to any differences between various parts of the empire. In fact, the few studies of this type which have been undertaken present generalizing pictures abstracted from evidence gathered from different parts of the empire. The upshot is that the impression created by these studies is one of parallel developments in different regions. However, a more detailed inspection of the evidence reveals that the epigraphic evidence relating to privately funded public dinners is found only in certain parts of the empire. Moreover, in those parts of the empire which have yielded evidence for these dinners, interestingly it was not always the same groups of participants who were invited, but also that different kinds of food were sometimes served to the same groups of participants in different regions.

Another weakness in those publications which offer a general overview of various types of communal dining, or are restricted to just one type of dining, is their tendency to obscure differences in the chronological trajectories of communal dining in various parts of the empire. Therefore a more detailed study of the epigraphic evidence might well bring to light differences in the chronological distribution of the evidence of privately sponsored communal dining in mainland Italy, North Africa and Spain.

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[26] Zaccaria Ruggiu (2003).
[27] Dunbabin (2003a), 208.
[28] Stein-Hölkeskamp (2005).
[29] In particular, the aristocratic banquets (*convivium*), for recent works, see e.g. Tchernia (2008); Schnurbusch (2011); {Vössing, 2012 #710}; Badel (2013).

Thirdly, although the existing literature has convincingly demonstrated that evidence of various types of privately sponsored communal dining can be traced in various parts of the Western Empire, little interest has so far been shown in the identities of the benefactors who funded these dinners. At the very least we should try to discuss epigraphic texts referring to the public dinners provided by local magistrates or town-councillors as well as to inscriptions referring to food-related benefactions offered by 'outsiders', for instance, people who happened to be the patrons of local communities. Similarly, a clear distinction should be made between privately sponsored public dinners to which *collegia* were invited alongside other groups and dinners for *collegiati* hosted by 'internal benefactors' belonging to the *collegia* in question.

In short, despite the very valuable research on private and public dining which has been carried out over the past twenty-five years, there is still room for a more detailed study which not only highlights distinctions between the various types of privately sponsored public dining but also illuminates the profound differences which can be observed between different parts of the empire.

Private sponsorship is the key to privately sponsored communal dining. Unlike private commensality and public/collegial dining, which was financed from a public/collegial treasury, communal dining in a public or collegial context financed by private munificence did have another role. It linked wealthy individuals to public and collegiate affairs. Therefore, the present book examines one particular type of social event: the benefactions bestowed on the wider community by individuals.

Geographically, the focus of my explorations will be on the western half of the Roman Empire. In opting for this geographical delimitation, I have been guided by two competing considerations. On the one hand, the practice of privately sponsored public dining is known to have existed not only in Italy but also in other parts of the empire. One of the aims of my enquiries will be to abstract the similarities and differences in the public dining practices of various regions. This can be done only by widening the geographical scope. On the other hand, a comparative investigation of communal dining practices in the Roman world could easily spin out of control if the geographical limits of this sort of examination are set too wide. For this reason, communal dining practices in the Greek-speaking provinces of the Empire will be excluded. Another justification for restricting the geographical scope of this book is there are good reasons to think that, in the western half of the Empire, the custom of privately funded public dining spread from Italy to various provinces. Because of this genealogical connection, it makes good sense to study Italy and the western provinces in a single book.

The chronological scope of my investigations will be first-to-third century AD, although some observations about earlier and later developments will be made. These chronological restrictions have been dictated by the ancient evidence relating to

privately sponsored public dining. As this book will show, the earliest evidence of the bestowal of privately funded food benefactions outside the city of Rome dates to the final years of the Republic. During the first century AD the amount of evidence steadily increases, but most of the epigraphic evidence belongs to the second or early third century AD. As far as we can tell, privately funded food benefactions targeting either entire civic communities or specific status groups within these communities petered out in the fourth century AD. The reasons for this chronological pattern will be investigated in the final chapter of this monograph.

1.2 Definition and terminology of privately sponsored communal dining

The term 'dining activities' refers to the communal consumption of food at any gathering in the context of public or associational life – although, as it will emerge this needs further specification. The circumstances in which such gatherings were held could vary, but the communal consumption of food was central. What information about Roman dining can be extracted from ancient sources?

Literary texts and epigraphic records reveal a rich and varied terminology related to food or the partaking of meals, and to 'dining' specifically.[30] Commonly used terms associated with 'dining activities' are *epulum*, *cena* and *convivium*, which literally mean 'feast', 'banquet' and 'dinner'. The *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* defines 'feast' as 'a religious anniversary appointed to be observed with rejoicing, in commemoration of some event or in honour of some personage; a sumptuous meal or entertainment given to a number of guests; a banquet, especially of a more or less public nature; an usually abundant and delicious meal.'[31] The definition of 'banquet' shares one feature with that of 'feast', namely: 'a feast, a sumptuous entertainment of food and drink'.[32] The term 'dinner' is defined in the *OED* as 'the chief meal of the day; a formally arranged meal of various courses; a repast given publicly in honour of someone, or to celebrate some

[30] See Donahue (2017), 5-12, 253, note 19.

