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Aqueducts and *Euergetism* in the Roman Republic

The role of public benefaction, known in scholarly literature as *euergetism* (from the Greek for "good deeds"), has long been recognised as being of utmost importance in the relationship between the aristocratic and lower castes of Roman society. While the term originally referred to the practices of Hellenistic monarchs and aristocrats in the Greek world, the custom was quickly identified as being common to many complex societies, both ancient and modern. Most scholarly investigations of *euergetism* in Roman history have dealt with the Imperial period because the amount of information regarding this period is much larger compared to earlier periods. However, *euergetism* also played an important role in the shaping of the Roman Republic, which was characterised by the concentration of power in the hands of a small group of individuals, culminating in the seizure of power by Julius Caesar in 49 BCE. *Euergetism* in the Late Republic had a wide range of forms, one of which was the construction of public buildings for the good of the community as a whole.

Modern scholarship on the topic of Republican *euergetism* tends to divide public works into two distinct categories: "monumental" and "practical" buildings. "Practical" buildings are those that catered to everyday life, such as granaries, aqueducts, roads, etc. "Monuments," then, are defined as the opposite of practical buildings: buildings which did not play such practical roles. These were often religious buildings, structures meant to commemorate a specific person or family, or buildings designed for the beautification of the city - the common link being that neither religious nor beautification buildings fulfilled any corporeal need. Both forms of public works are acknowledged as important in the context of aristocratic competition, yet there is little acknowledgment of the relationship between the two types. Instead, the forms are viewed as dichotomous. They are distinct categories, and practical buildings are only very rarely interpreted as having monumental significance as well. What are interpreted today as purely functional, practical buildings, however, often serve monumental purposes as well.

The hydraulic systems of ancient Rome, for example, served an obvious practical purpose: to provide clean water for the city's use. The structures themselves, however, also served monumental purposes. The clearest example of such practical-monumental public buildings is the aqueduct - the most well known and prominent of ancient Roman hydraulic technologies. Such structures obviously fulfilled functional roles, providing clean water for drinking and bathing, water for irrigation, and in some cases, sewage disposal for the cities for which they were built. The process through which this clean water was provided, including the construction of the aqueducts and the distribution of the water itself, served important monumental roles for those aristocrats who were involved in their construction. Thus, the euergetistic construction of hydraulic technologies by Roman aristocrats in the Republican period illustrates how so-called practical structures, while contributing prestige to their constructors by virtue of their functional purpose, also did so by overlapping with the traits of purely monumental euergetistic structures.

The problem of practicality versus monumentality in Republican *euergetism* is prominent in the study of ancient water management. In an early work on Roman aqueducts, William Smith explains that the Romans built aqueducts instead of more efficient hydraulic systems such as pipes because of

"their want of the materials, and the manufacturing skill, to make pipes of a sufficient size" and that the "whole matter is a question of the balance of advantages," advantages, which lie in mechanical principles rather than ideological considerations.[1] Years later, E. M. Winslow characterised the Aqua Appia, the first aqueduct in Rome, as "a simple thing, made for a simple purpose" despite the extreme language the ancient sources use to describe it.[2] Furthermore, he explains that "the earlier aqueducts, built under the Republic […] were strictly utilitarian affairs" with no socio-cultural purpose, in contrast to the aqueducts of the Imperial period which, "were grand show-pieces as well as utilities, products of an age that glorified conspicuous consumption in the erection of great baths, artificial lakes, and showy fountains."[3] He even titles his third chapter "Marcia, Gift of the Gods," but is blind to the possibility that the aqueduct had deeper meaning than a new supply of water. In a recent collection of papers on water use in Roman cities, Ann Olga Koloski Ostrow gives the following quotation in her introduction: "[Water is] a creed with its priests (doctors, architects, engineers), its temples and altars (aqueducts, baths…) and its congregations."[4] This quotation comes close to acknowledging the monumental role of water, but then retreats by couching it in very functional terms. Though water did indeed have priests, temples, altars, and congregations in a literally religious sense, these things are redefined as the very practical doctors, construction experts, and technologies that superficially define them. Rather than acknowledging the monumentality of hydraulic technologies, these authors have chosen to interpret them as purely functional endeavours.

