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

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Chapter 2

Benefactors of public dining in western cities

During the first three centuries AD, civic benefactors played an important role in municipal life in the western half of the Roman Empire. It is commonly accepted that benefactors were rich citizens who were willing to use their wealth to pay for actions of munificence.[1] In the Greek world, 'the *euergetes* earned enhanced status, and possibly material rewards, by making donations in cash or kind for the benefit of the citizen body.'[2] In the Roman world, the core function of benefactors remained unchanged, in the sense that, in Italy and the Mediterranean provinces of the empire at least, it was expected that wealthy citizens would make benefactions to help local citizen communities. Only from the second quarter of the third century AD do we see a striking downturn in civic benefactions.

Food-related customs in Rome ranged from hosts sending dinner invitations to their guests[3] to monthly distributions of free hand-outs of grain in the city of Rome.[4] In this chapter, the focus will fall on the benefactors who provided gifts of food to local citizen communities, or specific sub-groups within these communities, in Italy and the western provinces. Although there are some examples of local elites acting collectively, the vast majority of civic food benefactions referred to in the sources were examples of the liberality of individual donors. Further distinctions appear when we concentrate on the circumstances in which individual benefactors arranged food hand-outs. Although many public dinners or food hand-outs were donated by office-holders, we also find many examples of wealthy citizens providing public meals in reponse to the bestowal of various types of honours on them. Yet another group of benefactors seems to have sponsored public feasts or food hand-outs in a purely private capacity (that is, not as

[1] E.g. Veyne (1976), 113-114.
[2] P.C. Millett, 'Finance, Greek and Hellenistic' in: Hornblower, Spawforth and Eidinow (2012), 271.
[3] E.g. Mart. 5.79; Plin. *Ep.* 1.15; Hor. *Carm*. 3.29; Sen. *Ep*. 19.11.
[4] See Woolf (1990), 197-200; Garnsey (1988), 211-217.

office-holders) and without having been prompted to do so by any preceding bestowal of public honours.

The main questions which will occupy us in this chapter are: Who were the people who provided civic communities in the western half of the empire with food benefactions? What were the circumstances which stimulated them? And, above all, why did they do this?

2.1 Typology of benefactors

Benefactor is a general term which covers a variety of gift-givers: men and women, office-holders and people acting in a purely private capacity, members of the town council and wealthy ex-slaves. Below, various categories of benefactors are distinguished for the purpose of claryifying which type or types of benefactors are most often encountered in the epigraphic sources.

2.1.1 Collective benefactors

A handful of inscriptions refer to the members of the *ordo decurionum* making collective decisions about public dinners or food distributions.

In a famous inscription from Forum Sempronii which was set up in AD 18, we read that at its own expense (that is, paid for from the local treasury) the local town council gave wine and cakes to the women at the temple of Bona Dea and wine and cakes to the decurions and people on the occasion of the dedication of the statues of the Caesars and the Augusta, vowing that the latter gifts would be repeated in perpetuity on the anniversary of the dedication. The inscription also refers to the town council's decision to organize an annual feast on the birthday of the emperor, Tiberius but states that the cost of this feast would be shouldered by a private benefactor, a certain Q. Cascellius Labeo, rather than by the community as a whole.[5]

It seems reasonable to assume that other Italian and provincial communities also arranged for food distributions to be made on imperial birthdays or on other occasions associated with the imperial cult. As Fishwick points out, the local *fasti* which have been found at the sites of various Italian and provincial towns 'provide the pattern not only for municipal cult in Italy but also for festivals celebrated in the provincial and municipal cults of the empire as a whole'.[6] A good example is an inscription from Narbo which contains a record of various anniversaries of significant events connected with the imperial house: 7 January, the day on which Augustus assumed the *fasces* for the first time, 31 May, the day on which Augustus reconciled the people and decurions

[5] *CIL* XI, 3303 = *ILS* 154. For translation, see Lomas (1996), 190-191; cf. Hemelrijk (2015), 210, n.103.
[6] Fishwick (1987), Vol. II, 482.

of Narbo, and two days to celebrate his birthday (23-24 September).[7] Public feasts can be expected to have been part and parcel of at least some of these celebrations, but the *fasti* do not mention them.

In some cases, feasts organized and paid for by the local town council were part of a one-off celebration. In AD 57 the local council of Salpensa (Baetica) restored (*restituit*) the statue of Nero and provided a public feast on the day of its rededication.[8] Since the decision to restore the statue had been taken by the town council as a whole, it is not surprising to see that same body taking collective responsibility for organizing the public meal. A somewhat similar example comes from the North African town of Mididi. Between AD 290 and AD 292 the *ordo decurionum* of Mididi laid on a feast (*epulum*) for the plebs after the construction of a new council hall had been completed. It appears that the erection of this new building had been financed by contributions made by the local *curiae* (groups of well-to-do citizens). Consequently, the public meal which was offered after the completion of the building work had been paid for by 'all members of the *curiae*' (*prestantibus curialibus universis*).[9] Another inscription from Baetica referring to the *res publica Oba* (Baetica) dedicating a statue and providing a feast (*epulum*) might also belong to this category[10] but, since the first part of the inscription is missing, we cannot be entirely certain of this.

Two other texts are a record of the local town council decreeing public dinners to mark the occasions on which statues were granted to prominent citizens.

In the second century AD, the town council of another Baetican community, Sosontigi, decreed public dinners (*cenae publicae*) be held for Quintus Valerius Optatus, who was an *Augustalis perpetuus*, and set up statues for him, his wife and children.[11]

An often-discussed/controversial inscription from Iporca (Baetica), which has been dated to the late second or early third century AD, suggests that it might have been unusual for a local town council to sponsor public dinners in these specific circumstances. The text in question reports that the town council of Iporca not only set up a statue for Cornelia Tusca, who was a 'perpetual priestess' (*sacerdos perpetua*), but also provided a public dinner (*cenae publicae*) when it was dedicated. Interestingly, the inscription ends with the somewhat ambiguous phrase 'likewise the *seviri* remitted the [cost of their?] dinners'. From these words it has been inferred that, under normal

[7] *CIL* XII, 4333.
[8] *CIL* II, 1281.
[9] *CIL* VIII, 11774. The meaning of the term *curiales* ('members of the *curiae*' or 'members of the town council') is disputed, see Amodio (1998), 233-249, but the former interpretation is supported by various other North African inscriptions, e.g. Duncan-Jones (1982), 108 and Duncan-Jones (1962), 73-74. *Contra* Donahue (2017), 94, the text does not refer to a meal being offered to all the *curiae* of the town.
[10] *CIL* II, 1330.
[11] *CIL* II, 1721 = *ILS* 5492.

circumstances, Cornelia Tusca would have been expected to shoulder the cost of this public meal herself and consequently the council's decision to provide a dinner at public expense, prompting the *severi* to pay for their own meals, should be interpreted as an additional honour.[12]

According to Donahue, an inscription from yet another town in Baetica, the *municipium* of Epora, also refers to the local town council sponsoring a public dinner, but the text actually states that Marcus Valerius Phoebus, a local *sevir Augustalis*, had been awarded the privilege of joining the local council.[13]

Inscriptions which contain references to the provision of public meals by the collective citizens of various communities also concern the seving of food organized either after the successful erection of buildings at public expense or in connection with a decision to honour a prominent member of the community by awarding him or her a public statue.

If a plausible restoration recently proposed by Ari Saastamoinen can be relied on, the first variety is exemplified by a third-century inscription from the North African town of Sustri connected to the rebuilding of a local shrine by the [*populus Sustrita*]*nus*. When the shrine was dedicated on the birthday of Emperor Gordian III, the people of Sustri held a public feast 'because of the two festive occasions'.[14]

A good illustration of the second category appears in an inscription from Privernum which was set up in AD 137. In this year the citizens of Privernum (the *Privernates*) decided to organize a public meal (*cena*) for Titus Flavius Scopellianus on 15 March and to set up a statue for him as a reward for his meritorious service (*ob merita eius*). Scopellianus, who had held multiple local offices and happened to be the father of two *equites*, reciprocated by providing cakes and sweet wine (*crustum et mulsum*) on 20 August when the statue was dedicated.[15]

A somewhat anomalous case is referred to in the famous inscription from Palestrina commemorating the setting up of statue in accordance with the provisions of the will of the late-Roman senator, Postumius Iulianus. When Postumius died in AD 385 he bequeathed a piece of land to the town of Praeneste, on the condition that the *cives Praenestini* would honour his spirit year after year and set up a statue of him in the *forum*. The citizens of Praeneste duly erected the statue and decided to organize dinners in honour of their deceased patron 'twice a year or more often'.[16] Although Postumius did not spell out exactly how his spirit was to be 'honoured' after his death, the decision to organize commemorative meals was clearly taken in order to comply with the condition made in his bequest.

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[12] *CIL* II, 1046, discussed by Hemelrijk (2015), 146-147.
[13] *CIL* II, 2156 = *ILS* 6913. See Donahue (2017), 94.
[14] *CIL* VIII, 25935. See Saastamoinen (2010), Appendix 1, no. 546.
[15] *AE* 1974, 228.
[16] *CIL* XIV, 2934.

2.1.2 Individual benefactors

Men

Individual male benefactors accounted for the vast majority of civic benefactors who provided public meals in the Western Roman Empire. Most of them were members of the local upper classes, mainly those who were performing, or had performed, certain functions in their city.

The longer the *cursus honorum* of the person recorded had been and the more elevated the positions he had fulfilled, the higher his social status would be and the more likely he would have been to take on the role of benefactor.[17] One example of an individual who held multiple local offices, most of them successively, was Publius Lucilius Gamala from Ostia. From an inscription which was set up in the early years of the Principate, it appears that Gamala had been an *aedile* and had been admitted to the town council without charge. In the years which followed, he was elected *pontifex*, *duumvir quinquennalis* with censorial power and *curator* in charge of managing public property. He offered public meals three times, one *epulum* for 217 dining couches (*triclinia*) and two *prandia*.[18] It has been claimed that Gamala was the first municipal benefactor to have provided communal food in Roman history, and that the scale of his public feasts was unique. Perhaps his generosity earned him a public funeral in the twenties BC.[19]

Most male benefactors were local magistrates or had held this office. The obvious reasons for this are that local magistrates were recruited from wealthy families and that local office-holders were expected to display generosity towards their fellow citizens (cf. below). Nevertheless, we also encounter members of the local elite sponsoring food benefactions outside the context of office-holding and without any stimulus having been provided by any recent bestowal of honours. The motives which might have prompted such 'voluntary' benefactions will be discussed in the later part of this chapter.

There is one inscription referring to a member of the local elite who continued to maintain close links with his home community after attaining high office in Rome. Marcus Pontius Felix held several magistracies at Tusculum before becoming a senator.

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[17] For instance, *duumviri* are more often attested as benefactors (in 42 inscriptions) than *aediles* (in 25 inscriptions).

[18] *CIL* XIV, 375 = *ILS* 6147. D'Arms (2000), 198, suggests these public meals were provided on the occasion of Gamala's admission to the town council, but the inscription does not provide any concrete information on this point. A couple of the public meals referred to in the text might have been provided on the occasion of the dedication of one of the shrines which Gamala is said to have restored or built.

[19] D'Arms (2000a), 192-195.