[31] "feast, n.", *OED* Online, Oxford University Press (last accessed March 2018). There are different definitions of feasts given by different scholars. For example, Dietler defines feasts as 'forms of ritual activity that involve the communal consumption of food and drink,' see Dietler (2001), 65 and also 67, 69; Hayden keeps to the definition that 'any sharing between two or more people of a meal featuring some special foods or unusual quantities of foods (i.e., foods or quantities not generally served at daily meals) hosted for a special purpose or occasion.' See Hayden (2014), 8. It seems no single definition of feast dominates. The definitions can differ from each other, as Twiss argues, in respect of the number of participants, food types and quantity, degree of culinary skill and performative elaboration, location and occasion, etc. See Twiss (2012), 364. I personally suggest that any definition cannot work well without relating it to specific issues, therefore a definition can only be useful when it is made to answer specific questions.

[32] "banquet, n.1", *OED* Online, Oxford University Press, (last accessed March 2018).

event.'[33] These definitions help to cast light on some of the elements of Roman dining activities: communality, the idea of abundance and a social context. Nevertheless, much can be lost in translation and we should be aware that there is no perfect match between these Latin and English words. Therefore it is imperative to examine the meanings of relevant Latin terms in their particular contexts.

In his research on Roman public feasts, Donahue uses the dichotomous concepts – 'public' and 'private'. He defines a public meal as 'any gathering to which the *populus* at large or representative groups from within the community were invited in order to share a meal' and lists a series of cases such as 'citywide feasts, collegial and curial banquets, municipal feasts restricted to certain classes' and 'the banquets of the emperor at the imperial palace'.[34] Although this broad definition is an accurate description of the scope of Donahue's investigations, various questions can be raised in the context of the aim of this book: Is it really possible to label collegial gatherings and banquets held by emperors at the imperial palace 'public' meals? At the very least, it would seem advisable to replace Donahue's dichotomy with a tripartite distinction between dining in a purely private sphere, collegial dining and dining in town squares or other public spaces.

Accordingly, our definitions of 'dining activities' in the Roman world need to be refined: private dining involves eating with families, relatives, friends, acquaintances, personal clients or people in other relationships; public dining refers to consuming food at public gatherings in which the populace or representative groups within a city partake and collegial dining indicates the sharing of a meal with members of the same association. At this point in the study, it should be noted that the term '*collegia*' will be used to refer to Roman associations in a general sense.[35] In fact, if we adopt a broad definition of the term 'association' even the *Augustales* can be grouped under this heading. Needless to say, this categorization does not in any way imply that the *corpora* of the *Augustales* bore a close resemblance to professional associations or that there were no major social distinctions between *Augustales* and members of 'ordinary' *collegia* (cf. Chapter 4).

Since this monograph will be looking only at those public dinners whose costs were shouldered by private benefactors, the topic of my investigations can be defined as comprising all forms of food-related *euergetism* with the exception of food hand-outs which were not intended to be consumed during a communal meal. The term *euergetism* has been used to describe the phenomenon of 'private liberality for public

[33] "dinner, n.", *OED* Online, Oxford University Press, (last accessed March 2018).
[34] Donahue (2017), 3.
[35] Latin terms *collegium*, *corpus*, *sodalicium* and *sodalitas* are commonly used to refer to associations.

benefit'.[36] The Latin terms which were frequently used to refer to such acts of 'private liberality for public benefit' include *munificentia*, *liberalitas* and *merita*.[37] In this monograph, we shall be looking at those acts of liberality which involved the bestowal of food-related benefaction(s) on entire civic communities, on one or several status groups belonging to these communities or to associations, with the additional restriction that only those benefactions which were provided at the benefactor's own expense are considered.

A superficial inspection of some of the epigraphic sources is enough to reveal that 'food-related benefactions' came in multiple forms. The most frequently attested type is the 'communal meal'. This meal is usually referred to either as an *epulum* or a *cena*. Occasionally we encounter the term *prandium*, which denotes a mid-day meal, or the word *visceratio*, which refers to a public distribution of the flesh of sacrificial animals. Some inscriptions use none of these words, but merely provide the information that members of local communities or members of associations received something 'to eat'.

A second group of inscriptions does not refer to 'public meals' or 'communal dinners', but to distributions of 'cakes and sweet wine' (*crustulum et mulsum*), or of 'bread and wine' (*panis et vinum*). The limited information included in most inscriptions is not always sufficient for us to determine if these food items were consumed in public spaces or taken home by the recipients, but the general impression is that communal consumption was the norm.

Finally, a considerable body of epigraphic evidence refers to private benefactors donating sums of money whose interest was to be used to organize communal meals. Such cases of indirect sponsorship of communal dining will also be considered in this study.

Inscriptions referring exclusively to distributions of *sportulae* have been excluded from this study. Although the term *sportulae* might refer to hand-outs of food in some inscriptions, its most usual sense is distributions of money. In principle, this money might have been used to buy food, but there is no evidence to suggest that recipients of *sportulae* were expected to spend this money on food items to be consumed in public spaces.[38] At this point, it seems significant that a considerable number of inscriptions refer to *sportulae* being handed out *alongside* food, suggesting that we are dealing with two different types of benefactions.[39]

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[36] Veyne (1990), 10. See also Zuiderhoek's definition of civic *euergetism*, Zuiderhoek (2009), 6-14, esp. 9-10.
[37] See Forbis (1996), Forbis (1993), Forbis (1990).
[38] Duncan-Jones (1982), 138-140.
[39] For a discussion of the variable meanings of the terms *sportulae*, *epulum* and *cena*, see Slater (2000), 112.

