

THE GOOD KING AND THE SECOND SOPHISTIC: AN IDEOLOGICAL BARGAIN

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I

Before I begin, it would be useful to elaborate on the title of this paper. Who was the Good King? The view most often encountered in the ancient world is that the chief influencer of a king's actions was his personality, and that a king's rule should be based on and legitimised by his personal qualities; as Veyne puts it, "people did not talk about the craft of kingship, instead they exalted the virtues of the reigning prince".¹ In response to the monarchies established by the successors of Alexander the Great, a number of works were composed by the Greeks which held that a king needed to behave in certain ways, owing this behaviour to his innate goodness and personal dignity.² In effect, the Greeks constructed and presented Hellenistic kings with an image of an ideal king which, it was hoped, real kings would strive to live up to. This is the 'Good King ideology', the ideology that prescribed standards of behaviour that every good and legitimate ruler should observe.³ This ideology remained ever present in the Roman imperial period; the Roman emperor also had to appear to his subjects as a 'Good King' in order that he might ensure enthusiasm and approval for his rule.⁴

The Second Sophistic is a somewhat more difficult phenomenon to define. The term was coined by the biographer and sophist Philostratus in his work, *Lives of the Sophists*, to refer to the rhetorical and literary movement that flourished in the Greek east from about AD 50 to 250. In modern scholarship, the term is used to refer both to the historical period and to the literary and

¹ P. Veyne, *Bread and Circuses: Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism* (Harmondsworth 1976) 377.

² For a detailed discussion of these works, their authors, and various inscriptions communicating this ideology, see F.E. Adcock, 'Greek and Macedonian Kingship', *PBA* 39 (1953) 163-83; F.W. Walbank, 'Monarchies and Monarchic Ideas', *CAH* 7 (1984) 63-100. Also to an extent, G. Shipley, *The Greek World After Alexander 323-30 BC* (London 2000) 170.

³ See, for example, E.S. Gruen, 'Introduction', in A. Bulloch et al. (eds), *Images and Ideologies* (London 1993) 7-8.

⁴ See, for example, R.H. Barrow, *Plutarch and His Times* (London 1967) 137-39.

rhetorical movement.⁵ Scholars have approached and interpreted the Second Sophistic in various ways. Some prefer to emphasise the significance of the Second Sophistic in terms of its relationship to Rome. Bowersock, for example, holds that “it could be argued without apology that the Second Sophistic has more importance in Roman history than it has in Greek literature”.⁶ Others see it primarily as an expression of Hellenism and Greek identity invigorated in response to the Roman occupation; as Bowie puts it, Greeks needed “to reassure themselves that Greece had a claim comparable to Rome”.⁷ It is fair to say, however, that there is no single correct approach to the Second Sophistic; it made an impact in various domains: literary, historical, philosophical and rhetorical. This is confirmed by the existence of a number of excellent specialised studies, each concentrating on different aspects of this phenomenon.⁸

I am particularly interested in the way sophists functioned within the ideological context of Roman imperial rule. We know that the Roman imperial government spared no effort to present itself to its subjects as a benevolent power serving its subjects’ best interests. We also know that sophists of the Second Sophistic collaborated in no small degree in this effort, as they provided the Roman imperial government with a great deal of ideological support; in fact, sophists appear to have been the chief disseminators of the so-called ‘beneficial ideology’.⁹ Sophists deemed Roman rule beneficial due to peace, both established and maintained;¹⁰ to security against external attack; and to the general safety and freedom of the inhabitants.¹¹ The ‘prince of neurotics’ himself, Aelius Aristides, claimed that

⁵ See, for example, S. Swain, *Hellenism and Empire: Language, Classicism and Power in the Greek World AD 50-250* (Oxford 1996) 1; T. Whitmarsh, *The Second Sophistic* (Oxford 2005) 6-10.

⁶ G.W. Bowersock, *Greek Sophists in The Roman Empire* (Oxford 1969) 44.

⁷ E.L. Bowie, ‘The Greeks and their Past in the Second Sophistic’, in M.I. Finley (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Society* (London 1974) 208-9.

⁸ G.W. Bowersock (ed.), *Approaches to the Second Sophistic: Papers Presented at the 105th Annual Meeting of the American Philological Association* (Pennsylvania 1974).

⁹ V. Nutton, ‘The Beneficial Ideology’, in P.D.A. Garnsey and C.R. Whittaker (eds), *Imperialism in the Ancient World* (Cambridge 1978) 209-21. The benefits of Roman rule as seen by these Greek writers and sophists are described in vague general categories but they can be used neutrally “to define provincial attitudes to the Roman Empire and to construct an ideology in which both audience and orator shared” (Nutton 209); also see Whitmarsh (n.5) 12.

