Introduction
Benefactors and the Polis, a Long-Term Perspective

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Ancient historians generally consider benefactions by wealthy citizens to their civic communities as a phenomenon that gained prominence only in the post-classical polis. Under the heading of 'euergetism', such public generosity is mainly studied for the poleis in the Hellenistic and Roman imperial periods, and it is also often explained primarily in terms relating to broader social, economic and political developments supposedly typical of these periods. With this volume, we wish to challenge this perspective. Our starting point, the working hypothesis behind the volume, is that public generosity in one form or another was actually a structural feature of polis society throughout its long history, from the Homeric world until well into Late Antiquity. Such a wide chronological scope inevitably invites reassessments of the role of public giving in the various periods of Greek history, and these the reader will find in the chapters that follow. In this introduction we will sketch the historiography of the subject, and argue why, in our view, developments in the debate on public giving and its relation to polis society over the past few decades necessitate a turn towards a *longue durée* perspective.

The Rise of a Subject

Public generosity – gifts or contributions made by individuals to the wider community – was a prominent feature of civic life in classical antiquity. Indeed, the phenomenon is so omnipresent in our sources that scholars long took it more or less for granted, commenting on it in passing when dealing with more general topics such as the history of the post-classical polis, the broader Hellenistic world or Roman provincial administration, or treating it as an individual chapter in the history of social aid or care for the poor (*Armenpflege*). Thus Wilhelm Liebenam in his *Städteverwaltung im römischen Kaiserreiche* (1900) discussed gifts by members of the civic elite and the honours they received in return as part of his detailed

overview of civic public finances in the Roman Empire, while the liturgies paid by the wealthy in classical Athens had many decades earlier found a place in August Boeckh's monumental *Staatshaushaltung der Athener* (1817). Frank F. Abbott and Allan C. Johnson dealt in passing with the *munera* and liturgies (in their post-classical form, as munificence tied to office holding) recorded in the evidence from (Greco-)Roman cities in their volume on *Municipal Administration in the Roman Empire* (1926).[1] Civic munificence also figures prominently in some of the contributions to Tenney Frank's *Economic Survey of Ancient Rome*, particularly in the section by T. R. S. Broughton on Roman Asia Minor in volume 4 (1938), which contains long lists of elite gifts and foundations as part of a survey of the evidence for urban economic life under the Empire. Civic munificence is also considered in A. H. M. Jones's *The Greek City from Alexander to Justinian* (1940), where the proliferation of benefactions in Hellenistic and Roman-era Greek cities is interpreted as a sign of post-classical civic decline (on which more below).[2]

Gift-giving by Greek and Roman elites was unsurprisingly accorded an even more prominent place in studies of charity and poor relief in antiquity. In his *Wohltätigkeit und Armenpflege im vorchristlichen Altertum* (1939), Hendrik Bolkestein sought to explore the status of the poor and the social ethics and practices of poor relief in the Ancient Near East (Egypt and Palestine) and the Greco-Roman world, finding that whereas Near Eastern philanthropy focused on almsgiving and charity by the rich towards the poor (a tradition Christianity would inherit), Greek and Roman beneficence was concerned primarily with the citizen-community rather than with the poor *per se*. In his 1968 study *Charities and Social Aid in Greece and Rome*, Arthur R. Hands similarly focused on poor relief, but with attention only to the Greco-Roman world. While admitting, with Bolkestein, that Greek and Roman benefactors did not target the poor as such, Hands argued that various categories of munificence, such as the provision of (cash for the purchase of) basic commodities, educational facilities and gifts related to health and hygiene, nonetheless benefitted the poorer segments of society. One feature of Hands's study particularly relevant to the concerns of the present volume is that one chapter analyses elite munificence as a form of gift-exchange, in the anthropological tradition going back to Marcel Mauss's *Essai sur le don*,

[1] Boeckh (1817); Liebenam (1900); Abbott and Johnson (1926).
[2] Broughton (1938); Jones (1940).

focusing not just on what was given but also on the community's obligation to make a return gift that increased the benefactor's honour.[3]

Only from the mid-1970s onwards, however, did ancient public generosity come into its own as an object of study, a development due almost entirely to Paul Veyne's monumental *Le pain et le cirque: sociologie historique d'un pluralisme politique* (1976) and its (critical) reception in historical scholarship.[4] Veyne's subject was *l'évergétisme*, the word itself being a neologism based on the honorific epithet *euergetes* (benefactor), a title often awarded wealthy public donors in the ancient world.[5] Although Veyne did not invent the term, he made clear the types of ancient elite generosity to which it ought to be applied: specifically, the benefactions of wealthy citizens in the post-classical (i.e. Hellenistic and Roman-era) Greek poleis, as well as, up to a certain point at least, the public gifts of Roman Republican grandees and the public benefactions of Hellenistic kings and Roman emperors.