1.3 Two perspectives on privately sponsored communal dining in the Roman world

1.3.1 Categories of Roman commensality

One way of studying privately sponsored communal dinners is to examine these dinners from the angle of Roman commensality. I share the opinion of Suzanne Villeneuve who says that, 'there is no single type of food sharing behavior but rather an array of different motivations, characteristics, and conditions that occur under the umbrella of food sharing',[40] and different classifications of different kinds of Roman commensality have been made in the literature. For instance, various criteria have been formulated to distinguish feasts. These distinguishing features include the identity of hosts (for example, private versus public) and the motives of the organizers (self-interest versus altruism) to mention just two aspects.[41] As has already been explained, my investigations will be based on the tripartite distinction between private, public and collegial dining.[42] While other classifications might prove more helpful or illuminating in other research contexts, this tripartite division seems well suited to the particular set of problems which will be investigated in the chapters that follow.

Dining in private life

There is no doubt that everyday domestic commensality was the most fundamental and frequent type of communal dining in the private sphere, spanning the period from the time of the Republic to Late Antiquity.[43] Furthermore, as was to be expected, there were other occasions on which people ate together in a private context.

It was not uncommon for Romans belonging to various social groups to have dinner with friends.[44] For many Romans, a private dinner was an occasion for socializing. The host usually provided such a meal for a limited number of guests, with

[40] Villeneuve , 34.
[41] Hayden suggests ten approaches to classifying feasts and puts forward three major categories, namely: alliance and co-operation feasts, economic feasts and diacritical feasts. See Hayden (2001), 35-41; Hayden (2014), 9-11.
[42] For the classification of public feasts and collegial banquets in ancient Roman society, both Donahue and Ascough borrow from the typologies offered by Claude Grignon, including exceptional, segregative, transgressive and extra-domestic commensality. See Donahue (2003), 426-441; Ascough (2008), 33-45.
[43] Apart from the quotidian family meals, there were special domestic festival celebrations. For example, during the *Saturnalia*, all members of the household – masters and slaves, women and children – feasted together. See Beard, North and Price (1998), Vol. 1, 50, 261, Vol. 2, 124-126; Scullard (1981), 205-207; for the *Saturnalia* as a domestic ritual, see Dolansky (2010), 488-503.
[44] Plin. *Ep*. 2.6; Mart. *Epigr*. 5.78.

a focus on social enjoyment.[45] Cicero expresses his appreciation of this kind of Roman *convivium*: 'For our fathers did well in calling the reclining of friends at feasts a *convivium*, because it implies a communion of life, which is a better designation than that of the Greeks, who call it sometimes a "drinking together" and sometimes an "eating together", thereby apparently exalting what is of least value in these associations above that which gives them their greatest charm.'[46]

Luxurious settings and rich, succulent dishes turned dinner parties into banquets, at which the wealthy host could entertain a range of guests – his friends, his friends' friends (*umbrae*), his clients or the dinner-chasers/free-loaders/spongers (*parasiti*).[47] Although invitations were supposed to transcend the boundaries of class, hierarchies could still be emphasized at dinner, for example, in the way in which guests were seated or by the dishes they were served. A satirical description of such a sumptuous banquet is given in the *Cena Trimalchionis*, at which many luxurious dishes were served in an ostentatious manner.[48]

Imperial Rome gives another variety of this private commensality: private banquets organized by emperors. We are told, for instance, that on one occasion Otho invited eighty senators to have supper with him at the palace.[49] Emperors could also attend banquets as guests, as Nero did according to Suetonius.[50] Up to a point, banquets staged by the emperor in his palace or attended by him at other venues were like ordinary family banquets. However, extreme hierarchical structures juxtaposed with ostensibly convivial equality could be said to have been characteristic of the imperial 'private' banquets.[51]

Family gatherings, probably with friends present, were a customary manner to mark important milestones in the life of an individual and this kind of occasion often involved a banquet. The Romans not only celebrated their own birthdays but also those of their family members or friends.[52] The donning of the *toga virilis* around the

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[45] For the number of guests, see Gell. *NA* 13.11.1-3. For the settings of Roman dining places, see Dunbabin (2003a), 38-46.
[46] Cic. *Sen*. 13.45. See also Plut. *Mor*. *Quaest. conv*. 642.
[47] Dunbabin (2003a), 40-42; Fass (2005), 60-61.
[48] Petron. *Sat*. 26-78.
[49] Plut. *Otho* 3; Statius as Domitian's guest, see Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.
[50] Suet. *Ner*. 27.
[51] Vössing (2004), 533-543; Vössing (2015), 249-251. For the dining setting strengthening the difference in power and status between the emperor and his guests, see Bek (1983), 90-94.
[52] Cic. *Phil*. 2.15; Mart. 7.86; Plaut. *Capt*. 174; *Pseud*. 165-170, 175-185, 234, 775-780. For Roman birthday rituals and their functions in inter-personal relationships, see Argetsinger (1992), 175-193. For the *dies lustricus*, see Macrob. *Sat*. 1.16.36; Plut. *Mor*. *Quaest. Rom*. 288C-E. On this day, newborn babies were named and purified, sacrifices were offered and families gathered together. We do not know much about the communal feasts held on such an occasion, but a party in celebration of the neonate given by the parents for family and friends was deemed appropriate, see Ter. *Phorm*. 48-50; for the birth and *dies lustricus*, see Dasen (2009), 199-214; Dixon (1988), 237-240.

