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

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Chapter 3

Beneficiaries and the 'concept of community'

In this chapter, I focus on the beneficiaries of privately sponsored public dining. The inscriptions referring to privately funded public dinners mention various groups of recipients, with different groups, or combinations of groups, being invited on different occasions. None of these groups participated in all community-wide meals. Van Nijf argues that, 'public spectacles and civic celebrations were used to make serious political statements about the kind of community their organisers thought they were living in.'[1] Public spectacles or civic celebrations did indeed make these statements, but food-related benefactions are a particularly good way to study these perceived communities. Invitations to groups to attend public dinners should be seen as focused messages from the benefactors about which groups they considered to be part of the community.

This leads to the main questions posed in this chapter: Which groups were selected as the beneficiaries of privately sponsored public dinners? How often was each of these groups selected? Did benefactors distinguish between different groups by providing different types of food benefactions, or different amounts of food, for various categories of recipients? What do these choices reveal about how communities were perceived in Italy and the western provinces?

3.1 Beneficiary groups

Ideally, the beneficiaries of 'community-wide' meals should have included the whole population, but this was not always the case. The residents of a community consisted of a number of different juridical and social groups, not all of which would always participate in public dining at the same time. The recipient groups most often attested in the sources include the *populus*, the *decuriones*, the *(seviri) Augustales*, *collegia*, women, children and *incolae*.[2] In the following sections the frequency with which

[1] Van Nijf (1997), 135. See also Zuiderhoek (2009), 87.

[2] In his study on the distributions of money and food in the Italian cities of the Roman Empire, Mrozek puts forward four categories of beneficiaries: the *decuriones*, the *seviri Augustales* and

these groups of beneficiaries appear in the inscriptions will be examined, after which each group is considered in more detail.

3.1.1 Participation frequency

Recipients of privately sponsored public dinners differed in gender and age as well as social and juridical status. Some groups of beneficiaries participated in public dinners more often than others. An investigation of their participation frequency shows which groups were most often targeted by benefactors.

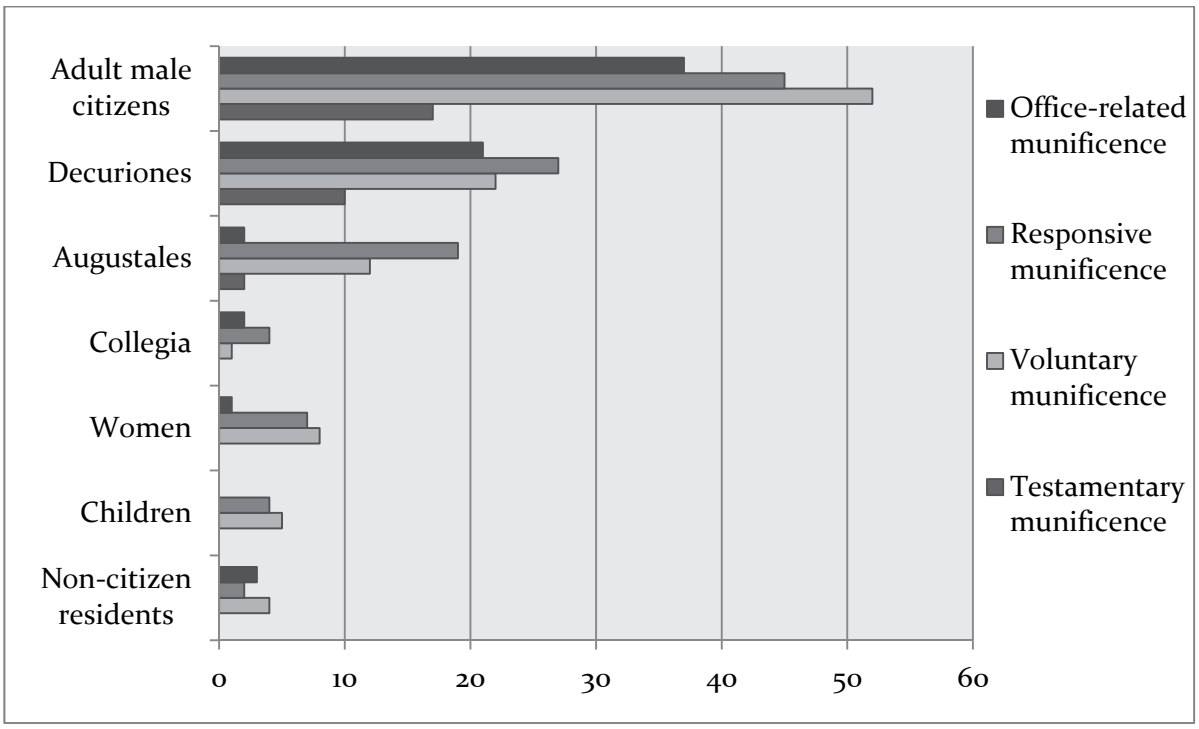

Figure 3.1 Beneficiary groups under different circumstances of munificence

Figure 3.1 shows that inscriptions recording the bestowal of voluntary or responsive benefactions on specific groups of beneficiaries are more numerous than those which record the recipients of office-related and testamentary feasts. The vast majority of office-related food benefactions were given to people with either local citizenship rights or the decurions, or both. The obvious explanation for this is that, in theory at

Augustales, other colleges and the people, see Mrozek (1987), 83-102. See also Donahue's discussions on recipients of banquets, Donahue (2017), 118-141. In the present study, those beneficiaries who only appear once in the sources are left out, e.g. *CIL* XI, 4815: *compitales Larum Augustorum*; *CIL* VIII, 1321: *congentiles* and *sacerdotes*. An exceptional inscription from Baetica (*CIL* II, 2011) mentions *servi stationarii* receiving cash hand-outs when a local benefactor provided a public banquet. Pudliszewski (1992), 76, argues that the *servi stationarii* must have attended this banquet with the other groups mentioned in the text; however, I think we cannot rule out the possibility that these *servi* did not take part in the public meal but received only *sportulae*.

least, magistrates were elected or appointed by the entire citizen body, although in practice popular elections were gradually transformed into an orchestrated formality, with the role of the assemblies restricted to being asked to ratify the list of candidates compiled by the council.[3]

Since public honours, such as the erection of a public statue, were normally bestowed at the behest of the local town council (sometimes at the request of the *populus*), it is not surprising that the *decuriones* feature prominently among the recipients of responsive food benefactions. Nevertheless, references to responsive food gifts presented to the entire citizen body are even more numerous. This suggests that the entire civic community was still seen as the source of civic honour.

In the case of voluntary food gifts, benefactors might have been expected to have had more freedom for manoeuvre, allowing them to select favoured groups of beneficiaries according to their personal preferences. Despite this assumption, the vast majority of all voluntary food benefactions were designated for local citizen bodies or decurions, or both. This strongly suggests that 'voluntary' benefactions were just as much 'political' as 'office-related' food gifts. From a statistical point of view, the most important difference between these two types of benefactions is that a significant minority of voluntary food gifts targeted *Augustales*, women or children.

Another way to approach the analysis of the quantitative data relating to various groups of beneficiaries is to focus on the gender of benefactors. From this point of view, we find that the citizen populace and the *decuriones* were invariably the groups most likely to receive benefactions – regardless of whether the donors were male or female (Figure 3.2). Noentheless, it remains noteworthy that female benefactors seem to have had more particular preferences. Besides the civic population, the local council and the *Augustales*, they gave priority to fellow women and children rather than to *collegia* or non-citizen residents. This is a distinct deviation from the behaviour of male benefactors. This finding provides grounds to infer that female donors were more inclined to recognize female citizens and non-adults as core groups of local citizen communities.

[3] For further analysis see the section on adult male citizens.

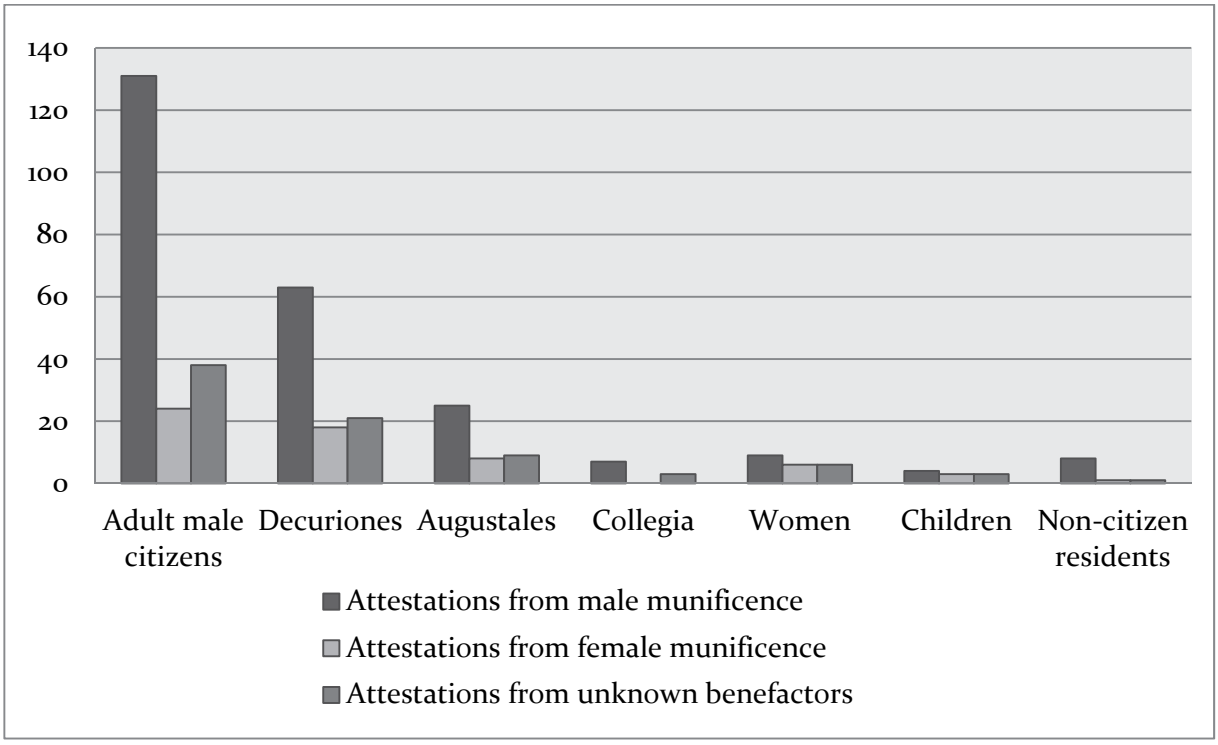

Figure 3.2 Beneficiaries participation frequency in terms of benefactor's gender

The first three centuries AD witnessed the inception, the heyday and decline of privately sponsored public dining (cf. Chapter 6). When the evidence is set out chronologically (Figure 3.3), it is clear that, from the late republic to the fourth century, the citizen population remained the most important group of recipients. They were included whatever the circumstances surrounding the benefactions were, they were recipients of benefactions provided by both genders and had benefactions bestowed upon them at different periods of time. However, even though the number of attestations to different beneficiary groups is likely to have been influenced by what was deemed socially appropriate, the civic body was and remained the most important recipient.

