

Exploring the Graeco-Roman Roots of Western Philanthropy*

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Recent historical studies of Jewish, Christian and Islamic philanthropic/charitable ideas and practices point to the striking similarity of the principles across the three world religions.¹ In particular, ‘the poor were thought to hold a special spiritual status, and one who gave them alms could expect to be rewarded for his/her actions.’² As far as the later Roman Empire is concerned, we owe it to Susan Holman (2001) and Peter Brown (1993, 2002)³ in particular for their penetrating insights as to how the Christian rhetoric on poverty led to the invention of “the poor” as a social category and stronger sense of the entitlements of the poor, inasmuch as they were understood as Christ. In interpreting the ecclesiastical discourses on poverty and the poor, Brown and Holman have pointed out that this material informs us more of the changing ideology of benefaction rather than the history of poverty. In Brown’s metaphoric language, bishops assumed the role of “governors of the poor.” In his analysis, the recognition of “love of the poor” (*philoptōchos*) as a public virtue was symptomatic of the weakened civic sense of

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¹ Frank M. Loewenberg, *From Charity to Social. The Emergence of Communal Institutions for the Support of the Poor in Ancient Judaism*. (Transaction Publishers, 2001); Mark R. Cohen, *Poverty and Charity in the Jewish Community of Medieval Egypt* (Princeton University Press, 2005); Adam Sabra, *Poverty and Charity in Medieval Islam* (Cambridge University Press, 2000). Lev Yaacov, *Charity, Endowments, and Charitable Institutions in Medieval Islam* (University Press of Florida, 2005).

² Sabra 3-4.

³ Susan R. Holman, *The Hungry are Dying: Beggars and Bishops in Roman Cappadocia* (Oxford Studies in Historical Theology. NY: Oxford University Press, 2001); Peter Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire*. The Menahem Stern Jerusalem Lectures (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2002).

community. The emerging scholarly consensus on the development of Christian philanthropy, therefore, emphasizes (Judeo-)Christian innovations and a discontinuity with the Graeco-Roman past. Richard Finn thus states in his 2006 book entitled *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire. Christian Promotion and Practice 313-450*

“Episcopal institutional almsgiving as an expression of religious authority and of the unity of the Christian community, together with the almsgiving of the radical ascetics, and the foundation of ptochotropheia, were all practices distinguishing Christians from their pagan neighbours in the late imperial cities.”⁴

Insightful as these observations are, they present only a partial picture of how philanthropy was conceptualized and constructed in the fourth century. In this period, although Christianity acquired legal status, it by no means singularly dominated the religious, cultural, monumental or political scene. Nor was the construction of the Christian identity immune from the reverse impact of the Graeco-Roman traditions. This aspect became particularly acute in the fourth century due to the accelerated formation of a Christian aristocracy. Recent studies of the late antique aristocrats, both pagan and

4 See also Timothy S. Miller’ review of *Charity, Endowments, and Charitable Institutions in Medieval Islam*. By Yaacov Lev. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida. 2005) in *The Catholic Historical Review* 93.1 (2007) 148-150: “Charitable institutions—hospitals for the sick, homes for orphans, asylums for the aged—did not exist in Classical Greco-Roman civilization nor in Germanic or Celtic cultures of northern Europe. Christianity created these institutions in the fourth century in cities such as Antioch, Alexandria, Caesarea (Cappadocia), and Constantinople in the Eastern Mediterranean. The rapid development of these philanthropic institutions into specialized facilities for needy people was no doubt linked to the conversion of Emperor Constantine to Christianity and the process of Christianizing the Roman state. Historians have traced the subsequent evolution of Christian philanthropic institutions in the Eastern Christian society of Byzantium and their slower development in the Western Latin provinces.”

Christian, have revealed the complexity of the reality by highlighting the continued force of traditional value systems of the Roman elite. Michele Salzman, in her 2002 book entitled *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, convincingly painted a picture of dynamic interaction between the Christian emperor, the Christian leaders and the senatorial aristocrats: “In trying to bring senatorial aristocrats into the church, many Christian leaders appealed to the status concerns of this powerful group. In so doing, they made Christianity more aristocratic in certain respects.” In a similar vein, Susanna Elm (2003) underscores the evolving nature of both Hellenism and Christianity in the fourth century CE. Referring to them as living cultures, Elm demonstrates that it was through responding to each other that what “being Christian” entailed and meant for the Graeco-Roman aristocrats became clearly defined.

