

17

Patrons, Clients, and Trade Guilds —the Nexus of Politics, Society, and Economics

INTRODUCTION:

WORD STUDY

AND IDENTIFICATION

The term “patronage,” as used in the first century C.E., referred to the nearly universal ordering of social relationships based on the exchange of wealth and influence.

This informal system of social stratification had the patron-client relationship at its core. The patron, or *patronus*, possessed a surplus of

financial and political capital and thus was in a good position to meet the requests of the one in need, the client. In response to receiving *beneficia*, “favours” or “services,” the social expectation of the day required the client to repay the patron in kind if possible, for “only the wise man knows how to return a favor” (Seneca, *Ep.* 81.12). Failing that, the client was to publicly express his or her gratitude to the patron and always seek ways to repay the social debt.¹ The client’s

¹ For the dynamics of debt and repayment in patronage, see Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, “Patronal Power Relations,” in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1997), 96–103; and Robert R. Kaufman, “The Patron-Client Concept and Macro-politics: Prospects and Problems,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 16/3 (1974): 284–308. Kaufman notes that there are as many definitions of the patron-client relationship as there are writers on the subject (p. 285 n. 3).

obligation to the patron could be relieved through a number of ways. For example, the client might make cash installments, provide various services, lend political support, include the patron in his or her will, or simply sing the praises of the patron at every opportunity.

It becomes clear that the principle of reciprocity lies at the core of the patron-client system. By this kind of exchange of services and influence, mutual interests were served, beginning with the upper echelons of society and continuing on down the chain of relationships to the level of slaves.

THE SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF ROMAN PATRONAGE

“The term ‘patronage’ refers to a system in which access to goods, positions, or services is enjoyed by means of personal relationships and the exchanging of ‘favors’ rather than by impersonal and impartial systems of distribution” (David A. DeSilva, “Patronage and Reciprocity: The Context of Grace in the New Testament,” *ATJ* [1999]: 32).

The rules governing the patron-client relationship were part and parcel with the social fabric of the day. The patron granted *charites*, “graces,” to the client, who in turn was to be “grateful,” *eucharistos*, toward the patron. Seneca reports that ideally the patron was to imitate the gods by giving with a pure motive, expecting nothing in return (*Ben.* 4.26.1; 4.28.1). On the other hand, Cicero claims that the expression of gratitude or favor for one’s patron was to be the first impulse of a client (*Off.* 1.47–48).² This creative tension between altruism and indebtedness was described by Seneca as an unbroken dance of dynamic proportions that can be profaned only by the ultimate crime, being *acharistos*, “ungrateful” (*Ben.* 1.3.2–5).³ For the

² DeSilva, “Patronage and Reciprocity,” 38–39.

³ DeSilva notes that this “creative tension” was rooted in the fact that the duties of the patron and those of the client were expressed separately. The goal of the moralists was that both par-

Roman, to be ungrateful was to be unjust, for the patron deserved praise and thanks. Thus, with respect to ingratitude, Seneca comments, “Homicides, tyrants, traitor there always will be; but worse than all these is the crime of ingratitude” (*Ben.* 1.10.4). A client responding in this way would receive the hatred and scorn of his or her neighbors. If profusely grateful, however, the client would be a good prospect for future benefits from even more powerful patrons. For, in the end, according to Seneca, gratitude is more of a benefit to oneself than to the one who receives the grace. According to him, to have felt gratitude creates an “utterly happy condition of the soul” (*Ep.* 81.19–21). In this way a cycle of relationships was established. Granting a favor enhanced one’s power; receiving a favor incurred indebtedness; arriving at ties were to act appropriately within their respective spheres so as to maintain the dynamic of reciprocity (*ibid.*, 43, 47).

some degree of parity was a matter of personal honor. Indeed, this principle of honor and dishonor was deeply ingrained in the Roman psyche. Even among the agrarian classes, giving time and labor to help a neighbor in need was the honorable thing to do. Also, cultivating a reputation along these lines served as a kind of social insurance. If one was generous to others, then they were obligated to help you in times of trouble (*Ben.* 4.18.1).

The practical realization of patronage occurred in the following ways. Wealthy patrons would sponsor public works such as paving roads, building amphitheaters, and the like. These patrons would also pay for public entertainment, usually in the form of athletic competition or gladiatorial combat. At times, the wealthiest of patrons would come to the aid of the people when they suffered from natural disasters such as earthquakes or famine. In these ways, the patrons built up their

client base, who would inevitably return the favor by supporting them for public office and by erecting monuments and inscriptions in their honor.

To modern ears, the patron-client relationship smacks of blatant favoritism and influence peddling. In a first-century context, however, all transactions that could not be bartered in the common marketplace required a patron. If one required a loan, sought a public office, desired Roman citizenship, sought to purchase property, or simply needed support to pursue the arts, a patron had to be secured. It was simply the way things were done in the world of the New Testament. Indeed, Seneca describes the patron-client relationship as the “practice that constitutes the chief bond of humanity” (*Ben. 1.4.2*). For the Romans, this bond had powerful political overtones. Through the judicious granting of benefits and power to local potentates, the Romans were able to rule the

entire known world by proxy. Through the patron-client system, Rome was able to govern vast territories with a minimum amount of administration or official staff.