Considering the gradual devaluation of popular election to office, which meant that political power was transferred even more firmly into the hands of local town councils, the staying power of local citizen bodies as the most frequently attested beneficiaries of privately funded public food benefactions is remarkable. One possible explanation is that the loss of effective voting rights did not undermine the symbolic importance of the local citizen body as the only source of political legitimacy. The viability of this hypothesis will be explored in more depth in the next section.

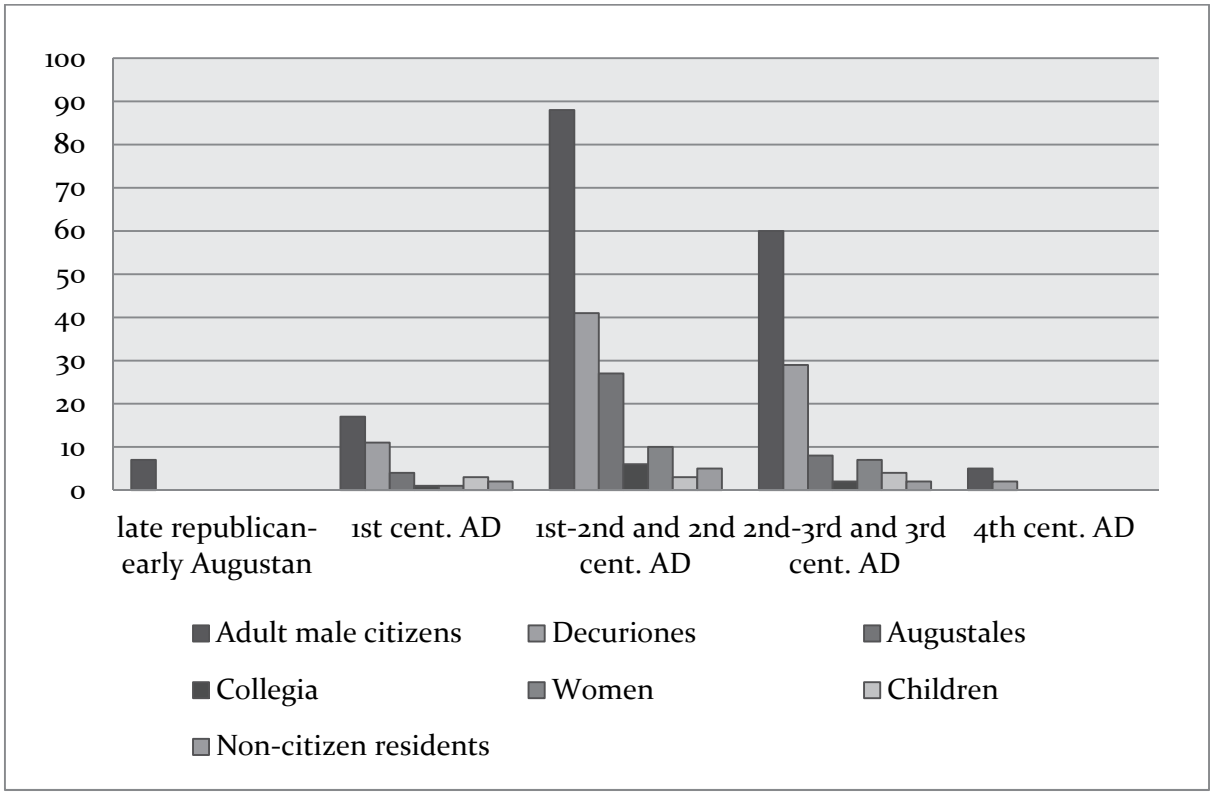

Figure 3.3 Beneficiaries during different periods

While local citizen bodies and members of local town councils account for the vast majority of all recipients of privately funded food benefactions during the first to third centuries AD, the chronological distribution of the epigraphic data also suggests that the role of the *Augustales* began to feature more prominently in the late first century and thereafter. On this basis it might be postulated that it was only during this period that the *Augustales* achieved wide recognition as the second-highest status group of local civic society. Despite their apparent rise in importance, during the second and third centuries epigraphic references to entire citizen communities receiving food benefactions are about four times more numerous than attestations of food gifts which were designated for the *Augustales*.

Lastly, the inclusion of other groups of beneficiaries appears to have remained optional throughout the period covered by this study. Inscriptions referring to food benefactions targeting *collegia*, women, children or non-citizen residents suggest that these groups might have been selected as socially significant components of civic society, but the epigraphic record as a whole leaves no doubt that the vast majority of food benefactions reflected a narrower concept of local communities in which the *populus* and the *ordo decurionum* remained the preferred target groups of elite benefactors.

3.1.2 Different groups in detail

Adult male citizens

As has been shown, the civic body of male adults is the most frequently attested group of beneficiaries of privately sponsored public dinners. In the following sections, the various terms for and ways of distinguishing between different groups of adult male citizens will be explained and illustrated with examples.

The best place to begin is with the most encompassing term: many inscriptions use the term *populus*. The *Oxford Classical Dictionary* defines *populus* as a collective term for the Roman citizen body.[4] In the epigraphic record of the first to third centuries, the term is used not only to denote the adult male citizens of local communities, but is extended to all permanent residents, including *incolae*.[5]

Many inscriptions distinguish between *populus* and *decuriones* or between *populus* and *Augustales*. It goes without saying that, in such cases, the term *populus* refers to 'the remainder of the male citizens' not comprised by those sub-groups of local citizens which are listed separately.[6] In other texts, the *populus* is distinguished from women and children, confirming the view that the term normally denotes the adult male citizens.[7] However, we also encounter the phrase '*populus utriusque sexus*', demonstrating that the term *populus* might also be used to refer to a civic body consisting of the two genders. Of course, it remains reasonable to suppose that the term retains its usual meaning wherever women are not explicitly mentioned.

Since Roman citizen communities were composed of both town-based citizens and country-dwellers of citizen status, the *populus* could include both groups. An inscription from Spoletium refers to a cash endowment of 1,500,000 sesterces, the annual income from which was to be used to provide the citizens (*municipes*) with a dinner, accompanied or preceded by a distribution of sweet wine and cakes.[8] Duncan-Jones has calculated that the endowment must have yielded an annual income of 75,000 sesterces and that the latter sum would have been enough to provide between 4,700 and 9,400 citizens with the food gifts referred to in the inscription. On this basis the size of the citizen population, men, women and children can be estimated to have been 16,450-32,900,[9] not including the unfree population. We also happen to know that early-imperial Spoletium had a walled area of ca. 30 hectares, of which approximately three-quarters was a built-up area. There were no significant suburbs.

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[4] T. J. Cornell, 'Populus' in: Hornblower, Spawforth and Eidinow (2012), *Oxford Reference Online*.
[5] Mrozek (1984a), 19. *Incolae* had (limited) voting rights in local assemblies.
[6] Duncan-Jones (1982), 279-280.
[7] For epigraphic references which distinguish *populus* from women/children, see e.g. *CIL* X, 5849; *CIL* IX, 3160; *AE* 1946, 174 = *AE* 1992, 244.
[8] *CIL* XI, 4789.
[9] Duncan-Jones (1982), 267.

Since assigning 16,500 inhabitants to a built-up area of 22.5 hectares would result in an impossibly high population density of more than 700 inhabitants per hectare, we can be certain that, at least in this particular case, the recipients included large numbers of country-dwelling citizens.[10]

Other complexities surrounding the term *populus* are illustrated by various other Italian inscriptions. An inscription from Auximum recording that a certain Vibia Marcella, wife of Lucius Praesentius Paetus Lucius Attius Severus, a citizen of Ancona who was patron of Auximum, provided a proper dinner (*cena*) for the *coloni* and a simple meal (*epulum*) for the *populus* on the occasion of the dedication of the statue she had put up for her husband.[11] In this text the *coloni* referred to must be the citizens of Auximum (which was a *colonia*), whereas the term *populus* must refer to a wider group. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this group also included the *incolae*.[12] Two inscriptions which were found in the territory of Visentium record the bestowal of food gifts on the *vicani* and the *populus*.[13] On both occasions the *vicani* were invited to an *epulum*, whereas the *populus* received only a donation of *crustulum et mulsum*. To judge from the find-spots of these inscriptions, the term *vicani* refers to citizens living in the rural *vici* of the territory of the town.[14] Since the *populus* received less significant food gifts, the logical conclusion must be that this term covers people without local citizenship rights.

In many inscriptions the recipients of various food gifts are identified as 'the citizens' (*cives, coloni* or *municipes*), 'the community of citizens' (*civitas*) or 'the community' (*res publica*). In other contexts various other terms, as among them *omnes*, *universi*, *viri*, *populares* and *patria*, are used to denote the beneficiaries of privately sponsored food benefactions.[15] Of these terms, only *viri* is completely unambiguous. Although in most inscriptions the other terms also seem to refer to adult male citizens,

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[10] De Ligt (2012), 232-233.

[11] *CIL* IX, 5841. A *cena* is usually considered to have been a better meal than *epulum*, see e.g. Mrozek (1987), 38, 41-42; Donahue (2017), 7-9; Dunbabin (2003a), 82-83, 91; cf. Duncan-Jones (1982), 263-264, n.3.

[12] Cf. Gagliardi (2006), 82-83.

[13] *CIL* XI, 2911 and *AE* 1980, 428. For the find spots see Tarpin (2002), 398 and Rossi (2012), 292-293.

[14] *Contra* Mrozek (1990), 39, who sees the *vicani* of Visentium as town-dwelling citizens. An inscription from Ariminum (*CIL* XI, 379 = *ILS* 6664) records cash gifts of 20,000 sesterces to the *vicani vicorum VII* of Ariminum. These *vici* are generally considered urban, for instance, by Duncan-Jones (1982), 283, Coarelli (1995), 175-180, and Cenerini (1997), 26.