¹⁰ See, for example, Plut. *Mor.* 824 C-D: “So far as peace is concerned the peoples have no need of statesmanship at present; for all war, both Greek and foreign, has been banished among us ...”

¹¹ Dio P. *Or.* 31.111.

the benefits of Roman rule outweighed all the benefits of Greek democracy.¹² Sophists almost always belonged to the Greek upper ruling class, which was for the greatest part supportive of Roman rule.¹³ This support, therefore, is hardly surprising, and even less so when we consider that many of the sophists had personal links with and had prospered under the emperors.¹⁴

The issue of particular interest to this discussion will be the intimate relationship of the Second Sophistic with the Good King ideology. To be more precise, its relationship with an aspect of the Good King ideology which demanded a 'Good King' to act as a benefactor. The role sophists and their oratory played in embassies requesting various benefactions from the Roman emperor was crucial, and this fact is often noted by modern scholars.¹⁵ Nevertheless, this issue will be readdressed as I believe that the true significance of these embassies has been largely missed in modern scholarship. In this paper I intend to examine the impact the sophists of the Second Sophistic had on the emperor's role as benefactor of Greek cities, and the emperors' influence on the sophists' role as benefactors of these same cities. I hope to suggest that the relationship of the emperors and the sophists can perhaps be best understood in terms of ideological exchange, where both sides helped elevate each other's ideological concerns.

II

Philostratus' work is the principal source for the relationship of emperors and sophists and for the phenomenon of the Second Sophistic in general. Philostratus' reliability, however, has been questioned, and often justifiably.¹⁶ Nevertheless, although Philostratus is by no means free from error, in several

¹² For Aristides' *Roman Oration*, see B. Forte, *Rome and the Romans as the Greeks Saw Them* (Rome 1972) 399-405. The chief point of Aristides' *Roman Oration* is that all are benefited by Roman rule, Greeks and barbarians. He stated that the advantages of Roman rule went far beyond those of Greek democracy; Romans rule over free men and are superior administrators. For further examples and a detailed discussion, see Nutton (n.9) 210.

¹³ Already in the late Republic there appears to have developed what has been characterised as an "open conspiracy in which Greek and Roman aristocracies found a bond of sympathy and material interest" (M.H. Crawford, 'Greek Intellectuals and the Roman Aristocracy in the First Century B.C.', in Garnsey and Whittaker [n.9] 194, quoting E.W. Gray).

¹⁴ For the personal relationship between Dio of Prusa and Trajan, see Philostr. *VS* 488. For Trajan's friendship with Polemo, see *VS* 532. For Marcus Aurelius and Herodes, *VS* 566.

¹⁵ Bowersock (n.6) 9-11; F. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World (31 BC-AD 337)* (London 1977) 385: "Once the hearing was gained, all might depend on the favour with which the emperor greeted the oration; hence arose the well-attested role of the orators of the Second Sophistic in embassies before the emperor".

¹⁶ For some demonstrable inaccuracies see, for example, C.P. Jones, 'The Reliability of Philostratus', in Bowersock (n.8) 15.

instances his statements have been collaborated in minute detail by inscriptional evidence.¹⁷ As shown below, Philostratus presents the ability of the sophists and quality of their oratory as crucial in determining the outcome of the Imperial embassies, thus bestowing on the sophists an importance that is sometimes thought to be exaggerated or overstated.¹⁸ I see no valid reason for this skepticism; the idea that the envoy's position, character and ability could be crucial in determining the outcome of the embassy predates the Second Sophistic.¹⁹ Additionally, the sophists' crucial role in ensuring the emperor's favour was known and mentioned by other authors,²⁰ and epigraphic evidence and the statements of the sophists themselves are equally suggestive.²¹

In regard to the sophists' role as benefactors of their own cities, both epigraphic and literary evidence leaves no doubt that the sophists benefited their cities often and generously. The evidence for these benefactions has already been discussed in detail,²² rendering any further discussion unnecessary. Nevertheless, for my purposes it will be necessary to assign the sophists' benefactions a place in the wider context of the ideology of civic benefactions. Evidence for the ideology of public benefactions in Greek cities is abundant. This applies particularly to epigraphic evidence as city elites always commemorated their benefactions and stated their motivations, or how they liked to see them, clearly. For my purposes, therefore, this category of evidence is relatively unproblematic.

Sophists and the Good King

Probably the most important role any good king had to perform was that of a benefactor. Kingship was in fact considered by some to be a prerogative of benefactors whose leadership people were generally willing to accept, or so

¹⁷ Jones (n.16) 15.