When the *municipes* and *incolae* of Tusculum set up a statue for him, he offered the *populus* a public feast and honeyed wine on the dedication day.[20]

Other prominent members of local elites belonged to the senatorial class either by birth or by adoption. Pliny the Younger falls into the latter category. As far as we can tell, he never held any magistracy in Comum.[21] However, he maintained close contacts with his native town and bestowed various benefactions on its citizens.[22]

Priests of various types, among them *pontifices*, *sacerdotes*, *flamines* and *augures*, were also recruited from the local town elites. As a matter of fact, a priesthood and a civic magistracy were often held by the same person either simultaneously or successively.[23] Most priesthoods were normally held for one year, but re-election to the same priesthood was possible and references to permanent priesthoods, indicated by the term *perpetuus*, are also commonly found. It is noteworthy that when priests acted as private benefactors their liberality was not necessarily linked to the priesthood.

Municipal patrons occasionally acted as civic benefactors.[24] In an article which was published more than thirty-five years ago, John Nicols demonstrates that between the principates of Augustus and Trajan about 60 percent of patrons of communities were senators, 22 percent were equestrians and 18 percent members of local elites who had held various local offices.[25] In this early period it was still uncommon for senators to become patrons of their home communities. Pliny the Younger, for instance, was patron of Tifernum Tiberinum but not of his home-town Comum.[26] In striking contrast to this more than three-quarters of equestrians became patrons of their own *patriae*.[27]

Many inscriptions refer to municipal patrons who had their home-town or other communities as clients, bestowing food benefactions on their client communities.[28] Should they have had multiple client communites, which included their home communities, they might have been expected to have favoured their home-towns when bestowing food benefactions.[29] Whatever the case might have been, at least one exception suggests that this assumption might not have been the case. Publius Aelius Marcellus, an army officer who was a native of Apulum in Dacia, was patron and decurion in his home-town. In addition, he was also patron of several towns in Italy.

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[20] *CIL* XIV, 2636.
[21] Krieckhaus (2004), 299-314.
[22] E.g. Plin. *Ep*. 4.1; *CIL* V, 5262 = *ILS* 2927.
[23] This person normally belonged to local upper class and was expected to take the interests of the local community to heart. Cf. Szemler (1972), 21; Beard (1990), 24.
[24] For Roman patronage, see e.g. Gelzer (1969), trans. by Seager, 86-101; Badian (1958). For the categories of patronage, see Nicols (1980a), 366; Nicols (2014), 2-4.
[25] Nicols (1980a), 380.
[26] Krieckhaus (2004), 308.
[27] Nicols (1980a), 381.
[28] E.g. *CIL* XIV, 2120; *AE* 2004, 467; *CIL* VIII, 1548; *CIL* X, 5917; *CIL* VIII, 25808b = *ILS* 9403.
[29] *CIL* IX, 5831.

The local council of one of his client towns, Forum Flaminii, decreed that a statue be set up for Marcellus. On the dedication day he provided bread, wine and 20 sesterces for the *decuriones* and their children and the sum of 4 sesterces for ordinary citizens.[30] Although the statue was decreed by the council of Forum Flaminii, the inscription was found at Fulginiae of which Marcellus also happened to be patron. In which town was the statue erected? Which town received the benefactions? There are no certain answers. Fulginiae was a larger town than Forum Flaminii.[31] Perhaps the two towns co-ordinated their efforts to honour their common patron. Of course, we cannot rule out the possibility that Marcellus also provided his home-town in Dacia benefactions, but there is no epigraphic evidence to support this supposition.

From the reign of Hadrian and thereafter, some interesting changes begin to creep into the social backgrounds of municipal patrons. Although senators continue to account for a considerable proportion of municipal patrons, their share sinks to 40 percent. In this same period, the number of senators who became patrons of their home communities rises to 31 (as opposed to 9), suggesting that asking a senator to accept a formal relationship of patronage with his home-town was becoming a way of cementing the relationship between the community and its most prominent members.[32]

Furthermore, the epigraphic record points to the existence of region-specific customs which guided the selection of municipal patrons. It seems clear, for instance, that communities in North Africa and Baetica tended to enter into relationships of patronage with senators or equestrians who had served as provincial administrators, whereas communities in Tarraconenses preferred to establish these relationships with men of local importance.[33]

Evidence of military men providing public food benefactions is sparse. One of the few inscriptions belonging to this category reports that Marcus Nasellius Sabinus, a *praefectus* of *cohors I Dalmata*, together with his father, who was an *Augustalis*, established a foundation (10,000 sesterces if at an annual interest rate of 5 percent) for the rural *pagus Lucullanus* in the territory of Beneventum. The *pagani* were to use the annual revenue (125 *denarii* = 500 sesterces) for the purpose of organizing annual feasts on Sabinus' birthday.[34]

Augustales appear quite often in the guise of providers of food benefactions to communities. In many older publications, the *Augustales* of the early-imperial period are described or defined as a kind of priests of the imperial cult.[35] In reality there are no good reasons to think of *Augustales* as having a particular connection to the

[30] *CIL* XI, 5215.
[31] De De Ligt (2012), Appendix II, 317.
[32] Nicols (1980a), 382.
[33] Nicols (1980b), 545.
[34] *CIL* IX, 1618. Cf. De Carlo (2013), 274.
[35] E.g. Duff (1928), 133-137; Taylor (1914); Duthoy (1978); Ostrow (1985) and Ostrow (1990).

imperial cult rather than simply as a status group which was created by Augustus.[36] Many *Augustales* were of servile origin.[37] Nevertheless, they achieved a relatively high social status beyond that of their original class. As in the case of the *decuriones*, most food benefactions were made by individual *Augustales* rather than by the *Augustales* as a collective body, but an inscription from Caere gives an exception to this rule. In AD 25 twelve freedmen organized plays in both the Latin and Greek styles on six successive days and provided the people (*populus*) of Caere with cakes and sweet wine.[38]

Besides the ex-slaves belonging to the *Augustales*, we occasionally encounter other freedmen sponsoring communal dining. During the reign of Hadrian, for instance, the freedman Leonas dedicated a statue for his patron and offered the citizens of Auximum a *cena*.[39] A few decades later a silk merchant, Aulus Plutius Epaphroditus, who was probably a freedman, paid for the construction of a temple of Venus at Gabii, distributed cash on the day of its dedication and also donated 10,000 *denarii* to the town of Gabii, the interest on which the the *decuriones* and *seviri Augustales* were to use to hold an annual feast on the birthday of his daughter.[40]

Figure 2.1 shows the absolute numbers of male benefactors belonging to various categories.[41]

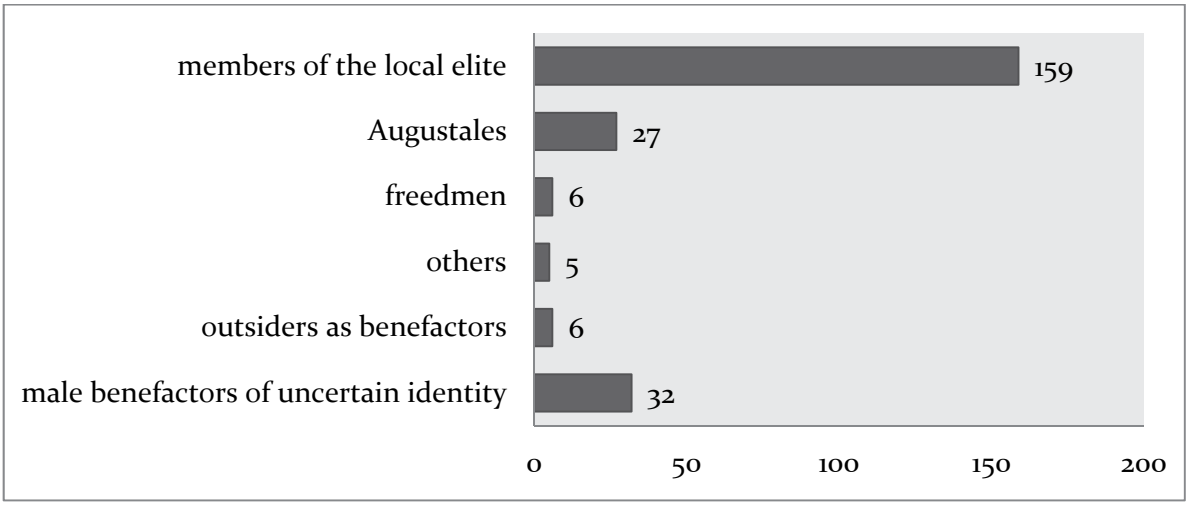

Figure 2.1 Male benefactors (n=235)

[36] See e.g. Beard, North and Price (1998), 357-358; Mouritsen (2006) and Mouritsen (2011), 250-261.
[37] E.g. *CIL* X, 1887; *CIL* V, 1897; *CIL* XI, 5222.
[38] *CIL* XI, 3613.
[39] *CIL* IX, 5833.
[40] *CIL* XIV, 2793. For discussions about this inscription, see Giroire and Roger (2007), 192; Rüpke (2014), 27-32.
[41] See Appendix III. 'Members of the local elite' include those who were holding or had held one or various magistracies, priesthoods, military ranks and those who were appointed civic patrons of their home-towns. 'Freedmen' only include those who did not belong to the *Augustales*. 'Others' refers to the rest local benefactors who might not have belonged to the local elite.

The results of this classification show that food-related *euergetism* was primarly something undertaken by local people. Looking at those benefactors whose social status can be identified (203 out of 235 individuals), it appears that the vast majority of them provided public dinners or food gifts while holding or after holding various local magistracies, priesthoods or military ranks. Taken together with those members of the local elite who were not office-holders, the share of benefactors belonging to local elite families amounts to 78.3 percent (159/203). If we go a step farther and regard the *Augustales* as a prominent group within the communities which consisted of well-off inhabitants, the share of powerful, prominent and wealthy local people who bestowed food-related benefactions on their communities rises even higher to 91.6 percent.

Women

Since Roman society was extremely patriarchal, there was not much public space in which women could play a role. Nevertheless, the epigraphic evidence leaves no doubt that a considerable number of women acted as civic benefactors.[42] Mrozek has estimated that about 10 percent of all donors in municipal Italy during the Principate were women.[43] On the basis of the data collected for the purposes of my own investigations, which focus only on food gifts but cover a large geographical area, the share of female benefactors can be estimated at ca. 19 percent (56 women vs. 235 men). Even though the number of female benefactors was much smaller than that of the male donors, their contribution to the communities does merit attention.

Under Roman law any free woman of citizen status who was not subject to *patria potestas* was entitled to own property, and this can be seen as a crucial prerequisite for women making public benefactions. Women could attain wealth by receiving dowries, by inheriting property or by engaging in economic activities.[44]

The social background of benefactresses was less diverse than that of male benefactors. Perhaps not surprisingly, women belonging to local elite families account for the largest proportion of civic benefactresses. These women were influential even without holding office. In many cases they provided food benefactions at their own expense, but sometimes they acted as co-donors. In quite a few cases we encounter benefactresses providing public dinners or food hand-outs to honour the testamentary dispositions in the will of a deceased member of their family.[45] In other cases, a family tradition of providing benefactions to local communities might have prompted elite women to give food gifts on a purely voluntary basis.

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[42] See e.g. Van Bremen (1996) and works of E.A.Hemelrijk. For recent work, see Hemelrijk (2015).
[43] Mrozek (1987), 74.
[44] Cf. Gardner (1986); Gardner (1999), 11-27.
[45] E.g. *CIL* VIII, 937; *CIL* II, 1047; *CIL* II, 1941; *CIL* III, 1717.