THE HIERARCHICAL NATURE OF ROMAN PATRONAGE

The patron-client system was inherently hierarchical, involving parties that were of unequal power and wealth.⁴ The bond between

⁴ “A patron-client relationship is a particular form of social relationship that involves an exchange of different types of ‘goods’ based on a *marked inequality of power*” (italics added) (Craig De Vos, “Once a Slave, Always a Slave? Slavery, Manumission, and Relational Patterns in Paul’s Letter to Philemon,” *JSNT* 82 [2001]: 97). In some cases, however, the parties exchanging benefits would be of equal social standing and were referred to as “friends” rather than clients (Pliny the Younger, *Ep. 4.22*). The rank of *amicus*, “friend,” was prestigious enough to encompass patrons of

patron and client was thus one of dependency, with the client depending on the good graces of the patron. The imbalance of power and resources established a pyramid of influence, decreasing in power from apex to base. The emperor was the supreme patron above all other patrons, and the obtaining of *amicitia principum*, friendship with the emperor, was the first step to being appointed a senator (Suetonius, *Vit. Caes.* 8.17.1–19.2; 8.22.1). The senators ranked just below the emperor and served as powerful brokers who arbitrated access to the emperor and all the wealth and power that he represented. Below them were the highest Roman officials appointed by the emperor. They served as prefects, procurators, military officers, and municipal magistrates. They were the *equites*,

both equal and inferior social status (Stephan Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor: Reciprocity, Strategy, and Theological Reflection in Paul's Collection* [WUNT 124; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000], 29).

“knights,” of the empire, of equestrian rank. During the time of Augustus, they numbered one thousand in Rome, and every major city had its ruling class. They served as the *curia*, or ruling senate of the city, patterned after the imperial senate in Rome. These subpatrons secured their positions by donating generously to the emperor and to the people. They donated buildings and amphitheaters and bankrolled gladiatorial games and festivals (Josephus, *Ant.* 15.267–275, 341).⁵ The lowest tier of free Roman citizens was the *plebs*, or common folk. These commoners included the small business owners craftspeople who made up the general populace of the empire. Finally, there were the freedmen and freed-women, who often

⁵ On subpatrons, see John E. Stambaugh, “Social Relations in the City of the Early Principate: State of Research,” in *The Society of Biblical Literature 1980 Seminar Papers* (SBLSP 19; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1980), 75–99, esp. 77, 79.

became clients of their former masters (Justinian, *Dig.* 37.14.1, 5, 9, 16). These persons at times incurred such a debt of gratitude that their quality of life was little better than that of a slave. In any case, they were no longer bound to the lowest stratum of Roman society, that is, the status of the slave class, or *servi*.⁶



This inscription from ancient Corinth reads, “Erastus in return for his aedileship laid [the pavement] at his own expense”.

This social categorizing of

⁶ The various ranks of Roman society from senator to slave are listed in David W. Gill, “Acts and the Urban Elites,” in *The Book of Acts and Its Graeco-Roman Setting* (ed. David W. Gill and Conrad Gempf; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 106–7.

inequality must be viewed contextually. A patron at one level in the hierarchy may be a client to more powerful patrons above. For example, Pliny the Younger was a client of the emperor Trajan († 111–113 C.E.), yet he served as a powerful patron to clients below him. As such, Pliny would have access to the emperor and would often seek appointments and citizenship for his clients. Pliny thereby played the important role of a broker or mediator in the patron-client system (*Ep.* 6.25)⁷

The entire system was a meritocracy in which not all enjoyed equal benefits. For this reason, one would curry the favor of the most powerful aristocrats. These patrons had the advantage of proximity to the emperor and thus had the greatest chance of extending some benefit to Caesar. It was hoped that there would be a reciprocal bless-

⁷ “Brokerage—the gift of access to another, often greater patron—was itself a highly valued gift” (DeSilva, “Patronage and Reciprocity,” 34).

ing from the emperor that would eventually trickle down to the lower clients. And so it went up and down the social ladder of 1st century Roman society.

One can see how the system of patronage was highly attractive to those with ambition. Patronage allowed one to enhance one's power through networking. This network of mutually beneficial relationships extended outward from the nuclear family to influential friends, then on to clients, and finally reached the resources of rich patrons. Those who were highly competitive by nature and able to "read between the lines" and do more than what was required stood the chance of acquiring great wealth and power.⁸

⁸ See John K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth* (JSNTSup 75; Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 42; and idem, "Patronage in Roman Corinth," in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1997), 125.

THE EMPEROR AS SUPREME PATRON

As direct beneficiary of the gods, the emperor was considered the patron of all humanity. As such, he was the *euergetēs*, the prime benefactor of the empire and the model for all other patrons in the realm.⁹ The examples of imperial beneficence are many, but the die was cast with Julius Caesar. Soon after enunciating his famous "I came, I saw, I conquered" statement, Julius Caesar sought to win the favor of the soldiers and the commoners by

tional, 1997), 125.

⁹ On the emperor as supreme patron, see Richard Gordon, "The Veil of Power," in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1997), 126-39. Cf. also N. T. Wright, "Paul's Gospel and Caesar's Empire," in *Paul and Politics: Ecclesia, Israel, Imperium, and Interpretation* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2000), 161.

bestowing lavish gifts upon all (Plutarch, *Caes.* 1.50.2; Suetonius, *Vit. Caes.* 1.37.2; 1.38.1-2). In this way he set the precedent for venerating the emperor as the patron above all other patrons.¹⁰

Julius Caesar made the city of Corinth the special object of his patronage. His edict that the ancient city of Corinth be rebuilt earned him special honors there. Indeed, the official designation for Corinth was “the colony of Julius Caesar.” Marble busts proclaiming Caesar as patron appeared throughout Corinth, and local coinage was inscribed with words proclaiming the emperor as their patron. The coronation of the emperor, his birthday, the celebration of imperial contests, and the Isthmian Games all exalted Julius Caesar as the supreme patron of Corinth.¹¹

¹⁰ By dedicating the temple to Claudius (41-54 C.E.), the Corinthians demonstrated their continued client relationship with the emperor.