[15] E.g. *cives*: *AE* 1992, 385 = *AE* 2002, +68; *CIL* VIII, 23880; *coloni*: *CIL* XIV, 375 = *ILS* 6147; *CIL* X, 4727 = *ILS* 6297; *CIL* IX, 2252; *CIL* IX, 5841; *AE* 1975, 354 = *AE* 1978, 291; *CIL* IX, 5823; *municipes*: *CIL* XI, 4789; *CIL* X, 5853; *CIL* XI, 6060; *CIL* XI, 5693; *civitas*: *CILA*, III, 1, 101 = *AE* 1958, 4; *res publica*: *CIL* II, 5941 = *ILS* 6954; *AE* 1979, 00352; *omnes*: *CIL* X, 5918 = *ILS* 406; *universi*: *ILAfr* 00304; *CIL* VIII, 15246 = *CIL* VIII, 15528 = *CIL* VIII, 26527 = *ILTun* 1404; *AE* 1997, 432; *viri*: *CIL* XI, 6190; *AE* 2001, 889; *populares*: *CIL* VIII, 1577 = *CIL* VIII, 15572; *AE* 1905, 35; *patria*: *CIL* VIII, 12006.

Mrozek has argued that, from the early second century onward, some Italian inscriptions use the term *cives* to refer to all free-born men living in a town, including those without local citizenship rights.[16] Furthermore, in an inscription from Siagu (in Zeugitana) the expression *omnes cives* comprises all adult men and women of citizen status.[17]

Another term used to denote adult male citizens is *plebs*. This term is mainly found in the Italian inscriptions. Outside Italy, the term *plebs* was rarely used – with the exception of one inscription found in Africa Proconsularis, and two in Baetica.[18] Although in most cases the term *plebs* seems to refer to the adult male citizens belonging to a community, but this was not necessarily the case. A second-century AD inscription from Pitinum Pisaurense records that the *decuriones*, *seviri Augustales* and *plebs urbana* were offered banquets (*epula*) and oil for bathing, whereas the *populus* and *plebs* were given bread and wine.[19] The distinction between the *populus* and the *plebs* is not entirely clear, but the former term might be interpreted as referring to all (country-dwelling) people with local citizenship rights, whereas the latter might be understood to be inclusive of resident foreigners (*incolae*) as well.[20]

In various cities of Roman North Africa, inscriptions refer to food benefactions being granted to groups of recipients called *curiae*.[21] As Duncan-Jones has demonstrated, these *curiae* were a kind of association composed of people with local citizenship rights who took care of the burial of members and held dinners.[22] From this point of view the *curiae* might be considered as representing the most affluent sections of the civic communities of Roman Africa. One inscription refers to the African *curiae* being recipients of benefactions jointly with the *populus*,[23] and another to food gifts presented to the *curiae* and 'all the citizens' (*universi cives*).[24] In these texts, the terms *populus* and *universi cives* must refer to those citizens who were not members of the *curiae*. In Italy an inscription from Lanuvium refers to *curiales* receiving food

[16] Mrozek (1990), 40.
[17] Duncan-Jones (1982), 264-265.
[18] *CIL* VIII, 23965; *CIL* II, 1047; *CIL* II, 1441. For the terms concerning people in the inscriptions, see Mrozek (1993).
[19] *CIL* XI, 6033.
[20] Cf. Mrozek (1984a), 17-21.
[21] On the differences between the African and Italian *curiae* see Duncan-Jones (1982), 277-278, n.5. Cf. Kotula (1968), Kotula (1980). For a recent discussion on the North African *curiae*, see Dawson (2016), 98-178.
[22] Duncan-Jones (1982), 278. Jacques (1990), 390-401, argues that the *curiales* were adult male citizens of good standing listed on a *publica* register; turning to those citizens who did not belong to the *curiae*, it is possible that they were unable to afford the expenses which would have been incurred.
[23] *CIL* VIII, 25371.
[24] *AE* 1975, 877.

benefactions,[25] but in this case those involved were the members of a voting division of the citizen population of the town.[26]

Two Italian inscriptions refer to public banquets which were held in rural areas. In AD 43 a certain Publius Crusius Germanus gave the *decuriones* of the *pagus Sarclanus* in the territory of Sinuessa 2,000 sesterces to enable them to organize an annual banquet on his birthday.[27] Since the benefactor is not identified as a magistrate or administrator, it seems reasonable to infer that he was acting in a purely private capacity. Another inscription, which has already been discussed in a previous chapter, reports that a certain Marcus Nasellius Sabinus and his father, who is identified as a former *Augustalis quinquennalis*, gave the *pagani* of the *pagus Lucullanus* (in the territory of Beneventum) 500 sesterces on condition that they would use the revenue to hold annual dinners after accomplishing their annual *lustratio* of the *pagus* and again on 8 June, Sabinus' birthday.[28] In both cases we are dealing with benefactors from a relatively humble background making a bid for immortality in the rural communities from which they must have originated themselves.

The large number of food benefactions which were designated for people with local citizenship rights clearly demonstrates that the concept of the civic community had not lost its importance during the first, second and early third century AD. During the final centuries of the Roman Republic, the civic body was the civic context in which the *res publica* was dealt with.[29] For instance, if benefactions were distributed in celebration of a triumph in the Republic, every citizen was entitled to receive a share because it was a civic affair conducted in the civic sphere and the benefactor was the representative of the *res publica*. Moreover, the shared citizen identity invested any members of this body, particularly those possessed of wealth and high status, with responsibility for and a reciprocal obligation towards their fellow citizens.[30] Despite the gap between the elites and the common people, the citizen community of republican times was an ideal unity of citizens. Therefore, it is unsurprising to find that private munificence in this period was often directed towards the entire *populus*. Traditionally, the Roman elite gained honour (*honor*) by their election to political office and the *populus* had a crucial say in these appointments.[31] The logical conclusion

[25] *AE* 1994, 345.
[26] Duncan-Jones (1982), 278. Another inscription from Lanuvium refers to a *curia mulierum*. This text will be discussed in the section on female recipients.
[27] *AE* 1979, 147.
[28] *CIL* IX, 1618. For *vicani* as the only recipients, see *CIL* XI, 2998.
[29] On the understanding of *res publica*, see Flower (2010), 10-17; Hodgson (2017), 1-20.
[30] For discrimination of the common people in terms of patronage, see Mouritsen (2001), 138-139.
[31] Mouritsen (2017), 96.

is that the elite could not have aspired to public office/honour without winning popular support.[32]

During the first centuries of the Empire the concept of the ideal civic community did retain its importance, although it did assume different forms. As Jones observed long ago, 'the one democratic feature in the civic constitutions, the popular election of the magistrates and, directly or indirectly, of the councillors, gradually fell into abeyance in the second century A.D.'.[33] However, even after local office-holders ceased to be elected by local assemblies, they were still expected to live up to the ideals of the local citizen community by displaying their concern for their fellow citizens.

In the local communities of the imperial period, benefactors displayed their generosity and superiority by lavishing gifts. Any intangible rewards for the provision of private munificence were provided by the recipients.[34] By displays of their altruism, benefactors created a much-needed audience to whom to advertise their election to high office or the bestowal of other public honours, such as public statues. Such occasions could also be prompted by the celebration of family anniversaries or for the perpetuation of personal memory. Benefactors could not achieve public recognition by displaying their munificence in isolation. Therefore, the *populus* was vitally important: not only did they form a passive public to whom benefactors wanted to present themselves, they also played an active role in acknowledging their benefactors' position in the community. The imperial benefactor still operated in a community defined by the citizen populace.

One way in which elite citizens could display their concern for their citizen community as a whole was to shoulder the cost of various public amenities, such as theatres, sanctuaries or *macella*. Another option was to provide a public meal to be enjoyed by all members of the citizen community. The latter would have been less financially burdensome. To judge from the information provided by the inscriptions,

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[32] Hölkeskamp (2010), 31.

[33] Jones (1974), 13; cf. De Ste Croix (1981), 308-315. As Mommsen noted long ago (Mommsen (1905), 317), the gradual concentration of the highest civic offices in the hands of a few families must gradually have robbed elections to office by local assemblies of their original significance. The early-fourth century rule that magistracies were restricted to those who were already members of the town-council (*Dig*. 50.2.7.2 Paul) can be seen as the logical outcome of this development. As various scholars have pointed out, there is epigraphic evidence for local assemblies electing magistrates in Italy in the mid-second century AD (e.g. *ILS* 6190), and a law of 326 AD refers to magistrates in North African cities being elected by the *populus* (*Cod. Theod*. 12.5.1; cf. Horstkotte (1984), 213, n.19), but such texts are fully compatible with the view that elections by local assemblies gradually developed into ritual expressions of consent with the rule of an increasingly narrow group of wealthy families.

[34] Garnsey (1999), 134, gives answers to why Hellenistic euergetists provide benefactions: '…for their self-esteem, for their survival as a social group, to reaffirm their legitimacy. The crowds who joined in … sanctioned the domination of the elite over society and politics.' Also see Zuiderhoek (2009), 113-153 for a more detailed analysis of legitimization by means of gift-giving by the elite.

organizing a public meal was much cheaper than erecting a public building. Such munificence as a public dinner for all people of citizen status was a good opportunity for conspicuous consumption and can be seen as a highly effective way of displaying the undiminished social and political relevance of the local citizen community. It might even be suggested that the gradual erosion of the elective role of local assemblies *increased* the social and political significance of private displays of public generosity simply because, simply because the gradual devaluation of popular elections meant that public munificence became relatively more important as a way of legitimizing elite rule in the eyes of non-elite members of civic communities.[35]

The appearance of the plebs urbana as a preferred target group

At least eleven inscriptions, all from peninsular Italy, refer to food gifts being bestowed on the *plebs urbana*.[36] Although at first sight these texts are not particularly remarkable, it should be remembered that many historians regard the separation of town and country as a medieval development. Finley, for instance, has argued that, during the period of the Roman Empire, 'the traditional unity of town and hinterland – political, juridical and residential – went on unchallenged'.[37] There can be no doubt that this assessment is correct to the extent that throughout Antiquity each city normally included a rural territory. Furthermore, we have seen that at least in some instances country-dwelling citizens were invited to privately sponsored public dinners organized for people with local citizenship rights. However, precisely because in the Archaic, Classical, Hellenistic and Republican periods there had never been a juridical dividing-line between town-based and country-dwelling citizens, the appearance of the

[35] Cf. Chapter 6.