Serving as a priestess is an indication of a relatively high economic capacity because the priestess or her family would have had to be rich to have afforded the post. Just as in the case of priesthoods held by men, an entry fee was required to become a priestess. Asicia Victoria, a *flaminica perpetua* in Thugga, not only paid *summa honoraria* for her priestesshood but also gave 100,000 sesterces for the priestesshood of her daughter.[46] Such women unquestionably would have had the means to bestow various kinds of material benefits on their home communities. Various inscriptions refer to women paying for a public feast because they had obtained a priestesshood[47] and we hear of women providing communal feasts while holding priestesshoods. Iunia Rustica, the first and perpetual priestess in the *municipium* of Cartima (Baetica), offered a public feast and public entertainments after financing the construction of porticos, the digging of a pool and the erection of a statue of Cupido.[48] In short, serving as a priestress provided women with a platform on which to play a role in the public sphere.

There are also some examples of freedwomen providing food gifts to communities, even though the evidence is scarce. In the small town of Nepet, an imperial freedman's wife and daughter made a dedication for their husband and father while offering a public feast to the decurions, the *Augustales*, the *plebs* and to their wives and children.[49] Because of their lower social rank freedwomen were much less likely to have made an appearance in public life, and this must be the explanation of the relative dearth of inscriptions referring to food gifts being provided by such women.

Like men of high social status, prominent women are known to have established relationships of patronage with local communities, but the number of civic patronesses attested in Italy and the western provinces is much smaller than the corresponding number of men.[50] If we apply Nicols' criteria for the identification of civic patronesses, or the slightly different criteria formulated by Hemelrijk,[51] there is not a single instance of a municipal patroness providing food-related benefactions.

There is one example of a municipal patron's wife dispensing food benefits to her husband's client community. The woman in question was a certain Vibia Marcella,

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[46] *CIL* VIII, 26590-26591 = *ILTun* 1427 = *Dougga* 73.
[47] E.g. *CIL* II, 1278; *CIL* VIII, 1491 = *CIL* VIII, 26525.
[48] *CIL* II, 1956, discussed by Hemelrijk (2015), 159-160.
[49] *CIL* XI, 3206.
[50] Hemelrijk (2004), 210-214.
[51] For Nicols's criteria, see Nicols (1989), 120. He puts forward two conditions for the recognition of a civic patroness: first, when the title *patrona* was explicitly granted to a woman; second, the text of the inscription was officially authorized by the decurions. For Hemelrijk's criteria, see Hemelrijk (2004), 213. She adjusts the criteria: in addition to the decurions' authorized decree, when the title *patrona* is mentioned in an inscription which was erected by 'the city (*colonia, municipium, res publica, civitas*, etc.), the *ordo decurionum*, the citizen body or a substantial section of it (such as the *plebs urbana*)', the woman is regarded as a municipal patroness.

who was married to Lucius Attius Severus, *praefectus* of *cohors I Africana* and patron of Auximum. Sometime in the second century AD, she had a statue of her husband erected in the town and to mark the occasion she offered the citizens a *cena* and the *populus* an *epulum*.[52] It is doubtful if Vibia Marcella should be regarded as a patroness in her own right.[53]

How do we explain this dearth of food benefactions provided by *patronae*? One possible reason might be that female patrons were seen primarily as intermediaries between client-cities and the imperial government.[54] If so, these women might not have been expected to provide food benefactions to the local communities in question. While this hypothesis could offer part of the solution, it does not explain why various male patrons of communities, including at least some external patrons,[55] are known to have provided communal meals in communities with which they had established relationships of patronage.

There is, however, a more convincing explanation. As both Nicols and Hemelrijk have observed, most of the municipal *patronae* belonged to the senatorial class, or even the imperial family.[56] Their status is strikingly different from that of male patrons, many of whom were equestrians or men of local importance (cf. above). Therefore it would seem likely that only well-connected women of very high status were co-opted as civic patronesses, suggesting that closeness to the emperor or other powerful people was regarded as a key qualification for their elevation.[57] If such connections were indeed of paramount importance, it does not seem that providing feasts or other food benefactions would have been regarded as an important duty of patronesses.

A closely related reason that female patrons did not provide local communities with food benefactions could have to do with the fact that the vast majority of those women who entered into relationships of patronage with Italian or provincial towns did not live in these towns, although it seems reasonable to suppose that patronesses would have had some kind of connection with the client-city before they were chosen as a city *patrona*. In some cases their families might have originated from the city; in other cases the female patron might have owned property in the city.[58] However, we can be certain that many high-ranking patronesses lived in Rome. Hence it is feasible to assume that the geographical distance separating patronesses from their client-cities dissuaded them from providing specific material benefactions. This observation applies

[52] *CIL* IX, 5841.
[53] Van Abbema (2008), 35, suggests Vibia Marcella can be regarded as a *patrona*.
[54] See e.g. Duthoy (1984), 148-151; Salway (2000), 140-148; Hemelrijk (2004), 222-226.
[55] See Appendix III, 'Outsiders as benefactors'. Cf. Donahue (2017), 115-116.
[56] Nicols (1989), 140, Table A; Hemelrijk (2004), 238, Table 3 and Table 4.
[57] Hemelrijk (2004), 224-226. It can be inferred that the difference between a city patron and other members of the local elite was that the former had contacts with the central power in Rome, see Duthoy (1984), 148-150.
[58] See Kajava (1990), 27-36.

especially to client-cities in North Africa. Eleven women, ten belonging to senatorial families and one member of the imperial family, are recorded as patronesses in Africa Proconsularis,[59] but none of them is known to have provided food benefactions for their client cities. In other words, while physical proximity to the imperial court was a major factor in selecting municipal patronesses, the very same proximity meant that they were less likely to have provided their client-communities with material benefactions. Viewed in this light, it might be no coincidence that few inscriptions mention any kind of benefactions provided by patronesses.[60] The only explicit exception is an inscription from Bulla Regia from which it appears that Iulia Memmia, patroness of Bulla Regia, built baths for the city and established a cash foundation for their maintenance.[61]

Yet another reason for the lack of epigraphic references to female patrons providing food benefactions could have to do with the chronological distribution of the evidence. As Hemelrijk has observed, approximately 60 percent of the inscriptions recording female patrons of communities should be dated in or after the third century, only 23 percent is dated roughly to between the late second and the early third century and the remaining 17 percent should be dated to the (late) second century.[62]

However, as we will see in Chapter 6, epigraphic references to privately sponsored public dining decline from the late second/early third century. Hence it can be argued that patronesses of communities were most active in a period in which the practice of communal dining was on the wane.

Interestingly, we find another two women providing food to communities from which they did not originate. In mainland Italy a certain Corellia Galla Papiana bequeathed 100,000 sesterces to Minturnae and the same amount to Casinum so that *crustulum* and *mulsum* could be distributed to celebrate her birthday every year.[63] At Ostur (Baetica), a certain Marcus Calpurnius Sentinatianus erected a silver statue of Juno Regina and his wife, Suconia Rustica, celebrated the dedication with a public banquet for both sexes.[64] Although the husband had held various offices (*primus pilus legionis primae Adiutricis, procurator provinciae Lusitaniae et Vettoniae* and *praefectus classis praetoriae Ravennatis*), his relationship with Ostur remains a bit of a mystery. What we do know is that this couple might have originally come from Hispalis.[65] Whatever their origins, the exceptional examples of Papiana and Rustica at least demonstrate that women's displays of generosity could serve either their own purposes or the interests of their families, even beyond their home communities.

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[59] Hemelrijk (2015), 536-540, Table 5.1.
[60] Forbis (1996), 12-21, 34-42.
[61] *AE* 1921, 45. Cf. Hemelrijk (2015), 236.
[62] For figures see Hemelrijk (2015), 536-540; cf. Nicols (1989), 140.
[63] *CIL* XIV, 2827 = *ILS* 6294.
[64] *CIL* II, 1267 = *CILA* 1, 81.
[65] Cf. Des Boscs-Plateaux (1995), 126-127.

The epigraphic data relating to food gifts provided by women are summarized in Figure 2.2.

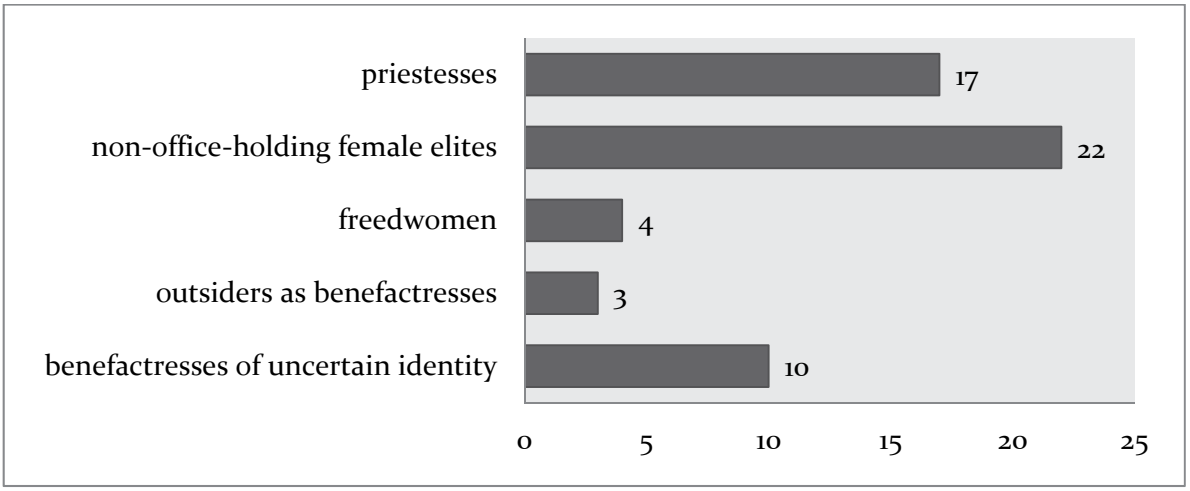

Figure 2.2 Female benefactors (n=56)[66]

The chart reveals that women belonging to local elite families, comprising both priestesses and women not holding any religious or other position, account for 84.8 percent of all identifiable female benefactors known to have provided food gifts to communities. The obvious explanation is that in an oligarchical society elite women were allowed, indeed expected, to help advertise the superior status of elite families and to make a contribution towards legitimizing elite rule by engaging in acts of public munificence.[67] At the same time, although women continued to be barred from civic magistracies they could hold those religious offices which had been held by women for many centuries. This explains why most of those elite women who provided food benefactions are not recorded to have held any type of office, but nevertheless a significant minority can be identified as priestesses. In their turn, the recipient communities not only enjoyed material benefactions but also strengthened their ties with the wealthiest and most powerful families in the town. In the case of freedwomen, their relatively low social status seems to have weighed more heavily than their financial capacity to display public generosity.

2.2 Categories of benefactions

While there can be no doubt about the frequency of communal dinners and food distributions sponsored by benefactors, the practice of privately funded public dining needs to be analysed in more depth. In what circumstances did they provide public food benefactions? Exactly why did municipal benefactors sponsor communal dining? And, how do we explain the popularity of privately sponsored public feasts?

[66] See Appendix III.
[67] Cf. Van Bremen (1996).

For analytical reasons, I shall divide food-related benefations from private munificence into four categories on the basis of the circumstances in which they were bestowed.[68]

My first category is composed of all acts of *office-related* benefaction, corresponding to what Paul Veyne has called benefactions *ob honorem*.[69] In Veyne's account of the transformation of the liturgical system of (parts of) the Classical world into the *euergetism* of the Hellenistic and that of the Roman world, this type of benefaction played an important part. One of the basic ideas guiding Veyne's analysis is that, from late-Classical times onwards, holders of magistracies were expected to shoulder some of the costs related to office-holding and/or to make gifts to the communities in which they held their offices. As a result civic offices were monopolized by wealthy town elites. Although ostensibly democratic institutions which had survived for many centuries, the *poleis* of Hellenistic Greece and Asia Minor became effectively oligarchical.

