

# PATRONAGE OF LETTERS IN THE EARLY ROMAN EMPIRE

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In the sociology of literature over the ages, patronage is undoubtedly one of the most pervasive themes.<sup>1</sup> The late 1st century AD presents no exception. Though the early Empire lacked a patron having the renown of Maecenas (d. 8 BC), it is nonetheless eminently worthy of study in this regard in view of two contemporary writers - Martial (AD 40 - c.103) and Statius (c.45 - c.96). Despite manifest differences in style and temperament between these poets, both can be described as occasional poets (i.e. poets composing for specific social occasions) and this fact alone renders patronage highly apposite.

Concentrating therefore on that period, I wish here to examine the phenomenon of literary patronage within the context of Roman *mores*. Broadly speaking, patronage of letters must be situated in the characteristically Roman system of patron-client relations. Topics to be discussed include its terminology and mechanics, origins, its purpose and value - material or otherwise - and the poet's economic position in society, and finally its continuity over Roman history. This study is undertaken in the form of a survey of some of the more important critical literature on the subject to have appeared in recent times, but I hope it can serve at the same time as a general introduction to the subject.

## I

The definition of the patron-client relationship offered by the social scientist Robert R. Kaufman provides a convenient starting-point. He has described this phenomenon as a "special type of dyadic exchange" which (a) "occurs between actors of unequal power and status", (b) "is based on the principle of reciprocity; that is, it is a self-regulating form of interpersonal exchange, the maintenance of which depends on the return that each actor expects to obtain by rendering goods and services to the other and which ceases once the expected rewards fail to materialize" and (c) is "particularistic and private, anchored only loosely in public law or community norms" (Kaufman 1974:285).<sup>2</sup>

The importance of personal patronage in Roman history has long been recognised (e.g. Friedlaender 1908:196-202; Warde Fowler 1908:269-70). From Republican times patronage, expressed by the Latin term *clientela*, was a major factor in all facets of social life, as illustrated by Brunt (1971:47-50; cf. Shelton 1988:13-17). Mutual interests and mutual services (*beneficia*), the stuff of patronage relationships, welded together Roman

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<sup>1</sup> This essay derives from an MA dissertation on the prose prefaces of Martial and Statius submitted at the University of Cape Town. I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor K.M. Coleman, for her guidance, as well as colleagues at UCT and Wits University, the examiners of the thesis, and *Akroterion's* reader for their helpful comments. I alone am responsible for any remaining deficiencies, inaccuracies and infelicities.

<sup>2</sup> In studying the Renaissance Lytle (1987) views all social groups as being formed in a continuum between friendship and patronage. Speaking of the same period in the first instance, Gunderheim (1981:3) describes patronage as "one of the dominant social processes of pre-industrial Europe. It is virtually a permanent structural characteristic of all early European material high culture, based as it is on production by specialists."

political factions in an almost feudal form of clientship; viewed in a favourable light these bonds were called *amicitia*, but otherwise *factio* (Syme 1939:157). The collapse of the Republic brought about the loss of democratic rights, and thereafter patronage became a "mainspring of public life" (de Ste Croix 1954:40). Under the Augustan Principate "political competition was sterilised and regulated through a pervasive system of patronage and nepotism" (Syme 1939:386).

Nor is the continued importance of patronage in later times difficult to identify. In fact the Augustan principate was, above all else, a manifestation on a vast scale of personal *clientela* (de Ste Croix 1954:40; Crook 1955:22; Yavetz 1988:96-97). The period following the death of Augustus did not witness any essential change in the system; in fact the *Epigrams* and the *Silvae*, together with the letters of the Younger Pliny, are among the most significant evidence of personal patronage at Rome in the 1st century AD. That the Romans regarded attachment to the rich as a respectable career in its own right is evident from Horace *Epist.* 1.17 and 1.18, addressed to young men who were about to join the entourage of the rich as a preliminary step in the *cursus honorum* (White 1982:57).

