Introduction

This book concentrates on a central paradox of Roman social and political life under the Empire: how a society of such breathtaking inequality could produce an elite whose generosity towards their communities was, in terms of its sheer scope and extent, probably unique in the history of pre-industrial civilisations. The book focuses on Roman Asia Minor, an area particularly rich in cities, inscriptions and benefactors, but I wish to suggest tentatively that at least some of its conclusions could serve as working hypotheses for the study of euergetism in other regions of the Empire.

The boom in elite public giving visible in the cities of the Roman Empire from the later first century AD onwards was unprecedented. When it was over, in the early third century, it was never repeated on the same scale, although euergetism remained an element in civic politics during the later Empire. Historians have often sought to explain euergetism by interpreting it as the economic cornerstone of civic life. According to this (very common) interpretation, the private wealth of elite benefactors was instrumental in financing the public infrastructure of the Empire's cities, which themselves were unable to draw in sufficient revenues to pay for the necessary amenities from public money.[1] Other scholars have viewed euergetism as an ancient precursor to Christian charity and the modern welfare state.[2] According to yet another highly influential study, benefactors primarily gave to satisfy a psychological need to be generous, and to emphasise the social distance between themselves and their non-elite fellow citizens.[3] They did not, however, expect a return; their generosity was, in that sense, disinterested.

In this book, I argue that none of these interpretations stands entirely up to scrutiny, particularly because of their essential inability to provide a

[1] See Chapters 2 and 3 for references.
[2] In particular Hands (1968). For more detailed discussion see pp. 32–3.
[3] Veyne (1976). See pp. 113–14.

sufficient explanation for the unprecedented proliferation of munificence in the provincial cities during the early and high Empire. This remarkable boom in public giving should, I argue, at least in the eastern Roman provinces, be seen first and foremost as a political and ideological reaction of urban elites and their non-elite fellow citizens to certain social and political developments within civic society (primarily a growing concentration of wealth in the hands of local elites, and an increasing social and political oligarchisation/hierarchisation of civic life) generated by the integration of the cities into the Roman imperial system.

It is perhaps useful to state at the outset what this book is not. It is not a thorough empirical survey of euergetism as it existed in all its local and regional variations over the course of time across the whole of Asia Minor, nor is it an epigraphic study of the various types of documents that are our main source for the study of euergetism. Rather, the book is perhaps best described as a long, interpretative essay that aims to provide the broad outlines of an overall model for analysing the remarkable boom in public giving in the provincial urban societies of the early and high Empire. Roman Asia Minor is used as a first testing ground for some of the model's propositions. If the main elements of the model stand up to this test, and turn out to be of some use for the investigation of euergetism in other parts of the Empire, the book will have served its purpose.

CHAPTER I

Introducing euergetism: questions, definitions and data

The council (*boule*) and the people (*demos*) of Aphrodisias and the council of elders (*gerousia*) have set up in the midst of his public works this statue of Marcus Ulpius Carminius Claudianus, son of Carminius Claudianus high priest of (the League of) Asia who was grandfather and great-grandfather of (Roman) senators; honoured on many occasions by the emperors, he was husband of Flavia Apphia high priestess of Asia, mother and sister and grandmother of senators, devoted to her native city, (worthy) daughter of the city and of Flavius Athenagoras, imperial procurator who was father, grandfather and great-grandfather of senators; he himself was the son of a high priest of Asia, father of the senator Carminius Athenagoras, grandfather of the senators Carminii Athenagoras, Claudianus, Apphia and Liviana, treasurer of Asia, appointed curator of the city of Kyzikos as successor to consulars, high priest, treasurer, chief superintendent of temple fabric, and lifelong priest of the goddess Aphrodite, for whom he established an endowment to provide the priestly crown and votive offerings in perpetuity; for the city he established an endowment of 105,000 denarii to provide public works in perpetuity, out of which 10,000 denarii were paid for the seats of the theatre, and the reconstruction of this street on both sides from its beginning to its end, from its foundations to its wall coping, has felicitously been begun and will continue; in the gymnasium of Diogenes he built the anointing room with his personal funds and, together with his wife Apphia, he walled round the great hall and entrances and exits; he supplied at his own expense all the sculptures and statues in his public works; he also provided the white-marble pillars and arch together with their carvings and the columns with their tori and capitals; he established an endowment for the distribution of *honoraria* in perpetuity to the most illustrious city council and the most sacred council of elders; he often distributed many other donatives to the citizens, both those living in the city and those in the countryside; he often distributed other donatives to the whole city council and council of elders; he often made free gifts on every occasion, in keeping with the city's