How, then, was this complex process of negotiation, integration and transformation manifested in the area of public and private ‘benefaction’? How, for example, did different ideas and practices meet, clash, or mutually influence each other? Essential for a fuller understanding of these issues would be a fresh exploration of the Graeco-Roman attitudes towards poverty and the poor, as well as the evolution of ‘pagan’ practices and ideas of philanthropy in late antiquity. Recently, Margaret Atkins and Robin Osborne, editors of *Poverty in the Roman World* (Cambridge University Press, 2006) made an admirable attempt to establish poverty and the poor as a serious research topic.⁵ While

⁵ For earlier discussions of the attitudes towards poverty and the poor, see, eg., Garrison, Roman. *Redemptive Almsgiving in the Early Church. JSNT Suppl Ser. 77.* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), esp. 41. For recent studies of the attitudes towards and the human service institutions for the poor and the sick in the 5th century to the beginning of the Middle Ages, see Valerio Neri, *I marginali nell'Occidente tardoantico poveri, "infames" e criminali nella nascente società cristiana.* (Bari: Edipuglia, 1998); and Rosalia Marino, Concetta Molè, Antonino Pinzone, *Poveri ammalati e ammalati poveri dinamiche socio-economiche, trasformazioni culturali e misure assistenziali nell'occidente romano in età tardoantica : atti del convegno di studi, Palermo, 13-15 ottobre 2005.* (Catania: Edizioni del Prisma, 2006).

the book as a whole is most successful in illustrating the methodological difficulties involved in studying such a topic, several contributions warned against over-exaggerating the alleged indifference to the poor in the ancient world. Meanwhile, the subject of the nature and practice of euergetism after the third century CE still awaits a full-scale investigation. This paper does not provide a general survey but limits the discussions to select case studies. However, all the examples will serve to demonstrate that more often than not, the distinctions between Christians and their “pagan neighbors” were by no means clear-cut.

Inscriptions recording privately funded public building projects, cash distributions, perpetual endowments, or other gifts to all kinds of collectivities ranging from the city to private organizations dotted the cities in the Graeco-Roman world. These deeds were presented as *beneficia*; the donors were extolled for their ‘virtues.’ Modern scholars are more willing to see these ‘benefactions’ as ‘a kind of natural expansiveness of superiority,’ and an ostentatious display of social distance.⁶ In sociological and anthropological terms, these forms of munificence can be described as embedded in ancient gift economy. In any case, there has been a scholarly consensus that benefactions in the Graeco-Roman cities were not directed at the poorer segment of the society but at the citizen body at large, and that the benefactors were not motivated by altruistic goals but by the desire for self-promotion.⁷

⁶ Paul Veyne, *Bread and Circuses: Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism*, transl. Brian Pearce (London and New York: Penguin Press, 1990) 104.

⁷ See esp. Veyne, *passim*; Greg Woolf, ‘Food, poverty and patronage. The significance of the epigraphy of the Roman Alimentary Schemes in early Imperial Italy’, in *Papers of the British School of Rome* 58 (1990) 197-228; Brown 2002.

Bryan Ward-Perkins once argued in his book entitled *From Classical Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (Oxford University Press, 1984) that the decline of civic munificence had already begun before the fourth century due to the decline of the local decurial class, and the economic and political uncertainties of the third and fourth centuries. In his opinion, then, civic munificence was not elbowed out as a result of the rise of Christianity. At most, the conversion to Christianity only inflicted a death-blow through an appropriation of the funds once designated for civic munificence.⁸ He supported this thesis with extensive documentation of statue erections and building activities from 300 to 800 in the Western Roman Empire. These data, however, have now been shown to be incomplete. Several articles, especially Luke Lavan's contribution, in the new essay collection on *Social and Political Life in Late Antiquity*, dismiss Ward-Perkins' argument emphasizing the early decline of civic munificence.

Civic munificence and the driving force behind it, especially the pursuit of public honor, were still pretty much alive at least as far as the fourth century is concerned. More importantly, Christians and 'pagans' alike participated in these activities in both the Eastern and the Western part of the Roman Empire. Thus, we found in the late fourth century Ephesus a Christian benefactress Scholastikia 'provided the great sum of gold' for restoring the part of the baths of Varius that had fallen down.⁹ The Christian fathers did not look at civic munificence without ambivalence. Take St. John Chrysostom (347-407 CE), for example. On the one hand, he saw the private individuals' funding of civic

⁸ "one part of the landed wealth of Italy was removed from the general fund of potential patronage of secular buildings into a separate category of patronage of ecclesiastical and charity buildings only." Ward-Perkins 1984, 65. See Ramsey MacMullen, *Corruption and the Decline of Rome* (Yale University Press, 1988) 5-6 figs. 4 and 5 for the curve of the Italian foundations.

⁹ *IE* 453. For a discussion, see Guy Rogers, 'The Gift and Society in Roman Asia, orthodoxies and heresies,' in *Scripta Classica Israelica* 12: 188-199, esp 195.

institutions as vainglory.¹⁰ On the other hand, he wrote sympathetically when men who could “list ten thousand notable acts of civic munificence” had their possessions taken away unjustly.¹¹ If civic munificence may seem to John Chrysostom less commendable than almsgiving to the poor,¹² it was not necessarily perceived as such by many other Christian clergy. St. Paulinus of Nola (356-431 CE), for example, spoke about his desire to found a basilica at Fundi in Latium ‘either as a pledge of my civic affection (*pignus quasi civicae caritatis*) or as a memorial of my former paternal estate (*memoriam praeteriti patrimonii*).’¹³ Though the object of aristocratic munificence may have changed, ‘Similar combinations of civic affection, familial pride, and patronal sensibility’ that ‘had goaded elite euergetism for centuries’ had not diminished,¹⁴ as Dennis Trout nicely put. In this respect, although separated by more than 200 years and different religions, Paulinus of Nola was not much different from Pliny the Younger as a(n) *euergetes*.