¹¹ Chow, “Patronage in Roman Corinth,”

Caesar Augustus seems to have continued the patronal tactics of his predecessor, Julius Caesar. The benefits afforded by Augustus to his subjects were security, food, clean water, public housing, and, in some cases, tax rebates. One of the most coveted gifts bestowed by the emperor was Roman citizenship (Suetonius, *Vit. Caes.* 1.42.1; 6.24.2). Full enfranchisement was often granted as a reward for valiant defense of the empire in battle (Tacitus, *Ann.* 3.40; Josephus *J.W.* 1.194.; *Life* 1.423).¹² Augustus also granted honorific titles to those who enhanced his power and wealth, and at times he would award an especially faithful client as head of the Isthmian or Caesarean games. He frequently paid for

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¹² Augustus was reticent, however, to bestow citizenship on persons who were not of Roman blood, for he thought that the granting of citizenship to other nationalities weakened the Roman people (cf. Suetonius, *Vit. Caes.* 2.40.3).

gladiatorial combats out of his own purse (*Res gest. divi Aug.* 4.22–23). At times he would increase his client base by disbursing a direct cash gift to all male citizens of an entire city (*Res gest. divi Aug.* 3.15, 17; Suetonius, *Vit. Caes.* 2.41.2). It is no wonder that many appeared at the imperial palace with hat in hand, and Augustus was known to make sport on such occasions.¹³



¹³ Even the rumor that the Augustus had been generous was used to pressure the emperor to give a handout. When Pacuvius Taurus tried this ploy, noting that it was common gossip that Augustus had already given him a large gift, Augustus retorted, “Don’t you believe it!” (Macrobius, *Sat.* 2.4.4).

The remains of the Temple of Apollo, Corinth. Julius Caesar made the city of Corinth a special object of his patronage.

Because he was at the apex of the hierarchical structure, Augustus appointed or approved all officials under him. Regional kings were allowed to rule so far as they submitted to the imperial will and secured a steady flow of tribute money for Rome. Augustus affirmed these royal clients by sending contingents of soldiers to serve as their personal bodyguards. Puppet kings such as Herod the Great were careful to cultivate these relationships with the imperial patron (Josephus, *J.W.* 1.400; *Ant.* 15.361). Like other clients of the emperor, Herod expressed his fidelity by forwarding large sums of money to Rome. Anyone who had received direct benefit from the emperor was expected to name him in his or her will (Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 59.15.5–6). Herod followed suit and left a thousand talents of silver to Augustus and half as much to Empress Livia (Josephus,

Ant. 17.146, 190). In this way the emperors garnered enormous wealth during their lifetimes. Remaining true to the principle of reciprocity, they often returned much of it to the people at their deaths. Throughout his life, Augustus showered cash gifts on citizens, soldiers, and the plebs of Rome (*Res gest. divi Aug.* 3.15, 17). Before his death, Augustus willed the equivalent of more than one and a half billion dollars to the people (cf. *Res gest. divi Aug.* 3.15, 17, and “Summary,” 1; Suetonius, *Vit. Caes.* 2.101.1-4).

In a similar fashion, Caligula disbursed millions to the soldiers and the citizens upon his inauguration (Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 59.2.1-3). He cast large sums of money and free tickets to the games from the Julian Basilica for days on end, with many commoners being trampled to death in the ensuing melee (Suetonius, *Vit. Caes.* 4.37.1-3; Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 59.9.6-7; 59.25.5). To celebrate his victory over the Britons, Claudius gave cash to those who were

dependent upon public welfare (Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 60.25.7-8). Upon his inauguration, Nero granted about twenty dollars to each male citizen. Suetonius describes the lavish patronage of the emperors; regarding Nero, he states, “Every day all kinds of food, tickets for grain, clothing, gold, silver, precious stones, pearls, paintings, slaves, beasts of burden, even trained wild animals and finally, ships, blocks of houses and farms” were given to faithful clients (*Vit. Caes.* 6.11.2). Nero granted Roman citizenship to his favorite actors, as did Claudius (Suetonius, *Vit. Caes.* 6.12.2; Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 60.7.2). Domitian followed suit by granting cash gifts to all male citizens on three occasions and providing lavish banquets for those of equestrian rank as well as food for commoners (Suetonius, *Vit. Caes.* 8.3.5).¹⁴ The emperor was publicly honored as “the Patron” or “the Benefactor” and worshiped as a god (Tacitus,

¹⁴ Miriam T. Griffin, *Nero: The End of a Dynasty* (New York: Routledge, 1984), 63.

Ann. 4.37-38, 55-56; Suetonius, *Vit. Caes.* 1.76.1-3; 4.60.1; 5.45-1).

Such grand benefaction required an appropriate response. In order to fulfill the “reciprocity ethic,” the people were to pledge complete loyalty or faithfulness (Gk. *pistis*) to the emperor. The faithful client must be willing to suffer shame and even death in order to bring honor to his or her patron. Indeed, Seneca exhorts that loyalty is the “holiest good in the human heart” and adds, “Loyalty cries: ‘Burn me, slay me, kill me! I shall not betray my trust; and the more urgently torture shall seek to find my secret, the deeper in my heart will I bury it!’” (*Ep.* 88.29).

All this goodwill toward the emperor stems from one unshakable principle. Imperial clients realized that their power and prestige were directly proportional to their access to the emperor. This access was obtained through loyalty and the bestowal of lavish gifts. Therefore clients strove to demonstrate their loyalty to the emperor

by extending every benefit and praise that they could manage, constantly competing with one another to gain the favor with those who in turn could benefit them. Augustus was particularly adept at exploiting this state of affairs by pitting one client against another, thus stimulating an ever-increasing flow of benefits to himself (Suetonius, *Vit. Caes.* 2.66.1-2.67.2). Although, according to the strict letter of Roman law, it was illegal to receive bribes and gifts from lesser officials, this was in fact the path to upward mobility.¹⁵ The patron-client relationship thus lent itself to much graft and corruption. Indeed, there was often a fine line between being a true friend who desires to help another and an exploitive patron seeking to extort favors from a client.¹⁶

¹⁵ Julius Caesar’s initial inroads to power were through bribery and corruption (cf. Suetonius, *Vit. Caes.* 1.11.1-1.14.2).

