VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS

Voluntary associations, as the name implies, were assemblies of individuals freely joining themselves together for a particular purpose. In other words, they were clubs. Not unlike their modern counterparts, voluntary associations were extremely diverse in the interests they represented but can be loosely categorized under three headings: funerary, religious, and professional.[146] Funerary associations were particularly concerned for the proper burial and continued funerary rites of their members; religious associations were organized for the worship of a particular divinity; professional associations were comprised of members of a guild or trade: bakers, tanners, mariners, and the like. This traditional taxonomy is useful, as long as the lines are not drawn too firmly. For example, most associations worshiped a patron deity, and associations across all three categories provided burial rites.[147]

I ORDER THE BAKERS NOT TO MEET AS AN ASSOCIATION AND NOT TO BECOME THE RINGLEADERS IN RECKLESS BEHAVIOR.

EDICT OF THE PROCONSUL OF ASIA

There were many appeals of voluntary associations, both social and religious. Voluntary associations would meet in a public building, such as a temple, or in a private home and would often share a meal, drink, and socialize. In Philo, voluntary associations are virtually synonymous with rowdy partying: "They are united by wine, drunkenness, and revelry, and the offspring of these indulgences, insolence."[148] While these social gatherings were known to get out of hand, there was also a very real concern for order during the meetings and polite behavior. Some associations posted lists of rules that spelled out the terms and obligations of membership and addressed behavior during the meetings:

THE MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION OF THE GOD SYLVANUS DURING THE PRIESTHOOD MAGIUS BICTOR ARE INSCRIBED BELOW. . .

INSCRIPTION, PHILIPPI

> It was voted further that any member who becomes *quinquennalis* in this society is exempt [from obligations related to banquets] and that he shall receive a double share in all distributions. It was further voted that if any member desires to make any complaint or bring up any business, he is to bring it up at a business meeting, so that we may banquet in peace and good cheer on festive days. It was voted further that any member who moves from one place to another so as to cause a disturbance shall be fined four sesterces. Any member, moreover, who speaks abusively of another or causes and uproar shall be fined 12 sesterces. Any member who uses any abusive or insolent language to a *quinquennalis* at a banquet shall be fined 20 sesterces.[149]

As this excerpt illustrates, voluntary associations elected ranks of officers, which were patterned after the provincial government. One social historian speaks of the "positive exuberance" evident in assigning officers in these clubs,[150] which points to an important need these societies met in providing status denied by the larger society (see City and Society: Class and Status). The roster of a typical voluntary association was drawn mostly from the lower orders: freedmen, shopkeepers, working-class artisans, slaves. Becoming a member of a voluntary association provided a sense of belonging, as well as an avenue to status and social standing. Every chance to trumpet this status was, quite understandably, taken full advantage of. One can only imagine the satisfaction gained by Titius Flavius and Tiberius Claudius at the opportunity of seeing this column set up in the forum in Corinth:

> This monument was erected by the decision of the Association of the Lares of the Imperial House. Those who had charge of its erection were the two most outstanding members of the association, Titius Flavius Antiochus, a freedman of the Emperor, and Tiberius Claudius Primignenius.[151]

Population Density

A city, of course, contains people—lots of people. Cities in the ancient world contained large numbers of people in considerably less space, proportionately, than do their modern counterparts. Rome was the true megapolis of the first century, with a population of nearly 1,000,000 people, followed by Alexandria and Antioch with about half that many, and then Ephesus with approximately 250,000. Lesser cities, but still large by ancient standards, were Corinth, Thessalonica, and Jerusalem, which hovered around 100,000. Historically informed artistic reconstructions of these cities found in books and on the Internet capture well their architecture, street plans, and general layout but fail to convey perhaps the most brutal reality of life in a major metropolis of the Roman world: overcrowding comparable to only the bleakest of modern urban slums. A crowded North American city like New York has a population density of approximately 41 inhabitants per acre; Chicago has 20, and Los Angeles 12.[152] First-century Rome had a population density of nearly 300 inhabitants per acre; Jerusalem contained 188 per acre, Antioch 117 per acre, and Ostia 158 inhabitants per acre.[153] Corinth would have been positively spacious with 65 persons per acre, fully three and a half times the urban density of Chicago. These staggering demographics provide the background for Juvenal's description of his trip home through the streets of Rome:

