Introduction

1 Words and things

This is a book about euergetism. But what is euergetism? Above all else, it is a word, a neologism – "évergétisme" – derived from *euergetês* and used for the first time in 1923 by André Boulanger in a study of Aelius Aristides. Henri-Irénée Marrou mentions the term in his *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'Antiquité* (1948), but only much more recently has it become widespread among scholars of the ancient world.[1] Paul Veyne's *Le pain et le cirque* (1976) was largely responsible for this, although scholarly response to his work was slow. In 1969, Veyne published an article in *Annales* entitled "Panem et Circenses: l'évergétisme devant les sciences humaines," and by the time *Le pain et le cirque* appeared, "euergetism" had attracted the attention of French historians.[2] It took time, however, for *Le pain et le cirque* to become a standard reference work. This is, after all, a work of "sociological history" inspired by Max Weber's sociology and far removed from the traditional methodology of ancient historians, and it is revealing that only one review of it appeared in a specialized journal.[3] But the passage of time, together with the movement of the social sciences and the humanities toward a postmodern paradigm more favorable to Veyne's Weberian point of view than to the positivism, Marxism, and structuralism of the 1970s, as well as the translation of the book into Italian (1984),

[1] Boulanger 1923: 25; Marrou 1948: 161, 405. In the 1956 English version of Marrou's book, the translator did not dare to use the word "euergetism" more than once, and at its second appearance in the original (405), he chose to translate it as "private munificence" (305).

[2] One need only note the work by Edmond Lévy, *Athènes devant la défaite de 404*, published in the same year (Lévy 1976, esp. 238–55). Cf. Veyne 1969 and Veyne 1976a.

[3] Veyne 1990: 2: "This is a work of sociological history: provided, that is, we use the word 'sociology' in the same way as Max Weber did" (in the French version Veyne 1976a: 11). The only review in a classics journal was by R. Chevallier in *Latomus*, 37, 1978: 226–31. But reviews appeared in publications of a more general nature, such as *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 33, 1978: 307–25 (J. Andreau et al.: ii) and *The Times Literary Supplement*, March 24, 1978, 356 (F. Millar). Veyne's book sparked some interest among sociologists (Elster 1983; Stinchcombe 1986) but received limited attention nonetheless, as it dealt with a subject pertaining to the ancient world.

German (1988), and English (1990), has conspired to make *Le pain et le cirque* an influential work, resulting in the popularization of the term "euergetism." Not all the credit for this belongs to Veyne. Philippe Gauthier also contributed to the popularity of the term with his *Les cités grecques et leurs bienfaiteurs* (1985), a book that engages in an open polemic with Veyne and that – in contrast to the latter's study – had an immediate impact among specialists.[4] As a consequence, in recent years numerous works have been published about various places (from Asia Minor to the Iberian Peninsula) and times (from classical antiquity to the seventh century AD) that include the term "euergetism" in their titles. Today we speak of "Greek euergetism," "Roman euergetism," "Christian euergetism," "religious euergetism," and "female euergetism."[5]

In general, the term "euergetism" is used by these authors to signify the phenomenon of the voluntary financing of public buildings, festivals, and city institutions such as schools, as well as the distribution of food or money by individual citizens, foreigners, Hellenistic kings, Roman emperors, and their representatives – what the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* calls "the socio-political phenomenon of voluntary gift-giving to the ancient community." This notion of euergetism corresponds to Veyne's definition ("gifts to the community and acts of patronage towards the city") and to the concept used by Boulanger, who refers to "the families in which 'euergetism' was a tradition," as well as to Marrou's conception, according to which it consists of "'foundations' by which private individuals gave the city capital to provide income for the upkeep, or at least the improvement of some particular public service."[6] Euergetism is taken to be a phenomenon distinguished by unilateral action, in which benefactors play an active role and the community a passive one. The former are the protagonists, the latter the recipients.