¹⁶ On patron, clients, and exploitation, see Alicia Batten, “[God in the Letter of](#)



Aerial view of the site of the Roman harbor at Caesarea, built by Herod the Great in honor of the Emperor, the supreme patron.

ROMAN GOVERNORS AND PATRONAGE

The most powerful patrons on a local level were the Roman governors, proconsuls, and client kings. These officials assumed the role of

James: Patron or Benefactor?" *NTS* 50 (2004): 257-72, esp. 258.

brokers or mediators for the imperial patron. For this reason, the aristocracy indigenous to any particular region viewed the Roman governors as their patrons. They understood that all imperial benefits came by way of the governor, for the latter conveyed the granting of citizenship, confirmation to local offices, the endorsement of building contracts, and the conferral of honorific titles. Consequently, honoring Roman governors as subpatrons of the emperor afforded access to Caesar, enhanced a local aristocracy's prestige in the empire, and garnered real material benefits for them, their families, and the subjects they governed. As client kings, the Herods lavished benefits upon the Caesars. They not only named cities and lakes in honor of the emperor; they even built entire cities for the emperor, complete with temples dedicated to the gods of the Greco-Roman pantheon (*Ant.* 15.331-41, 363-364; 20.211). All of these benefits were simply expressions of the most critical

benefits that they could afford: complete loyalty and military support.

The Trade Guilds:

Salutatio, Sportulae, Collegia

Tacitus notes that the *plebs*, or common people, were, for the most part, excluded from patron-client relationships (*Hist.* 1.4). Since most were very poor, they had no “graces” to extend to others or any means to repay favors they might receive from a patron. Their poverty, however, provided patrons with an opportunity to display their generosity to the masses. Poor communities would select a patron and pledge to that person their loyalty and political support. The patron in turn would build temples and public improvements at his/her own expense. In return, commoners could render back to the patron the one benefit they did possess—public praise.¹⁷

¹⁷ Suetonius records a clear description of the reciprocal relationship between

This interplay between philanthropy and popular acclaim gave rise to the tradition of the *salutatio*. The *salutatio* entailed the gathering of the *plebs* at the door of the patron at dawn (Suetonius, *Vit. Caes.* 330; Seneca, *Ep.* 47.18). As the patron left his or her estate, the commoners would greet the patron with acclaim. Many would follow the patron about during the day, the emperor and his clients. Regarding Augustus he records, “With this sum he bought and dedicated in each of the city wards costly statues of the gods, such as Apollo Sandaliarius, Jupiter Tragoedus, and others. To rebuild his house on the Palatine, which had been destroyed by fire, the veterans, the *collegia*, the tribes, and even individuals of other conditions gladly contributed money, each according to his means; but he merely took a little from each pile as a matter of form, not more than a denarius from any of them. On his return from a province they received him not only with prayers and good wishes, but with songs” (*Vit. Caes.* 2.57.1–2.58.2).

expressing admiration and granting loud applause for any speeches the patron might make. In return, the patron disbursed food to the *plebs*, and on occasion he granted the *sportulae*. The *sportulae* were often small sums of money to help the common people with daily living expenses and to purchase entrance into theaters, athletic contests, and gladiatorial events. The system was a constant drain upon the wealthy, for, Seneca laments, “A cultivates B and B cultivates C; no one is his own master” (*De brevitae vitae* 2.4). Cicero therefore gives instructions on the proper and improper use of the *sportulae*, commenting that benefits should not be squandered on giving banquets and gladiatorial shows but to pay ransom money and help real friends in need (*Off.* 2.52–56). There was also a monthly distribution of *sportulae* from the emperor, usually taking the form of a ration of grain. Since each recipient had to appear in person to collect the monthly dole, the sys-

tem became very disruptive to the workaday world of the empire. For this reason, Augustus tried to change the allotment to quarterly, but he received such protests from the people that he abandoned the plan (Suetonius, *Vit. Caes.* 2.40.1).

The political implications of the “corn dole” were not lost on those of the first century. Nero was careful to grant each Praetorian Guard a monthly allowance of grain free of charge (*Vit. Caes.* 6.10.2). Dio Cassius notes that even before the conflict between Antony and Octavian-Augustus, the senate had voted not to put the distribution of grain into the hands of one man (*Hist. rom.* 46.39.3). Augustus dispensed cash benefits to every male in the empire, including boys, in order to win the favor of the people. In times of scarcity, he would grant wooden “coupons” that could be redeemed for grain, oil, and other necessities (*Res gest. divi Aug.* 3.18; Suetonius, *Vit. Caes.* 2.41.2). Indeed, Augustus laments that some left off farming altogeth-

er because they could eke by on free corn rations. He wanted to abolish the corn dole altogether but feared that it would only be reinstated in the future by some politician seeking popular support (*Vit. Caes.* 2.42.3).¹⁸ The critical importance of the corn dole can be seen in special laws that were enacted to prevent fraud associated with the corn dole and especially to punish those who sought to interrupt the supply of grain to Rome (Justinian, *Dig.* 48.12.1-3).

The truly impoverished *plebs*, or freeborn poor, depended upon the *sportulae* to have enough grain. So, if the emperor could not supply the need, he was in deep trouble. This is why Vespasian's bid for the throne entailed gaining control of Alexandria so that he could cut off the supply of grain to Rome (Josephus, *J.W.* 2.386; 4.602-607; Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 60.11.1-5). Claudius

was publicly cursed and pelted with dry crusts of bread when he could not deliver the accustomed *sportulae* to the people, and under the cover of his guards, he barely escaped the mob (Suetonius, *Vit. Caes.* 5.18.2; Tacitus, *Ann.* 12.43). When Nero found himself in financial straits, he forbade the giving of lavish public banquets but continued the *sportulae* (Suetonius, *Vit. Caes.* 6.16.2).

