

Markets, elites and benefactions: some reflections on euergetism and economic development
in Roman provincial civic life, first to third centuries CE

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I.

Much of the behaviour of the provincial urban elites in the Roman empire is primarily visible to us through the lens of euergetism. That is to say, it is often chiefly from reading the honorific and career inscriptions set up for local notables, which list the offices and priesthoods that they held and the benefactions which they made to their communities, that we learn what local elite individuals got up to in their cities. The preponderance of honorific inscriptions relative to other types of evidence of course might create a distorting effect, perhaps unduly magnifying, to an extent, the actual importance of euergetism to civic life. Yet it cannot be denied, I think, that munificence and activities associated with it figured very large in the public life of most local elite individuals, and took up a great deal of time and energy, their own as well as that of the local political institutions.¹

This impression is reinforced by research carried out over the last few decades or so, in which civic euergetism has been reconceptualised as a form of gift-exchange between elites and the people.² Civic munificence should be seen as a form of political reciprocity: a socio-politically charged and ritualized exchange between civic elites and their non-elite fellow-citizens of public gifts for public honours and privileges.³ In this form, it became a central

¹ See Wörrle 1988 and Rogers 1991 for a detailed case study of the complex and time-consuming administrative processes and political negotiations accompanying a major civic benefaction, *in casu* the festival-foundation set up by C. Iulius Demosthenes at the small Lycian city of Oenoanda in 124-125 CE.

² Zuiderhoek 2009a; Domingo Gygax 2016, but see already Hands 1968, 26-48.

³ Zuiderhoek 2009a.

feature of political life in the Hellenistic and Roman-era *poleis*, but its roots go back much further, as Marc Domingo Gygax has shown, to the exchanges between cities and their foreign (i.e. non-citizen) benefactors in Archaic and early Classical Greece, and to the honouring of victorious athletes in Pan-Hellenic games.⁴ Yet it was in the Greek east under Roman imperial rule, particularly in Asia Minor during the first, second and the early third centuries CE, that civic euergetism, measured as the number of elite benefactions recorded on (honorific) inscriptions, experienced an unprecedented proliferation, never again repeated.⁵ A similarly spectacular rise in the number of civic benefactions, roughly following the same chronological trajectory, can be detected in the inscriptional evidence from many parts of the Latin west.⁶ It is important to note that what we are seeing here cannot simply be the product of epigraphic fashion independent of broader social and economic developments.⁷ First, as will be discussed shortly, the chronological distributions of inscriptions and epigraphically recorded benefactions follow more or less the same trajectory as the chronological distributions of other archaeological data sets, and this cannot be a coincidence. Second, as I have argued on an earlier occasion, as an artefact, the honorific inscription constituted an integral and fundamental part of the entire ritualized transactional process of civic euergetism, from the initial public promise of the gift in council and/or assembly to the eventual public honouring of the benefactor and the erection of the honorific monument.⁸ It not only recorded the benefaction and the honours received in return, but was part of the very essence of the exchange itself. Thus, the phenomenal rise, and subsequent decline, in the number of inscriptions recording benefactions cannot but reflect a real social phenomenon, namely the unprecedented proliferation of civic munificence during the first but primarily the second and early third centuries CE.

Here, the interest of the economic historian might well be piqued. After all, even if we should probably not overestimate the overall amount of elite wealth expended on benefactions, we are still dealing with a fairly constant stream of sometimes very large quantities of cash or other forms of capital being introduced into the civic economy for the provision of public

⁴ Domingo Gygax 2016.

⁵ See for Roman imperial Asia Minor Zuiderhoek 2009a, 16–20, figs. 1.2. and 1.3.

⁶ See Wilson 2011, 163-167, figs. 7.1 (chronological distribution of building inscriptions, including many benefactions) and 7.3 (chronological distribution of honorific inscriptions).

⁷ Pace MacMullen 1982.