> NOVIUS IS MY NEIGHBOR AND CAN BE TOUCHED BY HAND FROM MY WINDOWS. IN ALL OF ROME THERE IS NOBODY SO NEAR ME AND SO FAR AWAY.
>
> *MARTIAL

Caine - 125
Martial - 178
Juvenal ca. 500

cation was neither mandatory nor feasible for the masses, children were free to loiter or play where they found room, carving their game boards in the forum pavement.[161] The combination of high poverty levels and high population density led, predictably, to a high incidence of urban unrest and mob violence. This is particularly relevant as one follows Paul's travels in the book of Acts (see City and Society: The Perils of Carrying the Name). In the words of one first-century observer, "Whenever a blast of turbulence falls upon the assembly . . . we find jibes and brawling and laughter."[162]

THE CITY BLOCK OF THE ARRII POLLII IN THE POSSESSION OF GNAEUS ALLEIUS NIGIDIUS IS AVAILABLE TO RENT FROM JULY 1ST. THERE ARE SHOPS ON THE FIRST FLOOR, UPPER STORIES, HIGH-CLASS ROOMS AND A HOUSE. CONTACT PRIMUS, THE SLAVE OF GNAEUS ALLEIUS NIGIDIUS MAIUS.

PUBLIC NOTICE, POMPEII

Class and Status

Like many societies, Rome and its provinces were characterized by a hierarchical class structure divided along economic lines. These lines were more rigidly drawn than in most contemporary Western societies, though some upward (and downward) mobility was possible. In addition to wealth, Roman society pivoted on the axes of aristocracy versus plebe, male verse female, slave versus free, citizen versus non-citizen, Roman versus provincial, and Roman/Greek versus "barbarian." More subtle distinctions also applied.

Economic Disparity

At the top of the social pyramid was the senatorial order, representing six hundred families. In order to qualify for the senate one had to have a net worth of 250,000 denarii, a denarius being approximately one day's wage for a laborer. Senators wore a toga with a broad purple stripe and sandals with a crescent-shaped clasp, announcing at the same time their rank and their wealth. The equestrian order—so called because in the early republic they could afford to ride into battle on a horse—was much larger and had a property requirement of 100,000 denarii—still an enormous sum. Membership into these elite groups generally followed the successful completion of lesser posts and could be the crowning achievement of one's *cursus honorum* (see City and Society: Urban Landscape and Environment). Decurions, aediles, and other members of provincial and municipal aristocracy round out this upper echelon of society, and on the whole

GAIUS JULIUS, SON OF GAIUS, FROM THE TRIBE OF VOLTINA, HONORED WITH THE BROAD PURPLE STRIPE BY THE DEIFIED PIUS

*FUNERARY INSCRIPTION, PHILIPPI

would be much less well off. The imperial family possessed wealth almost beyond imagination, though they would be a statistically insignificant portion of the population. All together, these groups possessed most of the wealth, land, and goods, yet comprised only about 3% of the entire population of the Roman Empire.[163]

YOUR CHEST GLEAMS WITH COUNTLESS DINNER SUITS, AND YOUR WHITE GOWNS ARE ENOUGH TO CLOTHE A TRIBE. YET YOU GAZE IMPASSIVELY AT YOUR FREEZING CLIENT, YOUR THREADBARE ESCORT.