While many subsequent publications have cast doubt on various aspects of Veyne's analysis, for instance, by emphasizing the continuing importance of local citizenship and citizen communities in both the Hellenistic and the Roman world, the epigraphic sources leave no doubt that benefactions related to office-holding were an important part of social life. For the purposes of my own analysis, I define office-related food gifts to have been composed not only of those food gifts which were provided by office-holders but also by people who had been elected to offices or were taking up such offices at some time after their election.

My second category of benefactions comprises all food-related benefactions which were provided in response to the bestowal of various kinds of honour (but not in response to election to office). This type of food benefaction will be referred to as *responsive* food gifts. Benefactions provided by individuals who were responding to the bestowal of honours on close relatives will also be grouped under this heading.

Then there are many examples of food gifts being awarded outside the context of office-holding and without any discernible stimulus being provided by the bestowal of honours. In what follows, benefactions of this type will be referred to as *voluntary* food benefactions. As are benefactions *ob honorem*, this type of benefaction is extensively discussed by Paul Veyne. He postulates that it became increasingly common for the civic elites of the Hellenistic world to provide various kinds of 'spontaneous' benefactions, not because they wanted to defuse economic, social or political tensions, but simply because spontaneous largesse was seen to be an effective way of displaying or asserting membership of the social and political elite.[70] While this specific

[68] In what follows, I focus on food benefactions provided by individuals benefactors, to the exclusion of food gifts provided by the *ordo decurionum*, or by other groups, collectively.
[69] Veyne (1990), 90-94, 117-118, 122-123.
[70] Veyne (1990), 104-105.

interpretation has been heavily criticized, it is certainly true that in the western half of the Roman Empire a considerable number of food gifts were provided by benefactors who were neither office-holders nor recipients of any other type of civic honour.[71]

Fourthly, some food gifts were provided in accordance with the dispositions made in the will of someone who had recently died. Such food-related benefactions will be called 'testamentary'. However, it should be noted that it is not always clear whether the food benefactions provided by the heirs or other beneficiaries of a last will were prescribed in that will or provided on a voluntary basis.

2.2.1 Office-related benefactions

When an individual was elected to a magistracy or priesthood, the electee had to pay a *summa honoraria*.[72] This sum was usually destined for the public treasury, but in some cases it was used to pay for benefactions. From an inscription which was set up in Thibica (Africa Proconsularis) in the early- or mid-third century, it appears that Lucius Plancius Victorianus and Gaius Volussius Statianus multiplied the *summae honorariae* which they had to pay in connection with their election to the aedileship, and used this money to erect some kind of monument, probably a statue, and offered *sportulae* to the decuriones as well as an *epulum* and an oil distribution (*gymnasium*) to their fellow citizens on the day of dedication.[73] In other inscriptions, we read about the interest from a *summa honoraria* being used to pay for public feasts. During the reign of Septimius Severus, a certain Asicia Victoria, who had been elected *flaminica perpetua* in the North African town of Thugga, not only trebled the amount of money which was due as the *summa honoraria* for this priestesshood but also paid 100,000 sesterces for her daughter's priestesshood. The annual income from these sums was to be used to finance a whole range of benefactions, including *sportulae* for the decurions and a feast for the *curiae*.[74] While the *summa honoraria* took the form of a monetary payment, other contributions, such as construction of buildings, the dedication of statues, games and privately sponsored communal feasts, were sometimes provided as supplements. One example is that of C. Lucilius Athenaeus, a *flamen* of Ceres in Carthage, who was entrusted with the task of erecting a statue of Emperor Septimius Severus at Uchi Maius. After the 12,000 sesterces which he had paid as his *summa honoraria* in connection with this appointment, as well as an unspecified amount of public money, had been used to pay for this statue, Athenaeus not only provided extra money to

[71] For a critique of Veyne's insistence on the non-political nature of 'voluntary' benefactions see, for instance, Andreau, Schmitt-Pantel and Schnapp (1978), 307-325.
[72] See Garnsey (1971), 309 and n.1. Schwarz (2001) rightly doubts the financial importance of *summae honorariae* in the Roman East, but goes too far when she questions their existence in various parts of the Roman empire. Cf. Zuiderhoek (2009), 43.
[73] *CIL* VIII, 769. For the meaning of *gymnasia*, cf. Fagan (1999); Hemelrijk (2015), 144, note 112.
[74] *CIL* VIII, 26590-26591, *ILTun* 1427=*Dougga* 73. Cf. *AE* 1968, 588 = *IMustis* 20.

finance the plinth of the statue and its ornamentations but also provided a feast (*epulum*) for the *decuriones* after the statue had been dedicated.[75] Likewise, in the Numidian city of Madauros Quintus Obstorius Honoratus, a veteran of *cohors I urbana* (which was stationed in Carthage), spent 40,000 sesterces of his own money on an arch and a statue after paying 'all *summae honoriae*' into the public treasury. When the arch and the statue were dedicated, he provided *sportulae* for the decurions, a feast for the *curiae* and oil for the *populus*.[76] If we opt for a strict interpretation of the inscription reporting these gifts, the *summae honoriae* and the 40,000 sesterces were different sums of money.

Many other inscriptions refer to prominent citizens providing gifts of food after they had been elected to various magistracies or been admitted to the local town council. The magistracies in question ranged from an aedileship[77] and a duumvirate[78] to the office of *duumvir quinquennalis*.[79] Admission to the local town council appears to have been a separate honour.[80] Following such elections individuals displayed their generosity, in part in order to show their gratitude but also to advertise their newly acquired honours. One way of doing so was by inviting the decurions, or wider sections of the population, to a public meal. Sometime during the first century AD, a certain Lucius Cornelius M[---] offered the decurions of Surrentum a great meal (*magna cena*) after his election to an unspecified magistracy.[81] Similarly, in the second century a certain Labeo gave the people (*populus*) of Cures Sabini a meal after attaining the office of *quattuorvir*.[82]

Public meals were also offered by prominent citizens who had been appointed to priesthoods. We read, for instance, about food benefactions given *ob honorem flamonii* (*perpetui*) or *ob honorem pontificatus*.[83] Sometime after AD 138, a certain Gaius Pescennius Saturus Cornelianus set up two statues and provided two banquets at Zama Regia after he had been appointed *flamen perpetuus* of the deified Emperor Hadrian.[84] In the same period, Publius Marcius Quadratus, a *flamen* of the imperial cult, built a theatre at Thugga, organized theatrical shows and gave *sportulae*, a feast and distributed oil after being appointed *flamen perpetuus*.[85] Likewise, when Lucius Nonius

[75] *CIL* VIII, 26255.
[76] *AE* 1919, 44 = *ILAlg* I, 2130.
[77] *CIL* VIII, 858; *CIL* VIII, 14296.
[78] *CIL* VIII, 863; cf. *CIL* VIII, 862, referring to the erection of a statue and banquets for the members of the local *ordo* paid for by a member of the local elite who had been elected *duumvir* without having held the aedileship.
[79] *CIL* IX, 2553 = *AE* 2006, 362; cf. *AE* 1961, 109.
[80] *CIL* VIII, 25468; *CIL* VIII, 14296.
[81] *CIL* X, 688.
[82] *CIL* IX, 4973.
[83] *CIL* VIII, 20853; *CIL* VIII, 26606; *CIL* VIII, 10620.
[84] *CIL* VIII, 12018.
[85] *CIL* VIII, 26606.

Rogatianus Honoratianus had been appointed *flamen perpetuus* in the small town of Mustis (Africa Proconsularis), he gave the *curiae* a feast when he dedicated a monument together with his wife and two sons.[86] Yet another text from North Africa lists various benefactions made by a certain [---]nanius Abonius in connection with his own appointment as *flamen perpetuus* of the town of Sutunurca and his son's admission to the local town council. He showed his gratitude by building a temple on his own land, erecting statues of his father and mother in two niches and providing a feast (*epulum*) and distributions of oil (*gymnasia*) to the entire community.[87]

Some priestesses also showed a liberal hand in distributing food gifts after obtaining priestly offices. Instances include Iulia Paulina at Capena, [---]ia Celerina at Salpensa (Baetica) and [---] Patricia at Iliberris (also in Baetica), both of whom provided meals after being appointed to a *sacerdotium*,[88] and Iulia Paula Laenatiana who was honoured with a *flaminatus* at Thugga.[89]

An interesting text from Agbia (Africa Proconsularis) refers to food gifts being bestowed by Cincius Victor, a prominent citizen who had been appointed *patronus* of his home community during the reign of Antoninus Pius. Following this appointment, Victor shouldered the costs of restoring the portico of the temple of Ceres and of erecting a statue of the *Genius curiae* in the local council hall. On the day of the dedication, he distributed *sportulae* of 2 sesterces (each) to the decurions and provided a feast (*epulum*) for all the citizens. When the community responded by asking Victor's son to become the town's patron, the former paid for the cost of a statue of Fortuna and again provided the decurions with *sportulae* and the citizens with a public meal on the day of its dedication.[90]

There is also some epigraphic evidence of public meals being provided by freedmen when they obtained a place among the *severi*. In an inscription from Fidenae we read that, when Blastus Eutactianus and Secundus, two *liberti* of the former consul Iulius Quadratus, became *severi* and Italia, a *liberta* of the same ex-consul, became *magistra* of the Bona Dea, they made a joint dedication to the *numen* of the imperial house and also provided a feast for the town council, and perhaps for the other citizens as well.[91]

Apart from communal meals or food hand-outs provided by people who had been elected to magistracies or religious offices or who were taking up such offices, food-related benefactions were expected to be provided in connection with the particular

[86] *AE* 1968, 591. *Contra* Donahue (2017), 192, the text does not say that the sons of Honoratianus offered the *curiae* of Mustis an *epulum*.
[87] *ILAfr* 304 = *LBIRNA* 893.
[88] *AE* 1954, 165 = *AE* 1982, 267; *CIL* II, 1278 = *CILA* II, 3, 951; *CIL* II, 5, 631 = *CIL* II, 5514.
[89] *CIL* VIII, 1491 = *CIL* VIII, 26525 = *ILAfr* 522.
[90] *CIL* VIII, 1548.
[91] *CIL* XIV, 4057. Note that Donahue (2017), 224, wrongly identifies Blastus and Secundus as imperial freedmen.

magistracy or priesthood held by the benefactor. In many cases, however, it is uncertain whether or not such foods gifts were provided by the office-holders during their term of office or fell within the scope of their duties. Even in the case of holders of religious offices offering public meals in connection with building activities undertaken for religious reasons, the link between the priesthood held by the benefactor and the specific building which had been erected and dedicated is not always straightforward. An interesting inscription from Mustis reports that C. Orfius Luciscus, who had been appointed *sacerdos publicus* of Caelestis and Aesculapius after having been *praefectus iure dicundo pro duumviris* and *duumvir quinquennalis*, dedicated an arch and a statue for *Ianus Pater* and provided theatrical spectacles and a banquet (*epulum*) for the *curiae* and the association of the *Cerealicii* on the day of the arch's dedication. According to the inscription, the reasons for the dedication was Luciscus' 'enormous veneration of the most sacred divine power' (*praecipua erga sanctissimum numen religio*) and his undying affection for his native land.[92] There is, however, absolutely nothing to suggest that the 'divine power' referred to in the text is to be identified either with Caelestis or with Aesculapius. It has, in fact, been suggested that Pluto, who is referred to as the *genius* of Mustis in another inscription, is the most likely candidate for the *numen* to which the arch was dedicated.[93]