¹⁸ See, for example, E.L. Bowie, 'The Importance of Sophists', *YCS* 27 (1982) 29-55.

¹⁹ For example, the city of Rhodus sent Augustus' admiral Seleucus with a request for confirmation of privileges from Augustus. Augustus made clear that his relationship with Seleucus was an important factor in determining his attitude to the city (*JGLS* iii.718; Bowie [n.18] 34)

²⁰ For example, the embassy of Scopelian concerning the famous vine edict of Domitian (*Suet Dom.* 7,2,14.2; *Stat. Silv.* iv 3.11ff) For a more detailed treatment of Scopelian's embassies, see Bowersock (n.6) 43.

²¹ There exists an inscription from Smyrna which leaves no doubt about the importance of the sophist Polemo in securing benefaction from Hadrian (*JGR* 4 1431, line 33 in Bowersock [n.6] 45) Dio of Prusa (*Or.* 40.15, 45 2-3) tells us that he personally interceded with Trajan, winning the right to mint coins, increase the size of the Council, and invest in building works.

²² Bowersock (n.6) 17-29

we are told.²³ Hellenistic kings, in their attempts to ensure the goodwill, alliance or obedience of cities, took the role of benefactor extremely seriously. Numerous dedications survive which testify to the gifts of cash, food, and raw materials kings made to Greek cities, primarily as a response to their requests.²⁴ Likewise, Roman emperors were judged by the Greek cities by much the same criteria as were Hellenistic kings, most prominently by their activity as benefactors. As Sherwin-White puts it, “the empire was what men made of it, and it is not surprising to find that the Greeks made a kingdom of it”²⁵

Contacts between the emperor and cities consisted mostly of the cities’ approaches to the emperor. These approaches were used as formal expressions of loyalty, for ensuring the preservation of existing benefits and privileges, and for the approval of new ones.²⁶

Roman emperors who did their best to live up to the ‘Good King’ image, extended the vocabulary of gifts and benefactions to a whole range of privileges and rights they could confer. The term *beneficium* could be applied to decisions like admission into the equestrian or senatorial order,²⁷ and granting of the right to citizenship,²⁸ or even the most ordinary decisions, like authorisation to take water from an aqueduct.²⁹ On occasion, even when he merely executed acts of law, an emperor was known to call them ‘benefactions’.³⁰ It can be safely said, therefore, that Roman emperors fostered the idea that their entire rule was one great beneficial act. These steps are a good indicator of an emperor’s desire to fashion himself into a ‘Good King’ who, as Dio of Prusa asserted, is a benefactor by definition; he cannot be any other way and can no more be a cause of anything bad “than the sun can be the cause of darkness”.³¹

²³ Polyb. 6.6.4; Arist. *Pol.* 1286b

²⁴ For good discussions of this evidence, see K. Bringmann, ‘The King as Benefactor’, in A. Bulloch et al. (eds), *Images and Ideologies* (London 1993) 7-24; A. Chaniotis, ‘The Divinity of Hellenistic Rulers’, in A. Erskine (ed.), *A Companion to the Hellenistic World* (Oxford 2003) 439.

²⁵ A.N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Citizenship* (Oxford 1973) 431.

²⁶ See, for example, Dio *P. Or.* XL 13-15, describing the rush of embassies to Trajan from the Greek world with requests for new privileges and benefactions; Millar (n.15) 412-14.

²⁷ Dio LV 13; Sen. *De Ben.* 3.9.2.

²⁸ Pliny, *Paneg.* 37.3; Veyne (n.1) 348.

²⁹ Front. *De Aq.* 99.3.

³⁰ Veyne (n.1) 347.

³¹ Dio *P. Or.* 1.25-26.

Nevertheless, Roman emperors, with some notable exceptions, did not benefit Greek cities on the scale of Hellenistic kings.³² This should not surprise us; the emperor was the sole ruler of a much larger territory and his resources, although without question enormous, were nevertheless limited. This is not to say that he was necessarily bound to benefit cities from his personal resources. Probably the most frequently requested form of benefaction was immunity from taxation.³³ However, as Millar observed in his monumental study, the problem was that cities, in their frequent approaches to the emperor, were not often content with mere confirmation of old exemptions and privileges—they also often made substantial new demands.³⁴ Consequently, with every subsequent regime, the high degree of assent necessary became increasingly hard, if not impossible, to maintain.³⁵

The emperor, therefore, could not take credit for the donations of previous emperors but neither could his own donations, it appears, ensure him enduring credit. Pliny the Younger observed on one occasion that it was “generally agreed that past benefits cease to count unless confirmed by later ones”.³⁶ The benefactor’s good reputation only lasted as long as he sustained his generosity, so the Roman emperor was perhaps often plagued by the short term civic memory, the refreshment of which most likely required a much larger proportion of his resources and revenues that he was ready to commit.