So pervasive was *amicitia* in the lives of the poets that the money they received from patrons should be viewed essentially as a function of the *amicitia* system rather than as direct payment for the poems themselves - a misconception born out of anachronism (White 1978:87-88). In other words, while poets had little hope of direct remuneration for their efforts, their economic situation was in large measure informed by ties of patronage (of which their writing was one aspect). A result of the indefinite nature of patronage was that in financial terms the poet's situation was very insecure, as Martial is at pains to stress in his *Epigrams*. The words of one scholar in the context of 18th century England can be applied to Rome of the 1st century AD: "...the very irregularity and unreliability [writers] complained about was one of the actual system's most typical features, and helped underscore the subservient relationship of writer to patron that the system actually fostered" (Evans 1989:29).

The importance of reciprocity cannot be over-emphasised in this regard. This element, prominent in Kaufman's definition above, has considerable implications in a Roman context. In broad outline, it can be said that the poet's task of writing is paralleled at some level by the protection provided by the patron, protection in matters both material (for example inheritances, gifts of cash and land) and intellectual (e.g. help in meeting criticism). The writing of poetry was only one of the tasks fulfilled by *clientes*; others joined the rich man's entourage, advertised his importance, and provided him with cultured companionship during his official duties and during his leisure (White 1982:58). It does not follow, however, that poets received immediate remuneration for their work, and in this regard it is as well to bear in mind Martial's frequent protestations of the sad lot suffered by poets in this regard. Details of this will be considered in due course, but at this point suffice it to note that these relationships were a two-way process.<sup>3</sup>

Typical of any institution which results in grouping, patronage had a contradictory effect on the social fabric of Rome. While on the one hand it was a strong integrating force (Saller 1982:38; Wallace-Hadrill 1989:71-78), on the other hand it gave rise to competition and hence civil strife. The difference between macrocosmic and microcosmic views of patronage is to some extent seen in the term *amicitia*: the word could mean anything from a political alliance to ordinary private friendship (Millar 1977:111).

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<sup>3</sup> Hands (1968): ch. 3 "Giving for a return" and ch. 4 "The nature of the return"; cf. White (1978:76 note 5).

When considering literary patronage during the reign of Domitian particularly, it is important to appreciate the rôle of the emperor himself. In terms of achieving advancement in society it is clear that proximity to the emperor on the part of the *cliens* was a key factor (Saller 1982:58-69). One effect of this situation, especially under the Julio-Claudians, was that imperial freedmen and slaves reached positions of power quite incongruous with their low birth, and this provided a source of tension between emperor and aristocracy (Millar 1977:69; Saller 1982:66). Thus on the one hand, being an *amicus* of the emperor implied substantial public honour and privilege as well as the ability to distribute *beneficia* to others, but on the other hand it was an acutely unstable position which exposed a *cliens* to pressures and suspicion from the emperor, the imperial court and the public (Millar 1977:116). Saller has shown that the emperor treated equestrian and senatorial offices as gifts in his power to bestow, without following objective criteria in determining the political advancement of his subjects: "[no] attempt was made in the Principate to transcend the particularistic criterion of patronage by the introduction of the universalistic and rational criteria of seniority and merit (in the modern sense)" (1982:110).

A function of the supreme political power of the emperor was the arbitrary nature of his patronage. In this light one of Martial's *Epigrams* shows the poet anxious about the outcome of a request for money made to Domitian, a request which seems to have been turned down:

at quam non tetricus, quam nulla nubilus ira,  
quam placido nostras legerat ore preces!

(6.10.5-6)

"How far from stern he was, how unclouded with anger;  
with how serene a look had he read my petition!"

The context of the poem makes it clear that Martial had made a request himself, possibly in verse, and was observing the emperor's expression as he read it (Millar 1977:496).