If the vocabularies and expressions that Paulinus of Nola used here were reminiscent of the old value systems, the epigraphic media was even more so in this regard. Not only did the late antique inscriptions point to the persistence of old formulations but also highlight the adherence to traditional honorific practices. In particular, although “caring for the poor” loomed large as a key subject in the ecclesiastic

¹⁰ *On Vainglory* 4-6; *Sources chrétiennes* 188.74-80.

¹¹ John Chrysostom, *Homily 13 on the Statues* 1-2=*Patrologia Graeca* 49. 134-39. “Men who could list ten thousand notable acts of civic munificence had their possessions confiscated by the state and seals placed prominently on their doors.” (tranl. by Blake Leyerle 2000, 255).

¹² John Chrysostom, *Homily 21 on I Corinthians* 5-6=*Patrologia Graeca* 61. 176-79.

¹³ *Ep.* 32.17; transl. by Dennis Trout, *Paulinus of Nola. Life, Letters, and Poems* (University of California Press, 1999).

¹⁴ Trout 1999, 147.

discourses on social relations, salvation, and conduct in the fourth century, phrases such as ‘lover of the poor’ (*amator pauperum* or *amor paupertatis*) only appeared sporadically in the epigraphic sources. Nor did they belong to the regular tags in the extensive listing of virtues that was so typical of late antique honorific inscriptions.¹⁵ One can’t help but recall Seneca’s comment:¹⁶

‘And so all moralists are united upon the principle that it is necessary to give certain benefits openly, others without witnesses—openly, those that it is glorious to obtain, such as military decorations or official honors and any other distinction that becomes more attractive by reason of publicity; on the other hand, those that do not give promotion or prestige, **yet come to the rescue of bodily infirmity, of poverty, of disgrace—these should be given quietly, so that they will be known only to those who receive the benefit.**’

Although the discourses on poverty and the poor in sermons, orations, letters, and biographies of the saints (hagiographies) may be loud, lively and intense, in the epigraphic media, the volume was low; the picture was of subtle change. Fourth-century conceptualization of philanthropy developed in a context permeated by classical formulations of benefaction and honor, as well as classical monumental landscape. In

¹⁵ Heike Niquet, *Monumenta virtutum titulique. Senatorische Selbstdarstellung im spätantiken Rom im Spiegel der epigraphischen Denkmäler* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2000).

¹⁶ Seneca, *De beneficiis*, II. ix. Praecipunt itaque omnes auctores sapientiae quaedam beneficia palam danda, quaedam secreto. Palam, quae consequi gloriosum est : ut militaria dona, et honores et quidquid aliud notitia pulchrius fit. Rursus quae non producant, nec honestiorem faciunt, sed succurrunt infirmitati, egestati, ignominiae, tacite danda sunt : ut nota sint solis, quibus prosunt. Interdum et ipse qui iuuatur, fallendus est: ut habeat, nec a quo acceperit, sciat.

order to further illustrate this point, I will provide a case study of fourth century Praeneste, an Italian town not far away from Rome.

Praeneste was famous for the cult and the oracle of Fortuna Primegenia, which was still pretty much alive in the fourth century. But the spread of Christianity was well underway in the third century CE at Praeneste. The city had its first important martyr under Aurelianus. A bishop was recorded in 314. The *Liber pontificalis* listed several church properties in this area. It also became one of the six suburban bishoprics in either the fourth or fifth century. The expansion of the Christian elements, however, did not seem to have substantially changed the epigraphic landscape of the old public centers. In the fourth century, the old civic center of Praeneste, the forum remained crowded with earlier honorific inscriptions and statues of emperors and benefactors, with new ones added once in a while. The bid for a place in the forum was at one point remarkably open to generous benefactors from widely different social backgrounds. Thus, perhaps in the first century, a freedman, Lucius Urvineius Philomusus, received a public funeral and a statue in the forum because in his will, he provided for the populace three years of free bathing, 10 pairs of gladiators, and a gold crown weighing one pound for the goddess Fortuna Primigenia. On top of these, he also supplied 20,000 sesterces for games that would last for five days.¹⁷ In the fourth century, however, honorific statues are attested for the senatorial and equestrian grades (the *clarissimi* and *perfectissimi*) alone. In 333 CE, Barbarus Pompeianus, who belonged to a notable pagan senatorial family, gained a

17 *CIL* XIV. 3015=*ILS* 6256: L(ucio) Urvineio L(uci) l(iberto) Philomuso / mag(istro) conl(egii) libert(or)um / publice sepulturae et statuae in foro locus / datus est quod is testamento suo lavationem populo gratis / per triennium gladiatorumque paria X et Fortunae Primig(eniae) / coronam auream p(ondo) I dari idemque ludos ex HS XX(milia) per dies V fieri iussit / Philippus l(ibertus) monumentum de suo fecit.