Water was extremely important in Roman society, not least because it is a necessity for life, but also because of its importance in Roman ritual and custom.[5] Water held a place of reverence in Roman culture and religion from the Monarchical period through the Imperial period, which makes it even stranger that hydraulic technology has been relegated to the practical side of *euergetism*.[6] Any number of deities, from the obvious Neptune, ruler of seas and fresh water, to the less obvious Venus, Salacia, Carmenta, and others, had ceremonies devoted to them that centred on water.[7] All natural springs were by definition sacred, and votive offerings can be found nearly everywhere at sites where such springs existed in the ancient period.[8] Inscriptions have been recovered dedicating religious buildings and sacred spots to Neptune,[9] the water nymphs,[10] and others. Aristocrats who paid for the beautification or exploitation of sources of water made sure that those using the water were aware of their generosity in making the sources of water available for public use.

[1] William Smith. "Aquaeductus," originally published in *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (London, 1875), 109.
[2] E. M. Winslow, *A Libation to the Gods: The Story of the Roman Aqueducts* (London, 1963), 4.
[3] *Ibid*., 5.
[4] Jean-Pierre Goubert, as quoted in Ann Olga Koloski-Ostrow, "Water as a Symbol of Wealth? An Overview of the Roman Evidence," in *Water Use and Hydraulics in the Roman City* (Boston, 2001), 1.
[5] Ingrid Edlund-Berry, "Hot, cold, or smelly: the power of sacred water in Roman religion, 400-100 BCE," in *Religion in Republican Italy* (New York, 2006), 162-180.
[6] Frontin. *Aq*. 1.4
[7] Edlund-Berry, 164-165
[8] *Ibid*., 163-165.
[9] CIL I^2.2504.
[10] For example, CIL I^2.1624.

The earliest example of the construction of large-scale hydraulics in Rome is the Cloaca Maxima, built sometime in the sixth century BCE. The introduction of the cloaca technology (though not the construction of the Cloaca Maxima itself), a means of moving water to drain what would later become the Campus Martius,[11] is alternately credited to Tarquinius Priscus[12] and Tarquinius Superbus,[13] two of the semi-legendary kings of the Roman Monarchical period. Regardless of who introduced the technology, it was considered by ancient authors to be one of the most important achievements of human civilisation.[14] Tarquinius Superbus built the Cloaca Maxima and Livy describes it, along with the Circus Maximus, as "two works [whose magnificence] could hardly be equalled by anything in the present day."[15]

The Cloaca Maxima is today thought of as having been the "sewer" of Rome, which it had certainly become by the later periods of Roman history. The characterization of the structure as a sewer, however, carries with it the unavoidable biases of modern scholarship. To the modern reader, a sewer is hardly a glorious place, and certainly not one with which an aristocrat would like to have his name associated. The Cloaca Maxima, however, was not always merely a sewer, nor associated with waste water and disposal. In its original incarnation, the structure had a very different appearance. John N. N. Hopkins has suggested that it began as an open-air canal, which carried water through what would later become the Forum Romanum.[16] However, his characterisation of the original Cloaca Maxima seems somewhat far-fetched and over-enthusiastic considering the available evidence. Nevertheless, he is correct in that before the intense building programmes of later Roman history (especially the Augustan building programme of the early Imperial period), the Cloaca would have been a very different structure than what is described in the extant sources. It is likely that the original Cloaca Maxima was, in fact, above ground and functioned more as a primitive non-raised aqueduct system to bring water from the streams surrounding Rome into the city itself.[17] Certainly, Rome at the time of the Cloaca's formation would have been much smaller and less densely constructed than at the time of Livy's writing. Therefore, it is unlikely that the original Cloaca would have been underground, as there would have been no need for it to be built in this way.