Another example is the distribution of meat (*visceratio*) provided by Aufidius Felix, who was *flamen perpetuus* and *decurio* at Sutunurca (Africa Proconsularis). Since the term *visceratio* usually refers to a distribution of meat after an animal had been sacrificed, it is tempting to assume a connection with the flaminate, but the inscription suggests that this distribution was carried out in connection with a dedication which had been paid for with a *summa honoraria* (and perhaps with other money).[94]

A handful of texts refer to priestesses providing communal meals after dedicating temples or statues of various deities, [95] but a certain Anulla, *sacerdos divae Augustae* at Abdera (Baetica), did so after giving and dedicating a *basilica* and a fanlight (*hypaethrum*).[96]

2.2.2 Responsive benefactions

Many inscriptions refer to food gifts being provided by people who had been honoured by urban communities, in most cases with a public statue.[97] Those responding to the

[92] *CIL* VIII, 16417.
[93] See Fishwick (1991), 196-200.
[94] *CIL* VIII, 24003.
[95] *CIL* II, 964; *CIL* II, 1956; *AE* 1972, 270.
[96] *CIL* II, 1979.
[97] E.g. *CIL* XI, 6360; *CIL* XI, 3009; *CIL* VIII, 25808b; *CIL* IX, 5831; *CIL* XI, 5635; *CIL* IX, 981; *AE* 1960, 214. For the purpose of my analysis, all food benefactions provided by magistrates or

bestowal of such honours could be either those honoured themselves or their family members.[98]

In many inscriptions phrases such as *ob merita*, *ob munificentiam* or *ob munificentiam ac liberalitatem* are used to refer to the considerations which prompted communities to honour prominent citizens or powerful outsiders.[99] Therefore it would appear that many of those who provided food gifts after receiving civic honours had displayed their generosity on previous occasions. In this case, we are clearly dealing with a quasi-cyclical process in which expressions of public gratitude for benefactions bestowed on communities triggered new benefactions (Figure 2.3).

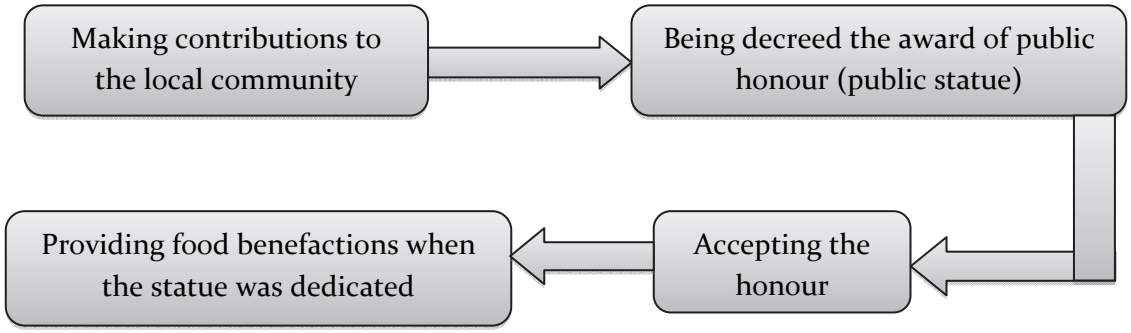

Figure 2.3 Cyclical pattern of responsive benefactions

Not surprisingly, wealthy and influential citizens account for the vast majority of those who were honoured with public statues and responded by providing communal meals. A certain Marcus Amullius Optatus Crementianus, an equestrian from the African town of Thagaste, exemplifies this category. This individual, who is praised as a 'man of generosity' (*vir munificentiae*), received a public statue which was paid for by voluntary contributions from the town council of his home city. When this statue was dedicated, Amullius again demonstrated his generosity by presenting his home-town and its *curiae* with the vast sum of 100,000 sesterces and by spending yet another 2,000 sesterces on banquets (*epulas vini*) and games.[100]

In a recent monograph, Hemelrijk has collected the epigraphic evidence of public statues being awarded to women belonging to elite families. From Hellenistic times onwards wealthy and prestigious women appear as benefactors of communities. From the time of the Principate, examples of this recognition of women are also found in Italy and in the western provinces of the Roman Empire. As in the case of prominent

priests who had been honoured with a public statue will be regarded as 'responsive' rather than as 'office-related'.

[98] E.g. *CIL* XI, 3211.

[99] *Ob merita*: *CIL* XI, 7556; *CIL* VIII, 1827; *CIL* XI, 6014; *AE* 1974, 228; *AE* 1894, 148= *ILS* 6468; *CIL* IX, 5831; *CIL* XI, 4815; *CIL* XI, 6054; *CIL* IX, 981; *CIL* IX, 3160; *CIL* IX, 4976. *Ob munificentiam*: *AE* 1976, 176; *CIL* X, 5853; cf. *CIL* VIII, 5146 (*munificentiae viro*). *Ob liberalitatem*: *CIL* VIII, 12422; *AE* 1958, 144. *Ob munifcientiam ac liberalitatem*: *AE* 1960, 214.

[100] *CIL* VIII, 5146.

male citizens, the local council sometimes decided to express its gratitude for the meritorious actions, munificence or generosity displayed by such women by honouring them with a public statue.[101] As did their male counterparts, they usually responded by offering public feasts on the day on which such statues were dedicated.

In an inscription from Saepo in Baetica, we read about the local town council's decision to honour Pomponia Rosciana, *sacerdos perpetua* of the deified emperors and empresses, with a public statue. As did many male recipients of public statues, Pomponia erected the statue at her own expense and provided a public feast (*epulum*) to mark the occasion.[102] In AD 173 Baebia Pontias also paid for the public statue which she had been awarded by the town council of Cures Sabini and provided cakes, sweet wine and *sportulae* on the day of its dedication.[103] A third example is Marcia Aurelia Ceionia Demetrias, who was honoured with a public statue after restoring the dilapidated baths of Anagnia. When the statue was dedicated, Marcia provided cash distributions and a banquet for the decurions, the *severi* and the *populus*.[104]

A somewhat exceptional case is that of Cornelia Tusca. As we have seen, this woman received a public statue in the town of Iporca (Baetica), but the cost of the customary public meal seems to have been shouldered by the participants themselves.[105]

Some women also provided communal meals after a close relative had been honoured with a public statue. In the first or second century a certain Egnatia Co[---] provided a banquet (*epulum*) for the decurions, the *Augustales* and the *plebs urbana* of the town of Carsulae after this community had erected a public statue for her son.[106] Similarly, a second-century inscription from Nescania (Baetica) reports that, when the local town council had ordered the erection of a public statue for a certain Gaius Marius Clemens, his mother, Fabia Restituta, stepped forward to shoulder the cost of this statue and provided a public banquet for the decurions and their sons as well as cash distributions for citizens, non-citizens and *servi stationarii*.[107] Another example comes from Nepet, where Otacilia Comice provided *sportulae* for the decurions and the *Augustales* and a banquet (*epulum*) for the *populus* after her husband, Gnaeus Corellius Frontinus, had been honoured with a statue in recognition of his holding of local offices over many years.[108]

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[101] For women honoured with public statues, see Hemelrijk (2015), 154-161; 272-320 and corresponding notes for epigraphic references to women receiving statues *ob merita/munificentiam/liberalitatem*.
[102] *CIL* II, 1341.
[103] *CIL* IX, 4970.
[104] *CIL* X, 5918.
[105] *CIL* II, 1046.
[106] *AE* 1996, 647.
[107] *CIL* II, 2011.
[108] *CIL* XI, 3211.

Close relatives might also provide communal meals when a prominent citizen was honoured with a statue after his death. For instance, when the African town of Gor decided to erect a public statue for a prominent citizen who had bequeathed 12,000 sesterces to the community, Maria Victoria, his daughter and heiress, erected the statue at her own expense and she and her husband provided a banquet (*epulum*) for the town council.[109]

Various municipal patrons were also honoured with public statues, and some of these patrons responded by providing food benefactions. A Gaius Sulpicius Victor, father of two equestrian sons, was patron of Lanuvium. After he had been granted a public statue 'on account of his incomparable loyality and immense munificence', he gave cash hand-outs to the decurions, *Augustales* and the *curiae* and a double meal (*epulum duplum*) to the *curia mulierum*.[110]

An interesting inscription from Carsulae shows that public meals might also have been provided by an *Augustalis* who had received a public statue. Titus Flaminius Maius, a *sevir Augustalis*, had the dilapidated aqueduct repaired at his own expense after his son had been elected *quattuorvir* at Carsulae. The citizens of Carsulae decided to honour him for his generosity by erecting a public statue for him and, following in the footsteps of so many members of the decurional class, Flaminius responded by distributing cash hand-outs and bread and wine on the day of the statue's dedication.[111]

2.2.3 Voluntary benefactions

A large proportion of benefactors provided food gifts outside the context of office-holding and without any discernible motivation being provided by, for instance, the erection of a public statue.[112] It cannot be a coincidence that a very large proportion of 'spontaneous' food gifts were furnished for the purpose of turning the benefactor's birthday, or anniversaries of other important family events, such as the birthday of a son, into a festive occasion for the receiving community as a whole. During their own lifetimes, benefactors could achieve this aim by distributing various types of food or drink on family-related anniversaries. A possible example of this direct approach comes from Sinuessa, where a certain Marcus Cacius Cerna, who had held the position

[109] *CIL* VIII, 12422.
[110] *CIL* XIV, 2120. The Sulpicius Victor mentioned in this inscription might be identical to the Sulpicius Victor *pater* who set up a funerary inscription for a deceased son who was an *eques equo publico*. Cf. Gregori (1997), 173-174.
[111] *CIL* XI, 4582.
[112] In at least some cases benefactions of the 'voluntary' type must have been the subject of negotiations between benefactors and the recipient communities, but the very nature of those inscriptions referring to 'spontaneous' acts of munificence makes it impossible to identify such cases.

of *duumvir*, began the practice (*instituit*) of providing the entire *populus* with an annual feast (*cena*) on 11 September, his birthday.[113]

Most benefactors who provided voluntary food gifts donated sums of money on the condition that the beneficiaries would use the annual revenue from these sums to hold feasts on particular anniversaries. In the late second or early third century Publius Ligarius Potitus, a decurion of the town of Gor (Africa Proconsularis), promised to pay 4,000 sesterces into the local treasury so that his birthday could to be celebrated with boxing matches, a distribution of oil and an annual dinner for decurions.[114] Another North African example comes from Theveste, where T. Flavius Caelestinus, who might have held the duumvirate (the phrase referring to this office has disappeared in a lacuna), donated 50,000 sesterces to the *curiae* on condition that those belonging to these groups would spend the annual interest yielded by this sum on an annual communal feast on his birthday.[115]

In Italy Gaius Torasius Severus, *IIIIvir iure dicundo* of Spoletium, gave 250,000 sesterces to the public treasury and 120,000 sesterces to the *seviri Augustales*, the priests of the imperial Lares and the headmen of various town quarters (*VIviris Augustalibus et compitalibus Larum Augustorum et magistrorum vicorum)*. The recipients were to use the revenue from these sums to hold an annual public feast to celebrate his son's birthday.[116] Likewise, in the second or third century Gaius Futius Onirus, twice *duumvir* of Croton, gave 10,000 sesterces to the *decuriones* on the condition that they would use the revenue from this endowment to have an annual feast on his daughter's birthday.[117]

A prominent citizen of Ferentinum, Aulus Quinctilius Priscus, opted for a more elaborate arrangement. After buying three estates and a meadow belonging to the community for 70,000 sesterces, he gave them back on condition that he (and his heirs) would be allowed to lease them in perpetuity for the annual sum of 4,200 sesterces (representing an annual return of 6 percent). The latter sum was to be used to pay for the cost of annual distributions of cakes and sweet wine and *sportulae* on his birthday.[118]