statue for restoring buildings.¹⁸ Anicius Auchenius Bassus, a Christian governor of Campania in 379-380, received a statue on account of his ‘diligence’ (*ob merita eius industria*).¹⁹ In 385, Postumius Iulianus bequeathed his property to the citizens of Praeneste in exchange for annual commemorative ceremonies and a statue in his name, engraved with his very will, in the forum.²⁰ The purpose was to nourish (*colant*) his *spiritum*, a familiar Christian expression. In the pagan context, the usual expression would have been *manes colere*. The citizens (*cives*), in turn, did not spare their praise vocabularies, but extolled his merit, love and sense of duty towards the citizens (*meritum amorem et religionem erga cives(!) universus*). They also celebrated his great affection

18 *CIL* XIV 2919=*ILS* 1219: Barbaro. / Pompeiano v c consulari cam/ universus ordo fatus adq ad/iutus beneficiis eius simul etiam/ quod publica aedificia in ru/inam conlapsa beniuola dispo/sitione refici adq instaurari prae/cepit statuam ad perpetuitatem/ nominis eius adque memoriae in fo/ro habitu civili exultantibus/ cunctis constituit curante iul Lauren/tio v p curatore civitatis eius.

On the side: De v non Mart/ M Nummio Albino / L. Laelio Maximo cos/ currant C. Valerio Dolutio Marciano.

19 *CIL* XIV. 2917=*ILS* 1263 (marble statue base, found in the forum, now in Vatican Museum; c. 379-380 CE; Bassus *PLRE* I, Bassus 11, Christian): Bassi./ Aniclo (sic) Auchenio /Basso, v(iro) c(larissimi), procons(uli)/ Camp(aniae), provisorii eius/dem provinciae, res/titutori generis/ Aniciorum, ob merita/ eius industria/ ordo populusque civita/tis Praenestinae pon(endam) cens(uit).

20 *CIL* XIV. 2934 = *ILS* 8375 (now in the Vatican Museum): Iulianii v(iri) [c(larissimi)] / Postumio Iuliano c(larissimae) m(emoriae) v(iro) ob meritum amorem et religi/onem quam erga cibes(!) universus habere satis dig/natus est quiqu{a}e testamento suo memor / honorificentiae n[ostr]ae memoriae reti/ne[n]s testamentoque [suo ka]sa(m) cui vocabulum / est Fulgerita{m} ter[r(itorio) Prae]nestino nobis uni/versis cibibus(!) quos magna adfectione di/ligebat reliquit cuique ob eadem contempla/tione dignissimo patrono cuius omnes requi(ri)/mus defensionem et vindicium statuam promp/to animo erigendam censuimus adq(ue) ob nimio / amore civico secundum in anno vel amplius universi / civ{v}es Prae(nestini) {a}epulum celebraturi ex(em)pl(um) tes(ta)m(enti) partis / Pos(tumius) Iulianus v(ir) c(larissimus) sanus salbus(!) sana quoq(ue) mente in/tegroq(ue) consilio memor condicionis (h)<u=O>man(a)e testamentu(m) / feci inter cetera civibus Prae(nestinis) omnibus dari bolo(!) ex / massa Prae(nestina) kasam(!) cui vocabulum est Fulgerita / regione Camp(ania) terr(itorio) Prae(nestino) ita **ut** ad memori(a)m / meam per singulos annos sine dubio **colant** / **spiritum meum** ita tam(en) ut conlocent statua(m) nomin(is) / mei in foro et hoc ipsu(m) ex(em)pl(um) testam(enti) ascribant ibi et non / hab(ean)t potest(atem) d<is=EX>tra(h)endi ut si qua(n)do alienar<i=E> boluerint(!) / fiscus possideat // Defun(c)tus XVI Kal(endas) Dec(embres) / d(omino) n(ostro) Arcadio Aug(usto) et Bautoni / v(iro) c(larissimo) cons(ulibus) / d(e)d(icata?) die IV Nonas / Mar(tias) co(n)s(ulibus) s(upra) s(criptis). Cf. E. Champlin, *Final Judgments: Duty and Emotion in Roman Wills 200 BC-AD 250* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1001), 167.

(*magna adfectione*) and good deeds (*honorificentia*). All these expressions would have been very familiar to earlier audiences.