However, other poems show Martial and Statius to have been more successful in their requests to the emperor, and in the process to have received various *beneficia*. Statius secured from Domitian the right to draw water from the latter's Alban property (*Silu.* 3.1.61-64); Martial made the same request and, from the fact that the poem conveying the request was published (9.18), it is likely that he was successful. An important aspect of public life, Martial requested and gained from Domitian the *ius trium liberorum* (*Epigr.* 2.91-92; 3.95.5-6; 9.97.5-6), having based his claims on his poetry, and he is proud to have obtained citizenship for a considerable number of others (3.95.11; Millar 1977:496). Comparison can be drawn with the granting of the *ius trium liberorum* to Pliny the Younger, something gained for him through a petition by a close intimate of the emperor, Julius Seruianus (*Plin. Ep.* 10.2; Millar 1977:114). The fact that this important right could be obtained by petition by or for the childless again emphasises the extent to which political power was centralised in the hands of the emperor.

The younger Seneca writes in his *De Beneficiis* 6.34.1-2 that the custom of *amicitia* was first instituted at Rome by Gaius Gracchus and Livius Drusus, acting in imitation of Hellenistic monarchs. He adds that it became traditional for *amici* to be divided into three categories. These were, firstly, the people admitted into the private audience of the emperor; secondly, those admitted with a larger, but still restricted, number; and, thirdly, those let in without any distinction or additional privilege. It is uncertain whether Augustus or the later emperors followed this tripartite division. It seems the presence of this passage in Seneca can be ascribed to the Roman predilection to attribute customs to a *κρίστης*

(founder). The sources do not give any substantial evidence on this issue, although there are several references both literary and epigraphic which suggest the existence of this division (see Millar 1977:117). However, the paucity of such evidence leaves doubt as to its continued existence (Millar 1977:111).<sup>4</sup>

In considering the role of patronage in literature, an entirely different approach is taken by Zetzel (1982). He denies strenuously the importance of patronage to Latin poetry, as opposed to its importance to the poets themselves. His argument rests heavily on the dubious assertion that the addressee of a poem is not honoured by the poem in any way. He argues that the use of an address in a poem is not necessarily dictated by the relationship between the poet and the person whose name is in the vocative, but that it is a "correlate of both the subject and the style of the poem" (1982:88). This approach abolishes the notion of client-poetry, since the addressee is thus by definition not a patron at all, but rather a poetic fiction. Zetzel relies on dubious evidence in this regard (as shown by Badian 1985:350-51), and he is on still shakier ground when he asserts that "in the case of organized poetic books there is no reason to assume that the individual poems ever had an independent existence prior to the creation of the whole" (Zetzel 1982:89).<sup>5</sup>

## II

Contrary to what one might expect from comparable modern English usage, the words *patronus* and *cliens* were scarcely used to describe relationships of patronage in classical Latin. In fact, Seneca, Tacitus, Pliny and Suetonius never use *patronus* of literary relationships, nor even more generally of an influential protector; the word is used only of a man who has manumitted slaves, is the formally designated sponsor of a town or corporation, or a lawyer engaged in defence (White 1978:79; Saller 1982:8-10). Similarly, *cliens* was not used of people in the inferior position of these relationships, but rather of humble members of the lower classes; though used of a rich man's satellites, the related abstract noun *clientela* is never used of the relationship (White 1978:79-80; Saller 1982:9-10). The fact that these words were so infrequent suggests that there was some stigma attached to them; they can be thought to imply social inferiority and degradation (Saller 1982:9). However, White's claim (1978:79) that the word *patronus* was not used of the social role of the lordly man who receives the attentions of lesser men and in turn rewards them favours is overstated; in fact epigraphic evidence disproves the assertion (see Saller 1982:10, esp. note 11 and 1989:54-56).