¹⁸ Domitian did abolish the distribution of grain but replaced it with formal dinners provided by wealthy patrons (Suetonius, *Vit. Caes.* 8.7.1).



Relief of Mercurius (Hermes), patron deity of trade, merchants, and travelers.



View of ancient Ephesus from the theater. The harbor of Bible times extended farther inland than it does today. The silversmiths' guild called a meeting in this theater to protest Paul's disruption of their trade.

The *plebs* were able to participate in the network of patron-client relations by forming collective associations called *collegia*. The *collegia* were clubs or associations organized around a common cult, interest, or trade and usually numbering forty to three hundred members in urban settings. The societies that gathered members from a single craft functioned like trade guilds. These guilds looked after the needs of their members,

helped in funeral arrangements, and promoted the interests of the common craft. Monthly dues were paid to cover burials and also to fund festive dinners to affirm the guilds' members.¹⁹

As part of the patron-client system, the *collegia* mirrored the hierarchical nature of Roman society. The patron deity occupied the highest level in the society, followed by the patron benefactor, who, more often than not, was a decurion, or city magistrate.²⁰ Wealthy women of the decurial order also functioned as patrons of *collegia*, often providing the priests

¹⁹ Garnsey and Saller note that the benefits of a *collegium* included fellowship, business contacts, burial insurance, legal services, and the receiving of city contracts to conduct business ("Patronal Power Relations," 100-101). Cf., on the funerary benefits of the *collegia*, Susan Treggiari, *Roman Freedmen during the Late Republic* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 202-3.

²⁰ For the responsibilities of decurions see Justinian, *Dig.* 50.2.1-2.

or priestesses for the patron deity.²¹ Club leaders came next in status, followed by the common members. The leader of the association was called the *quinquennalis*. He supplied oil to all of the members for bathing before banquets and was eligible for double portions of food. His assistant was eligible for a

²¹ Female patrons often sponsored *collegia*. E.g., Eumachia (ca. 213 C.E.) led the fullers' *collegium*. She donated a great meeting hall and supplied a priestess for the cult of Venus. Junia Theodora (43 C.E.) of Corinth is commended for her generosity, and Lydia of Thyatira was the patroness of the church at Philippi ([Acts 16:14](#)). Regarding the various gods and goddesses of the *collegia*, the carpenters and woodcutters worshiped Silvanus whereas those in the grain trade honored Ceres and Annona. Minerva was the goddess of handworkers, Vesta of bakers, and Mercurius of businessmen. See Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor*, 33; Stambaugh, "Social Relations in the City," 80-81; Chow, *Patronage and Power*, 66 n. 1; and Gill, "Acts and the Urban Elite," 117.

plate and a half. The *collegia*, in sum, constituted a way for those who held little influence to pool their resources and identities so that they might have more leverage in the wider society.

The collective representation and power of the *collegia* were attractive to Roman patrons. Wealthy patrons would sponsor an entire group, often paying up to fifteen thousand times the monthly dues of the common member for this privilege. In return, the patron would tap into the collective identity of the *collegium*. In addition, the group would have celebratory dinners in honor of the patron and his family. These dinners were conducted in the presence of the patron deity. The guild was obliged to support the patron in all public endeavors. In return, the *collegium* would receive funds and prestige from the patron.

There is some evidence that much of the membership of these *collegia* was composed of freedmen and freedwomen.²² These were

emancipated slaves whose masters had now become their personal patrons. As patrons, these former masters still wielded considerable control over their lives. A sign of their continued authority was that freedmen and freedwomen were forced to take the name of their masters as their own. As clients, freedmen and freedwomen were to express their gratitude by rendering free services to their patrons, never to bring suit against them, and even to grant financial assistance to their former masters in times of crisis.²³ Dionysius of Hali-

²² Even slaves were permitted to join a *collegium* with the consent of their masters (Justinian, *Dig.* 47.22.3).

²³ Some patrons became so rapacious that laws were enacted to ease the oppression of freedmen and freedwomen (cf. Justinian, *Dig.* 38.2.1-51). Patrons sometimes sought to forcefully restrict the freedom of those they had manumitted (*Dig.* 43.29.1-2). Most of the edicts in the *Digesta* sought to limit the claim that a patron or his descendants had upon the estate of their freedmen

carnassus records that some slaves were freed so that they might return a portion of their *sportulae* to their former masters (*Ant. rom.* 4.24.5). Also, the patron could claim up to half of a client's estate at the time of the latter's death (Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 60.17.7-8). In return for their fidelity, the patron provided legal and financial advice to those that were newly freed. In times of dearth, the patron would provide food and housing to his or her freedmen or freedwomen and seek justice on their behalf when a crime was committed against them.²⁴

Even so, the *collegia* gave these newly freed persons collective bargaining power to exercise their will over against more powerful constituencies in society, even against their former masters. Some *collegia* became so powerful that they were able to intimidate political candidates and even corrupt the

and freedwomen (cf. *Dig.* 38.5-15).

²⁴ Chow, "Patronage in Roman Corinth," 120-21.

electoral process. For this reason, the consolidation of the *plebs* into *collegia* raised suspicion in the minds of the emperors (cf. Justinian, *Dig.* 47.22.1-4). They feared that the private meetings of the *collegia* might serve as seedbeds for political unrest. The senate therefore passed legislation banning certain *collegia* that did not have an expressed purpose for the public good.²⁵ Similarly, Julius Caesar banned the *collegia*, and this ban was reinforced by Augustus and continued under Claudius (Suetonius, *Vit. Caes.* 1.42.3; 2.32.12; Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.17; Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 60.6). In response to Pliny the Younger's request for the formation of a firemen's guild in Nicomedia, the emperor likewise mandated caution. Trajan notes that regardless of how innocently such *collegia* might start, they inevitably led to political action of some kind

²⁵ For the power of *collegia* composed of freedmen and freedwomen, see Treggiari, *Roman Freedmen during the Late Republic*, 169-77.