[36] *CIL* V, 5262 (Comum, AD 100-109); *CIL* IX, 4215 (Amiternum, AD 338); *CIL* XI, 5963 (Pitinum Mergens, 2nd century); *CIL* XI, 6033 (Pitinum Pisaurense, 2nd century); *AE* 1996, 647 (Carsulae, 1st/2nd century); *CIL* IX, 3954 (Alba Fucens, 2nd/3rd century); *CIL* IX, 3842 (Antinum, 2nd century). In *CIL* XI, 6014 (Sestinum, AD 198-211) the *plebs* received *sportulae* of two *denarii* and *panis et vinum* are almost certainly identical with the *plebs urbana* who set up an honorary statue for the benefactor in conjunction with the local *seviri Augustales*. In *CIL* XI, 6360 (Pisaurum, 2nd century), the added *panis et vinum* are also likely to have been provided for the *plebs urbana* who had houldered the cost of a statue for the benefactor. In *CIL* XI, 6377 (Pisaurum) and *CIL* IX, 981 (Compsa, 2nd/3rd century), since the dedication was made by the *plebs urbana,* the food gifts which were provided for the *populus* should also have been designated for this group. Cf. also *CIL* XI, 2650: *sportulae* for the *plebs urbana* of Saturnia (AD 234); *CIL* IX, 977 (Compsa): distribution of *sportulae* to decurions and *populus utriusque sexus* after the dedication of a statue financed by *plebs urbana*; *CIL* XI, 3013 (*ager Viterbensis*): distribution of *sportulae* to decurions, *Augustales* and *plebei intra murum habitantes*. For more epigraphic references to the *plebs urbana* as a dedicant of honorary statues and/or as a recipient of distributions, see, for instance, *CIL* XI, 6060 (Urvinum Mataurense); *CIL* XII, 368 (Riez, Gallia Narbonensis); *CIL* IX, 4697 (Rieti); *CIL* IX, 5428 (Falerio Picenus); *CIL* X, 5064 (Atina); *CIL* XI, 2650 (Saturnia); *CIL* XI, 6369 (Pisaurum).

[37] Finley (1977), 307.

plebs urbana as a separate group of beneficiaries targeted by local benefactors is a highly significant development. As Clara Berrendonner has said in an article on the role of the *plebs* in the towns of early-imperial Etruria and Umbria: 'The fact that the term *plebs* is often accompanied by the adjective *urbana* suggests that the principal protagonists in civic life were the citizens of the urban centre as opposed to those who lived in the country.'[38]

One possible explanation of this development can be found in Zuiderhoek's recent book on the relationships between benefactors and citizens in early-imperial Asia Minor. One of the problems which Zuiderhoek tackles in his book is why non-elite urban citizens were prepared to accept the elite's claim to social and political dominance as legitimate. Part of his answer is that the town-based elites of Roman Asia Minor derived most of their income from estates they owned in the territory of their cities or elsewhere. From an economic and social point of view, this situation meant that 'the burden of exploitation was carried by the rural poor'.[39] Furthermore the fact that life in the cities of Asia Minor was also characterized by a high degree of economic and social inequality should not be lost sight of. Nonetheless, the simple fact that many townspeople made a living as self-employed shop-keepers, petty traders and manufacturers means that the exploitative aspects of life in the city were far less obvious than they were in the countryside. Zuiderhoek argues that this contrast between heavily exploited country-dwellers and lightly exploited, or unexploited, townspeople goes a long way towards explaining why the oligarchic system of the Greek cities of Asia Minor was entirely acceptable to most town-dwelling citizens.

Applying these ideas to the cities of peninsular Italy, it might be suggested that, in this part of the empire too, a long-established tradition of elite-residence in cities, in conjunction with a relatively low intensity of economic exploitation in urban communities, had the effect of fostering a close relationship between town-based elites and other town-dwelling citizens. Viewed in this light, the appearance of food benefactions specifically intended for the *plebs urbana* can be seen as symptomatic of the gradual opening up of a social divide between urban and rural citizens. In other words, while the civic elites of Roman Italy continued to legitimize their social and political dominance in the eyes of non-elite citizens, the town-dwelling *plebs* were increasingly seen as the most important target of their legitimizing strategies.

Decuriones (ordo decurionum)

The local *decuriones* form the second beneficiary group most often attested. Mrozek observes that there are no fewer than 150 inscriptions recording the *decuriones*

[38] Cf. Berrendonner (2005), 532: "Le fait que le term *plebs* soit souvent accompagné de l'adjectif *urbana* suggère en effet que les principaux protagonistes de la vie civique étaient les citoyens du centre urbain, par opposition à ceaux qui habitaient les campagnes" (my translation).
[39] Zuiderhoek (2009), 148.

receiving various distributions in the Italian communities alone.[40] In the present study on food-related benefactions, the *decuriones* as beneficiaries of privately sponsored public dining can be found in ninety-eight inscriptions in Italy and the western provinces.

Thirty-four inscriptions present this group as the only beneficiary group, of which twenty-seven contain information about the identities of the benefactors. In twenty cases we are dealing with magistrates or members of the town council who provided dinners specifically for the *decuriones*.[41] The parents of a *decurio* and holders of priesthoods are also found to have paid particular attention to this group.[42] By singling out members of the local council, benefactors could highlight their close relationship with this group.

More often than not, the *decuriones* and the populace were invited to a public dinner together. However, the explicit distinction between these two groups shows that hierarchical relationships among the citizen body were acknowledged facts. Given the existence of this hierarchy, one might have expected to find members of the town council being served better meals than ordinary citizens. A handful of inscriptions show that decurions did indeed receive preferential treatment in some cases at least. These inscriptions will be discussed in the second half of this chapter.

Augustales

The *Augustales* also enjoyed private munificence.[43] Inscriptions show they participated in public dinners with other groups, more often than not with the *decuriones* and the populace. Why were the *Augustales* singled out as a group in the inscriptions?

In older publications, the *Augustales* are often defined as a group of sub-elite citizens which played a prominent role in the imperial cult.[44] In recent scholarship this theory has been abandoned in favour of a more flexible interpretation which sees the *Augustales* engaging in various cultic activities but also recognizes their role as local

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[40] Mrozek (1987), 83, n.1.

[41] *CIL* X, 107; *CIL* XI, 3009; *CIL* VIII, 25468; *AE* 2003, 1985; *CIL* VIII, 860; *CIL* VIII, 12378; *ILTun* 746; *CIL* VIII, 10620; *CIL* VIII, 1284; *CIL* VIII, 858; *CIL* VIII, 859; *CIL* VIII, 861; *CIL* VIII, 862; *CIL* VIII, 863; *CIL* VIII, 23966; *CIL* VIII, 12421; *ILS* 6468; *CIL* X, 688. As recorded in *ILAfr* 294 and *CIL* VIII, 23991, the *decuriones* were given an *epulum* while the *populus* received *missilia*. Coleman (2011), 342 points out that the *missilia* were either items of food or cash tokens thrown to the crowd as prizes. In this instance, it is impossible to establish whether or not the *missilia* involved food, but it would seem to have been more practical to distribute tokens rather than food. Therefore in these two cases the *decuriones* were viewed as the only recipients of the food bestowed.

[42] E.g. *AE* 1928, 26; *CIL* VIII, 26255; *CIL* VIII, 1498.

[43] The titles of this group varied from town to town, including *Augustales*, *seviri*, *seviri Augustales* and other variants, see Duthoy (1978), 1254; Mouritsen (2006), 237-240.

[44] Duthoy (1978), Ostrow (1985) and Ostrow (1990) regard that the primary function of the *Augustales* was to perform priestly duties involved in the worship of the deified emperor.

benefactors and sponsors of public events.[45] Taking an important step forwards, Mouritsen has argued that the activities undertaken by the *Augustales* varied from town to town, thereby undermining any attempt to piece together a single picture of this institution using epigraphic evidence from a number of different towns.[46]

The hierarchical position of the *Augustales* in the communities has also become the subject of discussion. It used to be generally accepted that the *Augustales* formed an *ordo* ranking immediately below the *ordo decurionum*.[47] Refuting this widely accepted view, Mouritsen has recently argued that the preferential treatment granted to them in public 'was a direct response to their euergetic role and sponsorship of public amenities rather than a reflection of their "middle-class" position.'[48]

A considerable number of Italian inscriptions refer to privately sponsored food benefactions being bestowed on the *decuriones* and *Augustales* only or to the *Augustales* receiving larger cash hand-outs than the *plebs*.[49] Although these texts leave no doubt about the prominent position of the *Augustales* in the communities in question, they do not prove the existence of an *ordo Augustalium*.

Only two inscriptions refer to benefactors bestowing office-related food gifts on the *Augustales*.[50] The explanation of this is that, at least in theory, magistrates were elected or appointed by the entire citizen community. The *Augustales* never acquired a constitutional position comparable to that of either the *populus* or the *ordo decurionum*.

Epigraphic evidence for *Augustales* as the recipients of responsive food benefactions is far more plentiful.[51] In addition, we find evidence that *Augustales* were included among the beneficiaries of voluntary food benefactions.[52] In some cases the benefactor was a member of the *Augustales* himself or a freedman.[53] However, when prominent citizens provided public dinners after public honours had been bestowed

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[45] Beard, North and Price (1998), 357-358 and Mouritsen (2006), 240-242 hold the view that they were not particularly involved in the ruler cult and did not function as official priests. Also see Laird (2002) on the function and identity of the *seviri Augustales* at Ostia.
[46] Mouritsen (2011), 251-253.
[47] Duthoy (1974), 149-150; Abramenko (1993), 76-82.
[48] Mouritsen (2011), 256-259.
[49] E.g. *CIL* XIV, 2416; *AE* 1979, 169; *CIL* X, 1881; *CIL* XIV, 2793; *CIL* X, 110; *CIL* XI, 6360; *CIL* IX, 3838; *AE* 1976, 176; *CIL* IX, 23; *CIL* IX, 2553.
[50] *CIL* IX, 2553 (Fagifulae) and *CIL* XII, 697 (Arelate). Note that the benefactor from Arelate was a *flamen Augustalis*.
[51] E.g. *CIL* X, 1881; *CIL* X, 110; *CIL* XI, 6362; *CIL* IX, 3838; *AE* 1976, 176; *CIL* IX, 23; AE 1958, 144; *CIL* X, 5917; CIL XI, 3206; *CIL* IX, 3160; *CIL* XI, 6014; *CIL* V, 7905.
[52] E.g. *AE* 1979, 169; *CIL* XIV, 2793; *AE* 1958, 144; *CIL* XII, 697; *CIL* XI, 3206; *CIL* XI, 4815; *CIL* IX, 4971; *CIL* X, 110; *CIL* X, 5853.
[53] *Augustalis*: *AE* 2000, 344; *CIL* X, 1881; *flamen Augustalis*: *AE* 1958, 144; *libertus*/*liberta*: *CIL* XIV, 2793; *CIL* X, 5917; *CIL* XI, 3206.

on them, they also commonly included the *Augustales* among the beneficiaries.[54] An examination of the identifiable benefactors in the relevant inscriptions shows that twelve out of twenty-five benefactors were office-holders in the communities.[55] It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that a considerable proportion of benefactors who provided public food gifts of either the responsive or voluntary types were inspired by a hierarchical concept of the civic community in which the *Augustales* took their place alongside the *ordo decurionum* and ordinary citizens.