Table 1. Statues erected in the forum in the fourth century CE, Praeneste²¹

	Honorand	Status and religious identity	dedicant	benefaction	Date
<i>CIL XIV.</i> 2919= <i>ILS</i> 1219	Barbarus Pompeianus	<i>v.c.</i> , consularis Camp(aniae), Pagan		<i>Quod publica aedificia in ruinam conlapsa benivola dispositione refici ad(que) instaurari praecepit</i>	333
<i>CIL XIV.</i> , 2914.	Julian	emperor Pagan			360s
<i>CIL XIV.</i> 2917= <i>ILS</i> 1263	Anicius Auchenius Bassus	<i>v.c.</i> , known to be Christian	<i>Ordo populusque civita/tis</i>	<i>ob merita/ eius industria/</i>	379-380
<i>CIL XIV.</i> 2934= <i>ILS</i> 8375	Postumius Iulianus	Patron	<i>Cives</i>	Perpetual endowment <i>aepulum</i>	385
<i>ILS 8376</i>	Publius Aelius Arlenius	Son of a <i>v.p.</i> , Christian?	<i>collegia</i>	Perpetual endowments for <i>convivia</i>	Later fourth century

Of particular interest is a fourth century inscription recording Publius Aelius Arlenius' gifts to the local *collegia*.²² The grammar and spelling of the inscription are far

²¹ For the texts of these inscriptions, see also E. Savino, *Campania tardoantica (284-604 d.C.)* (Bari : Edipuglia, 2005).

²² *AE 1904,108=ILS 8376=FIRA III 43*, marble statue base, found in the forum, Praeneste, now in Museo nazionale delle Terme, Rome; first published by G. Gatti in *Notizie degli Scavi* 1903, 575; see also Edouard Cuq, *Une fondation en faveur des collèges municipaux de Preneste*, *Nouvelle revue historique de droit français et étranger* 28 (1904) 265-272. Ward-Perkins did not list this inscription on his Appendix 1: Late Antique Statues outside Rome.

5 [---Ar]lenii /
P(ublius) Aelius Apollinaris Arlenius natus die /
III Kal(endas) Nob(embres) (sic!) honeste vita moribus adque /
litteris educatus cum die VIII Kal(endas) Iulias /
agens annum octavum decimum caelo /
desideratus corporeo carcere libera /
retur petit adque impe{r}travit a Publio /
[A]elio Apollinare v(iro?) p(erfectissimo?) patre suo actore cau /
sarum praeside provinciae Corsicae prae /

from perfect, which is by no means atypical of later Latin inscriptions. But the basic information is clear. Born on October 28th, Publius Aelius Apollinaris Arlenius, son of Apollinaris, was brought up honorably and educated in literature. When on June 24th at the age of 18, desired by heaven, he was being freed from the bodily prison, he successfully persuaded/prevailed upon his father, Publius Aelius Apollinaris, a *vir perfectissimus*, who had been *actor causarum* (which signified juridical competence), and governor of the province of Corsica,²³ prefect of the fire brigades, to give the *collegia* of Praeneste an estate which was adjacent to the territory of Praeneste and called (?) “*ad duas casas*.” The condition was as follows: they or whoever succeeded them did not have the right of alienating the property. They should, however, have banquets twice a year on the above-mentioned dates (i.e., October 28th and June 24th), out of the yields of the estate. Moreover, he asked his father to purchase a garden at 5,000 folles, and give it

10	fecto vigilibus uti fundum q(ui) a(ppellatur?) ad duas casas / con[f]inium territorio Praenestorum / daret ac traderet collegiis Praenesti/ [nae] civitatis ea condicione ut isdem vel / [cu]jique in eorum iura corpusque successerit /
15	[a]balienandi quocumque pacto potestas / non esset sed ex ipsius fundi fructibus con/ [v]ivia bis annua diebus suprascriptis exhi/ berentur et quo auctior esset eiusdem / voluntas petit a supra dicto patre suo /
20	ut quinque milibus follium horti sibe (sic!) / possessio compararetur quae eorum / iuri adque corpori cum supradicta / condicione traderetur adque ita ob {c} / causa s(upra) s(cripta) in fundum s(upra) s(criptum) et hortos comparatos /
25	supra dicto modo pecuniae / omnes collegiati inducti sunt prop/ ter quod veneficium (sic!) collegiati omnes / statuam eidem togatam / in foro conlocaverunt

23 For Publius Aelius Apollinaris, see Jones 1971, Prosopography, Apollinaris, no 2, p. 84; Robert Sablayrolles, *Libertinus Miles: Les Cohortes de Vigiles*, 1996, 521-22. The orthography, the *cursus honorum* of Apollinaris, as well as the title *praefectus vigilibus* instead of *praefectus vigilum* all point to a late fourth century date.

to the groups under the above-mentioned condition. Because of this gift (*beneficium*), all the *collegia* members honored him with a togate statue in the forum.

The phrasing ‘desired by heaven, he was being freed from the bodily prison (*caelo desideratus corporeo carcere liberaretur*) immediately catches our attention. Granted, neither the concept of death as departing to heaven or the metaphoric reference to the body (*corpus*) as a prison (*carcer*) is uniquely Christian.²⁴ But it was in the Christian conceptualization and terminology that *caelum* was closely associated with afterlife.²⁵ In contrast, the references to heaven were very rare in non-Christian funerary expressions.²⁶ The metaphoric reference to the body as a prison was a familiar notion in both Platonic²⁷ and Stoic discourses as well as in the Orphic and Pythagorean cults. The body as fetters and a prison was a frequent subject in Cicero.²⁸ However, if in the classical period, the

24 In the Ciceronian language, for instance, the free sky (in *liberum caelum*) was the very home (*domum suam*) of the soul (*animus*). e.g. Cic. *Tusc.* 1, 22, 51.