(Ep. 10.33-34).

Luke's record in Acts 19:23-41 proves that such concerns were not misplaced. In this instance, Demetrius, head of the silversmiths' guild, mobilized its members and those from related crafts to riot in protest against Paul and his preaching of the gospel. As chief magistrate of the *collegium*, Demetrius knew that nothing would be done without the blessing of the patron goddess of the guild, Artemis. For this reason, he shrewdly linked Artemis with supposed offenses of Paul and his company (vv. 25-28). Demetrius's intent was to coerce the city magistrates into taking action independent of the provincial government and the Roman proconsul, who heard grievances at regular intervals (vv. 38-41). Since such meetings took place in the amphitheater, he led the rowdy crowd to protest there (v. 29). The "city clerk" realized the danger at hand.²⁶ As liaison to Rome, his duty

²⁶ The Greek phrase for "city clerk" is *ho grammateus* (ὁ γραμματεὺς). This is the

was to make sure that all assemblies fell within the bounds of Roman purview. He judged that this gathering was not a "legal assembly" and dismissed the crowd under threat of Roman punishment (vv. 39-41).

As a safeguard against such civil unrest, imperial law forbade *collegia* from meeting more than once a month. Those that met more frequently were subject to punishment. This might explain why the early Christians came under Roman censure. It is possible that the early church was viewed as a *collegium* of slaves and lower-class persons that served another "King."²⁷ Christianity had not same word used for "scribe" throughout the Scriptures and once again evidences the power and prestige that the scribe occupied across cultures.

²⁷ Slaves were permitted to join *collegia* that were officially recognized by the Roman government. Also, *collegia* associated with recognized religions were permitted. Members of the early church, whether slave or free, may

received official status as a *religio licita* (an officially authorized religion). Pliny the Younger informs Trajan that he tortures and executes all members of the “wretched cult” regardless of age or status ([Ep. 10.96](#)).

PATRONAGE AND THE ARTS

Wealthy patrons enjoyed surrounding themselves with philosophers, artists, and writers. Such clients added to the prestige of the patron, for they were a reflection of his or her culture and good taste. Moreover, the patron could draw upon the intellectual and artistic capital of such clients. In return, the patrons supported the artists and thinkers so that they could more readily exercise their talents (Suetonius, [Vit. Caes. 8.18.1](#)). In addition to financial support, artists and philosophers received dinner invitations, clothes, and even parcels of land. The patron would take gifted

have been viewed as forming an illegal *collegium* (Justinian, [Dig. 47.22.1-3](#)).

clients along on trips so that he or she could display their skills abroad. The artistic clients would receive an increased venue for their performances. The grateful client would be ever mindful to compose verses that praised the virtues of a generous patron. More than likely Luke’s praise of Theophilus as “most excellent Theophilus” (Gk. *kratiste theophile* [κράτιστε θεόφιλε], [Luke 1:3](#)) is the expression of a grateful client toward a wise and generous patron.

PATRONAGE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Patronage in Corinth

As already explained, the patron-client relationship was part of a social web that interconnected persons of the first century. This appears to have been especially true in Corinth. Since Gallio was the governor of Achaia while Paul was ministering in Corinth, he would have been the supreme Roman patron on the scene and

would have been honored as such. Indeed, an inscription in Corinth dating to 52-53 C.E. records the adulation of Anaxilas and Dinippus for the brilliant leadership of Gallio. Another inscription outside the theater speaks of the benevolence of a patron called Erastus, stating, “Erastus laid this pavement at his own expense.”²⁸ This Erastus may be the same person mentioned by Paul in [Rom 16:23](#), where Paul states that Erastus is the Roman *aedilis*, or city director of public works. The patronage of Erastus may have come to the attention of Gallio, who then appointed Erastus *aedilis* of Corinth. Although it cannot be determined, this goodwill between Gallio and Erastus may have led to the favorable judgment against Paul in [Acts 18:12-17](#).

²⁸ It was the custom to either inscribe the name of, or erect a monument to, any patron who made a large contribution to public works (Dio Cassius, [Hist. rom.](#) 60.25.3).



Ruins of the agora, ancient Corinth. The patron-client system was in effect in Corinth in the New Testament period.

Clearly the patron-client system was in place in Corinth and may have come to influence the church there. The various factions in the Corinthian church evidenced in the slogans “I am of Paul,” “I am of Cephas,” “I am of Apollos,” and “I am of Christ,” may reflect patron-client relationships ([1 Cor 1:10-17](#)). These groups within the church may have been claiming different leaders as their patrons to leverage special benefits from them. If this is so, then some of Paul’s decisions concerning the church in Corinth become more comprehensible.²⁹

²⁹ For how the principle of patronage

For example, his refusal to accept financial support from the Corinthians may indicate that Paul would not allow himself to become a client of the Corinthians (1 Cor 9:12). By not entering into a patron-client relationship with the Corinthians, he would have maintained his independence from them and perhaps, in his eyes, rendered his ministry more effective.

Patronage and Paul's Trial before Felix

Paul's trial before the governor Felix in Acts 24:1-27 likewise echoes aspects of the patron-client culture of first-century Rome. Tertullus, the trial lawyer who brought charges against Paul, opens his case with a *captatio benevolentiae*, a recitation of the benefits received from Felix's reign as governor: "When Paul was called in, Tertullus presented his case before Felix: 'We have enjoyed

may relate to Paul and his mission, see Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor*, 23.

a long period of peace under you, and your foresight has brought about reforms in this nation. Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude'" (vv. 2-3).³⁰ Thus Luke's record reflects the patronal practices of the day. As the client, the lawyer publicly acknowledges the benefits that the governor has done for Israel. The governor is now obliged to return the complement by giving ear to what the lawyer has to say against this troublemaker, the Apostle Paul.