*MARTIAL

Beneath the elite aristocracy would be a narrow band of modestly successful artisans, merchants, freedmen, military veterans, and others who were fortunate enough be able to acquire a small surplus but were still relatively poor by modern standards. This group would comprise about 7% of the population. The vast majority of people in the Roman World—estimates range from 70 to 90%—survived at or below the subsistence level.[164] They lived hand to mouth, hoping to earn or scrounge enough food each day to fill themselves and their dependents. In this group we would find most craftsmen and shopkeepers, farmers, fishermen, day laborers, slaves, and many (if not most) clients of patrons. Apuleius refers to this unfortunate lot as "the lowborn masses" (*vulgus ignobile*) who were "forced by ignorant poverty . . . to seek the filthiest of supplements and free meals for the shrunken bellies."[165]

The crucial difference between ancient Mediterranean societies and contemporary Western societies is the absence of a middle class. An economic class is generally understood as a group of people with shared socio-economic characteristics forming a significant and integral part of the economic system.[166] In this sense, there was no middle class in the Greco-Roman world.[167] Quite unlike many affluent economies today, where the middle class is pandered to as the largest economic force, in the milieu of the NT the few who did manage to achieve a modest surplus would have little impact on the economy as whole. The prospects for socio-economic advancement were so bleak that some were willing to sell themselves into slavery in order to procure adequate food and shelter.[168] The grim reality of life in the first century was abject poverty on a monumental scale. It was not so much a collection of societies consisting of the haves and the have-nots but simply of the have-nots.

ALL THE MEN IN THE WORKSHOPS TOILING AND MOILING FROM MORNING TILL NIGHT, DOUBLED OVER THEIR TASKS, THEY MERELY EKE OUT A BARE EXISTENCE.

*LUCIAN

Social Stratification

Roman society was extremely status conscious, and the distinction between the various strata was scrupulously observed. The most fundamental distinction

in the Greco-Roman world was between slave and free. Even to be of servile lineage (i.e., a freedman or the child of one) entailed an insurmountable social stigma no matter how far up the social ladder one subsequently climbed. In his biography of Roman grammatici and rhetors, Suetonius is careful to comment if any were slaves or freedmen, illustrating the long memory of highborn Romans regarding such things. Horace lauds his patron who, "unlike the rest of the world, does not turn up his nose at men of unknown birth, men like myself, a freedman's son."[169] According to (Pseudo-) Plutarch, those who lacked citizenship and a respectable lineage "have an indelible disgrace in their low birth which accompanies them throughout their lives and offers to anyone . . . a ready subject of reproach and insult."[170] This represents the perspective of the wealthy elite; no doubt those among the lower orders saw things differently.

FOR ALL PERSONS WHO HAVE PASSED THROUGH THEIR TRAINING I PRESERVE INTACT THEIR ALEXANDRIAN CITIZENSHIP, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF ANY PERSONS WHO HAVE INSINUATED THEMSELVES AMONG YOU IN SPITE OF HAVING BEEN BORN OF SLAVE WOMEN.

*EMPEROR CLAUDIUS TO THE ALEXANDRIANS

Roman deference to rank took innumerable forms, proper seating arrangements being prominent among them. Equestrians and senators were granted premier seating in the theaters while "the baser sort," notes Calpunius Siculus, "viewed the show in dingy garments near the women's benches."[171] In Philippi, similar arrangements were made for the *Seviri Augustales,* a priesthood of freedmen devoted to promoting the imperil cult.[172] Apuleius describes a typical scene at a public hearing where magistrates took their seats "in order of rank," duly acknowledging peers of higher status. In a display of almost comical fastidiousness but written with utmost seriousness, Aulus Gellius weighs the delicate issue of who should be seated first, a father or his son who is a magistrate.[173]

"OUT YOU GO! FOR SHAME!" SAYS THE MARSHAL. "OUT OF THE EQUESTRIAN SEATS, YOU WHOSE WEALTH DOES NOT SATISFY THE REQUIREMENT!"