An interesting text from Beneventum which has already been referred to shows that benefactions of this kind could also be bestowed on rural communities. Probably sometime during the second century a certain Marcus Nasellius Sabinus, *praefectus* of the *cohors I Dalmatarum*, together with his father Nasellius Vitalis, twice *Augustalis quinquennalis*, presented the inhabitants of their *pagus* with a decorated portico and with a shrine at the crossroads. They also gave 125 *denarii* to the residents of the

[113] *CIL* X, 4736.
[114] *CIL* VIII, 12421.
[115] *CIL* VIII, 1887 = *CIL* VIII, 16510.
[116] *CIL* XI, 4815.
[117] *CIL* X, 107.
[118] *CIL* X, 5853. Cf. Kehoe (1997), 84.

district banqueting on this spot, on condition that on 8 June the *pagani* would hold an annual feast on the birthday of Sabinus.[119]

Other inscriptions refer to public banquets being provided on the dedication day of a statue by the donor him- or herself or that of a close relative they had erected. An inscription from Pitinum Pisaurense refers to a prominent Gaius Caesidius Dextrus erecing a statue for himself. On the day of the dedication he offered banquets to the decurions, *Augustales* and the *plebs urbana* as well as giving bread and wine to the *populus* and plebs.[120]

Sometime in the second century, a certain Futia Longina prepared a dinner for the decurions and *Augustales* after setting up a statue for her son.[121] Another *mater*, Capria Quinta, from Corfinium provided a public meal and cash hand-outs for women after erecting statues for her children.[122] Similarly, when Vibia Marcella had a statue of her husband sculpted, she gave a *cena* to the *coloni* and an *epulum* to the *populus* on the dedication day.[123]

In addition, we also read about freedmen making dedications to their patrons. An inscription from Auximum reports a certain Leonas, *libertus*, set up a statue for his patron and provided a banquet for the *coloni* when he dedicated it.[124] A similar case is found in Pitinum Mergens. A certain freedman, Eutyches, offered the decurions and the plebs *crustulum* and *mulsum* on the occasion of the dedication of a statue to his patron.[125]

To judge from the inscriptions, benefactors also displayed their generosity by donating various momunents *sua pecunia*/*sua liberalitate* and followed up this initial gift by serving a banquet to celebrate the dedication. In a second-century inscription from Ocriculum, we read that a Sextus Aufidianus Celer distributed food gifts which he paid for out of his own pocket to the *populus* when he dedicated a monument to Fortuna Augusta.[126] A succinct text from Herculaneum refers to two brothers, Aulus Lucius Proculus and Aulus Lucius Iulianus, giving the decurions and *Augustales* a *cena* after making a joint dedication to Augustus *pecunia sua*.[127] In the early third century, Quintus Cervius Lucretius Maximus and Gaius Geminius Victoricus made a dedication to Mercurius Augustus which they paid for themselves and offered a banquet to the

[119] *CIL* IX, 1618. *Contra* MacMullen and Lane (1992), 35, this text does not say that Nasellius Vitalis had been an Augustal priest or a *duovir* for the *census* (*quinquennalis*). Cf. Torelli (2002), 221.
[120] *CIL* XI, 6033.
[121] *CIL* X, 110.
[122] *CIL* IX, 3171.
[123] *CIL* IX, 5841.
[124] CIL IX, 5833.
[125] *CIL* XI, 5960.
[126] *CIL* XIV, 3581 = *CIL* XI, 4081.
[127] *AE* 1979, 169.

decurions at Giufi.[128] Another inscription from North Africa reports that out of their own generosity two *aediles* erected a monument to Caelestis Augusta and provided banquets for the decurions when it was dedicated.[129] A certain *sevir*, Lucius Aemilius Daphnus, from Murgi generously donated some thermal baths to his civic community and gave a banquet for both the citizens and resident non-citizens.[130] A first- or second-century inscription from Taraconensis reports that a Voconia Avita also built warm baths for her town at her own expense. To celebrate the dedication she provided circus games and a public banquet.[131]

2.2.4 Testamentary benefactions

Testamentary food gifts were offered to fulfill a provison made in someone's will. In many cases the testator and the benefactor were the same person. For instance, it appears from an inscription from Sentinum, which was erected under Domitian, that one of the town's citizens, Gaius Aetrius Naso, an equestrian who had served as prefect of the *cohors Germanorum* and as *tribunus militum* of *legio I Italica*, had left a will which included not only the instruction to erect some kind of monument, probably an equestrian statue, for him after his death but also a bequest of 120,000 sesterces to the citizens of Sentinum. The recipients were to use the bequest to hold a feast on 16 August.[132] Similarly, an inscription from Hippo Regius reports that Aurelius Honoratus, a *flamen* of the imperial cult who had held all the municipal offices (*omnibus honoribus functo*), had bequeathed the town 100,000 sesterces to make it possible for the decurions, the members of the *curiae* and the *Augustales* to hold annual dinners on his wife's birthday.[133]

However, a public feast or food distributions, not stipulated in a last will that such food benefactions should be provided, were also given on the initiative of an heir who was the beneficiary. According to a late-second-century inscription from Tucci (Baetica), the will of Lucius Lucretius Fulvianus included the instruction to erect a silver statue weighing one pound. When his daughter, Lucretia Campana, executed the provisions of her father's will and dedicated the statue, she organized four days of theatrical plays and distributed food (*epulum*).[134]

In some cases it is impossible to determine whether communal meals provided by direct heirs or other beneficiaries of a will had been prescribed by the testator. A statue plinth from Barbesula (Baetica) has the following inscription: 'For L. Fabius Caesianus

[128] *CIL* VIII, 23991 = *ILS* 5776.
[129] *CIL* VIII, 859 = *CIL* VIII, 12376. See also *CIL* VIII, 861 = *CIL* VIII, 12379.
[130] *CIL* II, 5489.
[131] *AE* 1979, 352.
[132] *CIL* XI, 5745. The Aetrii were an important family at Sentinum, see Liu (2009), 188-191.
[133] *AE* 1958, 144.
[134] *CIL* II, 1663.

of the Galerian tribe, *duumvir*, perpetual *flamen* of the citizens of the *municipium* of Barbesula. Fabia Fabiana, daughter of Gaius, and Fulvia Honorata, daughter of Sextus, his heirs, erected this (statue) in accordance with his will and also provided a feast (*epulum*).'[135] Had this feast been prescribed by the testator or did Fabia and Fulvia provide it on their own initiative?

2.3 Aims and concerns of benefactors: emic perspectives

In her recent work on feasting, O'Connor provides the following summary of the functions of feasts:

> In all parts of the world, feasts were the primary arena for: the display of hierarchy, status and power including gender distinctions; the expression of competition and conflict; the negotiation of loyalty and alliance; the creation and consolidation of community and identity through inclusion and exclusion; the cultural recognition and regulation of the natural world, time and the life cycle; the enactment of public rituals; the linking of sacred and secular; the celebration of life and death; the honoring of the gods; the commemoration of specific events and personages; the mobilization and exploitation of resources.[136]

As this succinct analysis reveals, the motives and concerns which prompted members of local elite families and other people to step forward as benefactors can be studied and analysed from multiple perspectives. One possible approach is to look at the goals and concerns which are expressed either in the language of the inscriptions themselves or indicated by the choice of the occasion on which food gifts were provided to communities. Alternatively, we could try to uncover deeper causal connections by relating the appearance of food-related benefactions, and their persistence over a period of almost 300 years, to structural features of political and social life in the cities of the early and high Roman Empire. In what follows, I shall begin by examining some of the motives and concerns highlighted in inscriptions reporting food gifts. In the final part of this chapter, a more structural analysis of the driving forces behind such benefactions will be attempted.

2.3.1 Patriotic zeal and emotional attachment to local communities

To judge from the inscriptions, the generosity displayed by some benefactors was prompted by a strong emotional connection with their community.

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[135] *CIL* II, 1941.
[136] O'Connor (2015), 9.

A second-century inscription from Thugga refers to a certain Lucius Calpurniu[s ---] setting up a monument at his own expense inspired by his affection for his town (*in [amorem] civitatis su[ae]*) for which he also provided various benefactions including three days of plays, hand-outs for the decurions as well as the distribution of wine and oil for everyone.[137] In the same period, a text from North Africa reports that a life-long priest, Marcus Pinarius Fortunatus, had promised a sanctuary for Fortuna from his *summa flamonii*, over and above which he added some extra money. His heir and grandson, Marcus Salvius Celsus Pinarianus, completed the construction by contributing even more money because of his affection for his home-town *([i]n amorem patriae suae*) and when it was dedicated gave further proof of his liberality by hand-outs for decurions, a banquet and oil distribution for all citizens and a spectacle of theatrical plays.[138]

Some benefactors gave expression to the emotional connection with their home-town by making a dedication to its specific *genius*. In Etruria a *sevir Augustalis*, Quintus Peternius Amphio, erected a *cippus* for the *genius* of the *colonia*, Heba, providing the people with *crustulum* and *mulsum* on the day of its dedication.[139] In a similar vein, Quintus Cominius Abascantus erected two statues in the *forum* of Misenum, one of the *Genius* of the *municipium Misenum* and another representing the Protectress of the fleet, burnishing his generosity even more by distributing cash when they were dedicated.[140]

2.3.2 Religious beliefs

Communal meals funded by individuals were essentially mundane affairs. However, a significant proportion of recorded food gifts which targeted civic communities were provided when temples or shrines were dedicated to various deities, suggesting that, on an individual level, their religious beliefs also certainly prompted members of local elites to shoulder the costs of certain building projects as well as the costs of the food benefactions provided to celebrate the dedication of finished buildings. In the late second century AD, a certain Aulus Antonius Horus built a shrine to the Magna Mater, which he embellished with a portico in front of the shrine and a chamber for the *sacerdos*, in the Italian town of Atina. On the day on which the temple was dedicated, he distributed cakes and honeyed wine to the *decuriones*, the *Augustales* and the people.[141] An inscription from the Civitas Vazitana (Africa Proconsularis) reports that a certain Publius Opstorius Saturninus erected a shrine to Mercurius Sobrius which was furnished with a *pronaos* and an altar and he also provided a banquet and an oil

[137] *CIL* VIII, 15528 = *CIL* VIII, 26527 = *ILTun* 1404.
[138] *CIL* 12218 = *CIL* VIII, 23107.
[139] *AE* 1920, 97 = *AE* 1981, 342.
[140] *AE* 2000, 344.
[141] *CIL* X, 333.

distribution on the occasion of its dedication.[142] During the reign of Gordian III, an unknown *duumvir* of another town in Proconsularis, who was also a *flamen perpetuus*, built a temple of Victoria and erected three statues of the Victoria of the reigning emperor as well as an unspecified number of columns. When the buildings and the temple were dedicated, he gave the *decuriones sportulae* and a meal not only to the *curiae* but also to the entire *populus*.[143] An inscription from Baetica refers to a certain Baebia Crinita, who held a priestesshood, donating a temple of Apollo and Diana worth 200,000 sesterces and sponsoring a public meal after its completion.[144]

2.3.3 Concern for the well-being of emperors

Throughout the empire countless dedications were made 'for the well-being of the emperor' (*pro salute imperatoris*) and some of these dedications were accompanied by food benefactions.