> wishes, to citizens and aliens alike; he installed numerous drains in the swamps on the occasion of the channelling of the Timeless river; he often and felicitously carried out embassies; he was all his life long a devoted benefactor of his city.
>
> He just recently contributed an additional 5,000 denarii for the public work, making a total of 110,000 denarii.[1]

The honorific inscription for Carminius Claudianus, set up in Aphrodisias some time around AD 170, offers a lively and detailed snapshot of the public generosity unceasingly displayed by the notables of Rome's provincial cities during the early and high Empire. This phenomenon, christened 'euergetism' by modern ancient historians, after the Greek honorific title *euergetes* (benefactor) that was often bestowed on publicly generous members of the civic elite, was so widespread, and is therefore so familiar to scholars studying Roman provincial civic life and culture, that many tend to take it rather for granted; indeed, given euergetism's sheer ubiquity in the epigraphic record, and the fact that it ties in with so many other aspects of civic life, it can sometimes be hard not to. Yet it is precisely the sheer omnipresence of elite public generosity in Roman imperial cities, the fact that it jumps out at us wherever we look, that is truly its most remarkable feature, especially from a comparative perspective. Few societies in human history have been quite so socially unequal as the Roman Empire. Most of its wealth was controlled by a tiny elite of senators, knights and local town councillors, all in all perhaps 5 per cent of the Empire's population.[2] The gap between rich and poor was truly breathtaking. We can see this clearly when we compare the minimum fortune legally required of a town councillor (*decurio*/*bouleutes*), 100,000 *sestertii*, with the subsistence budget of a poor Roman: the curial census requirement would have sufficed to provide for over 800 Romans at a level of bare subsistence for a year.[3] Within the elite too, stratification was extremely steep: the minimum census requirement for a knight was HS 400,000, for a senator HS 1 (or 1.2) million.[4] Yet senators often owned quite a lot more than that: the Younger Pliny's

[1] *CIG* 2782. Translation by Lewis (1974) 91–2, slightly adapted.

[2] See Jongman (2003) for some speculative quantification.

[3] Or for over forty Romans 'for ever', on the assumption of 5 per cent revenue per annum on landed possessions, for which see Duncan-Jones (1982) 33. My estimate of the Roman annual subsistence ration is based on the assumption that subsistence needs equal 250 kg wheat equivalent per person/year. A wheat price of HS 3 per *modius* of 6.55 kg then puts the costs of one year's subsistence at HS 115, or about 30 denarii. Annual subsistence need of 250 kg wheat equivalent: Clark and Haswell (1970) 57ff. and 175; Hopkins (1980) 118 with note 51. Wheat price of HS 3 per *modius*: Rostovtzeff, *RE s.v. frumentum*, 149; Hopkins (1980) 118–19; Duncan-Jones (1982) 51; Jongman (1991) 195 with note 2.

[4] Duncan-Jones (1982) 4.

fortune has been estimated at HS 20 million, and he is often considered a senator of middling wealth.[5]

And yet the Empire's elites, and in particular its local civic elites, displayed a public generosity unmatched by the upper classes of most other pre-industrial societies. Particularly during the period stretching from the late first into the early third centuries AD, elite gift giving flourished as never before or after in Roman society. Elite benefactors and their gifts are everywhere, all over our records, whether epigraphic or literary. We cannot escape them. This state of affairs begs a large question, and this book is an attempt to answer it: why was there such an unprecedented proliferation of elite public giving in the provincial cities of the Roman Empire during the late first, second and early third centuries AD? The question is all the more pertinent because by Roman imperial times euergetism already had a long history behind it, with origins in the early Hellenistic period, and some roots going much further back still, arguably to the liturgy system of Classical Athens, and the aristocratic gift-exchange of Homeric and Archaic Greece.[6] My answer is that the extreme popularity of civic euergetism during the early and high Empire resulted from the fact that the phenomenon was indispensable for the maintenance of social harmony and political stability in the Empire's provincial cities at a time when these communities experienced a growing accumulation of wealth and political power at the very top of the social hierarchy. To a large measure, the well-being and stable functioning of the Empire depended on the vitality of its cities, and their success in accomplishing the vital tasks of tax gathering, local administration and jurisdiction. Hence, from this perspective, euergetism's contribution to civic socio-political stability may well have been one of the keys to the survival and flourishing of the Roman imperial system as a whole during the first two centuries AD. The rise, and eventual fall, of the Roman Empire may have had as much to do with the (changing) behaviour of its local urban elites as with the level of depravity of its emperors, or the absence or presence of barbarian hordes waiting beyond its borders.