age of seventeen marked full adulthood for males and this milestone was accompanied by a ritual ceremony,[53] after which there could be a banquet or distribution of gifts.[54] The wedding feast (*cena nuptialis*) was an important element in a Roman wedding.[55] Guests shared a wedding cake (*mustaceum*),[56] and another feast (*repotia*) would be held the day after the wedding.[57] It was also common for the Romans to have meals to commemorate the dead.[58] A funeral feast (*silicernium*) would be held on the day of the actual burial;[59] another meal would be held on the ninth day after the funeral (*cena novendialis*).[60] On the anniversary of the birth of the departed, and during festivals for commemorating dead ancestors, particularly the *Parentalia* and *Feralia*,[61] it was customary for living family members and friends to partake of a meal at the grave-site.[62] These examples show that commensality often played a part in private social occasions associated with significant moments in the lifetime of a person.

Dining in public life

Commensality also featured strongly in Roman public life, in which it was often a part of religious rituals and ceremonies. Sacrificial meals, such as the *epulum Iovis* or the *lectisternium*, linked the Romans with their deities.[63] People from various social classes could participate in public sacrifices and share the victims' meat afterwards.[64] Since the Roman calendar was packed with public festivals, there were plenty of scope for the organization of public meals. For example, during one of the most ancient Roman festivals – the Latin Festival (*Feriae Latinae*) – the flesh of the victim would be shared

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[53] This *rite de passage* consisted of dedicating the *bulla*, replacing the *toga praetexta* with the *toga virilis*, a procession to the Forum Romanum and ultimately the Capitol, and making sacrifices. See Dolansky (1999); Dolansky (2006), 40-92; Dixon (1992), 101-102; Rawson (2003), 142-144; Harlow and Laurence (2002), 67-69; Dolansky (2008), 47-70.

[54] Dolansky (1999), 56-57.

[55] Gell. *NA* 2.24.7-14; Suet. *Cal.* 25. According to Juvenal, with his usual wit, there was a huge wedding feast for Gracchus, who was the male bride and reclined in the lap of his groom, see Juv. 2.119-120.

[56] Cato left a recipe for this cake, see Cato, *Agr*. 121.

[57] For the wedding dining and drinking, see Hersch (2010), 212-213, 221-222.

[58] Lindsay (1998), 67-80.

[59] Varro *Sat. Men*. 303; Apul. *Flor*. 19.

[60] Tac. *Ann*. 6.5; Petron. *Sat*. 65-66.

[61] Ov. *Fast.* 2.533-570; Varro *Ling*. 6.13; Juv. 5.85 (*feralis cena*); Plin. *HN* 20.113 (*epulis feralibus*).

[62] Toynbee (1971), 50-51, 61-64.

[63] Yerkes (1952), 25-26, points out that 'the word *sacrifice* was used in Latin to describe various rites which arose from the common meal when that meal was held…for the purpose of entering into union with the mysterious Power or powers….'

[64] Rüpke (2006), 143, mentions three possibilities to partake of food: *cena recta*, *sportulae* and selling sacrificial meat. The 'right of dining publicly' (*ius epulandi publice*) was enjoyed by the top class of the society; the common people could either buy the victim's meat or join in the banquet, seated separately, see Scheid (1988); Scheid (1985).

at a common meal.[65] Generally speaking, a festival was not complete without feasting.[66] For instance, the populace was invited to a public banquet at the *Saturnalia* and the *Compitalia*.[67]

The feast of Jupiter (*epulum Iovis*) was probably established at an early date and later linked to the *Ludi Plebeii*.[68] The first *lectisternium* mentioned by Livy was celebrated in 399 BC after a grave pestilence: the *duumviri* who were in charge of the sacred rites arranged couches for the deities and people throughout the city opened their doors, offering food to everyone, be they friends, strangers or personal enemies.[69] In 196 BC a college of *epulones* was established. The primary task of these functionaries was to organize public feasts during the festivals and games.[70]

Apart from these religious occasions, public dinners to mark important moments in life were also provided by individuals during the republican period, particularly in the final decades of the Republic. In fact, what these private individuals did was to transform what had been private affairs into public events, thereby blurring the distinction between public dining and private dining. Only a few texts from the republican era refer to public commensality taking place to celebrate significant events in the lives of private citizens.[71] From the time of Augustus the sources increase in number. During the empire, the emperors could and did stage public banquets in the city of Rome when celebrating important occasions in their lives.[72] On the municipal level, local elites began to resort to such moments as opportunities to display munificence towards their fellow-townsfolk. For instance, the birthday of a private individual could be celebrated with a public banquet.[73]

Public commensality could also be organized by a private individual as a vehicle to make his personal achievements known to the general public. During the late Republic, public banquets were provided by powerful victorious generals and the emperors of the Principate followed this example. Furthermore, local notables in Italian and provincial communities began to broadcast the bestowal of various public honours, such as election to high offices or the erection of a public statue, by sponsoring public dinners for the inhabitants of the town.[74]