⁸ Zuiderhoek 2009a, 20-22.

goods and amenities. What were the economic effects of this? What, exactly, was the relationship between euergetism and the provincial urban economies, and how did public gifts impact upon urban markets, if they did so at all? Did benefactions stimulate markets and market expansion? Alternatively, was the flourishing of civic euergetism during most of the Principate itself ultimately a consequence of the expansion of markets and economic growth? These latter questions raise an interesting possibility, namely that the rise and decline of civic munificence might be used as a proxy for tracking long-term developments in the Roman economy. There does indeed seem to be a rough correlation between the proliferation, during the first, second and early third centuries, of civic euergetism, and its decline during the remainder of the third century, and the expansion and contraction of Roman economic activity over broadly the same time frame. To be more specific, the trend that can be observed in the chronological distribution of benefactions as recorded on honorific inscriptions more or less matches the trend visible in the chronological distributions of other well-known and much-discussed data sets indicative of the expansion and contraction of Roman economic activity. These include very diverse sets of proxy data such as: the atmospheric lead and copper pollution produced by lead/silver and copper mining and smelting that can be detected in the Greenland ice cap; the large set of dated shipwrecks from the Mediterranean, suggestive of the rise and decline of maritime trade; animal bone assemblages that serve as a proxy for meat consumption; the capacity of fish salting installations; the intensity of urban monumental public building, and so forth.⁹ All of these datasets come with their own specific methodological problems, but together they do indicate a broad expansion and contraction of the Roman economy between roughly the first century BCE and the later third century CE. Was there, however, some kind of *causal* relationship between this expansion and contraction of economic activity and the expansion and contraction of civic munificence during broadly the same time frame? This question becomes all the more pertinent if, as some scholars argue, the expansion and contraction revealed by the proxy data are indicative of real *per capita* economic growth and a rise in living standards for broad swathes of the population.¹⁰ To

⁹ McConnell et al. 2018, 5726, fig. 3 (lead and copper pollution); Wilson 2014, 151-153, figs. 2-7 (shipwrecks), 157-160, figs. 8-10 (fish salting installations); Jongman 2007, 613-614, figs. 22.1 and 22.2; Jongman / Jacobs / Klein Goldewijk 2019, 147, fig. 9 (animal bones); Jouffroy 1986 with Duncan-Jones 1996, 127, figs. 10-11; Wilson 2011, 163-164, fig. 7.1 (public buildings). For discussion of the use of proxy data to gauge Roman economic performance see de Callataÿ 2005; Scheidel 2009; Wilson 2009 and the contributions in de Callataÿ 2014.

¹⁰ See e.g. Saller 2002; Jongman 2007; Bowman / Wilson 2009; Temin 2012.

reiterate, did civic munificence actively contribute to such economic growth, if it indeed occurred? Or was the proliferation of euergetism itself a product of such economic growth? In most general accounts of Roman socio-economic and socio-cultural development, the proliferation of civic euergetism is often linked to the expansion of urbanism and the flourishing of civic culture and prosperity during the early and high empire, while the relative decline of urban munificence is commonly associated with the various troubles of the (later) third century. The exact causal connections, however, are usually left somewhat vague. Can we be more specific?

II.

Euergetism has been assigned an important subsidiary role in at least two recent explanations for the expansion of the Roman economy under the empire, explanations which more or less exemplify the two current major interpretative models in Roman economic history: an analysis in terms of markets and market integration, with the state playing only a supportive role, and an analysis in terms of empire-building and exploitation, with the imperial state being absolutely central to the structure and development of the economy.

Daniel Hoyer has linked the proliferation of civic munificence in the Roman west during the early and high empire explicitly to the expansion of markets, economic growth and an overall rise in living standards, first in a paper on North Africa, and now also, in much greater detail, in his recent monograph.¹¹ As I have argued in a paper recently published elsewhere, civic euergetism did indeed interact with urban markets in various ways.¹² Euergetic foundations, for example, required capital to be put out on loan or rented out if the capital consisted of land or real estate. Thus, they functioned as a source of credit and/or provided access to essential capital goods (houses, workshops, agricultural land) for primary producers.¹³ Food-related gifts by benefactors, such as distributions of grain, wine or other foodstuffs, or the subsidized sale of grain or other basic commodities at an artificially low price during periods of scarcity (an euergetic procedure known as *paraprasis*) naturally interfered with the urban food market.¹⁴ Festivals, games and other large events sponsored by the elite might boost local

¹¹ Hoyer 2013, 2018.