Religious and professional collegia

In his monograph on professional associations, Van Nijf lists nineteen inscriptions from Italy and the western provinces under the heading '*collegia* in public commensality in the West'. However, an inspection of his list reveals that it contains only seven texts which refer to food benefactions. The remaining inscriptions record only distributions of cash (*sportulae*).[56] If we add a few inscriptions which were not included in van Nijf's list, the tally for privately funded food benefactions targeting religious or professional associations in Italy or the western provinces rises to ten.[57]

Five of the community-wide food benefactions which were specifically bestowed on *collegia* can be assigned to the responsive type.[58] Three texts seem to refer to food gifts which had been offered spontaneously.[59] Only in two cases do we seem to be dealing with office-related benefactions.[60] The dearth of benefactions from this latter category can easily be explained: like the *Augustales*, professional and religious associations played no part in electing magistrates, or in rubber-stamping lists of candidates drawn up by town councils. The shortage of epigraphic references to *collegia* benefiting from either responsive or voluntary food benefactions is, however, more difficult to explain.

In some cases the decision to include *collegia* as a separate group of recipients seems to have been prompted by the fact that the benefactor was in fact responding to the erection of a public statue by the *collegiati*. For instance, a late-second or early-third-century inscription from Eburum reports that a civic patron, Titus Flavius Silvanus, was honoured by having a statue dedicated to him by the *collegium*

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[54] E.g. *CIL* IX, 3160; *CIL* XI, 6014; *CIL* V, 7905; *CIL* X, 5918; *AE* 1976, 176; *CIL* IX, 3838; *CIL* IX, 3171; *AE* 1997, 432; *AE* 2004, 467; *AE* 2000, 533.
[55] *AE* 1976, 176; *CIL* IX, 3838; *CIL* IX, 3842; *CIL* IX, 3160; *AE* 1997, 432; *AE* 2000, 533; *CIL* XI, 6360; *CIL* XI, 6033; *CIL* XI, 6014; *CIL* V, 7905; *CIL* XI, 4815; *CIL* X, 5853.
[56] Van Nijf (1997), 253-254. As argued by Duncan-Jones (1982), 140, there are no grounds for thinking that municipal *sportulae* were invariably intended to be spent on food.
[57] *CIL* IX, 3842; *AE* 2000, 533; *CIL* X, 451; *CIL* X, 5796; *CIL* IX, 2553; *CIL* V, 7920; *CIL* V, 7905; *AE* 1954, 154; *CIL* XII, 5905; *CIL* XII, 697 (*corporibus*). For *collegia* as recipients, see also Van Nijf (1997), 155; Donahue (2017), 126-128.
[58] *CIL* IX, 3842; *CIL* V, 7905; *CIL* X, 5796; *CIL* X, 451; *AE* 2000, 533.
[59] *AE* 1954, 154; *CIL* V, 7920; *CIL* XII, 5905.
[60] *CIL* IX, 2553 and *CIL* XII, 697.

dendrophororum. In return he donated 8,000 sesterces to the *collegium* so that its members would celebrate his birthday every year. On the occasion of the dedication of the statue, besdies the cash hand-outs distributed to the patrons of the *collegium*, former magistrates, the other decurions and the *Augustales*, he provided 1,000 sesterces and an *epulum* for the *dendrophori* and the *fabri* as well as cash and a *viscerationem* for the plebeians.[61]

Another example comes from Antinum, where the *collegium dendrophorum* set up a statue for their patron, Sextus Petronaeus Valerianus Antinus. In gratitude for the dedication, he distributed cash hand-outs during a dinner which had been organized for the *decuriones*, the *seviri Augustales*, the *collegium dendrophorum* and the *plebs urbana*. Notably, the *dendrophori* received a larger amount of money (12 sesterces apiece) than any of the other groups.[62]

This leaves us with only eight inscriptions from the entire western half of the empire referring to food benefactions offered to *collegia* which had not attracted the benefactor's attention by honouring a statue to him. Interestingly, four of these inscriptions come from Alpes Maritimae and from Gallia Narbonensis, two provinces which have also produced epigraphic evidence of dinners attended exclusively by *collegiati* (Chapter 5).

The paucity of epigraphic evidence for *collegia* taking part in community-wide meals casts some doubt on Van Nijf's claim that the first and second centuries AD witnessed the emergence of *collegia* as status groups of major importance in most cities of the Roman empire.[63] To judge from the inscriptional evidence from Italy and the western provinces, the *populus* as a whole remained the preferred recipients of privately funded food gifts throughout the period covered by this study. Of course, there can be little doubt that individual members of *collegia* benefited from such food benefactions but, as far as we can tell from the epigraphic record, they must have normally done so by virtue of their membership of the *populus* of their towns.[64]

Women and children

Terms such as *populus, cives, municipes, coloni, plebs, plebs urbana, pagani* and *vicani* were normally used to refer to men.[65] When women were recipients, they would be

[61] *CIL* X, 451.
[62] *CIL* IX, 3842: *ob cuius dedica/tionem dedit decurionibus / {a}epulantibus sing(ulis) HS VIIII n(ummum) / seviris Aug(ustalibus) {a}epulan(tibus) sing(ulis) HS VI n(ummum) / collegio s(upra) s(cripto) {a}epul(antibus) sing(ulis) HS XII n(ummum) / plebi urbanae {a}epul(antibus) sing(ulariter) HS IIII n(ummum).*
[63] Van Nijf (1997), 149-188.
[64] Cf. Donahue (2017), 126.
[65] Mrozek (1987), 99; MacMullen (1980), 212.

explicitly mentioned as such.[66] From the inscriptions it appears they received benefactions with other groups either as a separate civic category (*mulieres*), as the female half of the *populus utriusque sexus* or as the wives of the male beneficiaries (*coniuges, uxores*).

Women as a general group (*mulieres*) were provided for by both male and female benefactors.[67] However, they sometimes seem to have received preferential treatment as the only beneficiary of munificence displayed by female benefactors.[68] An inscription from Veii reports that a benefactress provided an *epulum* for the mothers, sisters and daughters of the *centumviri* and for the female citizens of every class.[69] Another example from Corfinium mentions that a mother set up statues for her children and on the occasion of dedication gave an *epulum* and 2 sesterces to each woman.[70]

In addition to this, a famous inscription from Lanuvium records the decision of the local town council and the *populus* to erect an equestrian statue for Gaius Sulpicius Victor, the father of two sons of equestrian status and patron of the *municipium*.[71] When the statue was dedicated, the honorand responded by providing the decurions, the *Augustales* and the (male) members of the *curiae* with *sportulae* of 24 sesterces each and the *curia mulierum* with a double meal (*epulum duplum*). Since the *curia mulierum* cannot have had a political role, it must have had a religious or social character (or both), and it is tempting to acknowledge Hemelrijk's suggestion that these women received a double meal because they belonged to upper-class families.[72]

In an inscription from Ferentinum, female recipients of a privately sponsored public dinner appear as wives, daughters and sisters of the local decurions and *decemviri* (and of those who had the right to dine with these men) as well as the wives of the *seviri Augustales*.[73] Strictly speaking, the relevant part of the inscription records a distribution of *sportulae* on the benefactor's birthday but, since the recipients are referred to as 'lying on their (dining) couches' (*discumbentibus*), it seems reasonable to infer that the distributions referred to in the text took place during a privately sponsored public dinner.

Another example of an inscription referring to wives of decurions taking part in a public dinner with their husbands comes from Corfinium, where the members of the

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[66] On females as recipients, see Mrozek (1972b), 46; Mrozek (1987), 98-99; Donahue (2017), 139-140; Hemelrijk (2015), 142-143; 208-211.
[67] Hemelrijk (2015), 208, points out that the terms *mulieres* and *feminae* refer not only to free-born women citizens but also to freedwomen and foreign female residents.
[68] For more examples of women explicitly included as recipients of female munificence (banquets, cash hand-outs and other distributions), see Hemelrijk (2015), 138-156, and Table 3.6.
[69] *CIL* XI, 3811.
[70] *CIL* IX, 3171.
[71] *CIL* XIV, 2120.
[72] Hemelrijk (2015), 206-207.
[73] *CIL* X, 5849.

splendissimus ordo were invited with their wives and children.[74] A third illustration is provided by an inscription from Nepet. Here the local decurions and *Augustales* and those belonging to the *plebs* were given an *epulum* together with their wives and children after a statue had been erected for Marcus Ulpius Thallus, an imperial freedman.[75]

It would appear that in all these instances women's qualifications to participate in public dinners depended on the juridical or social status of their husbands.

Finally, we find women being invited to public dinners as the female half of the *populus utriusque sexus* or of the *plebs urbana utriusque sexus*.[76] Interestingly, the 'non-citizen residents of either sex' (*incolae utriusque sexus*) are also referred to as participating in community-wide dinners.[77]

The sources discussed above indicate that women were more likely to be included as recipients when male honorands offered responsive benefactions or when a female donor gave a voluntary display of munificence. This pattern can be accounted for by distinguishing between the citizen body in a narrowly political sense and the community of citizens in a biological and social sense: although women did not have any voting rights, they did play a vital role in perpetuating the urban elite and the local citizen body.

Another point which cannot be ignored is that almost 90 percent of the evidence about women being included as beneficiaries comes from small and medium-sized towns.[78] There seems little doubt that women who lived in a smaller town could benefit from munificence more easily, simply because the cost of community-wide meals would have been more affordable in such communities.