In Veyne's vision, euergetism was a specifically Greco-Roman social phenomenon, to be distinguished from later Christian charity but also from other ancient forms of gift-giving, such as those associated with Greek guest-friendship (*xenia*), archaic largesse, the classical Athenian liturgy system and Roman patronage. As noted above, the subject had previously been dealt with by historians as part of the history of civic finance or social aid and poor relief, and some scholars had focused in detail on specific aspects of it, for example, the legal historian Bernhard Laum in his study of foundations, *Stiftungen in der griechischen und römischen Antike* (1914), and the epigrapher Louis Robert (one of Veyne's teachers) in his many studies of individual honorific inscriptions.[6] As such, the topic was not new. Veyne's distinctive contribution lay in refashioning elite public generosity, specifically, the variety he called euergetism, as an important sociopolitical phenomenon *tout court*, with its own complex history and links to other aspects of Greco-Roman society.

Yet despite Veyne's innovative attempt to delineate the defining features of *l'évergétisme* and his success in placing the topic on the research agenda

[3] Bolkestein (1939); Hands (1968); see Mauss (1967 [1923–4]).
[4] Veyne (1976). For the reception of Veyne's work, see the review essays by Andreau, Schmitt and Schnapp (1978) and Garnsey (1991) (in response to the appearance of the abridged English edition, Veyne [1990]).
[5] The word itself was coined by A. Boulanger in a study of Aelius Aristides, see Boulanger (1923), and was later picked up by Marrou in his 1948 work on ancient education.
[6] Laum (1914); Robert (1969–90).

of ancient historians, his analysis did not break entirely free from lines of interpretation that had shaped older, partial analyses of post-classical Greek public giving in particular, and that continue to characterize much work on euergetism today. The first of these is the conviction that euergetism was a product of the Hellenistic age, that is, that the rise of euergetism proper should be dated to the (later) Hellenistic period, even if there were already stirrings of it in the final decades of the fourth century BCE. For Veyne, euergetism 'did not exist' in the classical polis, because the socio-political conditions favouring its rise (the development of an 'oligarchy of notables') came to characterize the poleis only from the early Hellenistic period onwards.[7] From then until the high Roman Empire, Veyne detects little change in the operation of euergetism in the poleis, chiefly because in his view sociopolitical conditions (i.e. oligarchy) remained the same. Here Veyne's interpretation is in line with the scenario already sketched out by A. H. M. Jones in his *Greek City from Alexander to Justinian* (1940). More recently, a similar picture of a virtually unchanging development of euergetism in the context of an oligarchisation of civic politics from early Hellenistic times until the high Roman Empire was presented by Friedemann Quass in *Die Honoratiorenschicht in den Städten des griechischen Ostens* (1993).[8]

This brings us to the second line of interpretation Veyne shares with most earlier scholars discussing civic benefactions, namely, his close association of the rise of euergetism with a 'decline' of the Greek polis in the post-classical era. This decline is supposed to have manifested itself in two spheres. The first is public finance: earlier authors, notably Jones, believed that Hellenistic and Roman-era Greek poleis were so crippled financially that they could not function without private contributions by wealthy citizens. The second is popular politics, also stressed by Jones but particularly by Veyne: civic euergetism was linked to the development of an increasingly oligarchic political culture and practice in the Hellenistic and Roman-era Greek cities. For Veyne, euergetism was a clear expression of the superiority of civic notables, the wealthy citizens generally thought to have dominated the post-classical polis (Veyne is nonetheless at pains to stress that the development of euergetism cannot be explained by simply interpreting it as an instrument to 'depoliticize' the masses, as he imagines a Marxist historian might do)[9].

[7] Veyne (1990) 71–82 (quote from p. 71 = Veyne (1976) 184). For discussion, see Domingo Gygax (2016) 1–12, esp. 6–7.
[8] Jones (1940); Quass (1993).
[9] Jones (1940), esp. 157–91 and 241–50; Veyne (1976) passim.