¹² Zuiderhoek 2019.

¹³ See also Broekaert / Zuiderhoek 2015, 156-162 for evidence and discussion.

¹⁴ On *paraprasis* see Zuiderhoek 2013.

commerce. In addition, munificent gifts of all kinds, whether related to building, festive life or otherwise, might require some expenditure in the local economy by the benefactor (for more on these issues, including some caveats, see further below). More important than all this, to my mind, is the fact that euergetism generated specific social rituals that defined benefactor and recipients as part of an ‘in-group.’ Public rituals of reciprocity, repeated over individual lifetimes and from generation to generation, had the collective socio-psychological effect of creating bonds of trust between the citizens, elite and non-elite, of a specific urban community. Such pre-existing and consistently re-emphasized bonds of trust, I suggest, would have made it easier for citizens to engage in other kinds of transactions with one another, including commercial ones.¹⁵ In the parlance of modern economic theory, euergetism may thus have contributed to the lowering of transaction costs in Greco-Roman cities.

Hoyer, however, goes much further than this, and argues that the proliferation of civic munificence was a crucial factor stimulating a robust expansion and even integration of markets in North Africa and other parts of the Roman west during the first, second and early third centuries CE. He argues that elite benefactors primarily made use of the market to obtain the goods that they needed for their public feasts and for other types of benefactions, and so generated a significant local and regional demand for all types of goods. Through their expenditure on their gifts, as well as through the euergetic foundations that they set up, they injected a great deal of cash into the local economy, which stimulated monetization as well as marketization. Hoyer then speculates that such expenditure not only had multiplier effects in the local economy, but also stimulated the expansion of markets, in the sense that people could use income earned through selling goods required for munificence to buy products elsewhere, in other regions, and traders could make use of their knowledge of different levels of demand in cities in different parts of the empire, which were *inter alia* caused by the variegated incidence of munificence and public feasting, to sell their goods where this was currently most profitable. An increase of such exchanges over time would stimulate market integration. Moreover, living standards of ordinary inhabitants of the empire (mostly those in cities) were enhanced through the public goods made available by civic benefactors. On the whole, then, the upsurge in civic euergetism in Italy and the western provinces during the first two and a half centuries CE, in Hoyer’s analysis, stimulated monetization and market expansion and led to increased market integration and a rise in overall non-elite well-being.

¹⁵ Zuiderhoek 2019.

Yet another type of analysis of civic munificence in relation to economic life would link it to models of the imperial economy based on exploitation and elite rent-seeking. In the first edition of their well-known survey of Roman imperial economy and society, Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller had already argued that the provincial urban elites much preferred euergetism, i.e. making donations towards public amenities out of their own pockets, to ‘[t]he alternative of regular taxation [which] was unattractive, because it did not carry political, social and perhaps economic rewards.’¹⁶ If, in Garnsey and Saller’s view, the provincial urban elites did not wish to pay local civic taxes because they much preferred the various kinds of emoluments that came with munificence, according to Peter Fibiger Bang in his *The Roman Bazaar*, those same local elites very much enjoyed gathering and processing the taxes that their own communities had to pay to the Roman imperial government. As part of his model of the empire as a tributary economy, i.e. one in which the establishment of markets and overall economic development is driven in the first place by imperial resource extraction in the form of tribute, Bang interprets the rise of wealthy benefactors in the empire’s provincial cities during the first and second centuries CE as a sign of the successful integration of the local provincial elites into the Roman imperial extractive machinery. The proliferation of munificence, and particularly the appearance of euergetic grandees like the multi-city benefactor Opramoas of Rhodiapolis in Roman Lycia, whose case Bang discusses in some detail, is for him an index of the wealth powerful local elites were able to derive from being allowed to distribute the imperial tax burden within their civic communities.¹⁷ This wealth elites, or at least the most powerful stratum among them, managed to accumulate, according to Bang, by (partially) exempting themselves and their properties from taxation while overburdening their less powerful colleagues on the city councils, and by extending usurious loans to those members of their communities not able to pay their share of the tax straight away. If the latter failed to pay back such loans, their land or other properties could be confiscated, adding further to the portfolios of the local superrich. Such local ‘big men’ then engaged in spectacular forms of munificence to forge and maintain connections with the imperial elite and the emperor, as is *inter alia* demonstrated, Bang argues, by the case of Opramoas’ career and the subsequent history of his family.¹⁸

¹⁶ Garnsey / Saller 1987, 33.