Needless to say, refusals to grant benefactions could have negative ideological consequences, as they could be perceived as the emperor’s failure to live up to his ‘Good King’ image and to fulfil his role as universal patron and benefactor.³⁷ The ideological problem the emperor thus faced was how to refuse a request without damaging his Good King image and incurring the odium of his loyal subjects. Dio Cassius may have had precisely this problem in mind when he had Maecenas advise Augustus: “you ought not to allow your subjects even to ask you ... for what you are not going to give them”.³⁸ We have no evidence that this advice, assuming that it was really given, was ever implemented, but the problem, it is reasonable to assume, would still need addressing.

³² Veyne (n. 1) 344.

³³ Millar (n. 15) 420-21; Veyne (n. 1) 349.

³⁴ See above, n 26.

³⁵ Millar (n. 15) 412-14.

³⁶ Pliny *Ep.* 3.4.

³⁷ Evidence for refusals is not very common but this indicates “not so much the universality of their benevolence as the fact that in the case of refusal a city had no motive for going to the expense of the inscription” (Millar [n 15] 426).

³⁸ Dio 52.37.

Some ideological safeguards against the drawbacks of refusing benefits can be detected. Emperors always made an effort to specify that a particular benefaction was given ‘as a favour’ or ‘as a gift’,³⁹ or alternatively, they would attribute their benefaction to their ‘goodness’ or ‘liberality’.⁴⁰ By stressing this point, the emperor most likely wished to indicate to his subjects that when he bestowed benefaction there was not the slightest obligation on his part to benefit; he was not merely doing his expected duty, but benefiting them voluntarily and out of goodness. Should he have chosen to refuse this benefaction, no damage to his reputation would have been incurred, at least not in his own eyes.

Support for this interpretation comes from Dio of Prusa, who stated that the good king: “finds greater pleasure in conferring benefits than those benefited do in receiving them ... For the other functions of royalty he regards as obligatory; that of benefaction alone he considers both voluntary and blessed”.⁴¹ Evidently, strong emphasis is placed on the fact that, unlike all the other necessary functions of a good ruler, the one of benefactor was left entirely to the emperor’s discretion. After all, the ‘Good King’ is by definition entirely free from obligation because only a voluntary gift is an indication of one’s goodness. Further support comes from Pliny the Younger who in his *Panegyricus* also stressed that when Trajan bestowed benefactions, he did so voluntarily and out of his innate goodness.⁴²

So one ideological safeguard against the negative implications of an emperor’s refusal to bestow benefaction was the topos that benefaction was voluntary; failure to deliver it could not be interpreted as renegeing on an obligation, nor could it put the emperor’s legitimacy into question. But further, and perhaps more effective, ideological safeguards can be detected. To observe them I will now consider the Greek embassies that engaged in requesting these benefactions. In particular I will concentrate on the most famous and best documented embassies of the ancient world: those involving the sophists of the Second Sophistic. The sophists, as already mentioned, played an important part in the city’s approaches to the emperor and their eloquence was crucial in ensuring the emperor’s goodwill. Philostratus stated on one occasion that although the good king was generous by nature, “when

³⁹ See, for example, the case of money being given to Athens by Hadrian (Dio LXIX, 16.2). For further examples, see Millar (n 15) 422-3.

⁴⁰ Veyne (n.1) 379; Millar (n.15) 421-22.

⁴¹ Dio P. 1.24.

⁴² Pliny repeatedly stressed that Trajan bestowed benefactions often, did it voluntarily and asked for no return (*Paneg.* 2.21, 25. 2, 39.3, 42. 4, 43.5, 44. 6; P. Garnsey and R. Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture* [Berkeley 1987] 149).

incited by good advice and by eloquence, his qualities shine out more brightly and press on with ardour to noble deeds”.⁴³

Probably the most famous benefaction involving a sophist resulted from a letter of Aelius Aristides to Marcus Aurelius requesting money for the rebuilding of Smyrna after the earthquake of AD 178.⁴⁴ This letter survived and it is a unique composition and extremely valuable for indicating the nature of the actual speeches delivered when requesting benefaction. In the letter, Aristides appealed to the emperor’s virtues and to the generous nature that made him naturally predisposed towards granting benefaction.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, as Philostratus tells us, Marcus gave money after and primarily because Aristides’ rhetoric and eloquence touched him so deeply that it moved him to tears.⁴⁶ Therefore, Aristides’ oratorical skill was to be credited with Marcus’ favourable reply.