A final trait of Veyne's work, and perhaps the most noteworthy, which is not in line with earlier analyses of euergetism but in fact distinguishes his approach from that of some of his predecessors (particularly Hands), is his rejection of social scientific and historical-comparative explanations of euergetism. For Veyne (as argued in his *Comment on écrit l'histoire*), history is a way of analysing, describing or narrating what is *unique* about events and phenomena in the past. He recognizes that there are other methods of analysis, that is, those of the social sciences, where events and phenomena observed in various (past) societies are used as examples to formulate a general law or theory; but that, in his judgement, is not what historians do.[10] Euergetism was thus *sui generis* in Veyne's view, a phenomenon that could arise only in the specific social, political and cultural climate of the Greco-Roman city. Although one might compare it with examples of public gift-giving known from other societies, for example, the potlatch, to understand the *essence* of euergetism, to understand it *historically*, one must focus on its unique aspects. Indeed, for Veyne comparison only underlines historical uniqueness. He therefore rejects anthropological, sociological and economic explanations of euergetism as ultimately unusable (because too generic) and focuses on what he sees as euergetism's unique characteristics, namely, the way such gifts symbolically expressed the superiority of the notables, their *distance sociale* from the rest of the citizenry, and the specific psychological satisfaction the notables derived from using their wealth this way. The implication is that euergetism was for Veyne primarily a one-way street, with rich citizens showering gifts on a mostly passive *demos*.[11]

Recent Developments

In the past few decades, researchers have increasingly challenged these assumptions. The chronology of the development of euergetism proposed by Veyne and historians before him was questioned already in 1985 by Philippe Gauthier in an important study, *Les cités grecques et leurs bienfaiteurs*. Explicitly contra Veyne, Gauthier argues that the benefactions of the wealthy in the poleis of the early Hellenistic period continued to take place within a civic framework of public services provided by wealthy citizens, with only non-citizen outsiders awarded the honorific title *euergetes*, as had

[10] Veyne (1971). For a good discussion of Veyne's theory of history, see the review essay of Gorman (1987), in response to the English edition of *Comment on écrit l'histoire*, Veyne (1984).
[11] For a similar perspective, see Wörrle (1988), with the discussion by Rogers (1991).

been the case in the classical polis. Only from the second century BCE onwards, when Rome entered the Greek world and the Hellenistic kingdoms declined, did oligarchisation set in and euergetism develop into a 'système du gouvernement', in which the civic notables, honoured by their poleis for their many benefactions, occupied a central place.[12] In line with Gauthier's argument, historians of the Hellenistic polis have increasingly stressed the continuation of democratic or populist political practices in Hellenistic cities, which some have argued ended only with the subjugation of the poleis to Roman hegemony.[13] Others have contested the latter claim as well and have argued that even under Roman imperial rule, and despite some institutional changes in the poleis (e.g. city councillors now sat on the *boulē* for life, like *decuriones* in western Roman cities), aspects of traditional Greek popular politics continued to characterize political culture and practices; the popular assembly in particular remained a force to be reckoned with and, at least until well into the third century CE, continued to be structurally involved in political decision-making at the civic level.[14] The notion of a deterioration of civic public finances, the other element in the traditional 'decline of the polis' scenario, which provided a supposed economic rationale for the rise of euergetism, has also been contested. It has been argued that Greek civic finances in the Hellenistic and Roman periods were nowhere near as structurally inadequate as has been assumed (although periods of war or bad harvests constituted exceptions, and it was precisely when such events put pressure on public resources that benefactors chipped in).[15] This work suggests that a process of 'decline of the polis', if 'decline' is the proper term at all, should be located in the later Roman Empire as part of larger processes of transformation that occurred in (very) Late Antiquity.[16] Finally, inspired by social scientific studies of the gift, recent work on civic benefactions has placed particular stress on the reciprocal character of elite munificence. Scholars have focused on the honours successful benefactors received from recipient communities as counter-gifts for their public generosity, effectively reconceptualizing euergetism as a form of gift-exchange.[17]

[12] Gauthier (1985). For discussion, see the review by Gruen (1987).
[13] See Grieb (2008); Carlsson (2010) and the discussions in Mann and Scholz (2012); Wiemer (2013).
[14] Rogers (1992); Ma (2000); Zuiderhoek (2008); Heller (2009); Fernoux (2011); Brélaz (2013).
[15] Note, e.g. Schwarz (2001); Zuiderhoek (2009); Migeotte (2010).
[16] See notably Liebeschuetz (2001).
[17] See most recently Domingo Gygax (2003); Zuiderhoek (2009); Domingo Gygax (2016).

These developments in the literature prompt a number of questions and considerations. If euergetism can no longer be regarded as a historically specific product of a supposed decline of the Greek polis during the (later) Hellenistic and Roman imperial periods, euergetism or forms of public giving akin to it may already have been present in polis society (much) earlier. Furthermore, if the causal links between elite public giving and oligarchic politics or endemic civic financial distress are tenuous, we should perhaps look for other, more structural reasons for the prominence of public gifts in the Greek polis. Could the structural features (whatever they prove to be) that gave rise to elite public contributions have been part of polis society from its very beginnings? And if euergetism can be seen as a form of gift-exchange, could it be argued that euergetism itself was only one particular, albeit temporarily prominent, incarnation of a tradition of reciprocal exchange between elite individuals and their communities dating back to the earliest periods of Greek history (and perhaps enduring beyond the slow demise of the phenomenon in its 'classical' form in the later Roman period)? That is, would it be legitimate to view the largesse of Homeric *basileis*, the liturgy system of democratic Athens and the *euergesiai* of Hellenistic and Roman-era civic notables as varying manifestations of the same underlying sociopolitical mechanism? Or should they be regarded as (radically?) different phenomena to be analysed on their own terms? And what links, if any, existed between public gifts to the civic community at large and other types of gift-giving in the ancient world, for example, gifts associated with patronage and guest-friendship or Christian care for the poor?