Ten inscriptions from the western half of the empire refer to children participating in public banquets or to receiving food distributions with adults.[79] In some cases both male and female children of *decuriones* were provided for.[80] This shows that being a

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[74] *CIL* IX, 3160.
[75] *CIL* XI, 3206.
[76] *CIL* IX, 981; *CIL* IX, 3954.
[77] *CIL* XI, 5693
[78] *AE* 1946, 174 (Casinum); *CIL* X, 5849 (Ferentinum); *CIL* X, 5853 (Ferentinum); *CIL* XIV, 2120 (Lanuvium); *CIL* IX, 981 (Compsa); *AE* 1976, 176 (Blanda Iulia); *CIL* IX, 3954 (Alba Fucens); *CIL* IX, 3160 (Corfinium); *CIL* IX, 3171 (Corfinium); *AE* 1997, 432 (Fugifulae); *CIL* XI, 6190 (Ostra); *CIL* XI, 5693 (Tuficum); *CIL* XI (Nepet); *CIL* XI, 3811 (Veii); *AE* 1966, 183 (Munigua); *CIL* II, 1267 (Ostur); *CIL* II, 1191 (Naeva); *AE* 2001, 889 (Beneventum); *CIL* II, 1378 (Carmo). Duncan-Jones (1982), 143, indicates that in small towns women were usually included among the recipients of distributions.
[79] *CIL* X, 5849; *CIL* X, 5853; *AE* 2001, 889; CIL IX, 3160; *CIL* IX, 2962; *CIL* IX, 2252; *CIL* XI, 5215; *CIL* XI, 3206; *CIL* XI, 3811; *CIL* II, 5, 847.
[80] *CIL* X, 5849; *CIl* IX, 3160; *CIL* IX, 2962; *CIL* XI, 5215; *CIL* II, 5, 847.

member of the local council brought prestige and privilege, not only to the *decuriones* themselves but also to their families.[81]

According to a third-century inscription from Fulginiae, a certain Publius Aelius Marcellus was granted a public statue by the local council. On the occasion of the dedication of this statue, he provided bread, wine and 20 sesterces for the councillors and their (male?) children (*liberi*), and 4 sesterces to the citizens.[82] Another example comes from Nescania in Baetica. When the town council of this community decided to erect a public statue for a certain Gaius Marius Clemens, his mother, Fabia Restituta, gave the *decuriones* and their children (*filii*) an *epulum* as well as cash hand-outs to citizens, non-citizen residents and the *servi stationarii*.[83]

Sometimes the children of ordinary citizens were also included. Sometime during the second or third century, Lucius Manlius Rufio, one of the *seviri* of Telesia, provided the citizens (*coloni*) of the town and their children (*liberi*) with an *epulum* and the non-citizens received sweet wine and cakes.[84] Similarly, the inscription from Nepet, which records the bestowal of a public banquet in connection with the erection of a public statue for Marcus Ulpius Thallus (cf. above), explicitly mentions the children of the decurions, the *Augustales* and the *plebs* among the recipients.[85]

Like women, children appear to have been an optional group. The decision to include them might have been prompted by considerations related to the gender of the benefactor (cf. above), but also by personal preferences for which the reason remains hidden. The epigraphic record as a whole shows that women and children were rarely the principal beneficiaries of private munificence. Nevertheless, the fact that they were sometimes included indicates that they were regarded as constituent elements of the community in its wider sense.

Non-citizen residents

Non-citizen residents, *incolae* or *peregrini*, were those people who did not hold citizenship in the community on which the act of munificence was bestowed.

In nine inscriptions which refer to *incolae* being invited to privately sponsored community-wide meals, they are distinguished from the citizens by the use of juxtapositions such as *coloni et incolae*, *municipes et incolae* or *cives et incolae*.[86]

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[81] Jacques (1984), 562.
[82] *CIL* XI, 5215. See Donahue (2017), 140, who argues that the term *liberi* refers to boys only.
[83] *CIL* II, 2011.
[84] *CIL* IX, 2252.
[85] *CIL* XI, 3206. See also *CIL* X, 5849: the children of the *decuriones* were invited to a public dinner with their parents, while nuts were distributed to the *pueri* of the *populus*.
[86] *Coloni et incolae*: *CIL* IX, 2252; *AE* 1975, 354; *municipes et incolae*: *CIL* X, 5853; *CIL* XI, 5722; *CIL* XI, 5693; *CIL* II, 1191; *cives et incolae*: *CIL* II, 5489 ; *CIL* II, 2100. For an exceptional case, see *AE* 2002, 1115.

The relative scarcity of inscriptions mentioning *incolae* as beneficiaries of food-related *euergetism* might be explained as a reflection of the political and social marginality of this group compared to local residents with citizenship rights. However, there are some reasons to think that this inference might be incorrect for Italian towns in the second century AD. In an earlier section we have seen that a second-century inscription from Auximum uses the term *coloni* to refer to the local citizens and *populus* to denote a wider group which must have included *incolae*. Likewise, in an inscription from Visentium, the term *populus* seems to denote people without local citizenship rights (cf. above).

A first- or second-century inscription from Forum Sempronii suggests that the term *plebs* might also have been used to refer to local *cives* and *incolae*. From this text it appears that, after the *municipes* and *incolae* had dedicated a statue to Lucius Maesius Rufus, the latter responded by providing an *epulum* and cash hand-outs on the day of its dedication.[87] Although the beneficiaries of the banquet are not described explicitly, the cash hand-outs were given to the *decuriones*, the *sexviri*, the *Augustales* and the *plebs*. Since it was normal for those who had dedicated a statue to benefit from any food benefactions and the distribution of money provided by an honorand, it seems reasonable to infer that, in this inscription at least, the term *plebs* includes both *municipes* and permanent residents without local citizenship rights.

In this context, it seems highly significant that in Italian inscriptions *incolae* never appear alongside the *populus* or the *plebs*. This basic fact has prompted Mrozek to hypothesize that, from the early second century AD and thereafter, these two terms might have included citizens and *incolae*.[88] From both a political and a juridical point of view, the tendency to group these two categories under one heading makes excellent sense because *incolae* are known to have had (limited) voting rights in local assemblies.[89]

In a nutshell it seems legitimate to conclude that in the towns of mainland Italy *incolae* were often invited to privately funded community-wide dinners. This is in line with Mackie's observation that, 'social benefits, and obligations to the community, were to a large extent determined by residence rather than citizen status'.[90] If this observation is correct, as I think it is, we must also accept the secondary inference that the epigraphic record points to a gradual broadening of the political and social concept of 'community' in which the old distinction between people with local citizenship rights and 'resident foreigners' slowly but steadily lost some of the importance it had had in the late Republic and perhaps also in much of the first century of the Principate.

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[87] *CIL* XI, 6117.

[88] Mrozek (1984a), 19. He goes on to observe that African inscriptions of the second and third century continue to distinguish between *populus* and *incolae*, suggesting that the 'social emancipation' of the *incolae* might have been a region-specific development (*ibid*. 20).

[89] De Ligt and Garnsey (2012), 94.

[90] Mackie (1983), 78.

To sum up

The epigraphic evidence relating to community-wide meals leaves no doubt that, throughout the first, second and early third centuries AD, the binary distinction between town-councillors and male citizens remained a key feature of the civic communities of the Western Roman Empire. When making arrangements for such meals, the *Augustales* also tended not to be overlooked because of their relatively high status in the community. The inclusion of other groups seems to have been optional; however, the fact that they were invited to attend public dinners demonstrates that the concept of community was fluid. Citizenship still mattered, but was no longer the sole criterion in defining a community under the Empire: status, residence and gender also played their part.

3.2 Benefaction arrangements

One of the conclusions which has emerged from the foregoing discussion is that, in the first to early third centuries AD, food-related benefactions were used to express the continuing importance of membership of local civic communities. Nevertheless, such benefactions were used as outward and visible signs to express hierarchical relationships within these communities.

Food benefactions can be categorized into two types – public dinners and food hand-outs. Being invited to attend any kind of dinner, whether an *epulum*, *cena* or a *prandium*, should be considered as having been better treatment than just receiving snacks and drinks, such as pastry (*crustulum*) and honeyed wine (*mulsum*). At first sight, this distinction provides us with a good starting point for investigating hierarchies among food recipients. However, as Mrozek has pointed out with regard to cash hand-outs, the amounts of cash which were distributed could have depended not only on social distinctions but also on the financial capability of the donors, local custom and concrete occasions.[91] This observation also applies to food-related benefactions. Consequently there might be unknown variables involved in particular food hand-outs, with nothing to do with the status of the beneficiary groups. Even if we bear this warning in mind, we can still use the information about specific food benefactions found in inscriptions for various beneficiary groups to establish whether certain social members of local civic society tended to be treated better than other groups. In other words, examining the benefactors' arrangements in this matter is still a good way to study how the concept of community was applied in practice.

[91] Mrozek (1987), 87.

3.2.1 Distinctions between different beneficiaries belonging to various status groups

Beneficiary groups	Types of Food benefactions[92]							
	Meals					Food hand-outs		
	Epulum	Cena	Prandium	Visceratio	Unspecified meal	Crustulum and/or mulsum	Panis and/or vinum	Miscellaneous
Adult male citizens	126	9	3	4	1	24	9	1
Decuriones	63	7	-	1	2	5	5	-
Augustales	24	2	-	-	1	2	4	-
Collegia	8	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
Women	16	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
Children	6	1	-	-	1	-	1	1
Non-citizen residents	6	-	-	-	-	1	-	-

Figure 3.4 Distinctions between different food benefactions received by various status groups

Figure 3.4 shows how often various groups of beneficiaries were invited to public meals or received food distributions. With one interesting exception, the *populus* as a whole, the frequency with which they appear does not match the order in which various groups appeared in the inscriptions, usually listed as: the *decuriones*, the *Augustales*, the *collegia*, the *populus*, women.

[92] For a discussion on different kinds of distributions, see Mrozek (1987), 37-46.

The citizen population as a whole was often specified as the only recipient of food benefactions, which could have been either a public dinner or a food hand-out. No distinctions were made within members of this group.[93] The same applies to the *decuriones* when they were the only beneficiary group.[94] The great majority of inscriptions, around 77 percent of public dinners or food hand-outs, report that food was given to the citizen body, or decurions, or both. It is common to find the same food benefactions being provided to the *decuriones,* the *Augustales* and the *populus*, or to the *decuriones*, the local citizens and non-citizen residents, and so forth.[95] In some cases a public dinner was given without specifying specific beneficiaries.[96]

Nonetheless, there are a number of inscriptions in which multiple groups received food-related benefactions in a way which suggests a hierarchy.[97] An inscription from Tarquinii which was set up in 35 AD reports that the *decuriones* were treated to an *epulum* while the *plebs* got *crustulum* and *mulsum*.[98] Another example comes from Iuvanum. The text records that, on an occasion of a dedication, the *decuriones* and their children were provided with a *cena* whereas the *quinquennales Augustales*, their children and the *plebs* were given an *epulum*.[99] In a fragmentary epigraphic text from Ferentinum, we read that on an unknown benefactor's birthday the *decuriones* and *decemviri* and their wives, children, brothers and sisters, and the *seviri Augustales* and their wives were invited to recline together at a public dinner; *sportulae* were also given to those present; on the same day an *epulum* was held for the populace and nuts were scattered to their children.[100]

Other inscriptions refer to people with local citizenship rights receiving better meals than the *incolae*. In an inscription from Telesia, we read that the citizens (*coloni*) and their children received an *epulum*, while the non-citizen inhabitants were

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[93] E.g. *crustum* and *mulsum*: *CIL* X, 5714; *CIL* XIV, 3581; *AE* 1974, 228; *CIL* IX, 4976; *CIL* XI, 5222; *AE* 1920, 97; *cena*: *CIL* X, 4736; *epulum*: *CIL* IX, 4973; *CIL* IX, 5196; *CIL* XI, 3211; *CIL* VIII, 23862; *CIL* VIII, 14791; *ILS* 9403; *prandium*: *CIL* XI, 6161; *panis* and *vinum*: *CIL* XI, 4582.