But euergetism can also be understood in another way, which does not contradict the previous interpretation but complements it, by incorporating the reaction of the beneficiaries.[7] With this definition – the one used in this book – euergetism has two faces: the benefactions, but also the honors granted by poleis to their benefactors. Its main characteristic is thus

[4] Gauthier 1985: esp. 7–10.
[5] See the examples collected in Domingo Gygax 2003: 182 n. 3. To this list one can add Yon 2001; Pietri 2002; Vuolanto 2002; Goffin 2002; Lomas and Cornell 2003; Grätz 2004; Bringmann 2005; Thiers 2006; Beck 2007; Denlaux 2008; Curty 2009; Holstein 2010; Plácido and Fornis 2011; Zuiderhoek 2011; Hamon 2012; Brown 2013; Cracco Ruggini 2014.
[6] Spawforth 2012 (*OCD* 4th ed.); Veyne 1990: 1 (in the French edition Veyne 1976a): 9; Boulanger 1923: 25; Marrou 1948: 161 (quotation from Marrou 1956: 112).
[7] See Domingo Gygax 2003; Domingo Gygax 2009; Colpaert 2014: 186–8, 197–8; Blank 2014: 393–9.

reciprocity. From this perspective, euergetism was not a phenomenon but an *institution*: a polis-sanctioned practice of exchanging benefactions and rewards. This conception of euergetism rests on the idea that benefactions imply honors: they are rewarded with honors, or at least take place in a context where they are susceptible of being rewarded with honors. Any representation of euergetism that fails to consider the honors awarded by poleis thus ignores a substantial aspect of the euergetic "phenomenon" as it is studied here.

This conception of euergetism might seem insufficient to describe many displays of munificence in the Roman world and late antiquity for which the term "euergetism" is also used, since these displays lack rewards in the form of honors. The definition can nonetheless embrace a wide geographical and chronological range, the Greek world from the archaic period to Roman imperial times. Nor does restricting the social manifestations to which the term "euergetism" can be applied increase difficulties of interpretation. To the contrary, using the same word to refer to very different realities runs the risk of emptying it of meaning. The definition "gifts to the community" is so broad, after all, that unless we set cultural and chronological limits, it is possible to talk, for example, of "Andean euergetism" (Veyne) or – and why not? – to identify political patronage in the United States as "contemporary euergetism."[8]

The idea that the phenomenon of euergetism is linked to public recognition by the polis and thus to reciprocity is more firmly anchored, whether consciously or not, among scholars than it might seem at first sight. Boulanger uses "euergetism" in relation to a historical context (the province of Asia during the first two centuries of the Roman empire) in which benefactors were honored as *euergetai*, and he indicates that the main evidence for euergetism is precisely the honorific inscriptions. Almost all the examples of euergetism provided by Marrou likewise come from honorific inscriptions. The period to which Veyne, followed by the vast majority of scholars, ascribes euergetism (300 BC–AD 300) coincides with the time when civic benefactors in the Greek world were honored by their fellow citizens; it is surely significant that no one regards the donations of the archaic elite, which are similar to those of the Hellenistic elite but lacking in honors, as examples of euergetism.[9] Gauthier, on the other hand, although he does not define euergetism, seems to conceive of it as a phenomenon characterized by the granting of honors; his work focuses on honorific inscriptions, pays more attention to honors than to

[8] Veyne 1969: 787. [9] Boulanger 1923: 25–6; Marrou 1948: 161–2; Veyne 1976a: 9.

benefactions, and (in contrast to Veyne) includes among the groups studied foreigners who did not perform actions that could be described as "gifts to the community" simply because they were honored as *euergetai*, a treatment that did not require being a public benefactor.[10]

Veyne did not, of course, overlook the possibility that euergetism might be defined as a relationship of reciprocity. In his 1969 article, he contemplates understanding that "the euergetes exchanges wealth for prestige or authority," and he adds that "it is a fact that sometimes euergetism creates complicated relationship networks between donors, plebs and city, who exchange gifts and honors." Nonetheless, Veyne rejects defining euergetism as "exchange," since he regards the relationship between the elite and the people, who gave prestige and power to the former, as "a series of actions and reactions" rather than as an exchange and maintains that relations between givers and recipients do not explain the causes of the phenomenon. But there is more. Veyne argues that defining euergetism as an "exchange" would be a "structuralist" interpretation.[11] Indeed, his book can be understood as an attempt to show that an important historical topic could be analyzed from a perspective different from that of the fashionable movements of the 1970s on "the rive gauche of the Seine."[12]

When Veyne states that euergetism is *not* about exchange, he means that no exchange between the giver and the demos could explain the causes of euergetism (understood simply as donations to the community). In Veyne's view, euergetism is thus not a consequence of an exchange of gifts for power. But this conception does not rule out using the term to refer as well to the exchange of gifts and honors – a real exchange, whose existence, as noted earlier, Veyne recognizes. This does not mean that the view of euergetism presented in this book is entirely compatible with Veyne's. I argue that there was in fact an *exchange* of gifts for power and authority. Furthermore, and without entering into a debate about the ultimate causes of donations to the polis (which is the topic of Veyne's book, not of mine), I maintain that exchange – the exchange of gifts and honors – explains at least one cause that motivated such gifts: the expectation of reciprocity.