I will focus primarily on the public generosity displayed by the provincial elites of Roman Asia Minor during the early and high Empire. This area I shall use as a case study for the Empire more widely. In the chapters that follow, I shall first review some common arguments deployed by historians

[5] Duncan-Jones (1982) 17–32.

[6] On the Hellenistic origins of euergetism and the connections with archaic largesse and the Athenian system of liturgies see Veyne (1976) 186–228. On Hellenistic euergetism in general see e.g. Gauthier (1985); Quass (1993); Migeotte (1997).

to account for the centrality of euergetism in Roman imperial civic life, and argue why they are mostly unsatisfactory. After that, I will outline my own interpretation, which concentrates on the political and ideological side of munificence. First, however, we need to define our subject more closely (What precisely was euergetism?). Also the choice of Asia Minor and its local elites as the subject of a case study needs justification. Furthermore, to avoid confusion, we need clear definitions of the various collective social actors involved (Who precisely were the elite, or the demos?). Finally, I shall provide an overview of the data I have gathered on elite benefactions in Roman Asia Minor, primarily to elucidate the main chronological patterns in the evidence, so as to illustrate that the second century AD was indeed the era of euergetism's greatest proliferation in Asia Minor. These will be the subjects of the present chapter.

WHAT WAS EUERGETISM?

First some brief remarks on the historiography of the term itself. The term, or concept, 'euergetism' is a neologism, invented by modern ancient historians. It was first used in a work by A. Boulanger on Aelius Aristides and the sophists in Asia Minor and by H.-I. Marrou in his well-known study of Greek and Roman education. Its true fame came much later, however, with the seminal study of Paul Veyne.[7] The word derives, as we saw, from the Greek *euergetes*, or benefactor, an honorific title awarded to generous elite individuals, which we frequently encounter in inscriptions, and from the phrase *euergetein ten polin*, 'making a benefaction to the city'. In ancient Greek, *euergesia* was the term commonly used for a benefaction. The Latin *liberalitas* and the Greek *philotimia* cover much the same ground as the modern term euergetism, but both have wider connotations that make them less precise and therefore less suitable for analytical purposes. Hence, in this study I too shall employ the term (civic) euergetism or equivalents such as 'civic munificence' and 'elite public generosity'.

In my definition, euergetism was a form of gift-exchange between a rich citizen and his (occasionally her) city/community of fellow citizens, or groups within the citizenry. To make this definition more explicit, we can take the benefactions of Carminius Claudianus of Aphrodisias, listed in his honorific inscription quoted above, as our guide. The exchange between

[7] Boulanger (1923) 25; Marrou (1948); Veyne (1976), esp. 20 with note 7.

a benefactor and his/her community was commonly one of gifts for honours. Thus Carminius Claudianus provided endowments to Aphrodite for perpetual sacrifices, and to the city for public works. He financed reconstruction work on the theatre, made a major contribution to the Diogenes gymnasium and helped to restore and embellish the city's buildings and infrastructure in numerous ways. He gave distributions to the city council and the council of elders (*gerousia*), and to the citizens on a number of occasions, and even helped with the draining of swampland. As an influential member of the local and provincial elite of equestrian rank, with many individuals of senatorial rank in his immediate family, he was also well placed to act as ambassador to the emperor for his city, which he did on several occasions, apparently with good result. With these benefactions, especially his contributions to public buildings such as the theatre and gymnasium, and his distributions, Carminius Claudianus by and large moved in the mainstream of civic munificence in Roman Asia Minor.[8]