Another similar case was the posthumous triumph of Polemo, a sophist from Smyrna who was chosen for the embassy to Antoninus Pius but who died before he could go.⁴⁷ Others went in his place but failed to impress Antoninus with their speech. On the brink of refusal, Antoninus asked if Polemo had composed a speech before he died. This indeed being the case, Antoninus caused the court to be adjourned while the speech was brought and read. Pleased with what he heard, Antoninus accepted the request. Grateful members of the embassy rejoiced and declared that “Polemo had come to life to help them”.⁴⁸ What the above occasions illustrate is that the emperor was open to persuasion and, more importantly, needed to be persuaded by eloquent ambassadors in order to bestow benefaction.

Observing this state of affairs, Fergus Millar concluded that “the success ... in requesting *beneficia* depended on the quality of the oration addressed to him (the emperor) by a patron of good standing. Rhetoric was crucial, whether it related to a new privilege or to the retention of an old one”.⁴⁹ It certainly looks that way, but are we really to accept that such a crucial matter concerning the relationship of the emperors and the cities was left to be decided by the quality of a speech? It is certainly possible but, rather than interpret the lessons of these embassies at their face value, we should perhaps

⁴³ Philostr. *VS* 583.

⁴⁴ Philostr. *VS* 2 9; Dio 71 32.3

⁴⁵ Millar (n.15) 424

⁴⁶ Philostr. *VS* 582.

⁴⁷ Philostr. *VS* 540.

⁴⁸ Philostr. *VS* 540.

⁴⁹ Millar (n.15) 434.

concentrate on the considerable ideological benefits this state of affairs held for the emperor.

In the above examples, the emperor is portrayed as a remote and even, to a degree, fickle figure. Even Marcus Aurelius needed to be persuaded by an eloquent speech to bestow benefaction on a cause that was obviously worthy and difficult to refuse. It is evident, however, that by crediting Aristides' oration for Marcus' favourable reply, we are reminded that even such a worthy cause as the rebuilding of a city in the aftermath of an earthquake did not put the emperor under any degree of obligation to help his subjects. Polemo saving the day from his grave, and bringing Antoninus Pius back from the brink of refusal, could be interpreted in the same way. In their own way, these occasions reinforced the idea that any type of assistance to the city was outside the sphere of imperial obligation and duty and within the sphere of imperial *beneficia*, granted 'out of goodness'.

But perhaps there is a more important reason why this state of affairs would aid the emperor. Namely, that the sophists could now be *blamed* for refusals while the king's goodness would stay beyond reproach. Antoninus Pius almost refused the request prior to hearing Polemo's speech, not because he was a bad and ungenerous king, but because members of the embassy were incompetent orators. The responsibility for refusal in this case, therefore, would be effectively removed from the emperor and placed onto the embassy. There are further examples that could perhaps support this interpretation. Alexander of Seleucia was unsuccessful because he irritated the emperor "with unceremonious forms of address".⁵⁰ Caracalla refused a request from the sophist, Philiscus, because "he gave offence by his gait, he gave offence by the way he stood ... his voice [was] effeminate, his language indolent ... all this made the emperor hostile to Philiscus".⁵¹ These occasions indicate that the emperor could refuse any request without being at fault and without his good and generous nature being questioned. Instead, the personality and ability of the sophists was questioned.

It is clear that this state of affairs would be ideologically beneficial to the emperor as it would ensure that the emperor's 'Good King' image remained above reproach at all times, regardless of the embassy's outcome. Sophists also benefited from this situation, since they derived much of their pre-eminence in the cities from the crucial role they and their profession played in ensuring the emperor's goodwill. Admittedly, there were downsides to this arrangement, namely, that the sophists had to take the blame if the embassy

⁵⁰ Philostr. *VS* 571.

⁵¹ Philostr. *VS* 623.

failed. Nevertheless, there were further compensations that made up for the potential unpopularity they perhaps faced in the case of failure. This brings me to the second part of my discussion, in which I shall consider the potential ideological benefits the sophists received from the emperor.