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[65] Scullard (1981), 111-113.
[66] Macrob. *Sat*. 1.16.3-6.
[67] For the *Saturnalia*, see Scullard (1981), 205-207; for the *Compitalia*, see Scullard (1981), 58-60; Beard, North and Price (1998), Vol. 1, 184-186; for the development of the *Compitalia* at different periods, see Stek (2008), 112.
[68] Livy 29.38.8, 25.2.10, 33.42.11; Scullard (1981), 186; Beard, North and Price (1998), Vol. 1, 40.
[69] Livy 5.13.6-8; Beard, North and Price (1998), Vol. 1, 63.
[70] Livy 33.42; Scullard (1981), 186-187; Beard, North and Price (1998), Vol. 1, 100.
[71] Livy 8.22; Livy 39.46; Cic. *Mur.* 75; Suet. *Iul*. 26.2.
[72] E.g. Cass. Dio 48.34.3 for Octavian's coming of age; Cass. Dio 80.9.2 for Elagabalus' marriage.
[73] E.g. *CIL* X, 4736: a *duumvir* gave a banquet for the populace on his birthday.
[74] E.g. military victory: Plut. *Luc*. 37.4; Plut. *Caes*. 55; entry into office: *CIL* VIII, 769; honour bestowed: *CIL* VIII, 26606. For *cenae aditiales*, see Sen. *Ep*. 95.41; Varro, *Rust*. 3.6.6.

Dining within associations

We know that the members of an association held their own banquets during the first century BC.[75] It is not always clear where such gatherings took place, but some archaeological finds suggest that the *collegia* might have had special banqueting facilities.[76]

The important role of commensal activities in associational life can be inferred from some of the ways in which *collegia* referred to themselves: a 'dining club' (*collegium comestorum*/*sodales comestores*) or 'companions who are in the habit of banqueting together' (*convictores qui una epulo vesci solent*).[77] The by-laws of some associations dating to the imperial period show that *collegiati* had annual dining gatherings on special days (such as the foundation day of the association and the birthday of the patron deity).[78] Many *collegia* assumed responsibility for the burials and the death cults of their members and, on these occasions, funerary banquets could be held.[79] In addition, during various festivals, such as the *Parentalia*, *Rosalia* and the *dies Violaris*, banquets were commonly held to commemorate deceased members.[80] As Keith Hopkins put it, 'perhaps commemoration of the dead was merely an excuse for a good party'.[81]

At the time of the empire, the *collegia* are also encountered among the recipients of dinners funded by private munificence. For example, an inscription from Cemenelum records a woman named Etereia Aristolais who dedicated a statue for her deceased son and provided the *collegium centonariorum* with a banquet. Besides this meal, the *centonarii* received a sum of money on condition that they used the interest yielded by this sum to hold a banquet every year.[82] The evidence of such privately

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[75] Varro *Rust*. 3.2.16. For a discussion of banquets organized for members of associations, see Ascough (2008), 33-45; Donahue (2003), 432-434.

[76] See Bollmann (1998), 47; Dunbabin (2003a), 94-96. The meeting places might have varied from *collegium* to *collegium*, see Smith (2003), 102-105.

[77] *CIL* IX, 3693; *CIL* IX, 3815; *CIL* XI, 6244. Dunbabin (2003a), 94, 'Communal dining was beyond doubt one of the primary functions of the majority of *collegia*, whatever their official raison d'être.' Donahue (2017), 126-136.

[78] E.g. *CIL* VI, 10234; *CIL* XIV, 2112; Donahue (2003), 433-434.

[79] Waltzing (1895-1900), Vol. 1, 256-300; Ausbüttel (1982), 59-71; Van Nijf (1997), 38-69; Liu (2009), 266, summarizes the funeral arrangements which involved 'the maintenance of a collegial graveyard, the erection of inscribed tombstones for the deceased, the contribution of money for burials, (compulsory) attendance at the funerals of deceased members, giving funerary banquets, the performance of recurrent funerary rituals for the deceased, or some combination thereof.' The burial fees were probably paid by the deceased member (the membership dues) or by the living members, see Liu (2009), 269.

[80] Donahue (2017), 132-134; for the dining facilities at the tombs, see Liu (2009), 274 and note 94.

[81] Hopkins (1983), 214.

[82] *CIL* V, 7906.

sponsored collegial dining is limited, but it still indicates a new source of communal meals for *collegiati* in this period.

1.3.2 Privately sponsored communal dining as a form of '*euergetism*'[83]

A second way of studying privately sponsored communal dining is to group this particular form of private munificence with other forms of *euergetism*.[84] Similarities and differences between various types of *euergetism*, and the driving forces behind each of these types have long been contentious issues.[85] Not all of these discussions will be pursued here. According to the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, the term *euergetism* refers to 'the socio-political phenomenon of voluntary gift-giving to the ancient community'.[86] While this definition is an accurate description of some of the defining features of Hellenistic and Roman *euergetism*, it does not highlight the reciprocal relationship between benefactors and beneficiaries sufficiently. [87] Furthermore, even a superficial examination of the epigraphic evidence reveals that at least some benefactors in the Hellenistic and Roman world bestowed their generosity on particular sub-groups in local communities rather than the communities as a whole. As already mentioned, some benefactors provided communal meals exclusively for members of private associations. There are no good reasons not to study such privately funded collegial dinners from the angle of *euergetism*, especially because food-related benefactions targeting *collegiati* were obviously modelled on benefactions targeting entire communities.

