CHAPTER FOUR

CIVIC PATRONAGE IN THE PRINCIPATE

The particular questions to be discussed in this chapter all relate to the senatorial perceptions of the institution during the developed Principate (up to and including the reign of Marcus Aurelius). What were the attitudes of the literary elite toward civic patronage during this period? And how did perceptions and expectations change after Augustus? What was the relationship between formal *patronatus* and benefaction? What were the conditions and circumstances surrounding the initiation of these relationships? The discussion begins with an analysis of the theoretical concepts of benefaction and patronage in the literary evidence and then turns to a number of specific cases. In general one may see a growing influence of Stoic philosophy, not so much directed toward the role of the patron/benefactor as an imperial administrator (as outlined by Cicero *ad Q.fr. 1, 1*), but now in the role of broker and material benefactor in an area of mutual concern to the two parties.

4.1. Civic Patronage in the Literary Evidence of the Principate

The volume of literary material directly or indirectly related to the theory and practice of benefaction and patronage is not as extensive in the Principate as it is for the Late Republic. The major sources are Seneca's *de beneficis*, the correspondence of Fronto and especially that of Pliny, as well as occasional remarks in many authors including Tacitus and Epictetus. As with the literature of the Late Republic, it is the attitudes of the literary, senatorial elite that find expression. The exception is Epictetus whose discourses were selected, arranged and published by the consular historian Flavius Arrianus. The great majority of the passages that deal with patronage concentrate on personal relations between individuals, between leading senators and a wide variety of individuals including junior colleagues, members of the equestrian and decurial orders as well as freedmen and freedwomen. References to patronal action involving communities are a part of this mix. The range of activity, as documented most fully by Pliny and Fronto, is broad. Patrons and benefactors arrange marriages, provide their dependents with
material benefaction and legal protection; they also mediate disputes and secure honors and other advantages.¹

Benefaction and patronage assume mutual responsibilities, as Pliny and Seneca claim in virtually the same words. The latter writes at the beginning of the third book of de beneficiis: *non referre beneficiis gratiam et est turpe et apud omnes habetur* (3, 1.1), and then later confirms the point, noting that there is a precept (*dictum*): *turpe esse beneficiis vinci* (5, 2.1). The former uses the same language. In explaining why he has conferred an exceptional benefaction, Pliny notes *nam vinci in amore turpissimum est* (4, 1.5). Significant here is that *turpe* can apply equally to both sides in the relationship. There is then a moral equivalency of obligation that transcends differences in status and services. This feature is characteristic of the patronal system in general.² The failure to respond is not only personally shameful, but is to be condemned because it undermines social and civic harmony (Sen. *ben*. 1, 3–4; 3, 6.2; 4, 18.1).

There is an important implication to this moral equivalency. By performing services, one party can impose obligation on the other to reciprocate. Seneca was aware of the problem and condemns those who give in order to get (4, 14.1; 6.20.2). True benefaction, he argues, is not what is given, but rather the goodwill demonstrated, it involves *magnitudo* and is (or more accurately ‘should be’) motivated by the interest of the recipient (1, 5.2; 4, 29.2–3; 5, 11.5). Moreover, the benefaction must be freely (voluntarily) conferred (*beneficium enim id est, quod quis dedit, cum illi liceret et non dare*, 3, 19.1). This apparent paradox, one must reciprocate but the benefaction must be voluntarily conferred, is characteristic of most systems of patronage.³ At the purist and most theoretical level, reciprocity is essential but not mandatory; the benefactor does not / ought not to expect return; the beneficiary however should respond and do so in the appropriate manner.⁴ The ambivalent nature of reciprocation may explain in part why inscriptions mentioning patronage are so unspecific about the actual nature of exchange (cf. Ch. 7).

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¹ On the range of activity in general, Saller, *Personal Patronage*. The activity is not much different from what Caesar and Q. Oppius indicate, Representative Texts, J and K.
² Eisenstadt and Roniger, 2 ff.; also discussed in Ch. 1.
⁴ Litigation involving the two parties is of course not compatible with this ideal. Indeed both Seneca (*ben*. 3, 7.1: 14.3) and Fronto (*ad am*. 1, 1) felt it was fatal to the relationship. Actions involving third parties also posed serious difficulties (*Fronto ad M. Caes*. 3, 3).