What did he get in return for all his generosity? Like virtually all public benefactors, he received a statue from the city, 'set up in the midst of his public works', with the long honorific inscription quoted above probably carved on its base. No doubt the act of setting up this statue with its inscription had been a public ceremony in itself, which involved a public honouring of the benefactor in the company of all his fellow citizens, and perhaps, as often happened on such occasions, the demos had even chanted in his praise (see Chapter 6 for a discussion of such honorific acclamations). Even though statues and honorific inscriptions were nearly universally awarded to civic benefactors, other honours are also known. Thus for example Q. Veranius Tlepolemos was honoured 'with a gold crown and a bronze portrait bust, with first- and second-degree honours and front seating for life at public spectacles' for his benefactions towards the city of Xanthos in Lycia around AD 150, while in AD 52/3 Eratophanes, son of Chareinos, was honoured by the Rhodians 'with a gold crown and statue as well as the dedication of a silver bust', and by the inhabitants of the city of Kys in Caria 'with the highest honours provided by the law' for his generosity towards both communities.[9] The honours, especially the inscriptions and public acclamations, were by no means empty rhetorical gestures. As we shall see in Chapter 6, these public honours were a vital ideological instrument for affirming the legitimacy of the existing

[8] See Chapter 5, pp. 76–7 and Fig. 5.1.
[9] For Tlepolemos see *IGR* III 628, for Eratophanes Smallwood (1967) 135, translation by Lewis (1974) 84–5.

socio-political order in the cities. They afforded the non-elite citizenry a means of expressing consent with the current division of power in society, while allowing the elite ample scope for self-representation as its 'natural' leading caste.

To be sure, Carminius Claudianus of Aphrodisias was not in all respects entirely representative of civic munificence in the Roman provinces. It is true that he by and large gave the things most other benefactors in Roman Asia Minor gave (see Chapter 5, Fig. 5.1), but he gave rather a lot. The combined value of his gifts was 110,000 denarii, or HS 440,000, that is, more than the minimum legal property requirement of a Roman knight (which Claudianus was), and over four times that of a city councillor, and this in one round of gifts![10] Generosity of this magnitude puts Claudianus more or less in the middle range between, on the one hand, donors like C. Vibius Salutaris of Ephesos, who donated a festival foundation to his city worth 21,500 denarii, and, on the other, truly magnificent benefactors such as Ti. Claudius Erymneus of Aspendus, who spent 2 million denarii on an aqueduct for his city, or Opramoas of Rhodiapolis in Lycia, Menodora from Sillyon in Pamphylia or Publia Plancia Aurelia Magniana Motoxaris of Selge, each of whom made donations to a value of about a million denarii.[11] As I will show in Chapter 2, however, elite benefactors able to make donations worth tens to hundreds of thousands of denarii or (far) more were comparatively rare, and they should not be seen as emblematic of civic munificence in general. Nor are the very long inscriptions that some of these extraordinary individuals received entirely representative of the type of honorific inscription that we most frequently encounter in the records of munificence. Far closer to what we typically come across is, for instance, the following (probably) second-century AD text from Hierokaisareia:

> The council and people honoured Stratoneike daughter of Apollonides son of Protomachos, the priestess of Artemis, who behaved piously and generously [φιλοδόξως, implying that she made a contribution from her own money] during the festival of the goddess.[12]

[10] At 5 per cent annual return on landed property, this sum suggests that Carminius Claudianus must have owned property worth at least 2.2 million denarii, or HS 8.8 million, i.e. more than eight times the minimum senatorial census requirement. As this calculation is based on the patently absurd assumption that Claudianus spent his entire annual income on munificence, in reality he must have been considerably richer still.

[11] For Ti. Claudius Erymneus see *IGR* III 804, for Opramoas *IGR* III 739; *TAM* 578–9; Kokkinia (2000), with the comments of Coulton (1987) 172. For Menodora see Lanck. I nos. 58–61; *IGR* III 800–2 with van Bremen (1996) 109, for Motoxaris *I.Selge* (*IK* 37) 17 with van Bremen (1996) 100–3 and 109.

[12] For the text, translation and comments see Malay, *Researches* no. 51.