This book thus starts from a notion of euergetism different from Veyne's and from that of many others who use the term as a synonym for "ancient munificence." But scholars today are also familiar with the

[10] Gauthier 1985.
[11] Veyne 1969: 794–5: "Explaining euergetism by means of structuralism could consist for example in saying that euergetism is exchange" (my translation; original text in French).
[12] Veyne 1969: 794.

notion that euergetism involved the exchange of benefactions and honors, even if this is generally not acknowledged overtly. In the chapters that follow, I use my definition in a consistent fashion: I never refer to the phenomenon of donations as "euergetism," nor do I qualify as such the exchange of benefactions for anything that does not include honors. (Political power, prestige, and other gains that may accompany the honors and even be the main incentive for the benefaction are not sufficient by themselves.) Instead, I reserve the terms *euergetai* and *euergesiai* for, respectively, benefactors and benefactions recognized as such by poleis, and I identify simply as "benefactors" individuals such as members of the archaic elite who contributed to their communities without receiving honors. I attempt to demonstrate that this view of euergetism as a practice ruled by a relation of reciprocity and as an "institution" allows us to explore the phenomenon of donations to the community from angles that diverge from the conception of euergetism as pure munificence. In particular, it allows us to recognize donations that were incorporated into non-institutional relations of reciprocity similar to those of euergetism, and to identify benefactions – conceived of as such by the ancient Greeks, and not only by us – that were not *euergesiai*, as well as *euergesiai* that were not real benefactions.

2 Why euergetism?

Most ancient historians would agree that euergetism is among the most distinctive features of the Hellenistic and imperial polis. To a considerable extent, this is due to the nature of our sources. We have few literary texts that describe polis life, but many inscriptions, a substantial portion of them decrees honoring benefactors, which are so widespread in the documentation as to create the image of an "euergetic society." But the importance of an institution like euergetism in scholarship cannot – or at least should not – depend simply on how well represented it is in the sources but on the place it occupied in ancient Greek society. If euergetism deserves our attention, it is because the institution is a fundamental link in our understanding of the ancient world. Its longevity (enduring at least 1,000 years, from the archaic age to the third century AD), its economic impact, and the role it played in relations between the elite and the demos, as well as between the polis and kings or emperors, all indicate that an investigation of euergetism is essential to understanding how the polis functioned and negotiated social and political conflicts. Indeed, the scarcity of public resources meant that without donations from benefactors, the polis

would have been unable to erect many of its public buildings and monuments, to celebrate festivals in the same spectacular fashion, or to assist those portions of the population most vulnerable to famines and the devastation of war. The government and administration of the polis relied on an elite that spent time, money, and resources on public offices. These contributions were not only decisive in making the polis work, for to the extent to which they were perceived as acts of solidarity rather than *hybris* – the difference, admittedly, was not always clear – they also helped release social tensions between rich and poor in an economically polarized society. On the other hand, the other key aspect of euergetism – the capacity of the polis to award honors – provided the demos with some power in its relationship with an elite that was looking for ways to compete, express its social superiority, and accumulate symbolic capital. For similar reasons, honors were an important device in the relationships between the polis and kings, royal officers, citizens of other poleis, and other external agents. The language and rituals of euergetism served to disguise relationships of domination both within the polis and between the polis and kings. They served, for example, to present the submission of the polis to a victorious sovereign as loyalty to a benefactor, and the tributes paid him as countergifts for benefactions, making more tolerable a relationship that was otherwise humiliating for the polis and discomfiting for the king.

The need for further study of euergetism ought thus to be clear even to readers who do not agree entirely with some of the observations made earlier.[13] But why a book on the *origins* of the phenomenon? The exhaustive monographs of Veyne and Quass cover the Hellenistic and imperial periods of euergetism.[14] But its earlier stages have been treated in detail only by Philippe Gauthier, whose main interest was in the transition from the fourth century to the Hellenistic age and the differences between early and late Hellenistic euergetism, not in the origins of an institution visible, as I will argue, already in the archaic period. There seem to be at least two reasons why the initial phase of euergetism has attracted little attention: the scarcity of early honorific inscriptions and the influence of Veyne's work, one of the main theses of which is that euergetism did not exist before Hellenistic times. On Veyne's view, the combination of psychological conditions and social pressures that generated euergetism

[13] Veyne 1976a: 9, 15, 184, believes that euergetism did not replace taxation and has nothing to do with redistribution of wealth and "depoliticization." A very different view is offered by Andreau, Schmitt, and Schnapp 1978, and Sartre 1991: 147–66.