*Amicus*, the word most widely used to refer to patron and client, was ambiguous enough to encompass both the superior and inferior parties. The tendency to use *amicus* rather than the more demeaning *cliens* for the inferior party does not imply any egalitarian ideology: adjectives such as *inferior* and *minor* could be used when necessary to stress differences in status (surveyed by Saller 1982:11-15). A general trend in the language of *amicitia* is that words avoiding distinction of status are used far more often than words which imply differentiation. Also, there are more words to designate the rich friend (e.g. *locuples*, *potens*, *beatus*) and they occur more often than those which indicate the subordinate friend (White 1978:81-82). A significant early use of the word *amicitia* to describe patron-client

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<sup>4</sup> E.g. Sen. *Clem.* 1.10.1 "cohors primae admissionis"; *ILS* 1078 Antonius Pius' "salutatio secunda". Concerning differentiated access, an alternative view to that of Millar is given by Gelzer (1969:104-6) and Rawson (1985:38-40).

<sup>5</sup> In marked contrast with this approach Evans, in connection with Ben Jonson, has focused on what he calls the psychological effects of patronage on a poet's work (1989:23-30).

relationships can be seen at Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* 1.140-41, where "sperata uoluptas/ suavis amicitia" has been taken to refer to the relationships between Lucretius and his patron Memmius (Allen 1938:181; Wiseman 1982:35-36). Brunt has concluded from his study of patron-client relations in the late Republic that the term *amicitia* has a vast range, covering "every degree of genuinely or overtly amicable relation" (1965:20). This conclusion can be extended to embrace the Principate and the Empire (cf. Mayer 1989:17). The term *amicus* is very seldom used in inscriptions as a formal designation to refer to clients of the emperor. This is probably because there were political dangers in claiming publicly a status which the emperor could revoke at his will (Millar 1977:116).

The basic words used to describe the exchanges so essential to patronage relationships may be summed up as follows. Most important was the term *officium*, which originally referred to the activity particular to a specific group of people; it then developed into an idea of rules or obligations peculiar to these categories, and later expressed the *fides* implicit in relationships of this nature (Saller 1982:15). From this it is evident that reciprocity is a prominent element of patronage relationships, as is clear from Cicero's *De Officiis*. *Officium* in the sense of "exchange" is closely paralleled by *beneficium*, which literally means "kindness" or "favour", and *meritum* is semantically close to these. Though some scholars have tried to determine difference in the force of these three words, it is clear that there is some overlap between them (Saller 1982:17-21). The term *gratia* ("goodwill") differs from the other three in that it refers more to an attitude than an action (Saller 1982:21). The terminology for these reciprocal relationships and their agents can thus be described as largely unspecific.

### III

Some attention should be given to the mechanics of patronage, the day-to-day processes whereby such relationships were conducted.<sup>6</sup> Martial's *Epigrams*, together with the *Satires* of Juvenal, give considerable insight into the daily tasks of the *cliens* in the 1st century AD. A great many of the *Epigrams* are devoted to complaints about the many demeaning chores to which a *cliens* has to devote himself daily, for example the *salutatio* mentioned at *Epigr* 1.70. It is essential to bear in mind, however, that Martial's poetry cannot be taken at face-value as a reflection of Roman life, since he was writing satirical epigrams rather than serious autobiography (Hardie 1983:51-56; Saller 1983:246). Hardie has pointed out that this "mendicant façade" can be traced to Greek precedents, and he has gone so far as to portray Martial's *persona* as a "selective caricature" of the conditions of his life. Undoubtedly, Martial did have some duties to fulfil as a client, but there is every reason to assume that he has exaggerated (Hardie 1983:55-56).<sup>7</sup> At the same time, it should be said that our knowledge of this Roman custom derives largely from hostile sources, such as Martial and Juvenal who were in the inferior position within such relationships.

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<sup>6</sup> The "network approach", a new sociological technique focusing on social structure rather than individuals, may be found in Wellman and Berkowitz (1988). Bodemann's essay in that collection, "Relations of production and class rule: the hidden basis of patron clientage" (1988:198-220), examines patronage relations in modern Sardinia from a Marxist perspective.