Sophists and the Good Noble Ideology

The sophists were not poor philosophers, but leaders in their own right. All of them came from aristocratic backgrounds and were wealthy and extremely important men in their cities; as Bowersock puts it, "they were both rulers and the ruled".⁵² The political careers of the sophists demanded liturgies. In Classical Greece, liturgies were compulsory duties paid by the richer citizens towards the community, and they could include anything from maintaining the public gymnasia to equipping a warship.⁵³ Originally, they were separated from magistracies but in the period discussed in this paper, this was no longer the case. Sometime in the late Hellenistic period, most of the liturgies, like the post of the gymnasiarch, became elective, and all valid distinction between liturgies and magistracies disappeared.⁵⁴ More will be said below about the causes and implications of this development; for now it need only be noted that it was within the emperor's authority to absolve a deserving individual from obligation to hold office and pay the associated costs. Immunity from liturgies was the most common reward sophists of the Second Sophistic received from the emperors.⁵⁵

Modern scholars recognise, however, that immunity from liturgy was not granted in order to be claimed. Rather, it was intended to add to the honour of benefactors who gave *despite* having that immunity.⁵⁶ A number of inscriptions exist that honour the sophists by emphasising the fact that they, although exempted by the emperor from paying liturgies, had nevertheless accepted office.⁵⁷ Philostratus wrote of the sophist Antiochus who claimed

⁵² Bowersock (n.6) 17-29.

⁵³ D. Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor to the end of the Third Century after Christ* (Princeton 1950) 61.

⁵⁴ D. J. Geagan, *The Athenian Constitution After Sulla* (Princeton 1967) 128; Magie (n.53) 61, 654.

⁵⁵ Prior to the reign of Hadrian these immunities were granted by emperors to individual sophists, for example, to Flavius Archippus by Domitian (Pliny, *Ep.* 10.58). Vespasian was the first to grant immunity to teachers but Hadrian extended it to include philosophers as a whole; see *Dig.* 27.1.6.8, 50.4.18.30. For the ambiguous differences between sophists and philosophers, see Bowersock (n.6) 10-14

⁵⁶ Bowersock (n.6) 31.

⁵⁷ For example, an early third century inscription honoured one sophist who, although exempt from liturgies because of his profession, had nevertheless accepted the office of *strategos* and its associated expenses (Magie [n.53] 652).

immunity, refused the office, but still gave lavish benefactions to his city.⁵⁸ The significance of these immunities, therefore, appears to have been correctly interpreted in modern scholarship. Nevertheless, some further observations may necessitate a slight modification of this view, the first step being an evaluation of the relationship of benefactions and political power within the Greek city.

Evidence for the reliance of Greek cities on the benefaction of the rich comes all the way from Classical Athens, where the rich were expected to outlay money for the welfare of their fellow citizens.⁵⁹ It is widely held that this system was crucial for the legitimisation of political leadership of the rich and for the maintenance of harmonious relationships between the rich and the poor.⁶⁰ However, this view would not necessarily be shared by the Greek aristocrats, who preferred to see themselves as men of merit and virtue and it was these virtues that, as they tell us, legitimised their rule. Demosthenes, a politician from Classical Athens, on one occasion made clear that, as far as he was concerned, the greatest service he had offered his city was his good council and not his financial contributions.⁶¹ The Roman imperial period did not signal any change of attitudes on this issue. For Plutarch, an ideal politician ruled his city as a queen bee: he was responsible, capable, and sincere, and these virtues, rather than his payments, were what formed the justification for his rule.⁶²

For these aristocrats the idea of exchanging money for political power was repulsive. A number of ancient sources tell us that if benefactions were intended for the acquisition of political power, they constituted corruption and bribery.⁶³ The only way a benefaction could be made into something more than a bribe was if the motivation of the giver was beyond reproach.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Philostr. *VS* 568.

⁵⁹ See, for example, Xen *Oec.* 2.5-6. He speaks of various benefactions a rich man must give to the city lest he may get in trouble "with gods and man alike".

⁶⁰ Aristotle explicitly stated that financial benefactions were intended to stop people from desiring changes in government and went further by claiming that "magistracies ... should have expensive duties attached to them, so that the people will not desire them and will take no offence at the privileges of their rulers"; *Pol.* 1321, 1. Also see E.S. Gruen, 'The *Polis* in the Hellenistic World', in R.M. Rosen and J. Farrell (eds), *Nomodeiktēs: Greek Studies in Honor of Martin Ostwald* (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor 1993) 339-54; R. MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations* (Yale 1974) 125.

⁶¹ Dem. *Cher.* 8.70.

⁶² Plut. *Mor.* 822 B-C.

⁶³ Plut. *Mor.* 821F-822A; Dio. *P.* 34.29-30; Cic. *De Off.* 2.75.