In Tarquinia Marcus Tarquitus Priscus and his son, Marcus Tarquitus Etruscus, dedicated a monument for the well-being of Emperor Tiberius. On the occasion of its dedication, they offered the *decuriones* a banquet and the plebeians cakes and honeyed wine.[145] An inscription from Cures Sabini records two *seviri Augustales*, Quintus Veranius Asclepiades and Quintus Veranius Sabinus, dedicating a monument to Marcus Aurelius and distributing food hand-outs to the decurions and the people on the day of its dedication.[146] At Fagifulae a certain Quintus Parius Severus dedicated a statue to Emperor Antoninus Pius and provided a meal and cash distributions on the day of its dedication.[147]

In the Liburnian town of Asseria, Lucius Laelius Proculus left a will which contained a provision for the erection of a triumphal arch in honour of Emperor Trajan and the organization of a public meal.[148]

There are yet more examples from Baetica and North Africa. In Tucci (Baetica), Lucius Lucretius Fulvianus left a will in which he stipulated that a silver statue to be dedicated to the *pietas Augustae* should be erected. After his daughter, Lucretia Campana, had observed this wish, she provided theatrical performances, circus games and a public banquet when it was dedicated.[149] In the Numidian town of Theveste, Quintus Titinius Securus erected a temple of Saturn for the well-being of both Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, providing a banquet and theatrical performances when it

[142] *CIL* VIII, 12007.
[143] *CIL* VIII, 25371.
[144] *CIL* II, 964.
[145] *AE* 2008, 524.
[146] *CIL* IX, 4957.
[147] *CIL* IX, 2553.
[148] *CIL* III, 15021 = *CIL* III, 15034 = *AE* 1908, 193.
[149] *CIL* II, 1663.

was dedicated.[150] Similarly, a fragmentary inscription from Chidibbia reports food benefactions being distributed for the welfare of the emperor and his whole family.[151]

The birthdays of the imperial family were also occasions which attracted the attention of benefactors. An inscription from Telesia records that two civic benefactors, Quintus Fillius Rufus and Quintus Agrius Celer, who were *praetores duumviri*, built wool-workshops at their own expense to produce revenue which could be used to finance annual distributions of *mulsum* and *crustum* to the citizens (*coloni*) on the birthday of Caesar Augustus.[152] A town council decree from Forum Clodii refers to a certain Quintus Cascellius Labeo furnishing a perpetual *cena* for the *decuriones* and the people on the birthday of Tiberius and to the *decuriones* providing honeyed wine and cookies for female worshippers of Bona Dea on the birthday of Livia.[153]

2.3.4 Birthdays and posthumous commemorations

Many inscriptions refer to benefactors who provided communal meals with the intention of turning their birthdays into public occasions.

In the first century, a certain Marcus Cacius Cerna offered the people of Sinuessa a public *cena* on his birthday.[154] Since the inscription uses the term 'established' (*instituit*) in connection with this *cena*, this must have concerned an annual event. Although it is unclear whether the *cenae* established by Cacius Cerna were supposed to continue after his death, the epigraphic evidence leaves no doubt that this is what many other benefactors hoped to achieve. One example comes from Africa Proconsularis, where Publius Ligarius Potitus, a decurion of the *civitas Goritana*, promised to give 4,000 sesterces on condition that the decurions would use the income generated by this sum to pay for an annual dinner on his birthday in perpetuity.[155]

As has been noted in an earlier section of this chapter, some benefactors tried to ensure the perpetual celebration of their birthdays by bequeathing sums of money in their wills. A first-century inscription from Praeneste reports that a certain Corellia Galla Papiana bequeathed Minturnae and Casinum 100,000 sesterces on condition that the money would be used to distribute cakes and honeyed wine every year on her birthday.[156] In an inscription from Zucchar (Africa Proconsularis), we read that a certain Lucius Sisenna Bassus bequeathed a sum with the instruction that it be used

[150] *AE* 1933, 233.
[151] *AE* 2003, 2005.
[152] *CIL* IX, 2226.
[153] *CIL* XI, 3303.
[154] *CIL* X, 4736.
[155] *CIL* VIII, 12421.
[156] *CIL* XIV, 2827.

for the erection of a statue of himself and for providing an annual dinner and distributions of cash on his birthday.[157]

Some benefactors were more concerned about the birthdays of close relatives than about their own. In mainland Italy, Gaius Futius Onirus donated 10,000 sesterces to the decurions of Croton with the instruction that they were to use the interest to mark his daughter's birthday by holding an annual dinner.[158] At Pitinum Mergens, a woman named Licinia donated a sum of money on condition that the annual income would be used to organize a feast for the *decuriones* and the *plebs urbana* on her son's birthday.[159] At Rudiae, Marcus Tuccius Augazo promised 80,000 sesterces whose interest could be used to defray the cost of an annual meat distribution (*visceratio*) on his son's birthday.[160] In the North African town of Mactar, Caius Sextius Martialis gave the municipal treasury 50,000 sesterces in order to make it possible for the members of the *curiae* to hold a feast on his brother's birthday.[161] At Spoletium, Gaius Torasius Severus paid 250,000 sesterces into the public treasury so that the *decuriones* might celebrate his son's birthday with a public dinner.[162] At Pisaurum, Gaius Titius Valentinus bequeathed the colony one million sesterces whose interest would be used to provide a banquet for the people on the birthday of his son.[163]

Benefactors aspiring to perpetuate the memories of family members also had the option of erecting various buildings dedicated to the memory of their deceased loved ones and they could also provide communal meals on the occasion of their dedication.

An inscription from Sutunurca (Proconsularis Zeugitana) records various benefactions provided by a certain Abonius. After the death of his parents, he financed the construction of a temple, dedicated marble statues of his parents and provided an *epulum* and oil for everyone (*universis*) on the occasion on which the temple and the statues were dedicated.[164] At Mustis, the wish to honour the memory of his father and demonstrate his affection for his home-town prompted a certain Gaius Cornelius to dedicate statues and to provide games lasting three days, not to mention hand-outs for the *decuriones* and oil and dinners for the entire population (*universis popularibus*) on the occasion of their dedication.[165] According to an inscription from Ilugo (Tarraconensis), a certain Annia Victorina funded the construction of an aqueduct, including bridges, waterpipes and reservoirs and their ornamentation, in memory of

[157] *CIL* VIII, 924.
[158] *CIL* X, 107.
[159] *CIL* XI, 5963.
[160] *CIL* IX, 23. For more examples, see *CIL* IX, 1618; *CIL* VIII, 1845; *CIL* IX, 4971; *AE* 1958, 144.
[161] *CIL* VIII, 11813.
[162] *CIL* XI, 4815.
[163] *CIL* XI, 6377.
[164] *ILAfr* 304.
[165] *CIL* VIII, 1577.

her husband and son. A dinner was offered on the occasion of the dedication of these buildings.[166]

Yet another option available to benefactors was to donate money to fund commemorative rites and meals at their own graves or those of their loved ones. A text from Mons Fereter in Umbria reports that an anonymous individual, who had already donated various buildings to the city, bequeathed the huge sum of 200,000 sesterces which was to be used to pay for funeral meals and another 100,000 sesterces for the distribution of honeyed wine and bread.[167] In a funerary inscription from Patavium, we read that a certain Gaius Vettonius Maximus built a tomb for himself and gave the *pagani Misquilenses* 800 sesterces on condition that the annual income yielded by this sum would be used to lay flowers on the grave and to have a meal.[168]

These texts are quite explicit about the wish of benefactors to turn important family anniversaries into public occasions and the desire to perpetuate their own memory or those of their loved ones, figuring prominently among the reasons which prompted wealthy or moderately well-off citizens to bestow food benefactions on communities.

2.4 The political and social dynamics behind privately sponsored food gifts

As countless studies have explained, the fact that magistrates, priests and other members of civic elites bestowed various kinds of benefactions on civic communities in the Hellensitic and Roman worlds was intimately linked to the oligarchical nature of political life in these communities.

As early as the fourth century BC, Aristotle had formulated the idea that civic magistracies should have expensive duties attached to them. He also observed that, if magistrates offered magnificent sacrifices or erected public buildings upon entering office, 'the people who participate in the entertainments and see the city decorated with votive offerings and buildings will not desire an alteration in the government, and the notables will have memorials of their munificence'.[169] From Hellenistic times, particularly from the mid-second century BC, inscriptions referring to magistrates or other prominent citizens bestowing various kinds of benefactions on their home communities became a very common practice, and it is generally agreed that this signified the emergence of a political culture in which a relatively small group of elite

[166] *CIL* II, 3240. Cf. Hemelrijk (2015), 122.
[167] *CIL* XI, 6481. It has been suggested that this magnate was a senator, Champlin (1991), 157, n.5.
[168] *CIL* V, 2090. For further examples, see e.g. *CIL* VIII, 9052; *CIL* X, 107; cf. *InscrIt* 10, 5, 817 = *AE* 1996, 726 = *AE* 1996, 728 = *AE* 2001, 1067.
[169] Arist. *Pol*. 6.7. For translation, see Jowett and Barnes (1988), 152.

families monopolized access to the highest offices.[170] As innumerable studies have pointed out, neither the appearance of a culture of *euergetism* nor the increasingly oligarchical nature of urban political culture proved enough to undermine the importance of local citizenship or of local citizen communities. In fact, one of the most striking features of *euergetism* in its Hellenistic form is that almost all of the benefactions which were provided by members of local elites were gifted to people who had local citizenship rights. From this circumstance, it has been deduced that, from functional point of view, the purpose of office-related and other benefactions was to persuade less well-off members of local citizen communities to accept the legitimacy of elite rule.[171]

Under the early Empire, oligarchical rule and the practice of *euergetism* persisted in the self-governing *poleis* of the Greek-speaking East, and from the early years of the Principate and thereafter a very similar system emerged in Italy, Spain and North Africa. It therefore seems a foregone conclusion that the emergence and continued existence of the practice of providing food gifts for civic communities in these areas were a reflection of this development.

These summary observations go a long way towards explaining the custom of offering office-related food gifts by those prominent citizens who had been elected to high offices or by male or female office-holders.

On one level, all interactions between providers of food-related benefactions and beneficiaries can be seen as taking place in the context of a reciprocal relationship in which food gifts were exchanged for the purpose of accruing prestige and honour.[172] It has in fact been argued that terms such as *merita*, *munificentia* and *liberalitas*, which are often employed in the inscriptions, indicate that 'the ultimate goal of the donor was to secure honor and glory in the community'.[173] Adopting this approach but using a different terminology, other researchers have argued that food gifts and other benefactions can be seen as a way of converting material resources into 'symbolic capital'.[174]

At the same time, benefactions can be seen as an effective way by which civic elites could affirm their moral excellence through outward and visible displays of generosity. This concept applies not only to the willingness of civic elites to shoulder the cost of erecting various kinds of public buildings but also to elite-sponsored public meals and food distributions. Viewed in this light, the honorific language of inscriptions which

[170] Gauthier (1985).
[171] See, for instance, Quass (1993). For a study of political legitimacy, see Beetham (2013).
[172] Gill, Postlethwaite and Seaford (1998), 1.
[173] Donahue (2004b), 889. For these terms in epigraphic evidence from Spain and Italy, see Melchor Gil (1994), 65-76 and Forbis (1990), 505-507.
[174] For 'symbolic capital', see Bourdieu (1977), esp. 171-183; Gordon (1990a), 194-198 and Gordon (1990b), 224-231; Luraghi (2010), 249-250.

praise benefactors for their *liberalitas* or *munificentia* can be read as a legitimizing discourse which helped to cement elite rule.[175]

While this is true, instead of focusing exclusively on the symbolic and legitimizing aspects of benefactions, we should also ask why so many benefactors decided to provide public banquets and food distributions. In my view, an important part of the reason for the popularity of food benefactions was that the organization of banquets for members of local citizen communities helped to reaffirm the continuing importance of these citizen communities and the intimate relationships which existed between wealthy members of local elites and their fellow citizens. Throughout the early-imperial period inscriptions unfailingly refer to local assemblies and to the confirmation of the decisions of town councils by the *populus*.[176] Municipal charters refer to magistrates being elected by local assemblies.[177] Nevertheless, there are strong indications that the most important decisions were taken by town councils rather than by assemblies and that it was difficult for members from a non-decurional background to aspire to the highest offices.[178] Exactly what did it mean to be a citizen of an Italian, Spanish or North African community under these political conditions? Part of the answer is that membership of local citizen communities continued to be underlined in local religious festivals and also in local food distributions, many of which were provided for people with local citizenship rights.[179] Hence, it is hardly surprising that members of local elites account for ca. 80 percent of all identifiable male benefactors who are known to have provided food gifts to communities in Italy and the western provinces.