¹⁷ Bang 2008, 103-110. For the most recent edition of the large epigraphic dossier recording the munificence of Opramoas, see Kokkinia 2000.

¹⁸ Bang 2008, 103-105, 109-110.

The grand age of civic munificence, central to both analyses just discussed, did not last, however. After c. the 220s CE, the number of honorific inscriptions starts to decline precipitously in Roman Asia Minor, and chronological distribution curves of euergetic inscriptions from other parts of the empire demonstrate similarly downward slopes for much of the third century.¹⁹ Now as we saw above, given the centrality of the honorific inscription to the public rituals of euergetism, this can only mean that civic euergetism became a great deal less common than before. And once again, chronological distribution curves for other archaeological data sets follow suit.²⁰

Now, if we follow the lines of reasoning of both models just sketched, the decline in civic munificence in the later third century should, in Hoyer's model, be linked to, even cause, a severe contraction of markets, as euergetism's commercializing and monetizing effects mostly fell away. Indeed, in his book Hoyer argues for a strong correlation between the monetary and commercial troubles of the third century and the decline in euergetic activity in the west, even, to some extent, in North Africa, where the contraction was much less severe.²¹ Following the logic of Bang's narrative, the tapering off of local euergetism would signal a severely reduced role for local elites in the tributary extraction networks of the empire, creating a disincentive for them further to invest in integration into the imperial elite by means of euergetic display, most likely caused by an intensification of top-down imperial attempts at control over local resources.

These scenarios are not *a priori* unlikely, nor are they necessarily mutually exclusive. Overall, however, I would argue that the interpretations provided by Hoyer and Bang of the causes and effects of the proliferation of munificence offer a rather one-sided view of the relationship between, on the one hand, markets and civic euergetism and, on the other hand, local munificence and imperial administration, particularly concerning the role played by the local civic elite *vis-à-vis* both the imperial government *and* their own civic communities. In the remainder of this paper I will offer some critical remarks, and shall, along the way, attempt briefly to sketch an interpretation of my own.

¹⁹ Zuiderhoek 2009a, 16–20, figs. 1.2. and 1.3; Wilson 2011, 163–167, figs. 7.1 and 7.3.

²⁰ See the references in n. 9 above

²¹ Hoyer 2018, 155–156.

III.

I start with markets. *Pace* Hoyer, it is by no means self-evident that benefactors mostly acquired what they needed for their munificence via the market. Most civic benefactors belonged to the urban elite, who generally were large landowners: most of the olive oil, wine and grain or other foodstuffs that they provided during distributions and feasts would simply have come from their own estates.²² Thus an upsurge in euergetic feasts and distributions does not in and of itself require us to assume the coming into being of large regional or interregional trading networks. It is surely significant that whenever the price of grain or other essential foodstuffs rose on local urban markets, the sources indicate that the urban populace mostly directed its anger at *local* large landowners and/or the local public officials who derived from the same class.²³ Ordinary citizens expected their elite fellow-citizens to intervene during scarcity-induced price spikes and to use the contents of their stores for the purpose, just as those same elites did when, as benefactors, they organized feasts and distributions for the people.²⁴ The vast majority of cities in the empire drew for the bulk of their supplies on their immediate local or regional hinterland. There is no *a priori* reason to think that their elite citizens would do otherwise for euergetic distributions of foodstuffs. This is not to say that it never happened: benefactors organising a *paraprasis*, a below-market price sale, most often of grain during a shortage, might well buy their grain abroad, as some sources indicate, but if they did so it was probably to avoid local scarcity prices.²⁵

Broadly similar remarks can be made with regard to Hoyer's analysis of euergetic perpetual foundations. I fully agree with Hoyer that cash-based foundations, whereby a benefactor established a fund that, in most cases, was to be managed by the city magistrates, the proceeds of which were to be used for a recurring benefaction (often a festival), constituted an important source of credit in Greco-Roman urban economies, since the principal was often

²² Note e.g. Philostratos, VS 606, who describes in some detail the large landed estates owned by the Ephesian benefactor Flavius Damianus.

