

Problems with Patronage in Imperial Rome 70-130 CE

Among the many targets of the Roman satirist Juvenal are the equestrian class patrons of Imperial Rome. Juvenal regards these patrons as greedy, hypocritical, and cruel, ultimately offering nothing of value to their clients. However, scholarship on the patron-client relationship in Juvenal deemed it an unreliable source for details on the reality of this social practice during the satirists' lifetime (Cloud-1989 205-218). Although more recent scholarship has accepted that Juvenal's satires contain substantial resonances with the contemporary social and political landscape of Rome (Uden-2015) (Geue-2017), there has not been updated analysis of patronage in Juvenal's *Satires*. In this paper, I examine two of Juvenal's *Satires*, 5 and 9, the two which offer the most focused, but not only, criticism of the contemporary system of patronage. I put this in conversation with the *Epistulae* of Pliny the Younger's criticism of the patron, most notably letters 2.6 and 9.30. I ultimately argue that these two contemporary authors offer startlingly similar criticisms of patrons which not only reinforces the historicizing potential of the *Satires* but also demonstrates the solutions elite Romans proposed for this much criticized system.

Roman writers from Cicero (*De Amicitia*) to Seneca (*De Beneficiis*) have written on the importance of gift exchange to Roman Elite relationships. As Miriam Griffin summarizes, according to these two authors, relationships between elites were meant to exude equality, both in terms of language and gift exchange (Griffin-2003 97). Although the gifts exchanged did not need to be literally equal, they were meant to be equal relative to the means of both parties. Illustrating this is Pliny in *Epistle* 1.19, where Pliny writes to a friend whose wealth Pliny intends to quadruple so that he may reach equestrian rank. In return, Pliny only requests that his friend utilize his gift with dignity (*dignitas*) and the highest modesty (*modestissime*) (1.19 2-4).

In *Satire 9*, Juvenal denounces the morals of the patron and describes the unequal exchange of gifts through a conversation between a client named Naevolus, who is complaining about the treatment he has received from his unnamed patron. According to Naevolus, he has rendered a service to his patron, having sex with his patron's wife at the request of his patron (9.71-4), for which he was not given a promised reward. This situation illustrates an upsetting of the intricate balance of gift exchange. Pliny also offers similar criticisms of patrons and gift exchange. In letter 9.30, Pliny writes that men hardly give to those that would not give back a large reward, and that actions of true generosity were very rare (*tam raram*) in contemporary Rome (9.30 2-4). Most emphasized by Pliny is the desire of having things (*habendi cupido*) which has infected the Roman elite. Just as Juvenal writes in *Satire 9*, it is the patron who is attempting to profit from the client, not the opposite, as was the ideal championed by Cicero and Seneca.

Similarly critical to the patron-client relationship was the dinner. In *Satire 5* the speaker, Juvenal, describes all the wrongs a patron will commit onto you, the client, during a hypothetical dinner. During this dinner, the patron serves lavish food and drink to himself, while the clients receive dry wine, moldy bread, and other disgusting dishes (5.25-35, 60-75). According to Juvenal, this is done not only to save the patron money, but also to humiliate the client in front of the patron (5.156-159). In letter 2.6, Pliny writes to a friend about growing greed and unequal relationships among his fellow elites. On the topic of dinner, Pliny writes that he does not approve of serving different dishes to parties of different status. According to Pliny, he treats as equal all whom he treats as equal on the table (2.6.3).

This paper analyzes the perceptions of the system of patronage within elite communities from the authors Juvenal and Pliny the Younger. The satirist Juvenal, considered unreliable for

social history by past historians, seems to have been responding to contemporary social issues also shared by Pliny. This analysis first demonstrates Juvenal's utility for social history and historicizing and also allows us to better understand the problems contemporary Romans had within elite relationships and the solutions proposed by two authors communicating in vastly different mediums.

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