The Cloaca Maxima, then, serves as an early example of the prestige associated with the construction of hydraulic structures. Regardless of the form of the Cloaca in its earliest inception or even in the period of the Roman Republic, it is certain that it was *remembered* as a marvellous feat of engineering and a symbol of the might of the Roman people despite its supposedly Etruscan origin.[18] Although the Cloaca Maxima was primarily a practical construction, it contributed to the monumental significance of hydraulic structures in two ways. First, its antiquity and association with the very ancient

[11] Liv. *Epon.* 1.38.
[12] Plin. (E) *HN* 36.105
[13] Liv. *Epon.* 1.56.
[14] Plin. (E) *HN* 36.105; See also Strabo 5.3., Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 3.67.
[15] Liv. *Epon.* 1.56.
[16] John N. N. Hopkins, "The Cloaca Maxima and the Monumental Manipulations of Water in Archaic Rome," *The Waters of Rome* 4 (2007): 1-3.
[17] *Ibid*.
[18] *Ibid*., 1.

high aristocracy meant that later Romans could emulate the kings through the construction of hydraulic structures; this emulation of ancient customs and heroes was an important aspect of Roman aristocratic culture. Second, it was a symbol of the greatness of Roman civilisation, as opposed to the "lesser" peoples that surrounded the city, making the Cloaca Maxima monumental as well as practical even in the period of its own construction.

The most prominent of Roman hydraulic technologies is, of course, the aqueduct. Four aqueducts are known to have been built in the Republican period prior to the reign of Julius Caesar: the Aqua Appia, Anio Vetus, Aqua Marcia, and Aqua Tepula. The Aqua Appia was the first proper aqueduct in Rome, built in 312 BCE by the consul Appius Claudius, and it was lavished with praise by later authors. For example, Pliny gushes:

> But if any one [sic] will carefully calculate the quantity of the public supply of water [to Rome], […] the arches built, the mountains perforated, the valleys levelled; he will confess that there never was any thing more wonderful [than the Aqua Appia] in the whole world.[19]

The aqueduct underwent numerous repairs (and presumably expansions as well) after its original construction, and therefore, like the Cloaca Maxima, the Aqua Appia that Pliny describes may have been drastically different from that constructed by Appius Claudius.[20] Nonetheless, the magnificence of the structure was felt to justify the superiority of Rome over other peoples, thereby conferring upon Appius Claudius monumental prestige above and beyond the practical prestige he derived from supplying the city with water. Furthermore, the Aqua Appia is mentioned alongside military and political achievements in Appius Claudius' funerary inscription, indicating that it was associated with the non-practical prestige derived from those sorts of achievements even at the time it was built.[21]

The remaining three Republican aqueducts follow patterns similar to the Aqua Appia (though less so for the Aqua Tepula). The Anio Vetus was constructed by Manius Curius Dentatus, a war hero who celebrated triumphs for his conquest of the Samnites and his defeat of Pyrrhus during his censorship in 272 BCE. The Aqua Marcia was built by Quintus Marcius Rex in 144-140 BCE, which had been commissioned by the Senate to repair both the Aqua Appia and the Anio Vetus as well as "to bring into the City other waters so far as he could."[22] This was apparently a massive undertaking, costing the enormous sum of 180,000,000 sesterces.[23] The Aqua Tepula was apparently much more modest, having been built by the censors Gnaeus Servilius Caepio and Lucius Cassius Longinus in 125 BCE. Its description manages to avoid much of the hyperbolic language that surrounds the other three aqueducts, most likely due to the fact that it was a less impressive 18 km in length, and its waters, according to Frontinus, had to be mixed with water from other lines in order to be palatable.[24]

[19] Plin. (E) *HN* 36.123.
[20] Frontin. *Aq.* 1.9, 1.125.
[21] CIL XI.1827.
[22] Frontin. *Aq*. 1.7.
[23] *Ibid*.
[24] Frontin. *Aq*. 1.19.