JUVENAL

This attention to status was also played out at dinner parties; guests were seated according to social standing and allowed to comment on the after-dinner recitation of poetry according to rank, more prominent guests first:

> See, now, the sons of Romulus [Romans], having dined well, are asking over their cups, 'What has divine poetry to say'? Whereupon some fellow with a purple mantle round his shoulders [i.e. of senatorial rank] lisps out with a snuffle some insipid trash . . . the great men signify their approval . . . the lesser guests chime in with their assent.[174]

The social pyramid was also reinforced by serving higher-quality food and drink to more distinguished guests. Pliny's account of one such affair is worth citing at length:

WHY IS NOT THE SAME DINNER SERVED TO ME AS TO YOU? YOU TAKE OYSTERS FATTENED IN THE LUCRINE LAKE, I SUCK A MUSSEL THROUGH A HOLE IN THE SHELL. . . . WHY DO I DINE WITHOUT YOU PONTICUS, ALTHOUGH I AM DINING WITH YOU?

MARTIAL

I happened to be dining with a man whose "elegant economy," as he called it, seemed to me a sort of stingy extravagance. The best dishes were set in front of himself and a select few, and cheap scraps of food before the rest of the company. He even put the wine into tiny little flasks, divided into three categories, not with the idea of giving his guests the opportunity of choosing, but to make it impossible for them to refuse what they were given. One lot was intended for himself and for us, another for his lesser friends (all his friends are graded) and the third for his and our freedmen.[175]

Although Pliny disapproved of the somewhat extreme lengths taken by his miserly host, he goes on to observe that when he dines with his own freedmen, all get the same fare, but it is not of the same quality as he normally eats himself. It is difficult to tell how far down the social ladder such practices were maintained, though the numerous references to socially graded dining incline me to believe it was widespread.[176] Among the multitude of impoverished clients (see below) who depended on their patrons for an occasional meal, Juvenal's rhetorical question was probably asked frequently enough: "Is a dinner worth all the insults with which you have to pay for it?"[177]

Benefaction and Patronage

Given the economic inequities of the Roman world and the huge proportion of impoverished and unemployed, cities and individuals relied on the largesse of the upper classes for survival. The wealthy were expected to finance public works (benefaction) and to support as many of the needy lower classes as possible (patronage).

THE PEOPLE OF CLAUDICONIUM HONOURED LUCIUS PUPIUS PRAESENS, SON OF LUCIUS OF THE SABATINA TRIBE, MILITARY TRIBUNE, PREFECT OF THE PICENTINE CALVARY SQUADRON . . . THEIR BENEFACTOR AND FOUNDER.

INSCRIPTION, PHRYGIA

All manner of public works would be funded by the wealthy, from temples to libraries to public festivals and athletic competitions. Even the scanty inscriptional remains from Corinth show benefactors providing fountains, temples, shops, apartment buildings, paved streets, and so on.[178] This is the backdrop to Dio's remark that "time and again . . . there may be seen in our cities one

group of men spending, handing out largesse, adorning their city with dedications."[179] Such eager generosity was motivated by the expectation of receiving public honor in return. Fundamental to both benefaction and patronage was reciprocity. The benefactor or patron contributed to the needs of the citizenry and would receive honor from the recipients in exchange, in the form of esteem, political support, honorific monuments, and the like. Although time has obscured identity of this benefactor, his generosity to the city of Philippi remains evident:

> THOSE WHO HAVE LOST THE TRUE FAME THAT DERIVES FROM VIRTUE. . . . FLEE TO THE FAME WHICH RESULTS FROM FLATTERY, AND INVITE THE ACCLAMATION OF THE MASSES BY MEANS OF DISTRIBUTIONS AND PUBLIC FEASTS.
>
> PSEUDO-SOCRATES