<sup>7</sup> The problem of poetic sources for social history is not confined to Martial. Allen (1950) provided an important exposition of *persona* theory as applied to Roman poetry. More recently Winkler (1983:1-22, 59-89) and Braund (1989:1-3) have focused on Roman satire. See also Griffin (1985:48-64) and, in the context of English literature, Elliott (1982).

The *Commentariolum Petitionis*, traditionally attributed to Quintus Tullius Cicero (102-43 BC) but of disputed authenticity, divides clients into three categories according to the nature and extent of their duties. First there were the *salutatores*, who came in the morning to pay their respects and made several other calls as well (*Comment. Pet.* 35; cf. Cic. *Fam.* 9.20.1); also the *deductores*, who stayed on to escort the great man as he went down to the forum and perhaps for the duration of the first business (*Comment. Pet.* 36; cf. Cic. *Att.* 1.18.1; Cic. *Mur.* 70); and the *adsectatores*, whose devotion and duties were to one patron only and who could thus remain with him for the entire day, helping in various ways (*Comment. Pet.* 37; cf. Cic. *Mur.* 70-73). This last position, which was also the humblest, could often amount to a full-time occupation, whereas the *salutatores* were the least committed in terms of time spent attending any one patron (Wiseman 1982:29-30).

These categories would appear to give a fair indication of the various tasks involved in the role of client. Martial writes of his being expected at the early-morning *salutatio* (1.70; 9.100; 10.82), and also to join the patron's entourage on its way to the forum (3.46; 9.100; 10.82). At 3.46 Martial is seen attending his patron in the course of his daily work, including at court; the evenings might be devoted to attending dinner-parties of the patron to provide entertainment, even if that meant suffering his abuse:

Inuitas centum quadrantibus et bene cenas.  
Vt cenem inuitor, Sexte, an ut inuideam?

(4.68)

"You invite me at the cost of 25 asses and you dine well.  
Am I invited to dine, Sextus, or to envy?"

Martial stresses that the life of a client was tiring and tiresome; that is the impression conveyed by, for example, *Epigr.* 10.70, 74 and 82 (Saller 1982:128-29). In sociological terms, such customs as the daily *salutatio* can be regarded as ritualisation which reinforced patronage relationships and gave them public visibility (Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984:58; cf. MacMullen 1974:107-109).

The most demeaning of these customs are what Martial, for one, is eager to escape; to this end he requires patronage generous enough to free him from these duties. In this context Martial's declared aim of *otium*, i.e. literary leisure underpinned by financial security in the form perhaps of a country villa, is the antithesis to *ambitio*, the burdens of which plague the poet's life.<sup>8</sup>

What benefit did the patron get from these relationships? Apart from the unique skills of a poet in adding *elegantia* to the rich man's leisure time, there were a whole host of functions which clients fulfilled. In many ways the institutions of Roman society were poorly developed, and so it was left to *amici* to supply services analogous to those of merchants, lawyers and insurers, for example (Hands 1968:32).

Direct commissions for poems as well as for other works of art, in the modern sense of artistic commissions, do not appear to have been the norm in imperial Rome, or earlier, for that matter. It is likely that much was written on the prompting of a patron, but nowhere is there evidence that this was done with anything like the directness with which we associate a modern commission. Insofar as these promptings (to write, for example, celebratory poems) did take place, they tended to be more subtle than a commercial transaction. In fact we have no evidence of arrangements which commit patrons to pay for

<sup>8</sup> Taylor (1968:486) has discussed *otium* in these terms.

any poem, let alone stipulate an amount; it can be assumed that this would have been too crass for Roman sensibilities (White 1978:86).