²³ See e.g. Philostratos, VA 1.15 (Apollonius of Tyana only just about manages to save a local magistrate at Aspendos from being burnt alive by the people who are angry because of a grain shortage), VS 526 (enraged by high bread prices, citizens of second-century CE Athens attack a *strategos*); Petronius, *Sat.* 44 (local landowners, bakers and *aediles* are accused of colluding to keep bread prices high); Dio Chrys. *Or.* 46.8 (the people of Prusa in Bithynia accuse local landowner and civic notable Dio Chrysostom of hoarding his grain to drive up the price on the local market and attempt to raid his villa).

²⁴ Erdkamp 2008; Zuiderhoek 2008a.

²⁵ See Zuiderhoek 2013 for evidence and discussion.

lent out at interest to generate revenue.²⁶ Indeed, in a 2015 paper on the allocation of credit and capital goods in Roman cities, Wim Broekaert and I specifically included endowment funds among a range of credit opportunities available to ordinary citizens in need of investment capital.²⁷ Hoyer makes the important point that, even if cash-based perpetual foundations were a relatively minor phenomenon in the context of the Roman economy as a whole, their very structure, i.e. the way they operated, *presupposes* a sophisticated credit-based urban economy.²⁸ Again, however, I think he pushes the argument too far. From the fact that of the 158 endowment inscriptions from the Latin west that he has collected, 103 appear to have been based on a monetary fund, he concludes that ‘money was the typical principal used in endowment funds.’²⁹ Foundations based on land or other forms of real estate (houses, workshops) were very common, however, and not just a Roman Italian peculiarity, as Hoyer suggests.³⁰ In the appendix, I have listed a selection of evidence from the Roman east, but there is much more to be found, in both east and west. The ubiquity of land-based foundations again illustrates the mostly agrarian nature of most civic benefactors’ wealth. Moreover, in a pre-modern agrarian economy, land equals economic certainty. Coins might be stolen, depreciated or melted down, as might bullion, but land remains. For Greeks and Romans, therefore, investing in land was the safest way to store value. Moreover, since the crops it produced would always be in demand, land was sure to generate revenue indefinitely. Both of these qualities were important to donors of foundations, who were obsessed with the future continuity of their generosity. Similar arguments can be applied to urban property (houses, gardens etc.). It too was of a relatively permanent character, and since demand for scarce housing or urban building space was unlikely to fall dramatically in the future, revenue was sure to continue for a long time. Monetary foundations were riskier, from the perspective of the donor, but may for that very reason have generated higher revenues (and thus more funds for the benefaction) than land-based ones, since to compensate for the risk a rate of

²⁶ Smaller endowment funds might be managed by sub-civic bodies such as *collegia*.

²⁷ Broekaert / Zuiderhoek 2015.

²⁸ Hoyer 2018, 50-52. There is, however, nothing particularly ‘modern’ about this: pre-modern urban economies as far removed in time as early modern England and the ancient Near East have left evidence for sophisticated credit structures. See Graeber 2011 for a fascinating exploration.

²⁹ Hoyer 2018, 44.

³⁰ Hoyer 2018, 43.

interest could be asked that exceeded the rate of return on landed property.³¹ If, as Hoyer argues, the existence of foundations based on a monetary principal which was lent out at interest is suggestive of a sophisticated credit economy, then surely the fairly ubiquitous attestation of land- or real estate-based endowments is suggestive of the crucial role played by land and real estate in the property portfolios of elite individuals and of cities. We need both sides of the equation. Cash-based foundations could only function because credit already played an important role in Greek and Roman economies, but Greek and Roman credit systems could only function because they were ultimately, and literally, grounded in land or real estate, which functioned as collateral.