Or the following, early third-century, one from Smyrna:

> To good fortune! The most famous city and metropolis, in beauty and greatness the first in Asia, three times temple warden of the *Augusti* following the decrees of the most holy Senate, and the pearl of Ionia, the city of Smyrna, his beloved fatherland, (honours) Iulius Menekles Diophantos, who as Asiarch shiningly donated gladiatorial games with sharp swords (which lasted) for five days.[13]

Whether benefactors contributed just one column to a temple or financed an entire gymnasium or large annual festival, what is important to remember is that they were involved in a strongly ideologically charged process of exchange with their (non-elite) fellow citizens. A public benefaction, together with the honours received in return for it, constituted a public, political act, with very specific political and ideological aims and consequences. It is this interpretation of euergetism as a form of politics that I shall try to defend in this study, because I believe that only such a definition provides us with a key to explaining the unprecedented proliferation of public generosity in the Empire's provincial cities during the late first, second, and early third centuries AD.

As will have become clear from the above, I do not deal in this book with every form of gift-giving modern historians have from time to time designated with the term euergetism. Instead I primarily focus on what might be called *civic* euergetism, which should be taken to encompass every instance when a member of the local or provincial elite used his (or her) private wealth or power in such a way that people conceived it to be a public gift or contribution to the city, the citizenry or groups of citizens. Such civic euergetism is the type of munificence we encounter most frequently in our sources, and, I would like to stress, it is to *this* type of munificence that the argument concerning euergetism's role and function in civic society developed in this study applies. Of course, there existed other forms of gift-giving behaviour that are also often grouped under the heading of euergetism. I refer, for instance, to the small bequests of money to *collegia* or other private clubs we hear about, often with the attached obligation to use it for financing the performance of commemorative acts at the donor's gravesite,[14] or to gifts by city grandees to their native village or to country shrines.[15] I also leave out of account benefactions by the emperor,[16] and the

[13] *I.Smyrna* (*IK* 23–4) 637.
[14] For good discussion of this category of small foundations for private commemoration, mostly involving the performance of funerary rites at the donor's gravesite, see Andreau (1977) 180ff.
[15] On rural euergetism, mainly with respect to the donation of domanial market facilities, see briefly de Ligt (1993) 176–8. Note also the discussion in Schuler (1998) 278ff.
[16] On which see e.g. Veyne (1976) part IV.

euergetism of members of the imperial elite (senators and knights), except if the latter acted in their capacity as members of the local elite of their native town. I am aware of the fact that the boundaries between what I define as civic euergetism and the types of munificence just mentioned cannot always be drawn very clearly, but as a sort of working definition of the type of munificence most frequently attested in our sources, and the type on which I wish to focus in this study, civic euergetism as I have just described it will probably do. Euergetism had a long history, originating in the early Hellenistic period, and during the course of this history it assumed many shapes and forms, but only in its most common civic variety did it begin to play a very specific political and ideological role in Roman provincial civic society during the late first and second centuries AD. It is on this political function of civic euergetism during the period just referred to that I wish to concentrate in this study.

I should also add that my definition of civic euergetism is one that consciously and deliberately takes in forms of public expenditure by the rich that are usually termed liturgies (i.e costs associated with an office, which the holder was supposed to pay for out of his own pocket). I have a clear reason for defining the subject thus broadly, and that has much to do with what was, I think, the perspective of contemporaries on what precisely constituted an act of civic munificence. When one goes through the sources, it quickly becomes evident that, for the ancients, a wide and fairly flexible gamut of acts could, depending on circumstances, qualify as public benefactions. Of course there were some main trends in gift-giving, but on the whole the ancient conception of civic euergetism seems to have been fairly fluid. This fluidity had a clear function, which quickly becomes apparent when we interpret civic euergetism primarily as a form of politics and ideological ritual, aimed at easing social tensions, for it allowed parties to present a fairly wide range of actions and behaviours as acts of civic munificence, and hence to increase the amounts of social (prestige), political and ideological benefit that could be reaped from them. Thus, civic euergetism allowed pent-up political energies that otherwise might have been (and sometimes were) spent in fierce social conflicts between elite and non-elite groups to be transferred into a process of subtle and skilled political negotiation over gifts and counter-gifts between benefactors, their fellow elite-members and the demos. Such negotiation could take a variety of forms. Non-elite citizens could aim to please elite members by deliberately interpreting certain of their actions as benefactions and grant them honours for these, thus hoping to accumulate goodwill and extract more future benefactions from the elite individuals in question.