25 E.g. *regia caeli, Aetherias domos*. St. Cyprian compared this world with “foreign lands”, and called heaven one’s “own country”. Thus Emensus, who died at 13 years old and was buried in the Christian catacomb of Priscilla, had these words inscribed on his epitaph, “I lie down the body (*corpus*) but live in heaven (in *caeli aethera*) in front of the Lord Christ.” “*Emensus lucis spatium tris atque X annos/ hic corpus iaceo caeli sed in aethera vivo ante pedes Domini praecellens munere Christi.*” (From the cemetery of Priscilla). Epitaph of SS. Felissimus and Agapetus, from the *Syllogae*. H. P. V. Nunn 1952, p. 57.

26 In the classical literature, rising to heavy connoted of immortality of prominent figures by way of deification or apotheosis. The most conspicuous example was perhaps the literary epitaph allegedly composed by Ennius for Scipio Africanus, “*si fas endo plagas caelestum ascendere cuiquam est, / mi soli caeli maxima porta patet*, if it is right for anyone to ascend into the tracts of the gods, the greatest gate of heaven opens for me alone.” The phrasing *porta caeli patet* was echoed only more than 500 years later on the epitaph of the eminent pagan activist Praetextus. Cf. CIL VI 1779=Heathcote William Garrod, comp. (1878–1960). *The Oxford Book of Latin Verse*. 1912.

27 Plat. *Phaed.* 62C; 250C; 248C-D

28 *qui ex corporum vinculis tamquam e carcere evolaverunt*, Cic. *Rep.* 6, 13-14 ; *Tusc.* 1, 30, 74; *Luc.* 6, 721; Cic. *Scaur.* 4 *corpore animus tamquam carcere saeptus*
Rep. 6.14 *qui e corporum vinculis tamquam e carcere evolaverunt.*
Tusc. 1.74 *nec ...illa vincla carceris ruperit Socrates.*
Verg. Aed. 6.734 *animae clausae tenebris et carcere cauco*
Sen. Benef. 3.20.1 *cui inclusa est mens*; *Seneca Consolatio ad Polybium Dial.* 12.93 *animus...velut ex diutino carcere emissus*

notion of the body as a prison was more or less confined to the circles of philosophers and certain mystery cults, it gained much wider publicity and acceptance among the Christians. Indeed, while death was usually described as *acerba* (painful), *tristis* (sad) and *infelix/dustuchês* (unhappy) in pagan funerary expressions, death as liberation and freedom from the body found much more representation on Christian inscriptions. In this vein, a verse epitaph dated to 399 CE spoke of death as freedom from the chains of the body (*corporis exutus vinclis*).²⁹

More than 400 years later, Macrobius, in his commentary of Cicero's *Somnus Scipionis*, used a stronger language: the body was not only described as a prison, but also an enemy (*foedum*) and a grave (*sepulcrum*) of the soul, which it had to endure. Marc. Somn. 1.10.9 *corporibus inclusae animae carcerem foedum ...patiuntur. Macr. somn. 1.11.1-3, antequam studium philosophiae circa naturae inquisitionem ad tantum uigoris adolesceret, qui per diuersas gentes auctores constituendis sacris caerimoniarum fuerunt, aliud esse inferos negauerunt quam ipsa corpora, quibus inclusae animae carcerem foedum tenebris horridum sordibus et cruore patiuntur. hoc animae sepulcrum, hoc Ditis concaua, hoc inferos uocauerunt et omnia, quae illic esse credidit fabulosa persuasio, in nobismet ipsis et in ipsis humanis corporibus adsignare conati sunt: obliuionis fluiuium aliud non esse adserentes quam errorem animae obliuiscantis maiestatem uitae prioris, qua antequam in corpus truderetur potita est, solamque esse in corpore uitam putantis.*

If Macrobius' religious identity is arguably dubious and still debatable, clear biblical references were by no means rare. The apostles such as Paul and Peter sometimes referred to men as "spirits in prison" (1Pet.3. 19) See also *Vulg. Apoc.* 4, 2; 11, 15, etc. and "fellow prisoners." In the early third century, Tertullian, who according to Jerome was a celebrated orator in all churches, spoke of the soul as being obstructed and obscured by *concretio* and *oppansum corporis*. *Tert. Anim.* 53. St. Cyprian, in his *de mortalitate* (15) spoke of death as liberation from this world and a departure to salvation. In the fourth century, the celebrated churchman, Paulinus of Nola wrote for the deceased Clarus with these words: the limbs rest in the tomb, the soul freed from the corporeal prison rejoices among the stars, *sed membra caduca sepulchro, libera corporeo mens carcere gaudet in astris.* (Paul. Nol. epist. 32.6). Also cf Arnob. *Nat.* 2.45 *corporum animae indutae carceribus; Ioseph 6,31 in hunc corporeum carcerem uenerit; Bon. Mort.* 11.48 *quod ex hoc corruptibili carcere in lucem libertatemque perveniret; Prud. Perist.* 13.63 *eripe corporeo de caecere vinculiue mundi hanc animam. St. Augustine, De civitate Dei 10.30 correctus est....Porphyrius, ut saltem in solos homines humanas animas praecipitari posse sentiret, beluinos autem carceres evertere nimime dubidaret; 12.27 nihil esse aliud quam fabros compedum cacerumve nostorum.*