For other kinds of benefactions, for instance building munificence, we can assume that benefactors would have acquired materials and hired labour via the market, if necessary, but even then it seems very likely that they supplied labour from the manpower under their own control (e.g. slaves or other dependents) whenever they could, and also use material from their estates, if these for instance included mines, quarries or clay pits, whenever possible. Doing so would not only have been convenient, but was also very much in line with the spirit of civic munificence, the very *raison d'être* of which was to achieve status and prestige for the benefactor through substantial expenditures, from the latter's private wealth, on public gifts. Euergetism was primarily a socio-political phenomenon, even if it impacted in various ways on the urban economy, and social, political and ideological motives will, for this reason, generally have been far more determinative of the behaviour of benefactors and of the shape and substance of their gifts than strictly economic considerations. Munificence was, in effect, a form of costly signalling, that is, it served to demonstrate very publicly that you really dug into your own resources, cut into your own flesh, that it really cost you, hurt you, to provide all this, but that you were prepared to make the sacrifice out of love for your fellow-citizens.³² What better way to show this, to signal such costs, than very publicly to use your own possessions, your own estate and its proceeds, to benefit your city.

Even if euergetism sometimes stimulated monetization and marketization, we should remember that certain forms of euergetism might also distort the workings of the local urban market, as when benefactors gave food away, sold it at an artificially low price (*paraprasis*),

³¹ The normal annual rate of return on landed property was 5-6% (see Duncan-Jones 1982, 33), while interest rates on monetary foundations, as far as they are attested, might well vary between 5 and 12%. See Broughton 1938, 900 for evidence from Asia Minor.

³² See Wandsnider 2013 for an analysis of euergetism as costly signalling.

or helped finance a civic fund to do just this in times of scarcity. To put it another way, Greco-Roman food markets, like urban food markets in other pre-modern societies, often did not work very well in connecting a fluctuating agricultural supply to a continuous urban demand.³³ Civic government interventions, such as setting up civic grain funds, and certain types of munificence, such as *paraprasis*, gifts of food or contributions by benefactors to civic grain funds, in fact served to compensate for such market failures.³⁴ We should also note that, while the festivals, games, public feasts and distributions organised by benefactors may well from time to time have benefitted the local economy, it is noteworthy that festival organisers often had to resort to a fiscal stimulus to attract sufficient outside clientele and foreign merchants, through setting up a festive *ateleia*, that is, abolishing all civic import- and export taxes, market dues and other civic taxes for the duration of the festival.³⁵

Thus, even though I agree with Hoyer to some extent, in that I think that euergetic expenditure and the events organized by benefactors, such as festivals drawing big crowds to the city, might indeed on occasion be good for local commerce, and that like him, I would also argue that monetary foundations could be a source of credit for local producers, I do not think that civic euergetism on the whole was, or could have been, the massive economic stimulus that Hoyer wants it to be.

Turning to Bang's model, I certainly agree with Bang that their control over tax gathering for the imperial state coffers will have contributed to the wealth of local urban elites in the provinces, but there is no evidence and also no reason to suppose that such control was directly linked to the proliferation of civic munificence under the empire. Rather, such income as might be derived from handling imperial taxes is likely to have been supplementary only, similar to income from trading ventures or urban properties, to the bulk of local urban elites' income that derived from agriculture. Here, indeed, lies one of the keys to the proliferation of civic munificence in the east under the empire. As I have argued elsewhere, slow but sustained population growth during the first and for most of the second century CE made local elites, who were mostly large landowners, steadily richer as land became scarcer and rents rose. It also expanded their numbers, as many formerly middling landowning families in due

³³ Erdkamp 2005.

³⁴ Zuiderhoek 2008a.

³⁵ For a clear example, see the epigraphic dossier recording the festival foundation of C. Iulius Demosthenes at Oenoanda: Wörrle 1988, 4-17, ll. 87ff. and ll. 108ff. The reply of the Roman governor makes clear that these are civic taxes, cf. l. 115. For further examples, see De Ligt 1993, appendices I.C and II.C.