Such collusion between lawyers and governors in the ancient world was common. Powerful lawyers would make public dedications and monuments to governors and pledge to defend the governors against charges of corruption in office. In return, the governors would grant gifts to the lawyers for their loyalty. To modern ears, the

³⁰ Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 705.

mutual exchange of gifts between a judge and a lawyer sounds outrageous. In the culture of patron-client relationships, however, exchanges of gratitude were expected. A lawyer's gifts to a Roman governor demonstrated his support of the regime and thus enhanced his status before the community. The governor's favor for the lawyer demonstrated his sense of justice in doing the appropriate thing.

Paul did not have access to an expensive trial lawyer, and so he had to defend himself. From the start, Felix would have understood that he would not receive any large cash benefits from Paul. If he were to receive anything, it would have to be extorted under the table. Predictably, v. 26 states that Felix repeatedly sought some money from Paul, often sending for him and talking to him about the matter. Apparently Paul sees this for what it is and declines to enter into this unsavory aspect of the patron-client relationship. Not to be com-

pletely denied, Felix then seeks to parlay Paul's predicament into political capital. As Roman patron to the Jews, he leaves Paul in prison as a favor to them. Now the Jews are obligated to affirm his leadership and, by extension, acknowledge the rule of Rome (v. 27).

Patronage, Jesus, and Pilate

Patron-client relationships explain much about the political interconnections between the governor, Pilate; the client king, Herod Antipas; and the appointed high priest, Caiaphas ([Matt 26:57-75](#); [Mark 14:53-72](#); [Luke 22:63-71](#)). Herod Antipas directly owed his position to Caesar Augustus and to his procurator, Pontius Pilate. As the supreme local patron, Pilate had the power to grant special Roman dispensations to Herod. In turn, Caiaphas was indebted to the Roman procurators for his appointment as high priest (Josephus, [Ant. 18.35, 95](#)). This network of relationships was tailor-made for patronage to hold full sway.

Pilate could please his patron, Augustus, by keeping the peace with Herod and the Jews. Regarding Jesus and his trial, it was clear to Pilate that Herod wanted Jesus out of the way. It was equally clear that the unrest of the Jews could be settled by crucifying Jesus ([Mark 15:9-20](#); [Luke 23:13-25](#)). So, against his better judgment and in a manner very similar to Felix's treatment of Paul, Pilate endorsed the execution of Jesus. He thereby appeased the Jews and their leadership, fulfilled the imperial commission to keep the peace, and indebted Herod and the Jews to himself. This nexus of mutual benefits makes [Luke 23:11-12](#) more comprehensible: "Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies." In the context of patronal relationships, Pilate's decision served the interests of various clients and strengthened his

position as well.

PATRONAGE AND THE EARLY CHURCH

The early church was birthed within the context of patron-client relationships and could in no way escape its influence. Indeed, there is evidence that wealthy patronesses, such as Lydia ([Acts 16:14](#)), John Mark's mother ([Acts 12:12](#)), and Chloe ([1 Cor 1:11](#)), were essential in establishing the early churches. The ideology and jargon of patronal relations helped to form the church's identity and its message. One can readily see how the concepts of "grace" (Gk. *charis*), "graces" (Gk. *charites*), "grateful" (Gk. *eucharistos*), and "faithfulness" or "loyalty" (Gk. *pistis*) were taken over by the first believers and put into the service of the gospel. The Scriptures are replete with references to God the Father as the ultimate patron ([Acts 14:7](#); [17:24-28](#)). For example, God is the source of all benefits ([Jas 1:17](#)). God unselfishly graces the just and the

unjust and is indebted to no one (Matt 5:45; Luke 6:35; Rom 11:35–36). The Father’s matchless gift to all humankind, regardless of race or status, was the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ (John 3:16; Gal 3:28). As mediator, Jesus becomes the broker who grants access to the Father for all who believe in him (John 15:14–16; Rom 5:1–2). He in turn mediates the gift of the Spirit and all of the charismatic gifts that empower the church (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4–5; Rom 12:3–8; 1 Cor 12:1–31).

The beneficence of the Father and the Son is a reflection of their character and justice (2 Pet 1:3). As recipients of their grace, believers are to be unwavering in their loyalty to God and unceasing in their praise and thanksgiving (2 Cor 1:11; Heb 12:28; 1 Thess 5:18). The saints must be willing to suffer shame and even die for his name (Acts 14:17; 17:24–28). Indeed, they are to sacrifice their entire beings in gratitude (Rom 12:1–2). The ungrateful can expect to receive the ill consequences due the unfaithful (Heb

6:4–8; Rom 2:4–5).

For the believer, Jesus becomes the model for true giving (Rom 3:22–26; 2 Cor 5:18–21). By helping the poor, the Christian reflects the character of God and thereby receives the honor of an obedient servant (2 Cor 8:1–5; Phil 2:29–30; Rom 12:1–6; Eph 4:7, 11–12).³¹ The goal of Christian giving, however, is not to build up one’s client base as in the classical patron-client relationships of the first century. Rather, the intent is to be like God in the service of one’s neighbor without any thought of being paid back. The community of goods in the first six chapters of Acts reflects this ideal (Acts 2:42–47, 4:32, 34–5:11; 6:1–6), an ideal attempted by the covenanters at Qumran.³²

³¹ DeSilva, “Patronage and Reciprocity,” 52, 67–69.

³² Brian Capper, “Reciprocity and the Ethic of Acts,” in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 506–7, 516.