⁶⁴ Plutarch, who was aware of the necessity of benefactions for public life, called them bribery if they were used for political gain; *Mor.* 821F-822A. Similarly, Cicero insisted that in public administration it was necessary to avoid "the slightest suspicion of self-seeking"

Accordingly, we find that although Greek aristocrats often made benefactions to their cities, any suggestion that these benefits were given for political gain was explicitly avoided. The motivation for these benefactions was always clearly stated in the honorary inscriptions; notables benefited their cities out of duty, patriotism or *philotimia* (the desire to be honoured).⁶⁵ Love of honour and glory were the most often attested motivation of *euergetes*.⁶⁶ Glory itself, although it earned praise for those who pursued it, was not about political power but was primarily a display of generosity and moral excellence, a form of personal quest for moral self-improvement.⁶⁷

Political offices demanded payment, but it is necessary to note that this was not seen as payment for the office or for the right to perform a public function. Offices were officially open to merit and holding one was considered an honour, so the payment was seen as a sort of gratuity—a way for the magistrate to thank the community for the honour it had bestowed on him.⁶⁸ This was the so-called *euergetism* ‘*ob honorem*’.⁶⁹ It is reasonably clear that Greek aristocrats did not like to think that they paid in order to rule. Giving, whether in the context of acquiring political office or otherwise, was more of a display and further proof of the virtues which, in the eyes of the notables, ultimately formed the justification for their rule.

Nevertheless, the way power is exercised and legitimised in practice in a particular society more often than not bears little resemblance to the publicly stated ideals. In our case, it appears this ‘Good Noble’ ideology was insufficient to disguise some of the cruder realities of power. Scholars have noticed that by the late Hellenistic period no office whatsoever, in any Greek city, remained free of charge; even the position of a Councillor, although entailing no public expenses, demanded a ‘payment of a gratuity’.⁷⁰ These expenditures, it appears, would often be virtually extracted from the

lest the benefaction be seen as a bribe; *De Off.* 2.75. Cicero is a reliable indicator of Greek attitudes since, according to his own words, he was primarily using the Hellenistic philosopher Panaetius on this subject; *De Off.* 2.60.

⁶⁵ M. Austin (trans and ed.), *The Hellenistic World from Alexander to the Roman Conquest A Selection of Ancient Sources* (Cambridge 1981) nos 43, 98, 110, 113, 119, 120. See also *Dem. De Cor.* 18. 257

⁶⁶ For example, the honorary decree from Miletus, honouring Eudemus for his benefactions, claims that he bestowed these benefactions in order to “perpetuate for all time the memory of his own love of glory”; Austin (n.65) no. 119. Further examples include Austin, nos 43, 98, 110, 113, 120. *Euergetes* is Greek for benefactor and the system of public benefactions is commonly known as *euergetism*; Veyne (n.1) 116.

⁶⁷ *Cic. De Off.* 2.31-36.

⁶⁸ Veyne (n.1) 117.

⁶⁹ Veyne (n.1) 116

⁷⁰ Veyne (n.1) 130

magistrate. A large amount of evidence exists that indicates that the notables were placed under considerable pressure to pay and assume public offices; as Veyne puts it "... they bought an honour or found themselves forced by the city to buy it"⁷¹ This situation, needless to say, effectively restricted all political power in the hands of the rich. It is primarily as a result of this development that the distinction between obligatory liturgies and magistracies tended to disappear in this period.⁷² While the rich once only paid for the services, now, as the city leaders, they also supervised and directed the funds.⁷³

Although political office was still officially open to merit, it was becoming increasingly evident, therefore, that wealth (and its redistribution) was both the necessary, and the only, requirement for the acquisition of an office.⁷⁴ These developments, as contemporaries well understood, were ideologically damaging, as they made it virtually impossible for the elites to disassociate their political power from their payments. Dio of Prusa complained that this situation left no room for men of merit in the political life of the city:

Men ... incompetent to manage even a village as it should be managed, but recommended only by wealth or family undertake the task of government ... consequently one may see in every city many who have been awarded crowns ... but a man of probity and wisdom, who is really devoted to his country and thinks and speaks the truth ... such a man is hard to find .⁷⁵

The situation, therefore, had the potential, at least in the minds of some, to effectively reduce the virtuous city elite—the responsible, capable and patriotic elite who gave voluntarily and with pleasure—to the status of rich men incapable of governing but nevertheless holding power due to their financial superiority.

⁷¹ For evidence of compulsion, formal and informal, see Veyne (n 1) 130-32; also Geagan (n.54) 128; Magie (n.53) 654. It should not surprise us that compulsion existed since people, it seems, felt entitled to payments from the rich. We can recall the famous words of Socrates to Critobulus: "whenever you seem to fall short of what is expected of you, the Athenians will certainly punish you as though they had caught you robbing them"; Xen. *Oec.* 2.5-6. Plutarch, writing in the second century AD, showed that in this respect little had changed; he commented on his own times in strikingly similar terms: "the masses are more hostile to a rich man who does not give them a share of his private possessions than to a poor man who steals from the public fund ..."; *Mor.* 822A. Also, see n.59.