course reached the level of wealth required to become part of the curial/bouleutic elite.³⁶ Two other factors need to be taken into account as well, however. The first is the low bureaucracy-structure of the empire, which left the duties of tax gathering, local administration and jurisdiction to the provincial urban elites. Bang stresses this too, and emphasizes how via a range of mechanisms local elites benefitted from their fiscal role. What was I think equally important, however, is that the social power that their elevated role in the imperial structure brought local elites, coupled to their ever-increasing wealth, created a problem of political legitimacy in the cities. This brings us to the second factor, the institutional-ideological context of the polis societies in which all this took place. Local elites' primary constituency was the mass of their poorer fellow-citizens, the *demos* (whom they, it should be remembered, had to face without the aid of anything resembling a modern police force). Inequalities of wealth and political power in the polis, as brought on by the integration of the cities into the empire, could only be ideologically justified through contributions by the citizen-wealth elite to the common well-being of all citizens. Such behaviour brought honour and prestige, and legitimated socio-economic hierarchies in a society centred on the ideal of the basic political equality of all (adult male) citizens. This path-dependent quality of polis politics, in combination with the broadening of civic elites during the best part of the first two centuries CE, also ensured that euergetic status competition among local elites became particularly fierce. Individuals like Opramoas and other supra-civic benefactors simply took this model of legitimization to the next level, broadcasting the honours they received from many different communities, cities and provincial leagues (*koina*), to emperors who were effectively engaged in the same legitimating game, i.e. positioning themselves as first citizens of an empire-wide 'civic community'.³⁷ The tributary, extractive imperial structure sketched by Bang simply could not have functioned without these legitimating strategies, that is, without political elites making the costly signal of literally giving something back, not if their aim was to avoid even costlier conflicts, and to exercise their power peacefully in the longer term. Euergetism, patronage and status-based reciprocity were essential tools required to run a low-bureaucracy pre-modern imperial polity, and to legitimately exercise power within it. This was very clearly understood by the empire's local urban elites, who knew that if they allowed internal civic conflicts between elites or elite and *demos* to get out of hand, the central authorities would

³⁶ Zuiderhoek 2009a, 53-56, with many references.

³⁷ *Mutatis mutandis* a broadly similar analysis might be applied to explain the proliferation of civic benefactions in the western half of the empire.

intervene, which of course would immediately undermine their own power and position.³⁸ Avoiding such intervention created a strong incentive to invest in conflict-prevention, and euergetism was an excellent tool to do so, very publicly, and to enhance one's status at the same time. This was all the more important during the high empire, as the expansion of cities and markets had made parts of the city population, especially those engaged in trade, manufacture and service provisioning, wealthier, the institutional effect of which was the flourishing of professional associations that we see in many parts of the Roman world.³⁹ These middling groups, who dominated the cities' public assemblies, were a vocal force in urban society, and as the many euergetic links between their associations and the urban elites demonstrate, elites thought them a group well-worth cultivating relationships with (a sentiment that was likely reinforced by the fact that assemblies played a crucial role in allocating honours among elite benefactors).⁴⁰

All this started to change in fundamental ways during the third century, due to a set of developments of which I can offer only the briefest sketch here. Population growth was brought to a halt, at least for a while, by the Antonine Plague, arguably arresting the growth of elite wealth and the broadening of civic elites. Euergetic competition continued for a while under the Severi, but increasingly we see both local elites and the state intensifying extraction and exploitation to cover for diminishing surpluses. Demographic contraction coupled to military and political unrest and associated troubles most likely caused markets to shrink, and the economic fortunes of urban middling groups to dwindle. As can be seen for Asia Minor, more centralized imperial control over local resources meant that tax gathering was partly taken away from local elites and placed in the hand of (semi-)military officials.⁴¹ To the extent that local elites retained control over local taxation, it increasingly appears to have turned from a privilege into a burdensome financial obligation. A task that had once brought social power had now developed into an administrative and often oppressive duty.⁴²

³⁸ See e.g. Plutarch, *Mor.* 814f-815a.

³⁹ Van Nijf 1997 on *collegia* in the Roman east.

⁴⁰ See Zuiderhoek 2008b for a broader exposition of this argument, with many references.

⁴¹ Mitchell 1993, 232; Zuiderhoek 2009b on third-century CE Asia Minor.

⁴² Jones 1940, 183-192 offers the classic account of the increasingly compulsive nature of city council membership and the associated duties in the eastern cities from the late second century CE onwards.

IV.