In considering specifically literary patronage, as distinct from other types of *amicitia* relationships, some consideration should be given to the directness of the patron's influence over the poet and his writing, which are two separate issues (cf. Zetzel 1982). Traditionally it has been assumed that Maecenas conscripted poets to eulogize the ideals and personalities of the new state under Augustus (e.g. Syme 1939:253-55), but as Dalzell (1956:153-55) has pointed out, there is no real proof that Maecenas' intervention with the poets of his age was as direct as that. There is little justification for holding that Maecenas' patronage was conditional on a set political programme.<sup>9</sup> The occasional poetry of Martial and Statius, however, by and large fulfils a very direct social function (e.g. praising, thanking, requesting) whereas the extant Augustan poets do not seem to have been subjected to "occasional" constraints to the same extent.

#### IV

The economics of the poet's position in society are centrally at issue in a discussion of this nature. Again the presence of a literary *persona* in Martial makes it difficult to assess objectively the situation of a poet at this time. Whatever the extent to which poets had to use their craft as a source of income, it is clear that there were other opportunities of earning available. Military service and other types of civil service (particularly of an administrative or financial character) were among the other options open to poets (White 1982:53-55).

From the situations implied by Statius' *Silvae* it can be assumed that this poet was in a position similar to that of Martial with regard to patronage; furthermore, it seems that their condition was closely matched by that of Juvenal some two or three decades later (White 1978:77). Statius' literary *persona* is based squarely on his status as a professional poet.

Such aspects of Roman literary patronage had their roots in the activities of Romans abroad; contact with Greek encomiastic poets was a major factor. The advent of Greek slaves at Rome meant that many of these Hellenistic practices came to Rome. This was then assimilated into the cult of the emperor, and increasing imperial patronage of the arts brought with it increasing praise for the emperor (Hardie 1983:39). The Greeks provided poets with the archetype of writers needed by great men seeking political advantage from literary support; the tradition of Greek panegyric, dating from the fourth century BC, provided the technique and an available body of thematic material for these purposes (Williams 1982:9).

#### V

Among the most problematic issues surrounding patronage is the purpose it fulfilled for the poets. Did they need patrons to fulfil their material needs, as one might reasonably conclude from reading Martial's *Epigrams*, or was it more a matter of the patrons' lending support in literary disputes? Modern scholarship on this issue witnesses a debate

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<sup>9</sup> It might be noted, though, that Horsfall (1981, at 1), followed by Griffin (1983) and DuQuesnay (1984), has revived the view that "Maecenas did influence and indeed direct the Augustan poets".

between White and Saller on the relative importance of material and non-material support for the poets in terms of *amicitia* relationships.

White's approach is that a poet in Martial's situation had no urgent need of financial assistance, since he had enough resources to fulfil the property qualification of an *eques*. Even the poorest knight earned enough from rents and interests to lead a modestly comfortable life; Martial was thus concerned not with how to secure his basic income but how to enhance it, and thus to improve his standard of living (White 1982:52). In this regard White (1978:90-91) has formulated seven categories of *beneficia* in terms of which clients could profit. These are (1) inheritances and bequests first and foremost (non-senators needed the *ius trium liberorum* before they could take up these); (2) cash gifts made during the rich man's lifetime, of which Pliny's gift of a *uiaticum* to Martial is an example (*Epist.* 3.21; Pliny says clearly that the gift was made in recognition of their friendship and the verses Martial wrote about him, and that this took place in accordance with an old custom);<sup>10</sup> (3) loans at low or no interest, which would have been tantamount to gifts when given to an unscrupulous borrower; (4) gifts of land and houses, such as Horace and Martial received; (5) lodgings in the townhouses and villas of the rich;<sup>11</sup> (6) sinecures and beneficial appointments arranged for poorer friends; and (7) marriage to the daughters of rich men. White emphasises, however, that the property qualification for a knight (400 000 HS) would in its own right have yielded enough income (from rents and interests) to ensure financial security without the additional benefits of patronage (White 1978:88-89).