[14] Veyne 1976a; Quass 1993.

was absent until the appearance of the "oligarchy of the notables" in the Hellenistic polis; in classical Athens, euergetism "did not exist."[15]

But study of the origins of euergetism makes sense not simply because "it fills a gap," but because it helps us understand the institution better. Many aspects of euergetism are recognizable and fully comprehensible only when the process of its emergence and expansion is considered. The notion of benefaction and its limits can be better understood in light of the debate about liturgies in Classical Athens, and with reference to the non-tangible counter-gifts attached to honors visible in the history of the reactions to gifts and services and the agonistic dimension of euergetism apparent among the first citizens officially recognized as *euergetai*. The reasons for rewarding benefactors with honors, the motives for awarding some of them honors and not others, the strategies employed to attract benefactions, the differences between the euergetism of foreigners and citizens, and the power relationships embedded in euergetism, all likewise become clearer when the origins of the phenomenon are analyzed and reconstructed.

Last but not least, behind the selection of a particular topic for historical inquiry is always a philosophy of history, some conception of the fundamental object and method of the enterprise, of *what* historians should study and *how*. Although there are most likely as many philosophies of history as historians, in the historiography of the past decades, three main approaches to the study of the human past can be discerned – and the suggestion that such a distinction is possible already indicates something about the philosophy of history behind this book. First, there are the heirs to the "linguistic turn," who focus on texts and the internal contradictions that make it difficult or even impossible to grasp the "reality" behind them. These authors emphasize that modern historical "reconstructions" suffer from the same constraints as many of their sources – the impossibility of depicting the past without invention – so that the difference between history and fiction is less clear than one might wish. Deconstruction, narrative history, rescue of "marginal" themes, explicit subjectivism, and careful attention to the form and style of scholarly writing are among the reactions to these challenges.

The second approach is far more optimistic about the possibility of historical knowledge. It concentrates on historical facts – what has existed or happened and can be verified through the traces it has left behind – and aims to reconstruct the human past in all its richness and diversity. This

[15] Veyne 1990: 71 (Veyne 1976a: 184). He deals with the "precedents" in a brief section entitled "Before euergetism" (Veyne 1990: 71–82).

approach highlights the particularities of each culture and society, the uniqueness of events, and the exceptionality of the historical sequence. It is less concerned with problems of objectivity, which it attempts to overcome through the application of honesty and common sense and is skeptical about the use of models and theories, which it regards as proper to the social sciences and thus, in a way, as the opposite of the historical disciplines.

These two approaches have in common an interest in plurality, be it within texts or within the "real" world. The third approach – the one from which this book is written – attempts to identify regularities, patterns, and principles behind the variety of human deeds. When it analyzes a society, it looks for structures, when it scrutinizes the historical process, for continuities. To draw a parallel with textual analysis, one might say that this conception is more interested in syntax than in semantics (the first perspective) or in the richness of vocabulary (the second perspective). Indeed, it assumes that some degree of generalization is one main goal of historical inquiry, and it accordingly relies on models and theories to explain the functioning and evolution of society. As a result, this approach is more deductive and less inductive than the others, and it tends toward a greater – but deliberate – degree of simplification. It nonetheless shares with the first view an interest in the objectivity/subjectivity question, and with the second a dedication to a search for positive knowledge.

Within this third approach, strategies that tend to use a social scientific methodology largely based on statistics as well on as models and theories of sociology, political science, and economics, should be distinguished from a *neo-modernist* perspective that pays more attention to the criticisms of the linguistic turn and is more closely related to historical anthropology than to the hard-core social sciences. My book takes its point of departure from this final standpoint and deals with an extended period of time (from the archaic age to the Hellenistic period), allowing for the detection of continuities such as the social practices that paved the way to the euergetic institution; basic principles of social relationships, including the rules of reciprocity; and structures based on these rules, such as the system of euergetism. I also pay considerable attention to oppositions and contradictions, which can be sources of social change as well as of stability. I accordingly differentiate between institutional practices and those not openly acknowledged by the polis; attempt to show that some things are not what they appear to be, while others are similar despite looking different; and interpret some seeming paradoxes as consistent actions.