This Volume

Starting from such questions and considerations, the editors invited a number of scholars specializing in different periods of Greek history to contribute chapters to the present volume, which aims to examine public giving in the Greek polis for the first time from a truly *longue durée* perspective, tracing continuities and exploring changes and developments, as well as regional variations, from Homeric Greece to the later Roman Empire. Our focus is on the Greek polis, not because Roman traditions of munificence are uninteresting, but because most of the earlier debate on euergetism also concentrated on the polis, albeit during the post-classical periods. As the foregoing will have made clear, it was precisely the recent challenges to the traditional 'declinist' perspective on the post-classical polis that prompted our main research question, namely, whether elite

public contributions were a structural feature of polis society from beginning to end (with the euergetism we know from Hellenistic and Roman times being only one particular – if prominent – manifestation of the phenomenon). The same question could profitably be asked with regard to the role played by public giving in Roman civic society from its earliest beginnings onwards. Such an investigation would be sufficiently complex and wide-ranging to require its own volume, but it would be interesting to compare its results with those that emerge from the contributions collected in this volume.[18]

It should be noted in any case that under the Empire, Greek public giving and Roman traditions of *liberalitas* merged in the benefactions of the emperors, whose gifts to Greek poleis also receive attention here (see the chapter by Carlos Noreña), and arguably to some extent in the munificence of civic elites in the eastern provinces, to which another portion of the volume is devoted (see the chapters by Onno van Nijf and Arjan Zuiderhoek). While we focus primarily, therefore, on public gifts made within the context of the polis itself by residents (citizens, metics, freedmen) to the community, we include three chapters (by Rolf Strootman, John Tully and Noreña) on benefactions by powerful outsiders, that is, Hellenistic kings and emperors, because it has traditionally been argued that the structure and content of royal or imperial benefactions powerfully influenced the euergetism of civic elites in the poleis.

To ensure the volume's analytic cohesion, we have asked contributors dealing with public generosity in particular periods to pay close attention to similarities and differences from, and (dis)continuities between, earlier and later periods of Greek history. Beyond this, the authors have been left free to choose the aspects of public giving they wish to consider, where they place their emphasis and how they frame their arguments, our goal being to ensure original insights and fruitful debate stimulating further research. In line with this, we wish to emphasize that we have deliberately *not* provided our authors with a strict working definition of elite public giving (beyond the intentionally vague 'gifts or contributions by individuals to the wider community'), nor do we provide such a definition in this introduction. This is because the question of precisely what public generosity in the polis entailed in different eras of Greek history, and of how such forms of gift-giving should be defined, on their own and in relation to

[18] For a good collection of studies examining civic munificence in Roman Italy, see Lomas and Cornell (2003).

one another, is precisely what motivates this volume. Hasty *a priori* definitions would only hamper exploration of these issues.

As part of the project, the authors were invited to present draft versions of their chapters during a workshop held at the Princeton University Department of Classics on 10–11 April 2015. Feedback from discussion at the workshop was incorporated into the chapters as they now appear, providing a *longue durée* view of public gifts and their relationship to the Greek polis in the form of a series of detailed snapshots from different periods (Homeric and archaic Greece, the classical era, Hellenistic and Roman times and Late Antiquity). The chapters are followed by a general conclusion by the editors, in which we discuss the implications of each contributor's findings and attempt to draw out some general themes emerging from the individual contributions.

The advantage of taking a long-term perspective on public generosity, as we do in this volume, is that it allows discussion of elite public giving in relation to a wide range of important avenues of research, for example, the structure of Homeric society, the 'rise of the polis', tyranny, Athenian democracy, post-classical popular politics, festival culture, the relationship between poleis and empires, and the impact of Christianity and its institutional actors (priests, bishops). In addition, by opting for a long time span and explicitly including discussion and comparison of different manifestations of ancient Greek elite public generosity within a single volume, we hope to contribute to (and demonstrate the relevance of work on ancient Greek benefactions for) wider debates among historians and social scientists on gift-exchange and its role in society, both in antiquity and beyond. Should this volume succeed in offering inspiration to scholars (and students!) active in fields beyond Classics *sensu stricto*, as well as to colleagues working in more specialized areas, we would regard our mission as accomplished.

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