⁷² See above, n.54.

⁷³ Magie (n.53) 61.

⁷⁴ Veyne (n.1) 85: "... leisure, culture and *euergesiai* were needed to such an extent that this 'merit' was accessible only to those who had either inherited or acquired some affluence"; cf. also 130-38

⁷⁵ Dio. *P. Or.* 34 29-30. Also see Plut. *Mor.* 821F-822A.

Some attempted to find a solution to this problem. Plutarch advised young politicians to resist the demands for benefaction and to seek to please the people with their dedication in public life, their honesty and sincerity.⁷⁶ Plutarch never questioned the necessity of the payments, but he warned politicians that by bowing to pressure to assume and pay for an office they were in fact bribing the masses rather than benefiting them.⁷⁷ He insisted that politicians should make an effort to appear to be benefiting their cities voluntarily and for something other than political office.⁷⁸ Evidently, Plutarch was well aware that these steps were necessary if *euergetism* was to remain, at least in appearance, that which its ideology suggests it was: a celebration of the ruling class's generosity and virtue and not a mere device intended to appease the masses or buy political power. Epigraphic evidence indeed confirms that these concerns were a reality. It indicates that many rich citizens started making an effort to be seen as, and be honoured specifically for, holding office and making the associated expenses voluntarily.⁷⁹

It seems, therefore, that the appearance of bestowing benefactions voluntarily, out of generosity or love of honour, was an ideological imperative of the civic notable, just as it was of the Roman emperor. To give in response to pressure or out of obligation was ideologically damaging to the elite and it brought its members neither honour nor glory. The emperor's grants of immunity to the sophists of the Second Sophistic should, I believe, be viewed against this background. So rather than to see them as an honorary measure, it would perhaps be more accurate to describe immunities as an ideological measure; a form of ideological aid the emperor bestowed on the sophists.

Grants of immunity, as we saw above, were not meant to be claimed and as such would be of considerable ideological benefit to the sophists. They would transform sophists from rich men who possessed political power solely because they could and had to pay for it, into responsible and virtuous leaders. These leaders ruled their cities not because they paid to do so, but because they felt it to be their duty and because they were *the* most capable. Their benefactions now became merely an indication of their virtue and

⁷⁶ Plut. *Mor.* 822 B-C.

⁷⁷ Plutarch said that "those also who give such bribes should bear in mind that they are destroying themselves"; *Mor.* 821F-822A.

⁷⁸ Plutarch advised young politicians: "first let the gifts be made without bargaining for anything; for so they surprise and overcome the recipients more completely; and secondly they should be given on some occasion which offers a good and excellent pretext, one which is connected with worship of god and leads people to piety"; *Mor.* 822B

⁷⁹ For a collection of evidence praising benefactors specifically because they have benefited voluntarily, see Magie (n 53) 651-54.

goodness, and a means by which they displayed their patriotism and love of honour. In other words, grants of immunity would transform the sophists into something that was more in accordance with the view they held of themselves.

Grants of immunity also appear to be intimately linked with the role of the sophists in imperial embassies. Interestingly, immunities appear to have provided the sophists with precisely the same type of ideological benefit as the emperor gained from the sophists' participation in the embassies; they removed the appearance of obligation from the benefactor, and provided safeguards against any negative implications of the failure to benefit. At this point, therefore, it may be legitimate to speak of ideological co-operation between the emperors and the sophists, or even go as far as to speak of a degree of ideological interdependence between them.

The discussion above has shown that the relationship of the emperors and the sophists can be interpreted in terms of an ideological exchange, where both sides helped to elevate each other's ideological concerns. The emperors maintained their image of giving *beneficia* voluntarily, because of their personal virtue, rather than out of an obligation arising from their office. But the sophists offered an escape valve for the odium that would accrue after an imperial refusal of a request. By taking credit for any successes and with it a responsibility and blame for any failures, the Sophists enabled the emperor to refuse requests, and thus exercise the choice of when and whom to benefit in his vast empire, while keeping his 'Good King' image above reproach. In return, the sophists acquired immunity from liturgies: precisely the same form of ideological aid they themselves, in their own way, bestowed on the emperor. After all, what the sophists gave to the emperor can perhaps also be seen as a form of immunity. The sophists enhanced their prestige in their home cities through their role as mediators between the emperor and the cities. But, in doing so, they also acquired for themselves the image of ideal politicians, of dutiful men of culture and merit who performed their civic duties freely, gladly, and willingly.

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