[94] E.g. *epulum*: *CIL* VIII, 25468; *AE* 2003, 2006; *AE* 2003, 1985; *CIL* VIII, 860; *CIL* VIII, 12378; *CIL* VIII, 23991; *CIL* VIII, 26255; *CIL* II, 5492; *panis* and *vinum*: *CIL* XI, 3009.

[95] E.g. for *decuriones* and *Augustales*: *CIL* XIV, 2416; *AE* 1976, 169; *CIL* X, 1881; *CIL* XIV, 2793; *AE* 1937, 119; *CIL* IX, 4957; for *decuriones* and populace: *CIL* X, 1459; *AE* 2004, 467; *CIL* XI, 5960; *CIL* XI, 5963; *CIL* XI, 5992; *AE* 1997, 1643; *CIL* VIII, 1447; *CIL* II, 1047; *CIL* XI, 7556; *AE* 1854, 165; *AE* 1961, 53; *CIL* VIII, 15457; *CIL* II, 1441; for populace and *incolae*: *CIL* IX, 2252; *CIL* II, 1191; *CIL* II, 5489; *ILS* 3395; *AE* 1975, 354; *CIL* XI, 5722; *CIL* XI, 5693; for multiple groups: *AE* 1946, 174; *CIL* X, 333; *CIL* XI, 3206; *AE* 1954, 154.

[96] E.g. *CIL* X, 5967; *CIL* IX, 3950; *CIL* XI, 7431; *CIL* III, 2869; *AE* 1954, 243; *CIL*III, 6359; *CIL* VIII, 15578; *CIL* VIII, 15381.

[97] Van Nijf (1997), 152-156.

[98] *AE* 2008, 524.

[99] *CIL* IX, 2962. Mrozek (1987), 38, suggests that a *cena* was considered more honourable than an *epulum*.

[100] *CIL* X, 5849.

provided with *crustum* and *mulsum*.[101] Similarly, an inscription from Auximum reports that the *coloni* were treated to a *cena* but the *populus* (which must have comprised non-citizens) a less expensive *epulum*.[102] Although these examples certainly exist, they represent a small minority.[103]

Benefactors also set up funds whose income would pay for food benefactions. This was a way to ensure that the kindness and generosity of the benefactor would be regularly recalled and selected beneficiaries would, year after year, be provided with occasions for communal dining. It is interesting that in these cases the *decuriones* and the civic body were most commonly specified as the beneficiaries of such dispositions.[104] Other groups, including the *Augustales*, the *incolae*, women and children, are also attested, but only in a few cases.[105] This discrepancy seems to reveal more about who were seen as the core of the community rather than internal hierarchies.

Sportulae add another dimension to these findings. It is well known that *sportulae* were often distributed in a way commensurate to the hierarchical structures of the town.[106] Unlike food, cash could easily be quantified and distributed accurately according to social rank. For this reason, if a benefactor did want to make a distinction between different groups, cash gifts rather than food hand-outs were provided.[107]

When *sportulae* were provided in conjunction with food benefactions, the amount of cash distributed to the different groups does indeed reveal a hierarchy,[108] as do the amounts of money which were distributed to various groups of beneficiaries during dinners.[109] In some cases, the citizen population as a whole were treated to a public dinner, while the *decuriones* (and the *Augustales*) were given *sportulae*.[110] The logical conclusion is that, on these occasions, the *sportulae* would have been more valuable

[101] *CIL* IX, 2252.
[102] *CIL* IX, 5841; cf. Mrozek (1990), 36.
[103] Donahue (2017), 122, cites *CIL* IX, 3160 (from Corfinium) and *CIL* IX, 5189 (allegedly from Asculum Picenum) as additional evidence of the hierarchical arrangements by which *decuriones* were served better meals than the *populus*, but the former inscription refers to decurions, *seviri Augustales* and the *plebs universa* receiving *sportulae* at different rates at the dinner organized on the occasion of a dedication of a public statue, and *CIL* IX, 5189 is widely regarded as a forgery (Duncan-Jones (1982), 234).
[104] *Decuriones*: *AE* 1979, 147; *CIL* XIV, 350; *CIL* XIV, 2793; *CIL* X, 107; *AE* 2000, 344; *CIL* XI, 4815; *CIL* XI, 5963; *CIL* VIII, 12421; *populus*: *CIL* XIV, 2827; *AE* 2000, 344; *CIL* XI, 6377; *CIL* XI, 5722; *CIL* XI, 4789; *CIL* XI, 5963; *CIL* VIII, 1845; *CIL* VIII, 1887; *CIL* VIII, 11813; *CIL* VIII, 24017.
[105] *CIL* X, 5853; *AE* 2000, 344; *CIL* XIV 2793; *CIL* XI, 4815; *CIL* XI, 5722.
[106] Duncan-Jones (1982), 138-144; Donahue (2017), 123.
[107] During dinners, hierarchical relationships could be expressed by assigning decurions and/or *Augustales* more sophisticated dining facilities.
[108] Sometimes it is not clear if the money given with the dinner was intended to be used to pay for the dinner or whether it was an extra cash gifts, e.g. *CIL* XI, 6117; *AE* 1976, 176.
[109] E.g. *CIL* IX, 3838; *CIL* IX, 3842; *CIL* IX, 5085.
[110] E.g. *CIL* XI, 6060; *CIL* XI, 3211; *CIL* VIII, 769; *CIL* XI, 5965.

than food benefactions and that they were gifted only to prominent groups. Nevertheless, leaving aside these pecuniary donations, it seems that hierarchy did not play a big role in arrangements for benefactions of food. Although we cannot rule out the possibility that unwritten rules dictating hierarchical arrangements did exist in practice and hence acknowledge that hierarchy was the yardstick guiding the organization of food gifts in some cases, a large number of inscriptions do not refer to privileged groups receiving preferential treatment. This omission suggests that, unlike *sportulae*, food benefactions were expected to be bestowed on the community as a whole, ideally as uniformly as possible.

3.2.2 Distinction between the two genders

Women account for only 5 percent of attested beneficiary groups. Although women seem to have received food gifts as members of the undifferentiated *populus* on at least some occasions (cf. above), this low figure shows that groups of men were deemed to have been the more important recipients. This still does not answer the question of whether male recipients were also accorded preferential treatment in food-related benefactions for recipients of either sex. This then raises the matter of whether women were more likely to have been targeted by female benefactors.

Reference	**Benefactions for women**	**Benefactions for men**	**Gender of the benefactor**
***CIL* XI, 3811**	epulum - matribus Cvir(orum) et sororibus et filiab(us) et omnis ordinis mulieribus municipib(us)	/	female
***CIL* X, 5853**	crustul(i) p(ondo) I mulsi hemin(a) - mulierib(us) nuptis	crustul(i) p(ondo) I mulsi hemin(a) - praesent(ibus) municipib(us) et incol(is), mulsum et crust(ulum) et sportul(a) HS X n(ummum) - decurionibus, crust(ulum) mulsum et HS VIII n(ummum) - puer(is) curiae increment(is) et VIvir(is) Aug(ustalibus) quibusq(ue) u(na) v(esci) i(us) e(st)	male

***CIL* XIV, 2120**	epulum - curi(a)e mulierum	nummos XXIIII - decurionibus et Augustalibus et curis	male
***AE* 1946, 174 = *AE* 1992, 244**	[epulum] - [m]ulier[ibus]	[epulum] - [decurionibus et popu]lo	female
***AE* 2001, 889**	(denarios) X[---] epulum - m[ulie]ribus	(denarios) X[---] epulum - [l]iberis viris	/
***CIL* IX, 981**	(denarios) C et e[pulum] biduo - populo utrius[que] sexus	(denarios) C et e[pulum] biduo - populo utrius[que] sexus	male
***CIL* IX, 3160**	epulantes - coniuges eorum (splendidissimum ordinem)	epulantes - splendidissimum ordinem liberosque, epulantes - populum	male
***CIL* IX, 3954**	crustu[l]um et mulsum - plebei urban[ae] utriusque sexus	crustu[l]um et mulsum - plebei urban[ae] utriusque sexus	/
***CIL* XI, 6190**	epulum - mulierib(us)	epulum - viris	male
***CIL* XI, 5693**	epulum et HS IIII(milia) n(ummum) - municipibus et incolis utriusque sexus	epulum et HS IIII(milia) n(ummum) - municipibus et incolis utriusque sexus	male
***CIL* X, 5849**	discumbentibus - [decurioni]bus et Xviris et q(uibus) u(na) v(esci) i(us?) uxoribusque ... filiabus sororibusq(ue) ... VIviris Aug(ustalibus) et uxorib(us) eorum	discumbentibus - [decurioni]bus et Xviris et q(uibus) u(na) v(esci) i(us?) ... [fili(i)s fra]tribus ... VIviris Aug(ustalibus)	/
***CIL* XI, 3206**	epulum - coniugibus (plebei)	epulum - decurionibus Augustalib(us) et plebei et liberis	female
***CIL* IX, 3171**	epul(um), (denarium) s(emis) - mulierib(us) sing(ulis)	/	female
***CIL* II, 1191**	epulo - municip(ibus) et incolis utrius sexus	epulo - municip(ibus) et incolis utrius sexus	male and female
***CIL* II, 1267**	epulo - utriusq(ue) sexus	epulo - utriusq(ue) sexus	female

***CIL* II, 1378**	epulo - utriusq(ue) sexus	epulo - utriusq(ue) sexus	male
***AE* 2006, 640**	epulo - utriq(ue) sexui	epulo - utriq(ue) sexui	male
***AE* 1976, 176**	epulum - mulieribus (HS II nummum)	epulum - decurionibus (HS VIII nummum), Augustalibus (HS VI nummum), populo (viritim HS IIII nummum)	male
***AE* 1997, 432**	epulum - mulieribus (singulis HS II)	epulum - decurionibus et Augustalibus (singulis HS VIII), Martialibus (singulis HS V), plebeis (singulis HS IIII)	male

Figure 3.5 Food benefactions for the two genders

As shown in Figure 3.5, in sixteen out of nineteen cases women and men received the same food benefactions. Various male groups, including the *decuriones*, the *Augustales*, citizens and non-citizen inhabitants, are found to have participated in public dining in the company of their womenfolk. As noted in an earlier section of this chapter, women were sometimes juxtaposed with separate male groups. In other inscriptions they appear as the wives of male beneficiaries or as the female half of the *populus*/*plebs* (or the *incolae*) *utriusque sexus*. A famous inscription from Forum Clodii records that the women were presented with pastry and wine on the birthday of Livia and that the *decuriones* and the *populus* were given the same food gifts when the statues of Augustus, Tiberius and Livia were dedicated.[111] In this case, men and women were targeted by different sponsors on two separate occasions, yet received the same kind of food hand-outs. Only two inscriptions refer to women as the sole beneficiary group,[112] and one inscription reports a male benefactor providing women with a dinner but distributing cash hand-outs to men.[113]

Most male donors provided the same food benefactions for both sexes, and even cash hand-outs of exactly the same amount.[114] When women provided benefactions, they either treated the sexes equally or provided only for other women. This evidence appears to show that, as far as food gifts are concerned, on the whole men and women were treated equally.