The practice of *euergetism* in the communities of Roman Italy and in the African and Spanish provinces has attracted a great deal of attention in the modern literature,[88] but examples of private munificence in the north-western provinces

[83] Cf. Marrou (1956), 305, in which *évergétisme* is translated as 'private munificence'.
[84] The first introduction of this term to the scholarship of ancient history is owed to André Boulanger, see Boulanger (1923), 25; earlier contributions to the use and popularity of this term were also made by Marrou (1948), Veyne (1976) and Gauthier (1985).
[85] For example, Veyne (1976) and important reviews of Veyne by Andreau, Schmitt-Pantel and Schnapp (1978), Chevallier (1978) and Garnsey (1991); see also an overview in Migeotte (1997). For recent works on *euergetism*, see e.g. Zuiderhoek (2009), Domingo Gygax (2016).
[86] *Euergetism* in Hornblower, Spawforth and Eidinow (2012), 566.
[87] In the sense of gift-exchange between the private benefactor and local city/representative groups as beneficiary. Cf. Zuiderhoek's definition of civic *euergetism*, Zuiderhoek (2009), 9-12.
[88] On Roman Italy and North Africa, Duncan-Jones and Stanislaw Mrozek made a series of contributions in the 1960s: Duncan-Jones (1962); Duncan-Jones (1963); Duncan-Jones (1965); Duncan-Jones (1981); Duncan-Jones (1974a), a second edition came out in 1982; Mrozek (1968); Mrozek (1972a); Mrozek (1972b); Mrozek (1978); Mrozek (1984b); Mrozek (1987); Andreau (1977); Jouffroy (1977); Wesch-Klein (1990); Goffin (2002); Lomas and Cornell (2003); Zerbini (2008). On the Spanish provinces, Mackie (1990); Melchor Gil (1992); Melchor Gil (1993);

remain poorly known.[89] A common feature of the existing studies is that they focus on either one particular region of the empire or a limited number of regions. In his study of public feasts, Donahue discusses 'the Western Empire – primarily municipal Italy, Roman Spain and North Africa'.[90] However, as has already been observed, scant attention has been paid to the geographical distribution patterns revealed by epigraphic evidence of public feasts. At the very least we should try to explain why *euergetism* was well developed in Italy, North Africa and Spain, but much less in other parts of the Western Empire.

The phenomenon of *euergetism* in the Roman world is usually examined within a specific timeframe.[91] However, in his study published in 2009, Arjan Zuiderhoek looks at long-term developments in patterns of benefactions in Asia Minor.[92] Interpreting *euergetism* as 'a form of politics', he explains the proliferation of *euergetism* between the late first and early third century AD as prompted by the need of urban elites to legitimize their rule in an increasingly oligarchical society. *Euergetism,* Zuiderhoek argues, was a tool to be wielded to maintain social stability in the cities, but this does not mean that such an increase in *euergetism* should be ascribed primarily to potential threat of political and social instability.[93]

In an article which was published in 1994, Melchor Gil discusses the evolution of *euergetism* in Roman Spain.[94] Although he does discern an increase of *euergetism* from the late first century to the second century, he then sees a decline. But why? He discards explanations based primarily on economic crises, and suggests that the causes of its disappearance could lie in the changing mentality of the members of the elite. It is certainly plausible to argue that changes in both the structure of the empire and in the mentality of the elites did play a crucial role in the disappearance of *euergetism*. Nevertheless, there is certainly room for a more detailed discussion of exactly why elite mentality towards *euergetism* changed in this period.

Private munificence has been widely discussed in the context of other research, such as Duncan-Jones' work on the quantitative aspects of wealth in the Roman world, Forbis' study on municipal virtues in the Roman Empire and Hemelrijk's research into

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Blázquez (1993); Melchor Gil (1994); Navarro Caballero (1997); Andreu Pintado (2004); Melchor Gil (2005); Melchor Gil (2009); Pudliszewski (1992).

[89] On the Gauls and the Germanies, Frézouls (1984); Frézouls (1985-87). On Roman Britian, Blagg (1990). For a recent study of *civic euergetism* in Roman Asia Minor, see Zuiderhoek (2005); Zuiderhoek (2009). For banquets and distributions in the Greek East during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, see e.g. Schmitt-Pantel (1992), 255-420; Schmitt-Pantel (1982); Van Nijf (1997), 149-188; Schmitt-Pantel (1997).

[90] Donahue (2017), 4.

[91] E.g. Panciera (1997) on civic *euergetism* during the Roman Republic; {Alföldy, 1997 #688} on *euergetism* in the Augustan period; Eck (1997) on *euergetism* and the imperial cities.

[92] Zuiderhoek (2009), 17-20.

[93] Meyer (2011).