Saller, on the other hand, has opposed the view that Martial's status as an *eques* necessarily implies financial independence of the sort that guarantees a desirable standard of living. In this regard the validity of White's evidence (1978:89) has been called into question. For one thing, Juvenal *Sat.* 7, cited by White as evidence that the rich are reluctant to support poor poets, in fact implies that the rich were expected to provide the sort of support whose absence Juvenal bemoans. Furthermore, the fact that Martial makes relatively little mention of monetary gifts is of no significance; Martial's poem for Pliny (10.19) makes no reference to the gift we know Martial received (Saller 1982:28 note 94). Saller (1983:250) has asserted that the equestrian census of 400 000 HS was drawn up in Republican times, and that in the rising cost of living at Imperial Rome this would certainly not have been enough to maintain a decent, let alone luxurious, standard of living. However, this reasoning is invalidated by the fact that there is no evidence of serious inflation or devaluation at Rome in this period.<sup>12</sup>

Publication was a crucial benefit for poets in respect of patronage. In a society without a highly developed book trade and without laws of copyright, wealthy men were in a uniquely privileged position in their ability to bring the works of poets to public attention (White 1978:83; Wiseman 1982:37). Thus it is that Martial in *Epigr.* 12.2 appeals to Arruntius Stella for assistance in the publication of his poems, a request matched in a different way by Statius in his *Silu.* 2 *praef.* addressed to Atedius Melior. Poets needed encouragement, publicity, protection and criticism of their work; in particular, they

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<sup>10</sup> Saller (1983:253) has stressed that these were important financially and more frequent than White suggests.

<sup>11</sup> *Silu.* 2.2, occasioned by Statius' stay at Pollio's villa at Surrentum; see Nisbet (1978).

<sup>12</sup> See Jones (1974:187-227). The phenomenon of inflation or devaluation seems to apply only to the late second century and beyond. This does not tell the whole story, however, as it should also be borne in mind that occasionally shortages of essential goods such as corn caused prices to rise sharply (Jones 1974:192).

required help from influential friends when, in the circumstances of unrestrained or distorted reproduction of their work, they might face the embarrassing problem of having libellous works falsely attributed to them. An example of this can be seen when Martial asks Paulus for help in such a situation (cf. 10.3 to Priscus):

si quisquam mea dixerit malignus  
atro carmina quae madent ueneno,  
ut uocem mihi commodos patronam  
et quantum poteris, sed usque, clames:  
"Non scripsit meus ista Martialis."

(7.72.12-16)

"Should some nasty person describe as mine poems which drip with black poison, please lend me a patron's voice and shout as loudly and as long as you can: 'My Martial did not write that.'"

These aspects of patronage must have had a very practical application in terms of a poet's success (White 1978:85; Saller 1983:247). Poets relied on patrons to organise and finance public readings (cf. Plin. *Ep.* 8.12); on a more aesthetic level Martial sometimes asked friends to read his poems with a view to suggesting improvements (e.g. 5.80 to Severus; Saller 1983:248).

## VI

Some consideration should be given to Martial's frequent assertion that the standard of literary patronage had declined considerably by his time. However, as has been noted previously, one should avoid taking at face-value what Martial says about his own circumstances: such is the nature of his literary *persona*. Certainly, it is one thing to speak of continuity in the overall style of patronage from one period to the next, and it is something completely different to consider whether the same amount of opportunity is available to a poet in one age compared with those of a previous age. The gist of Martial's tirades bears more on the latter, i.e. that patrons are not as generous as they were in previous generations. The main development in *amicitia* since the first century BC was the centralisation of political power in imperial hands, beginning with Augustus; this meant that, by the magnitude and variety of the *beneficia* he could confer, the emperor himself was a key factor in the availability of patronage. If there really was a decline in literary patronage, the tastes of the reigning emperor would have played no small part. We have already seen that the emperor's discretionary powers were considerable, and it can be said that different emperors placed different degrees of importance on literature, and had different tastes in literature (see Williams 1978:280-286 and 1982:3-27).