29 *ICUR I 1453 = CLE 679* (dated by consular date to 399 CE): *Hic iacet extinctus pri[mo sub limine vitae/ Augusto multum dilec[tus tempore pupus./Nec reor hunc lacrimis [fas esse urgere beatum./Corporis exutus vinclis q[ui gaudet in astris,/Nec mala terreni sensit c[ontagia sensus;/Menses namque nov[is postquam super addidit anno/Complevitque dies vitae s[ex, ivit ad astra. See also Inscr. Chris. Rossi II, p. 117, 76.5: corporis humani sors est, quae claustra resoluit nec retinet animam; InscrIt IX:1, 165= Carm. Epigr. 783.3. Petronius Probus in CIL VI 1756 = CLE 1347 also reached the stars, vivit et astra tenet (v.12 in part b) and the heavenly ether, *exuviis resolutus, in aetheris aequore tutum / curris iter cunctis integer a vitiiis* (part a, v.1-2). He lives blessed in the eternal abode of paradise and has put on the new garments of his heavenly office, *vivit in aeterna paradisi sede beatus, / qui nova decedens muneris aetherii / vestimenta tulit* (part a, v.23-25).*

P(ublius) Aelius Apollinaris Arlenius left two pieces of properties for the *collegiati* to have communal meals on his birthday and on what appeared to be the date of his death. Although it was a common practice for the *collegia* to receive donations to perform commemorative rites for the donor's birthday, especially on certain festival such as the *rosalia* (May 13th, a rose festival), and *parentalia* (February 13th to 21st., a festival in commemoration of the deceased relatives), it was unusual for them to be requested to feast on the date of the donor's death. This may have to do with the Christian notion of death as a new birth and new beginning.³⁰ All things considered, unless we assume that Arlenius was an ardent follower of philosophy or mystery cult, he was most likely Christian.

What, then, does the Praeneste material tell us? The dialogues between the monuments, the honorands, the beneficiaries and the viewers followed a particular genre of their own. Nor did the forum as an honorable place and locus for display lose its appeal to potential benefactors, pagan and Christian alike.³¹ This is in line with Luke Lavan's observations based on the archaeological data concerning the functions of *fora* and *agorai* in the fourth and fifth centuries. The forum did not appear to be a battleground of religious beliefs. Nor was it used as a venue for displaying competing patterns of public virtues. Notably, the religious identity of the recipients of the meals or gifts was nowhere prescribed. There is, however, more than just plain persistence of tradition. In the case of our Publius Aelius Apollinaris Arlenius, the perpetuation of memory apart,

30 Arthur D. Nock, *Cremation and Burial in the Roman Empire*, *The Harvard Theological Review* 25. 4 (1932), 321-359, esp. 354, note 140.

³¹ It is, however, not because that we only have a small sample of late inscriptions to work with. In fact, on average, we have about the same numbers of inscriptions for each century. But we are ill informed of the activities surrounding the church in Praeneste in this period.

renunciation of property and even a redemptive agenda may be suspected in view of the incorporation of the language of denouncing the body. A new and rather subtle spin might have been put to old practices.³²

Christian elite apart, Church leaders were, in fact, keen observers, spectators, and commentators of the practices of the “others”. Rather than disapproving the “others” practices, they even sought philanthropic paradigms among the “others” and aroused a sense of shame among “us” by setting “others” up as mirrors. This point should be clear in the hortatory language of Basil, the influential bishop of Caesarea (c.330-379), in his homily *In Time of Famine and Drought* (PG 31.303-28),

“8 [325 A] Let us who are rational not seem more savage than those without reason, for they share the natural products of the earth. Flocks of sheep pasture on the same mountain and multitudes of horses graze on the same plain, each permitting the others all the natural enjoyment of the necessities. But we lock up what is common; we kept for ourselves the things that belong to everyone. **That which the Hellenes call philanthropy is fulfilled by a large community sharing one table, common bread, and one hearth.**” (transl. by Megan Holman)

What Basil picked up from the traditional practice of civic munificence was the conspicuous communal aspect of it, *apanta koina*. The same language can also be seen in

³² The word *philanthropia* never made a grand entrance into the classical Latin vocabulary.³² I haven't found any instance of the use of *philanthropia* in Latin inscriptions. This, of course, does not mean that there was no similar concept in Latin. *Humanitas*, *beneficium*, *voluntas*, *liberalitas* all capture the various shades of philanthropy. It is, however, not clear to what extent the meanings or connotations of these terms changed in the fourth century CE.