[94] Melchor Gil (1994), 77-81.

public roles of women in civic life.[95] In their discussions of motives behind munificence, scholars have come up with various interpretations, often related to the social and political elements of munificence.[96] Mrozek argues distributions were manipulated by benefactors as a political instrument to ensure support in elections and as a means to display one's social position.[97] Melchor Gil views *euergetism* as a tool serving to make manifest and perpetuate the existing social order and to create civic memories for the benefit of the benefactor and his/her family.[98] Similar arguments can be found in Donahue's analysis of benefactors. In his words, benefactors sponsored public feasts 'with the common thread being the overarching need to express publicly one's magnanimity and, in the process, to reinforce and dramatize economic and social differences between provider and recipient'.[99]

While the observations just quoted apply to *euergetism* in general, we need to bear in mind that the motivations behind private munificence could vary from one occasion to another and from one kind of benefaction to another. In his book on public dining, Donahue mentions different occasions on which public feasts were provided, but his main thesis is focused on the perspective of class distinctions, and he does not devote much time to motivations. Moreover, neither Donahue's book nor any other publication provides a satisfactory answer to the question of why privately sponsored communal dinners were such a popular form of *euergetism* in the period from the first to the third century AD. In other words, why did so many benefactors spend large sums of money on food-related benefactions?

Turning to the *collegia*, it has often been noted that collegial dinners were the primary activities of Roman associations.[100] Taking this basic observation as their point of departure, various scholars have examined occasions for collegial dining, the dining arrangements and the buildings in which these banquets were held.[101] It has also been noted that members of *collegia* could be invited to privately funded banquets offered

[95] Duncan-Jones (1982); Forbis (1996), 29-43; Hemelrijk (2004); Hemelrijk (2006); Hemelrijk (2013); Hemelrijk (2015), Ch.3, 'Civic Benefactresses'. See also Donahue (2004b); Van Bremen (1996).
[96] Mackie (1990), 184, gives a list of motives including 'regard for fellow-citizens, pride in one's town, religious sentiment, desire for power, for posthumous prestige or memory, and honor, esteem, a public reputation'.
[97] Mrozek (1987), 105.
[98] Melchor Gil (1992), 393.
[99] Donahue (2017), 116.
[100] For banqueting as one of the principal activities of *collegia*, see, for example, Waltzing (1895-1900), Vol. 1, 392; Ausbüttel (1982), 55-9; Patterson (1994), 233-234; Zanker (1994), 275-277; Dunbabin (2003a), 97.
[101] Donahue (2017), 130-134; Liu (2009), 248-251; Dunbabin (2003a), 94-99; Bollmann (1998), 37-39, 47-57, 133-134.

to civic communities.[102] It has also frequently been observed that hierarchical dining arrangements seem to have been a defining feature of collegial dinners. Nevertheless, it is still unclear whether benefactors throughout the western half of the empire included *collegia* among the recipients of community-wide dinners; the other possibility is that this happened only in certain regions and in certain periods. Similarly, the existing literature has little to say about the geographical and chronological spread of privately sponsored dinners which were organized exclusively for *collegiati*. Do we find such collegial dinners in the same regions in which *collegia* are known to have participated in community-wide meals or do the data sets for these phenomena reveal different geographical distributions?

1.4 Quantification and interpretation

As some existing studies have already attempted, the goal of this monograph is to examine privately sponsored dining primarily from the perspective of political and social history. An important difference with most existing publications is that my investigations will highlight geographical patterns in a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Quantification helps to achieve a better understanding of the identities of benefactors and beneficiaries, the occasions for such munificence and the differences between civic groups. Maps, graphs and tables based on quantitative data help to abstract geographical patterns. Consequently my approach will also be comparative: geographical patterns revealed by maps or graphs invite us to compare regions and to come up with explanations of region-specific phenomena. This also means that qualitative interpretation will remain an essential building block in my enquiries.

A parallel approach to the distribution of private munificence for communal dining looks at the chronological patterns. One of the central contentions of this book is that the long-term evolution of the practice of privately sponsored public dining cannot be understood without taking into account region-specific differences in political cultures. At the same time, the long-term changes – revealed by the chronological patterning of the epigraphic evidence – cannot be understood without taking into account long-term changes in the specific social and political structures of Roman society. In particular, we have to explain why inscriptions referring to privately funded communal meals peter out in the late third and early fourth century AD. Did this decline simply reflect a gradual impoverishment of civic elites or should we look for a more complex explanation?

[102] Duncan-Jones (1982), 141-143; Van Nijf (1997), 154-187; Donahue (2017), 126-128; Liu (2009), 222, 235; Hemelrijk (2008), 140. For the endowments used for collegial banquets, see Liu (2008a).

1.5 Evidence and structure

There are only a few literary sources which mention public (as opposed to private) banquets held by prominent figures in republican Italy or in the western half of the empire during the early Empire. Therefore any study of the practice of privately sponsored communal dining has to rely almost exclusively on epigraphic materials. To explore the issues which will be covered in this study, I have set up a database of 349 inscriptions containing information about private munificence expressed in the form of public and collegial dining. I have been able to build my work on a solid foundation. The catalogue contained in Donahue's book has been very helpful, but his corpus is not a specialized collection of epigraphic materials on Roman feasting paid for by private benefactors. Richard Duncan-Jones has included epigraphically recorded costs of feasts in his catalogue of costs and prices in Africa and Italy.[103] Stanislaw Mrozek and Jacek Pudliszewski give tables of benefactors who provided food distributions (and distributions of cash) to various groups of recipients in Roman Italy and Spain.[104] These lists provide a good starting point for a comprehensive understanding of communal dining as a benefaction across broader areas. For the purposes of this research, I have collected all inscriptions which are concerned with private munificence for communal dining in the communities of Italy and the western provinces, excluding the city of Rome. Although it can never be claimed that a collection is 100 percent complete, I do think that my corpus can be used as a representative sample on which to base a quantitative study.