Complaints about an alleged decline in the quantity and quality of patronage should certainly be seen against the background of widespread misgivings on the part of writers of the early Empire about the prevailing condition of cultural decadence. Tacitus' *Dialogus de Oratoribus* is one important expression of this sentiment, even though the work is limited ostensibly to rhetoric.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> In one way or another, many of these value-judgments have filtered down to the modern age, through a long history of literary prejudice; merely the use of the term "Silver Latin", as opposed to "Classical" or "Golden Latin", is testimony to this long-standing view (Williams 1978:6; White 1982:61).

Vessey (1973:16) supports the contemporary view that the 1st century AD witnessed decline in the standard of literary patronage. Similarly, Seager (1977:40-50) takes seriously allegations of a decline in *amicitia*, whereas LaFleur (1979) and Saller (1982:11 note 15) are more circumspect about the comments of Tacitus and Juvenal in this regard. As Saller has pointed out, there is no solid basis for evaluating the notion; decline was such a common motif in Roman literature that it should always inspire suspicion (1983:255). In the words of Mayer (1989:16) concerning Juvenal: "The theme of abused friendship is part of a larger concern, the tottering rule of *officium* in Roman society."

Much of what Martial says of a decline in literary patronage is expressed in terms of an ideal figure, namely Maecenas. In a much-quoted epigram, Martial says that the absence of large-scale literary patronage ("Maecenases") is responsible for the absence of first-rate writers ("Virgils"):

sint Maecenates, non derunt, Flacce, Marones,  
Vergiliumque tibi uel tua rura dabunt  
(8.55[56].5-6)

"Let there be Maecenases, Flaccus, and there will be no shortage of Virgils; or even your own farm (i.e. your money properly bestowed as a patron) will produce a Virgil for you" (cf. Post 1908:203 *ad loc.*).

Generally speaking, Maecenas' name goes together with images of *otium*. In a poem to Lucius Julius, answering a challenge to write more poetry on a bigger scale, Martial says (cf. 12.3[4].2; Mayor 1853:158 on Juv. 7.94; Kay 1985:65):

Otia da nobis, sed qualia fecerat olim  
Maecenas Flacco Vergilioque suo  
(1.107.3-4)

"Give me leisure - leisure such as once Maecenas provided for his own Horace and Virgil."

Certainly, this image of Maecenas as the ideal patron, allaying all the poets' material difficulties, became a well-worn topos in literature; by the middle of the 1st century AD his name had become a byword for a good literary patron (Vessey 1973:16; Quinn 1982:117). That this topos lived long beyond classical times is adequately attested.<sup>14</sup> As White has commented (1978:77), it is quite probable that through their friendship with Maecenas, Virgil and Horace were in more favourable circumstances than Martial, but that in many ways such a relationship should be considered the exception rather than the rule. There is no compelling reason to believe that the Augustan poets were in any radically different position to those of Martial's time, except insofar as the emperor's monopolistic tendencies increased. However, it is true that the Augustan poets mention fewer patrons than do their Flavian successors.

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<sup>14</sup> For example William Herbert, the Third Earl of Pembroke, was described as "the greatest Maecenas to learned men of any peer of his time and since. He was very generous and open handed" (quoted in Brennan 1988:150, cf. 83). See also Curtius (1953:416 note 9) and Gold (1982:xi).

Personal patronage has emerged from this study as a major integrating force in the fabric of Roman social relations, existing in a context of loose reciprocity. I have tried to show that patronage of letters is simply one branch of this pervasive phenomenon. The same basic patterns of *amicitia* can be seen to endure from the Republic to the Empire, though the autocratic rule of emperors brought about greater centralisation of power than had previously been the case. An important lesson to be learned is the unreliability of the literary evidence on patronage - most notably that of Martial and his "mendicant façade".

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