

do ut det: Patronage and Prayer in Martial's Epigrams

Scholars of Roman religion and history have already observed that there is a great deal of similarity between the relationship Romans have with their gods and the relationship between clients and patrons; both of these relationships are reciprocal, asymmetrical and based on the notion of *fides* (Saller 1982, Scheid 2015). This paper will examine the intersection between human-divine and client-patron relationships in Martial's *Epigrams*. Martial often reflected on the proper relationships between client and patron, going beyond considerations of material gifts into the questions of duty, gratitude and greed (Sullivan 1991). I propose that studying the role of prayer within the context of patronage can advance our understanding of how Martial used Roman religious thinking to define social relationships.

The line between gods and human patrons can sometimes be blurred, as in epigram 12.77, in which Aethon's mistake during a prayer to Jupiter (1: *multis dum precibus Iovem salutat*) results in him dining at home (6: *adfecit domicenio clientem*). The uses of *cliens* to signify a votary of a god and *salutare* to mean praying are not unprecedented; furthermore, this kind of punishment could reasonably be imagined as something inflicted by a human patron on their client. In spite of these parallels between the ways gods and humans treat their subordinates, Martial nevertheless does not treat his non-imperial patrons as divinities in his poetry. For example, birthday rituals from the early imperial period onward show a trajectory towards performing cultic activity that recognizes the patron as a deity (Argetsinger 1992). In Martial's birthday epigrams, however, the description of cultic activity is minimal and unspecific (10.87.4: *natalem colimus, tacete lites*). In fact, the divine *genius* of the patron is never praised or even mentioned in his poetry. A sense emerges that Martial is careful to distinguish human and

divine actors in his poetry, especially in the sphere of social relations. Martial appears to create a triangular system in which clients, patrons and gods each play an important role: clients pray to gods for the wealth and wellbeing of their patrons, gods enrich the patrons, and patrons give gifts to their clients in exchange for their petitions and services. This system, like many other social relations in Martial, is best illustrated in satirical epigrams which make their misgivings apparent. For example, in epigram 1.99 Martial and his fellow clients pray for their generous patron Calenus to become even wealthier. Their prayers were granted (5: *audit vota deus precesque nostras*), but in turn Calenus became stingy and gave less to his clients. Similarly, 9.42 is a prayer to Apollo to grant his patron Stella a consulship, for which Martial will, in good Roman fashion, offer the god a sacrifice (8: *felix tunc ego debitorque voti*). The role of prayer in these epigrams is evidently not to ask for personal enrichment, but for the prosperity of the patron, which will in turn enrich the client.

Finally, I will turn to the role of the emperor within this system. Given the emperor's own divine status, his place in the "triangle" of gods-patrons-clients is at times ambivalent. On one hand, in 7.60 Martial can claim to Jupiter that his excessive prayers should not be looked down upon, since he prays for the emperor's sake, while he makes petitions for his own sake to the emperor (7-8: *te pro Caesare debeo rogare: pro me debeo Caesarem rogare*). This example shows that the emperor can be placed into the existing model as a human patron. The problem arises, however, with the identification of Domitian with Jupiter, which results in petitions made to the emperor being likened to prayers. In 8.24, Domitian is asked to be accessible for requests the same way Jupiter is always open to prayers and offerings (4: *offendunt numquam tura precesque Iovem*). Just as a god is expected to respond to individual prayers, so the emperor ought to allow himself to be asked and give back, if the petitioner deserves it (Nauta 2002).

Martial further notes in the same poem that gods are not created by those who make expensive statues, but by those who pray (6: *qui rogat, ille facit*). The complex relationship between divinity, reciprocity and patronage illustrated in these epigrams gives an insight into Martial's conception of the emperor and the imperial cult in the wider context of Roman society and religion.

Bibliography

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