> A decree of the assembly: Since [Da]rit[us] [?], a friend of the city of Philippi, has not ceased to be continually well disposed to the city, and where able provides materially according to his means, and has promised to loan money interest free, the assembly thought it good to praise him and to post this decree next to the city hall.[180]

The patron-client system involved people of unequal social and economic status in a mutually beneficial relationship. The higher-status patron assisted the lower-status client materially and otherwise in return for support in the political sphere, honor in the public arena, and a variety of other services. Refusing the offer of patronage could result in animosity on the part of the rejected patron. A person might refuse a benefaction if the giver were deemed unworthy or if accepting the offer of patronage might put the recipient in a difficult situation with respect to another party, perhaps another patron.[181] Religious organizations and voluntary associations (see City and Society: Voluntary Associations) also benefited from patronage. The patron might receive special privileges from the organization, such as larger portions at meals,[182] and of course honorific monuments: "The initiates of the mysteries Botrus Dionysus have given tō Rufus Zipas, their benefactor and chief initiate [this monument]."[183] The generosity of a patron always entailed an obligation, as Martial, himself a client, understood well: "Whoever gives much, wants much in return."[184]

> CLIENTS YOU SAY? NOT ONE OF THEM WAITS ON YOU, BUT RATHER WHAT HE CAN GET OUT OF YOU.
>
> SENECA

The duties of a client often began with greeting the patron at his residence early in the morning (the *salutatio*),[185] where the client would receive a small stipend (in the form of food or money) and instructions regarding any other help the patron might need for the day. Clients were received not in order of arrival but in order of rank: "Praetor first, and after him the Tribune," shouts the

patron's steward.[186] Failure to address the patron with due respect could cost the client his daily wage, as Martial learned:

> By chance I greeted you this morning by your real name, Caecilianus, instead of calling you, "my lord." Do you want to know how much such freedom costs me? It robbed me of a hundred farthings.[187]

A client might have several patrons, and the patron would have as many clients as he could reasonably afford. The patron, too, might be the client of someone higher up the social pyramid. Occasionally the client would be required to attend the patron throughout his daily activities. To be surrounded by a troupe of clients was one way the patron could display his status and wealth, and some would even borrow money to keep themselves supplied with clients and to ensure that their stroll through the city was noticed by all.[188]

WHEN SELIUS IS SPREADING HIS NET FOR A DINNER, TAKE HIM WITH YOU TO APPLAUD, WHETHER YOU ARE RECITING OR ACTING AS A COUNSEL: "A GOOD POINT! WEIGHTY, THAT! HOW READY! A HARD HIT! BRAVO!" THAT IS WHAT I WANTED. YOU HAVE NOW EARNED YOUR DINNER; HOLD YOUR TONGUE.

MARTIAL

The obvious danger of becoming a client is summarized by Publilius Syrus: "To accept a benefaction is to sell one's freedom."[189] In the context of a lopsided distribution of captial, the inevitable consequence of the patron-client system was to produce a sizeable caste of groveling, servile, parasites who were forced to flatter and connive to fill their stomachs every day. Imagine a client loitering about the public latrines hoping to receive a dinner invitation from his patron,[190] or shouting gratuitous flattery as his patron delivers a speech,[191] or being forced to escort the patron's litter through the muddy streets to massage the patron's ego.[192] These were common sights in the major cities of the Roman world. Horace, a successful literary client to a wealthy patron devoted two essays to the topic of how to court a patron without appearing as a parasite. His advice amounts to, "Be compliant and full of compliments."[193] Plutarch wrote the corresponding essay from the perspective of a patron: "How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend."[194]

Manual Labor

As is true today, cities in antiquity contained a full assortment of all the vocations necessary to sustain a community: butchers, bakers, barbers, shopkeepers, carpenters, tradesmen, teachers, clerics, and so on. Also similar to today, some trades and professions were held in greater esteem than others. Slave traders, for example, were widely despised, and Martial lumps the small tradesman together with embezzlers, political informants, and gladiator trainers.[195]