The evidence from inscriptions can offset the deficiency in the literary sources and counteract the effects of earlier Rome-centric approaches. Nevertheless, the epigraphic nature of the primary sources also poses a series of problems and challenges. One of these concerns the possible distorting effects of what has come to be known as 'the epigraphic habit'. As is generally known, the output of inscriptions has its own characteristics in terms of chronological and geographical distribution. The problems arising from the geographical and chronological patterning of the epigraphic record as a whole will be examined more closely in Chapters 5 and 6. What I want to emphasize here is that the 'winners' in the local communities of the Western Roman Empire are more likely to have left traces of their achievements.[105] In practical terms, this means that most of the surviving evidence consists of inscriptions referring to those who had the capacity (and the aspiration) to leave such accounts. Perhaps the distorting effects of this bias should not be overestimated. Although the theoretical possibility that some people paid for communal dining without leaving records cannot be entirely dismissed – it should not be forgotten that advertising benefactions was an important ingredient

[103] Duncan-Jones (1982), costs of feasts in Africa, see 104; in Italy, see 201-203.
[104] Mrozek (1987), 64-75, Tables V-VIII; Pudliszewski (1992), 72-73.
[105] Liu (2009), 25; Hemelrijk (2015), 4.

of *euergetism* in the Roman Empire. Hence the former is not a very plausible scenario. Since *euergetism* was primarily the preserve of wealthy citizens and revolved around an exchange of material benefactions in return for public honours, the distribution patterns observed in the evidence available should reflect a historical reality. Another type of distortion could arise from the uneven distribution of evidence across regions. Promising findings from a particular area, or limited access to the sites of some Roman cities in other areas, could have influenced the spatial patterning of the evidence. However, while this difficulty is real enough, the differential availability of the surviving evidence cannot explain the complete lack of evidence of public dining in some areas which are rich in epigraphic sources. For example, although there is a considerable amount of epigraphic evidence from Roman Britain, not a single British inscription refers to privately sponsored public dining. Here too it does not seem far-fetched to assume that the surviving evidence reflects a historical reality.

The interpretation of the epigraphic evidence also poses several challenges. The inscriptions are often brief and formulaic. As a consequence, only a few texts provide detailed descriptions of how communal dinners were organized.[106] In some cases the only information provided by an inscription is that 'X gave an *epulum* or other food hand-outs'. Often there is additional information about the benefactor, including his or her name, career path or family background, and an explicit reference to the circumstances which prompted the benefactor's liberality. Beneficiaries can also be identified, for instance, the identification of the civic community as a whole or a list of representative groups. Unfortunately, the records are not always so explicit.

Furthermore, the sources are often fragmentary. In some cases the benefactor's name as disappeared in a lacuna, not allowing us to go beyond the conclusion that 'someone' gave a banquet. A closely related problem is that highly fragmentary inscriptions can be restored in multiple ways. One of the inscriptions included in Donahue's catalogue runs as follows: *[---] XIpr[im ---] / [---]us et pro[---] / [---]m et sta[tuas(?) ---] / [--- ded]icatio[ne*.[107] In this text, the phrase *[---]m et statuas* has been variously restored as *[temple]m et statuas*, or as *[epulu]m et statuas* or as *[porticu]m et statuas*.[108] In my view this text cannot be regarded as providing unequivocal evidence of a privately sponsored public meal.

Another issue concerns the provenance and dating of the epigraphic evidence. Most inscriptions cannot be dated precisely, and the provenance of the relevant inscriptions cannot always be recovered. I have had to rely upon existing literature and have tended to adopt the dates and places provided by specialists.

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[106] In the words of Meiggs (1973), 313: 'Inscriptions do not tell the whole story, it is the things that were taken for granted and were not worth recording that we most want to know.'

[107] *AE* 1991, 1676.

[108] Cf. Donahue (2017), 237, no. 309 and *Epigraphische Datenbank Heidelberg*, http://edh-www.adw.uni-heidelberg.de/edh/inschrift/HD055532: *------]XI pr[imus?] / [ob honorem IIvirat?]us et pro[misit?] / [templu?]m et sta[tuas?] / [--- ded]icatio[ne? ------*.

Lastly, it should be emphasized that the epigraphic material which has been included in this study consists entirely of published inscriptions. Sources which await discovery or publication might necessitate a future revision of my arguments or at least a re-analysis of the patterns revealed by my investigations.

In spite of these pitfalls, the relatively abundant epigraphic record has a unique value in shedding light on some important issues pertaining to the practice of privately sponsored communal dining. In Chapters 2 and 3, this material will be used to study the benefactors who donated communal dinners and the various groups of beneficiaries who were the recipients of their benefactions. The principal aims of these chapters are to place the privately funded food benefactions of the first centuries of the Empire in their political and social contexts so as to reconstruct the motives of those who provided them. Chapter 4 is concerned with privately sponsored communal dining for various associations. Finally, Chapters 5 and 6 will deal with the macro level. In these chapters geographical and long-term chronological patterns will be delineated and an attempt will be made to explain these patterns as a reflection of the existence of region-specific political cultures but also as a mirror of long-term political and social changes in the political cultures and mentalities of the western half of the Roman empire as whole.