Against this background, it is interesting to see that differences between the two genders appear in at least some cases in which *sportulae* were distributed at privately

[111] *CIL* XI, 3303.
[112] *CIL* XI, 3811; *CIL* IX, 3171.
[113] *CIL* XIV, 2120.
[114] E.g. *CIL* IX, 981; *CIL* XI, 5693.

sponsored public meals. In one inscription from Ferentinum, which has already briefly been discussed, different beneficiary groups (*municipes*, *incolae*, *mulieres nuptae*, *decuriones*, sons and daughters of *decuriones*, *seviri Augustales*) were all given *crustulum* and *mulsum*. However, at this dinner, *sportulae* were distributed differentially, with the *decuriones* receiving 10 sesterces, their children, the *seviri Augustales* and those with the right to dine with them 8 sesterces, and those dining at the benefactor's table were given one sesterce extra.[115] There were no *sportulae* for women, citizens or non-citizen inhabitants. On another occasion, the *curia* of women of Lanuvium was offered an *epulum duplum*, while the *decuriones*, the *Augustales* and the (male) members of the other *curiae* were given 24 sesterces each.[116] In a situation analogous to what appears to have been the case in distributions designated for decurions and ordinary citizens, the cash hand-outs seem to have been used to make a distinction between men and women.

These observations show that the concept of community involved at least four different levels:

1) the core part was the adult male citizen population;
2) prominent groups within the civic body were singled out and highlighted;
3) women and children were optional recipients in terms of food benefactions;
4) non-citizen inhabitants were normally grouped with non-elite citizens (at least in Italy) and only occasionally provided with separate benefactions.

3.3 The 'concept of community': from Republic to Empire

Private expenditure on public feasts was a custom which was observed in the republican period. Hence, a brief investigation of beneficiaries in Republican times is required to complete the picture, before returning to the state of affairs under the Empire. The aim is to facilitate an insight into developing concepts of community in the imperial period.

[115] *CIL* X, 5853: *municipib(us) et incol(is) et mulierib(us) nuptis crustul(i) p(ondo) I mulsi hemin(a) / et circa triclin(ia) decurionibus mulsum et crust(ulum) et sportul(a) HS X n(ummum) / item puer(is) curiae increment(is) et VIvir(is) Aug(ustalibus) quibusq(ue) u(na) v(esci) i(us) e(st) crust(ulum) / mulsum et HS VIII n(ummum) et in triclin(io) meo ampl(ius) in sing(ulos) h(omines) HS I n(ummum)*. For a discussion of this inscription, see Fagan (2006), 378-379.
[116] *CIL* XIV, 2120. Hemelrijk (2015), 206-207.

3.3.1 Civic community under the Republic

It was not until the late Republic that the practice of offering privately sponsored public feasts began to gain popularity.[117] Although there is only a handful of evidence from this period, it is sufficient to gain an idea of which groups of participants were invited to public dinners. At this point, a note of caution should be sounded: recipients are not always specified explicitly. However, to judge from those cases for which this type of information is available, the *populus* was the group most frequently targeted by food-related benefactions.

Benefactor	**Beneficiary**	**Benefaction**	**Circumstance**	**Date**	**Reference**
Marcus Flavius	populus	visceratio	at the funeral of his mother	328-327 BC	Liv. 8.22
-	-	visceratio, epulum	on the occasion of the funeral of Publius Licinius Crassus, the *pontifex maximus*	183 BC	Liv. 39.46
Titus Flamininus	-	visceratio epulumque	to commemorate the death of his father	174 BC	Liv. 41.28.11
Quintus Fabius Maximus	populus Romanus	epulum	in honour of his uncle Publius Africanus	129 BC	Cic. *Mur.* 75
στρατηγοὶ	πολῖται	ἑστιάω	when celebrating triumphs	late second century BC	Ath. *Deipn.* 5.221f.
Sulla	δῆμος	ἑστιάσεις	celebration of triumph with offerings to Hercules	81 BC	Plut. *Sull.* 35.1
Crassus	δῆμος	ἑστιάω	offerings to Hercules	70 BC	Plut. *Crass.* 2.2
Caesar	δῆμος	δεῖπνα	during his aedileship	66 BC	Plut. *Caes.* 5.5

[117] See Chapter 6.

Lucullus	πόλις, κῶμαι	ἑστιάω	to celebrate the triumph	63 BC	Plut. *Luc.* 37.4
Quintus Arrius	tot hominum milia	epulum	funeral festival	59 BC	Cic. *Vat.* 12.30-13.32
Caesar	populus	epulum	in filiae memoriam	52 BC	Suet. *Iul.* 26.2
Caesar	-	cena	celebration of his triumph	46 BC	Plin. *HN* 14.97
Caesar	-	epulum	during his third consulship	46 BC	Plin. *HN* 14.97
Caesar	populus (δῆμος)	epulum ac visceratio (ἑστιάσεις)	celebration of four triumphs (over Gaul, Egypt, Pontus and Africa)	46 BC	Suet. *Iul.* 38; Plut. *Caes.* 55; cf. Dio 43.19-22
Caesar	populus	duo prandia	after his Spanish triumph	45 BC	Suet. *Iul.* 38; cf. Dio Cass. 43.42.1;

Figure 3.6 Beneficiaries under the Republic

As mentioned earlier, under the Empire, the term *populus* was used quite ambiguously and can be contrasted to the use of *populus* in the republican period, in which it referred to the complete body of Roman citizens. The Republic was inextricably linked to the concept *res publica*, signifying (*inter alia*) the business of the *populus* as a whole.[118] The four texts mentioning the *populus* as the sole recipients of privately sponsored public banquets reflect the idea that the community was composed of the adult male citizens. The term *δῆμος* used by Greek authors appears to express the same idea. Food benefactions given by a citizen to all of his fellow citizens signified munificence bestowed on the whole civic community. On such occasions, non-citizens were excluded from receiving benefactions – and hence metaphorically from the community. At this stage, the concept of community was structured around citizenship.

3.3.2 Continuity and development in the imperial period

As shown in Figure 3.7, there are several ways in which beneficiaries in the republican and imperial periods differed. This raises the following issue: Something changed

[118] Cic. *Rep.* 1.25, *res publica res populi*.

between republican and imperial times – what does this reveal about changing concepts of community?

Attributes of beneficiaries	Beneficiaries under the Republic	Beneficiaries under the Empire
Citizenship	citizens	citizens and non-citizen residents
Gender	male	male and female
Age	adults	adults and children
Differentiation	entire citizen body	various civic groups and internal differentiation within the civic body itself
Unity	within the territory	within the territory but with a distinction between urban and rural

Figure 3.7 Comparisons between beneficiaries under the Republic and the Empire

Citizens were always deemed an important group by benefactors.[119] In the republican period, only adult male citizens were qualified to attend public feasts. Under the empire, the citizen population still occupied the core position, and the benefactions bestowed on the entire civic community were five times as numerous as those only targeting the *decuriones*. The attention paid to the entire citizenry suggests the continuity of an earlier ideal civic community.

However, the recipients were no longer restricted to adult male citizens. The term *populus* was still used in the epigraphic records in the imperial period, but its meaning began to change and it was used with increasing frequency to refer to all permanent residents of local communities who had voting rights (at least in Italy). The fact that non-citizens were also included as recipients of civic munificence in the communities of Italy and the western provinces demonstrates that those who had been excluded from the republican *populus* could now be perceived as part of the community. Under the Empire, women, and sometimes children as well, also began to be included as beneficiaries. Although the frequency of participation of women and children was low

[119] Patterson (2006), 174-176, emphasizes participants of citizen status and the idea of a civic community consisting of fellow-citizens.

compared to that of adult male citizens, these groups could now be considered to be a part of a relatively more inclusive community.

Nevertheless, within this inclusive community a clear hierarchy was discernible. The food benefactions show this in terms of frequency: while the (re-defined) *populus* did retain its place as the primary target of privately funded public food gifts, the *decuriones* were highlighted as the most prominent citizens in the community. Their appearance as a separate group of beneficiaries implies an increasingly hierarchical understanding of the civic community by the benefactors. When *decuriones* were the only beneficiaries of food-related benefactions, the benefactors were often members of the local council, suggesting they were using these benefactions to underline their membership of the local town elite.

The inclusion of other civic groups, such as the *Augustales*, *collegia*, women and children, was optional and these groups appear only in certain contexts.

In some cases, arrangements for privately sponsored public meals were made according to the social distinctions between *decuriones* and ordinary citizens, or those between *decuriones*, *Augustales* and *populus*. Nevertheless, the bulk of the evidence concerning food benefactions does not point to a strong distinction between various groups. This is an interesting difference with the distribution of cash which often still disclosed a hierarchical pattern. Consequently, it is difficult to avoid drawing the conclusion that providing members of different social groups with different sorts of food when privately sponsored food distributions were organized never became a widely accepted way of signalling status distinction within local communities.

Another interesting development concerns relationships between town-based citizens and their rural counterparts. During republican times, these two groups had been treated as members of one and the same citizen community. Although the epigraphic record of the first and second century AD leaves no doubt that country-dwelling citizens were occasionally invited to public meals provided by wealthy members of the town-dwelling elite, this same epigraphic record also carries a strong suggestion that a sense of distinction between urban and rural citizens began to emerge in this particular period. One reason which might have prompted this change is that the landowning elites in most parts of the western half of the empire were town-based. Another possible explanation is because relationships between town-dwelling elites and other urban residents were less exploitative than those which existed in rural areas. Although there are only eleven relatively certain attestations of the *plebs urbana* as recipients of privately-sponsored food benefactions, the mere existence of such texts points to an increasing awareness of the social and political distinction between urban and rural citizens.