In this paper I have addressed the role assigned to civic euergetism in (versions of) two broad models of the Roman imperial economy, one in which markets, market expansion and market integration are placed at centre stage, and one in which the dynamics of the imperial economy are thought to have derived from tribute extraction, with markets playing only a subsidiary role (i.e. transforming surplus from kind into coin or *vice versa*). Both are sophisticated attempts at economic-historical modelling, but I have argued that each presents too simplistic an analysis of the flourishing of civic munificence and its relationship to the market and to local and imperial administration. The proliferation of civic euergetism in the east under the empire was the product of a specific political culture in the cities with deep roots in the ideological, socio-political and institutional history of the Greek polis, the central tenets of which, however, strongly intensified under Roman imperial rule, as external demographic, economic and administrative pressures, generated by the establishment of empire and the *pax Romana*, impacted on civic social and political relations. Population growth resulting in increasing local elite wealth and the broadening of civic elites; the social power urban elites derived from the role assigned to them in a low-bureaucracy imperial structure, power that had to be exercised, however, within the socio-political and ideological context of polis society with its ideal of basic political equality; the growth of cities and urban markets stimulating the rise of strong middling groups; traditions of ritualized public reciprocity between citizen-elite and *demos*; and intra-elite agonistic competitiveness: all these factors combined to produce a unique outpouring of euergetism in the provincial cities of the Roman east. When the pressures exerted by such internal and external forces ceased and/or became realigned in complex ways during the third century, the simultaneous decline of civic munificence during that era signifies that civic political culture also changed profoundly.

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Appendix: a sample of land-based perpetual foundations from the Roman east

As Louis Robert, *Op. Min.* II, 1054-57, at 1055 note 2 states: ‘On sait que les exemples de donations de terres, dont les revenus doivent servir à un usage prévu par le donateur, ne sont pas rares à l'époque imperiale.’ Examples (some of which are also listed by Robert) include *I.*

Assos (IK 4) 22 and 23 = Le Bas-Waddington 1033a = Laum II 67 (revenues of land Kleostratos left to the city used for restoring buildings); *KP I 47* = Laum II 83 (revenues of land Cornelia consecrated to the *boule* of Philadelphia to be used for annual distributions among members on her brother's birthday); *AM III* (1878), p. 58 = Laum II 89 (land left to the inhabitants of Teira); *Le Bas-Waddington 1611* = Laum II 100 (revenues of land Aristokles left to the city of Aphrodisias to be used for an annual distribution of money among citizens); *BCH IX* (1885), p. 125 = Laum II 130 (revenues of meadowland Aelius Alkibiades donated at Nysa to be used for the annual celebration of Hadrian's birthday); *TAM II 578-579* = Le Bas-Waddington 1266 = Laum II 139 (the annual revenue of 1250 d. coming from estates at Korydalla which Opramoas gave to the city of Tlos to be used for a penteteric festival and a distribution among the *sitometroumenoi andres*, who each receive 1 d.); Laum II 144 (various land-based foundations at Sidyma); *I. Perge (IK 54) 77* = *SEG VI* (1932) 673 (Mouas leaves his mother his estates, on the condition that after her death, the lands will pass on to Apollo of the *Lyrbotai* and the revenues be used to finance sacrifices to the god and an annual festival in memory of the donor and his family, Perge, Λυρβωτῶν Κώμη); *BCH XVI* (1892), pp. 427-429 (Diotimus the high priest of Augustus donates estates to Ariassos, but revenues will accrue to the city only after his death); *BCH XLV* (1921), pp. 156-159, no. 9 (revenues of estates donated to Thasos to be used for buying grain?); Laum II 174 (revenues of a plot of land donated by Aurelius Aristeas to the *Protopyleitai* to be used for the annual decoration of his wife's tomb with roses, Acmoneia); Robert, *Ét. An.*, p. 305 f., no. 2 = Le Bas-Waddington 1006 = Laum II 197 (estates donated to Synaus; revenues accrue to the city); *BCH XXIV* (1900), p. 302 = Laum II 200 (revenues of two plots of land donated to the *Dadokometai* by Bobas and his wife Lilaia to be used for annual decoration of their tomb with roses, Kör-oghlou-devrend). Cf. in addition Laum (1914) I 133-135 for foundations based on other forms of real property.

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