3 Precedents and debts

Before the popularization of the term "euergetism," scholars examined "philanthropy," "beneficence," and "charity." For many years, they concentrated their attention on Christian charity, but that changed with the publication of Hendrik Bolkestein's pioneering *Wohltätigkeit und Armenpflege im vorchristlichen Altertum* (1939). Using predominantly literary evidence, Bolkestein argued that the most interesting difference is not between Christian and pagan attitudes to charity, but between Greco-Roman beneficence ("Wohltätigkeit") and the charity of the Near East (Egypt and Israel); the former was directed toward citizens, the latter – like Christian charity – toward the poor, the reason for the difference being the greater gap between rich and poor in Near Eastern societies. Bolkestein also explored the orientalization of Greco-Roman beneficence, a process he took to be related to increasing political, social, and economic disparities in the Roman Empire, and which he argued helped explain the origins of the Christian notion of charity.

Although Bolkestein's interpretations were not universally accepted, the monumentality and erudition of his book seem to have discouraged other scholars from undertaking general studies of ancient philanthropy for almost 30 years, in part because the writing of history was in this period a highly positivist enterprise and Bolkestein seemed to have collected most of the evidence. Not until 1968 was a new survey published: Arthur R. Hands' *Charities and Social Aid in Greece and Rome* (1968), which continues the scholarly tradition of focusing on assistance to the poor and also offers a comparative approach. In Hands' book, however, the comparisons are not between two ancient cultures but between the conceptions of the Greeks and the Romans (not treated separately, as by Bolkestein), on the one hand, and modern ideas of the welfare state and the Elizabethan law of charity, on the other. Hands accepts Bolkestein's division between oriental and classical philanthropy and admits that the classical world does not have the same emphasis on pity for the poor as in Christian culture. But he also stresses that this does not exclude the existence of actions from which the needy benefited, actions directed to both private individuals and the whole community. Two aspects of Hands' work are of particular interest for the present project. First, despite relying largely on literary sources, he incorporates considerably more information from inscriptions than Bolkestein did. Second, Hands pays attention to the obligations created by gifts and relates this aspect of his study to the work of Marcel Mauss.[16]

[16] See in particular the chapter "Giving for a Return" (Hands 1968: 26–48).

The publication of Paul Veyne's *Le pain et le cirque* in 1976 marked a turning point in research on ancient philanthropy. As noted earlier, Veyne's central topic was not assistance to the poor but the phenomenon of gift-giving to the community – what he called "euergetism." Compared with the work of Bolkestein and Hands, Veyne's topic was broader, in that it included any type of public gift, regardless of its consequences for the poor, but also narrower, in that gifts to individuals were excluded on the assumption that a clear distinction can be drawn between services to the collectivity and services to individuals. Veyne's claim that euergetism had not previously been studied[17] is not to be taken literally, for attention to "gift-giving to the community" is an important part of the monographs of both Bolkestein and Hands, which Veyne cites only *en passant*.[18] It is nonetheless true that euergetism is never to the foreground in those works, and that neither uses the term "euergetism." Veyne also draws a clearer line between euergetism and Christian charity. He does not investigate possible evolutions of euergetism toward forms of beneficence similar to Christian ones, since he is uninterested in historical processes or in the interplay between continuities and discontinuities. Nor is Veyne interested in comparison with other ancient cultures; his object of study is purely Greco-Roman. Finally, as noted previously, he does not pursue Hands' interest in reciprocity but concentrates on the individuals who give (the notables), a perspective that had tremendous influence on the conception of euergetism in later scholarship.

But Veyne's book is far more than a study of euergetism. It is the application of a theory of history presented in *Comment on écrit l'histoire* (1971) and *L'inventaire des differences* (1976), two programmatic works that must be read together with his study of euergetism. Assigning Veyne's work to one of the three theories of history discussed earlier is difficult, because he works from a Weberian perspective unusual for historians and shares aspects of all three approaches (although not in equal proportions). Veyne believes that the focus of history, unlike that of the social sciences, is the particular rather than the general, so that what sociologists consider *examples* of generalizations are the ultimate object of history. But he is not a positivist; he works not with facts but with concepts. What Veyne attempts is to grasp the particular through the fabrication of general concepts that allow recognition of multiple variants, and he defines his

[17] Veyne 1976a: 22: He makes this claim in a paragraph that has been removed from the English version (cf. Veyne 1990: 11).

[18] He refers to Bolkestein's book as a work on "assistance and charity in the Roman world" (Veyne 1976a: 22; the reference does not appear in Veyne 1990: 11).