John Chrysostom: “He, nevertheless, does not withdraw His benefits from all of them; rather, He extends to all the ray of the sun and the rains and the crops of the earth to be shared in common by all. You do likewise by demonstrating His philanthropy.” (Homily 10) These hortatory languages were hardly different from Julian’s repeated exhortations on sharing (*koinōnēteon*). “We ought to share (*koinōnēteon*) with all men, more generously with the helpless and the poor so as to suffice for their need,” wrote the emperor Julian, who was raised as a Christian but became known as the Apostate, because of his conversion in adulthood to paganism, in a letter to an unknown priest. Urging the pagan priests to care for the poor and the helpless, a practice which Julian called both *philanthropia* and *litourgia*, was a recurring theme in his letters to various priests.³³ Julian projected caring for the poor as a revival of an ancient practice rather than an imitation or grafting of Christian practices.³⁴ “For from Zeus come all strangers and beggars. And a gift, though small, is precious,” Julian repeatedly quoted from Homer (Odyssey 14.56). By so doing, Julian aimed at situating *philanthropia* in the earliest and most important works in the Hellenic culture (*paideia*). Although Julian detached *philanthropia* from the Christian theological basis, the recurring themes of caring for the poor and strangers in his correspondences with the pagan priests betrayed his attempt to expand the religious dimension of the pagan *philanthropia* and to promote *philanthropia* as a religious obligation: “a god who loves mankind (*philanthropon*) has more kindness for those men who love his fellows (*philanthropous*).”³⁵

³³ In 362, Julian, who became known as the Apostate, wrote a letter to Arsacius, High-priest of Galatia, urging him and all the priests in Galatia to establish frequent *ksenodokeia* in order that “strangers, or anyone who was in need of money may benefit from this *philanthropia*.”

³⁴ Julian, *Misopogon* 348B, C.

³⁵ Julian, *Fragment of a Letter to a Priest*, 289 B

Lofty theorization aside, Julian was not shy to underscore the competition between the followers of polytheism and monotheism.

“For it is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg, and the impious Galilaeans support not only their own poor but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us...let us not, by allowing others to outdo us in good works, disgrace by such remissness, or rather, utterly abandon, the reverence due to the gods.”³⁶

The contrast between “us” and “others” reveals that at the heart of the competition was not what *philanthropia* entailed, or how to manifest it, but WHO performed it. Indeed, Julian and Basil did not differ on the forms that *philanthropia* may take. Paradoxically, in the process of boundary drawing and “othering,” pagan and Christian conceptions of *philanthropia* became similar. Church fathers of the fourth century such as the Cappadocian Fathers and Dio Chrysostom may have painted an emotional and graphic picture of the lurid sufferings of the poor to make them “more socially visible”,³⁷ but the poor or the needy were never a clearly defined group. Neither Basil nor Julian was concerned with relieving the poor by making fundamental changes of the society. ‘The widespread lists (*matriculae*) of the local poor supported by the Church is sufficient testimony to discrimination; genuinely open-handed, unquestioning distributions were rare.’³⁸

36 Julian, *Letter to Arsacius* 431 B

37 Susan Holman, in Bowden, W., A Gutteridge and C. Machado. *Social and Political Life in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 2007) 460 and passim.

By way of conclusion, I would first like to emphasize the simple fact that euergetism was certainly not limited to the non-Christians; nor were charity or almsgiving limited to the Christians. The promotion of almsgiving hardly replaced other forms of generosity. To a large extent, this was partly because the stretch from the Graeco-Roman virtues of generosity (*liberalitas, benevolentia, beneficia, munificentia, industria, humanitas*) to Christian *charis* or *philanthropia* was by no means difficult. In the formative years of what was to become Byzantine philanthropy, therefore, the Graeco-Roman ideas and practices of benefaction were active elements in defining philanthropy rather than merely stubborn residues or a fading backdrop. Activities such as distributions, *convivia*, and *epulum* that were popular forms of traditional *beneficia* were precisely ways of sharing, which was a crucial aspect of the fourth century definition of *philanthropia*. Such commensality was also a means of cultivating and reinforcing communality. There was also only a small step or an easy spin away for these ‘civic’ gifts to be praised as manifestations of disdain for wealth, which was exactly what we would find on some fifth-century inscriptions. Such benefactions as those attested in fourth century Praeneste, therefore, may fulfill multiple goals: they were simultaneously deeds of *philanthropia* through the sharing and renouncing of properties for the sake of personal salvation. They also addressed the status concerns of the oh-so-status-conscious aristocrats. Instead of centering our conversation on the continuity or discontinuity of the classical euergetism as defined by Paul Veyne, I will have fulfilled my goal if I have demonstrated the subtlety of the changes.

38 Peregrine Horden, The Earliest Hospitals in Byzantium, Western Europe, and Islam, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 35.3 (2005) 382.