In an earlier section of this chapter, we have noted the fact that ca. 19 percent of all epigraphically attested food benefactions were provided by women, and that women belonging to local elite families account for ca. 85 percent of those female benefactors whose status can be identified. As various scholars have pointed out, the fact that under Roman law women who were not subject to *patria potestas* were property-owners can be assumed to have been a prerequisite for such benefactions, but their liberated legal status does not really explain *why* a significant number of property-owning women took the step of showering public meals or food distributions on their home communities.

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[175] Cf. Zuiderhoek (2009), 122-133.
[176] See for example *AE* 1948, 18 = *AE* 1953, +184; *ILAlg* 1, 2145 = *AE* 1919, 37; *CIL* X, 7915; *ILAlg* 2, 3, 7936 = *AE* 1916, 34; *AE* 1949, 55; *ILAlg* 1, 1295 = *AE* 1998, 1580. Cf. Boatwright (2000), 47-48.
[177] Lex Malacitana 51-59. Galsterer (2000), 350, 355-356.
[178] Cf. Reynolds (1988), 25-26; Mackie (1983), 55, 79; Langhammer (1973), 202-277; Mouritsen (1988).
[179] Of course, members of the local elite also had the option of affirming their membership of their group by restricting their food gifts to town-councillors only. Nevertheless, it is siginificant that most privately sponsored food gifts were distributed to all people with local citizenship rights.

In an attempt to account for the reason that women provided benefactions for their communities, Donahue argues that 'as towns relied more and more upon financial support from its citizens to maintain viability during the Principate, gender became less important'.[180] It would appear, however, that this explanation looks at the situation in terms which are too focused on the financial aspect. A more convincing explanation can be found by taking a closer look at the role of elite women in the oligarchical political cultures of the civic communities of Italy and the western provinces. In an important book which appeared more than twenty years ago, the Dutch ancient historian Van Bremen argues that in the increasingly oligarchical *poleis* of the Hellenistic world women from elite families were not just allowed but actually *expected* to display the same kind of generosity as men from the same social background. In other words, in an oligarchical world it became both possible and even quasi-compulsory for elite women to make benefactions which helped to perpetuate and legitimize collective elite rule.[181] Hence I would argue that the epigraphic evidence of food gifts provided by elite women can be read in the same light.

This is not to suggest that distinctions between gender roles were entirely extinguished in the increasingly oligarchical cities of the early and high Roman Empire. Unlike elite men, women were never elected to magistracies, a step which would have given them real power.[182] This explains why female providers of food gifts appear in inscriptions either as priestesses or as 'voluntary' benefactresses.

A few words have already been said about the dynamics of 'responsive' food benefactions. In particular, attention has been drawn to the fact that many of these benefactions seem to have been part of a quasi-cyclical pattern of interaction between benefactors and beneficiaries in which displays of generosity triggered bestowals of public honours which then elicited offers to shoulder the cost of both public statues and food-related benefactions. The most likely explanation of this pattern is that those who had received public honours became 'indebted' to the community which had awarded them.[183] Therefore, if those honoured wanted to maintain their social superiority, they were obliged to reciprocate any bestowal of public honours by making yet another display of generosity. In other words, whenever a community decided to erect a public statue for a prominent citizen, the latter must have been under enormous pressure to shoulder the cost of this statue and to show his gratitude to the community by providing a public meal on the day of its dedication.

In the case of food-related benefactions of the voluntary type, 25 percent of these benefactions were provided on condition that the recipients would use the money (or

[180] Donahue (2004b), 873, n.3; cf. Donahue (2017), 112-113.
[181] Van Bremen (1996).
[182] In a few cities of the Greek-speaking East, elite women were elected to eponymous magistracies. Although such offices were extremely prestigious, they did not involve any administrative responsibilities. Cf. Van Bremen (1996), 30-34.
[183] Cf. Domingo Gygax (2009), Domingo Gygax (2016), 45-57.

the food) to organize banquets on the benefactor's birthday or on anniversaries of important events affecting his or her close relatives. Another 18.75 percent of food benefactions were offered when the benefactors celebrated the dedication of a statue for their loved ones. How do we explain this large proportion (43.75%) of food benefactions closely related to a person's private life?

In a monograph which appeared in 1987, Mrozek has identified the competitive nature of the *munificentia privata* which was a part of political life in the municipalities as the general reason Italian inscriptions record large numbers of benefactions of this type. In his view, elite competition for local offices and affirmation of one's social position made such seemingly 'voluntary' food gifts more or less obligatory.[184]

It also seems likely that some providers of voluntary benefactions bequeathed large sums with no other purpose in mind than to perpetuate the memories of themselves or their loved ones. Some inscriptions explicitly identify this as the donor's motive and there is no reason to dismiss such claims as disingenuous.[185]

While both these explanations contain an important element of truth, we should also bear in mind that the increasingly oligarchical nature of political and social life in Italy and the western provinces meant that the line between 'public' and 'private' was becoming increasingly blurred. As various other scholars have observed, in the oligarchical societies of the Hellenistic world the private life of prominent elite families became a matter of public concern for all members of citizen communities.[186] This explains why citizen communities in the Greek-speaking East began to issue 'consolation decrees' after elite families had lost one of their members.[187]

In my view, food benefactions provided a way of making it possible for all decurions or, better still, for all citizens, to celebrate the birthday of the benefactor or that of one of the benefactor's close relatives, or to celebrate the dedication of a statue the benefactor erected for his or her family member(s). By transforming the celebration of family anniversaries and affairs into public occasions, elite families were able to give expression to the idea that local citizen communities were governed, and ought to be governed, by a restricted group of distinguished families whose biological continuity and prosperity and whose remembrance of its members were matters of public concern.

In the case of testamentary benefactions, the nature of the Roman will should be taken into account. Unlike most wills drawn up by people in the modern world, the Roman will can be described as 'the product of a tension between private hopes and social expectations'.[188] In this sense, testamentary benefactions bear some resemblance

[184] Mrozek (1987), 103, 105. Cf. Ramanius (2012), 114.
[185] E.g. *CIL* VIII, 12421; *CIL* IX, 1618.
[186] E.g. Gauthier (1985), Van Bremen (1996), Pleket (1998).
[187] Cf. Pleket (1994), 147-156; Pleket (1998), 209-210.
[188] Champlin (1991), 6.

to those offered on a voluntary basis: both types of benefactions were inspired by the benefactors' sense of duty towards other people and by their wish to give a good impression of themselves. Those who provided testamentary benefactions had their sights set on establishing a reputation for moral excellence, or to perpetuate one if they already had earned it posthumously.[189] This reputation would bring credit to their family. Importantly, their heirs or other people who had been entrusted with executing a will which bestowed benefactions on local communities were presented with an opportunity to show their own public-spiritedness and generosity by adding benefactions of their own. This is what the sons and heirs of Marcus Baebius Secundus did when they distributed *crustulum* and *mulsum* on the date on which they dedicated a statue of their father as stipulated in the latter's will.[190] While all benefactions bequeathed in someone's will can be read as posthumously affirming the rightful place of the deceased and his family among the local elite of the community, those executing the will were given the opportunity to assert their own entitlement to social and political prominence by demonstrating that they possessed the same superior moral qualities as the deceased.

2.5 Conclusions

One of the findings of this chapter is that the vast majority of benefactors and benefactresses who provided public meals or food hand-outs originated from local elite families. Although unquestionably many food-related benefactions were provided by office-holders, the occasions on which such benefactions were bestowed did not need to have anything to do with their office. My investigations into the circumstances of privately sponsored public dining reveal that, besides benefactions *ob honorem*, food benefactions were also offered to celebrate the bestowal of non-office-related honours and as a way of displaying spontaneous generosity, whether during a person's lifetime or posthumously.

To judge from the epigraphic materials, the local elite and other wealthy individuals were prompted to provide food gifts for civic communities, or specific sub-groups within these communities, by a number of considerations, among them affection for his/her home-town, religious beliefs, a display of political loyalty, celebrations of birthdays or family anniversaries and the perpetuation of personal memories. Although these concerns reveal concrete motivations which could differ from one occasion to another, the popularity of expressing this form of *euergetism* by the offering of food must have been deeply embedded in the social and political culture of an oligarchical society. In this vein, we must acknowledge that, by and large food-sharing activities did help to create a sense of togetherness between participants.

[189] *Ibid*. 168.
[190] *CIL* X, 5714.

By showing an interest in taking care of the well-being of civic communities, food-related *euergetism* contributed to the establishment of an intimate relationship between wealthy members of the elites and ordinary citizens; an outcome which served the interests of the local elite.

Office-related food gifts can be seen as a reflection of a specific political culture which developed in certain parts of the Western Empire. Up to a point this political culture was oligarchical, a system in which the highest local offices were monopolized by a small group of elite families. Nevertheless, despite the foothold of the latter on the ladder to success, the citizen body was still the most important source of political legitimacy. As local assemblies gradually lost much of their political significance in popular elections, the practice of privately sponsored public dining presented itself as an excellent alternative which could be adopted by the members of the local elite to demonstrate their allegiance to civic values and to reaffirm the importance of the citizen body. It would be easier to understand why female benefactors also participated so readily by placing their generosity in the context of the oligarchical political culture. As in the oligarchical *poleis* of the Hellenistic world, women belonging to the elite families in the communities of Italy, Spain and North Africa were very probably expected to display munificence towards their communities because such benefactions helped to cement collective elite rule.

A quasi-cyclical pattern revealed by 'responsive' food benefactions suggests a reciprocal relationship between the community and its prominent citizens, one in which acts of munificence were lauded by the bestowal of an honour which in its turn triggered a new round of display of generosity and so on and so forth. Those so honoured were expected to show their gratitude after they had been granted any public honour and providing food benefactions can be seen as a great way to achieve this. Such acts of generosity not only provided a feeling of relief from a sense of inherent 'indebtedness', they also contributed to the maintenance of superiority.

In the case of 'voluntary' food-related benefactions, despite any consideration of affirming moral excellence, many inscriptions refer to the desires of members of the local elite to celebrate their own personal birthdays or those of people close to them and to commemorate the dedication of statues for their family members in public. These statements can be interpreted as declarations by elite families, who found themselves in an increasingly oligarchical society, that local communities were being governed and should be governed by them and consequently their continued prosperity and private life was a matter of public concern.

The motives behind 'testamentary' benefactions share similarities with the voluntary type in the sense they contributed towards affirming a good reputation. However, one underlying cause for arranging food benefactions posthumously could have been that the testator hoped to perpetuate his or her elevated prestige in the community after death. Those providing extra food benefactions in order to observe

the provisions set out in a will can also be seen as taking advantage of the opportunity to achieve prominence in the community.

The motivations of private benefactors for providing public feasts or food distributions can be explored in greater depth by taking into account their selection of recipients. In the next chapter, we enquire into who were (frequently) targeted and the benefactors' preference will be related to the changing concept of community under the Empire.