In addition to these broad examples of patron-client principles in the Scriptures, there are many practical expressions as well. The benevolent centurions merited divine attention ([Luke 7:1-10](#); [Acts 10:1-48](#)). The Gentiles received spiritual riches from the Jews, and so they were obligated to return material blessings ([Rom 15:27](#)); Paul therefore orchestrated a massive collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem ([Rom 15:26-27](#); [2 Cor 8-9](#)). In addition, much of the language of Philemon echoes patron-client relationships. Paul reminds Philemon that God used him to bring salvation to his household. Therefore Philemon should be amenable to Paul's requests for Onesimus and grant "some benefit" to the apostle ([Phlm 19-20](#)).

In conclusion, the early church was immersed in a climate of patron-client relationships and reflects the jargon and practices of those relationships. It does not appear, however, that the early believers adopted the patron-client

system *carte blanche*. In many instances, the church appears to have rejected the onerous sense of obligation and the tedious *quid pro quo* that characterized much of Roman patronage, a trait that ran counter to the love commandment ([Jas 2:8-9](#)). Contrary to the conventions of his day, Jesus taught that one should invite the poor to banquets and give to those who are not able to repay ([Luke 14:1-24](#)). [Luke 7:36-50](#) represents a revision of patron-client relations within the context of the first century. Jesus, as the supreme benefactor, grants forgiveness, but he does so not as a superior to an inferior, expecting payment in kind. Rather, he counts himself among the poor, and brokers God's grace on their level. The creditor in [Luke 7:41-42](#) forgives both debtors and thus refuses to build up his client base. In these ways, Jesus challenges the entire patron-client system.³³ On

³³ On how Jesus called into question critical aspects of the patron-client system, see S. Mason, "Chief Priests, Sad-

the other hand, the profuse expression of gratitude and love of the one forgiven still makes sense within the world of patrons and clients. Thus Simon the Pharisee can understand what Jesus has done (7:43), yet at the same time he is invited to see things differently.³⁴

This critique of patronage carried over into the early church. Paul's counsel to the Ephesian elders that it is more blessed to give than to receive strikes at the core of patron-client relations. James chides his recipients for being overly dependent upon a wealthy patron who was trying to manipulate them as indebted clients (Jas 2:1-13).³⁵ Paul rebukes

ducees, Pharisees, and Sanhedrin in Acts," in *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting* (ed. Richard Bauckham; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 133-77, esp. 140.

³⁴ On how Jesus tapped into, yet altered, patron-client imagery, see Evelyn R. Thibaux, "'Known to Be a Sinner': The Narrative Rhetoric of Luke 7:36-50," *BTB* 23 (1993): 151-60, esp. 155.

Thessalonian believers who might have been loitering about waiting for the *sportulae* of wealthy patrons and refusing to go to work (1 Thess 4:10; 2 Thess 3:6-11).³⁶ In the end, the Christian gives to others in order to emulate Christ and bring honor and glory to God. In this way, the faith radically reconfigured the dynamics of patronage in the first-century world and undermined the principle of reciprocity, which was so entrenched in the Roman mind. God is the supreme benefactor-friend who gives from the heart out of his innate goodness and care for others. The church is to replicate this benefaction in the world and not uncritically endorse the patronage of its day.

³⁵ Alicia Batten, "God in the Letter of James," 257-58, 264-65.

³⁶ On the ill effects of dependence on the corn dole, see R. P. Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 12-20.

Annotated Bibliography

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tures. The student will have to sift through the offerings to find the articles that address particular research concerns.

- Joubert, Stephan. *Paul as Benefactor: Reciprocity, Strategy, and Theological Reflection in Paul's Collection*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 124. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000. This dissertation explores the principle of reciprocity inherent in patronage and relates it to Paul's missionary strategy. It is interesting to see how Paul both adapts and adopts the aspects of patronage found in his world.
- Saller, R. P. *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982. This is a good source to begin an in-depth study of patronage in the Roman Empire. It is thorough but comprehensible to the serious student.
- Treggiari, Susan. *Roman Freedmen during the Late Republic*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1969. Treggiari examines how manumission was brought about in the Roman Republic and the kinds of contributions freedmen made despite the prejudice directed at them by native-born Roman citizens. Treggiari attempts to extricate the values and contributions of Roman freedmen from their consistently negative portrayal in some ancient primary sources. The author includes discussions of manumission, adjustment to

a new life of freedom, rights before the law, and life as dictated by custom. This is a good place to explore the personal and social dynamics that freed slaves faced in an ancient elitist society.

18

The Greek Philosophers — Faith and Intellect in Dialogue

INTRODUCTION

Just as patron-client relationships determined much of the social world of the first century, so Hellenistic philosophy formed the foundation of the intellectual world during this period. The Hellenistic philosophers were the sem-

inal thinkers who inherited the philosophical traditions of Plato and Aristotle (Cicero, *Fin.* 4.3).¹ The Hellenistic philosophers' contribution to Greco-Roman thought consisted in their creative engagement with these traditions, an engagement that ranged from admiring modification to vehement rejection. Their task was to articulate a reasoned explanation of the cosmos and humankind and to prescribe the kinds of actions best

¹ Plato established his philosophical school, the Academy, in Athens in 369 B.C.E. and died in 347. Aristotle, the tutor of Alexander the Great, studied at the Academy from 367 to 347 B.C.E. and developed his own philosophical system; he died in 322. Within the first decade of the fourth century B.C.E., both Epicureanism and Stoicism had been established in Athens as well. Thus, roughly within one generation, the two great founding fathers of Greek philosophy and two of the most prominent of the Hellenistic philosophies had made their mark on the intellectual world.

suited for life in this world. Their worldviews not only influenced the life and thought of the early church but have continued to impact ways of seeing and acting to this day.