Thus, despite their practical function, aqueduct construction was not, as might be expected, relegated to lesser officials. The construction of the aqueducts, especially the first three, were either paid for or overseen by a top-level Roman magistrate: consul, quaestor, or censor. From this one can infer that involvement with aqueducts bestowed prestige on their builders since politicians of such powerful stature would not be bothered with trifling projects, and would have assigned the tasks to lower officials. The monumentality of this prestige, as opposed to its practicality, can be seen in the consistent couching of these aqueducts in similarly hyperbolic terms by later authors, as they did for the Cloaca Maxima. Pliny describes the Aqua Appia as the most wonderful thing in the world, and the Aqua Marcia's waters were thought to be the purest, cleanest, and healthiest waters available to Romans.[25] The extreme cost associated with the latter also lends the project an air of monumentality. The non-literary records of these structures - the funerary inscription of Appius Claudius being a major example - show that aqueducts functioned euergetistically as well.

The prestige derived from the building of these aqueducts was not only enjoyed in Rome itself, but also where these structures led. Interestingly, aqueducts, which are commonly thought of as feeding only Rome, likely also supplied water to surrounding towns. Frontinus states that the Anio Vetus had a branch that supplied water to the Tiburtine region, through which the aqueduct was built.[26] As well, a recent study has found archaeological evidence indicating that three later aqueducts, including the Republican Aqua Marcia, were likely built partially to meet the needs of that region as well.[27] Inscriptions from the city of Tibur indicate that it had its own water supply system that likely predated the Aqua Marcia.[28] The fact that the Aqua Marcia was used by the Tiburtines indicates that their existing water supply was insufficient in meeting their needs, or at least that a greater supply of water would be 'helpful.' Perhaps the path of the aqueduct through the countryside would have made it easy to use the water to supplement irrigation on Tiburtine farms. Thus, practical prestige for both Q. Marcius Rex himself and the Romans in general was derived from this aqueduct by fulfilling the practical hydraulic needs of the Tiburtine region.

Beyond the practical prestige of the aqueduct, two points illustrate that the structure also bestowed monumental prestige. First, the aqueduct supplemented the inadequate pre-existing Tiburtine hydraulic system, making the water carried by it a symbol of the greatness of Roman civilisation over that of the Tiburtines, as well as of Roman dominance in the region. The Tiburtines had not yet been granted Roman citizenship in 140 BCE when the aqueduct was completed, but that privilege was granted fifty years later in 90 BCE. In fact, the prosperity brought to the region by the aqueduct may have been a factor in the Tiburtines' decision to become full Roman citizens. Second, the aqueduct itself was a massive and imposing structure, and must have therefore been an omnipresent reminder of Roman greatness and strength. For these reasons, the monumental prestige enjoyed by the aristocrat Q. Marcius Rex from the construction of the Aqua Marcia extended beyond the borders of the city of Rome. It can be plau-

[25] Plin. (E) *HN* 36.41.
[26] Harry B. Evans, "In Tiburtium usum: Special Arrangements in the Roman Water System (Frontinus, Aq. 6.5)" *American Journal of Archaeology* 97 no. 3 (1993): 447-448.
[27] *Ibid*.
[28] *Ibid*., 448-449.

sibly inferred that the other aqueducts served similar purposes for the regions through which they coursed.

The aqueducts were not solely meant to be impressive structures. Their waters eventually reached Rome, and the prestige of having been associated with the construction of an aqueduct grew when urban Romans used the water for their own purposes. Water was differentially distributed in Republican Rome based on social standing and wealth, though less so than it would be during the Empire. The ultra-aristocracy controlled the distribution of water to private homes during the Republic for both private use and public events.[29] The vast majority of water was meant for public consumption. Romans without private access to water were obligated to draw water from public sources, often aqueduct-fed fountains. Fistula stamps reminded them of who had brought the water they consumed to Rome, reinforcing among the lower classes the practical prestige that aristocrats derived from hydraulic technology.[30] All Romans, therefore, were in some way supplied with water by the aqueducts, illustrating the practical purpose of their construction.

Once the water reached Rome, however, the use of water by the ultra-aristocracy was often monumental rather than practical. In a city where private running water was a rarity, the ability of very rich Romans to drink, bathe, and dispose of waste matter within the comfort of their own homes would clearly have set them apart from the lower classes of Roman society. Thus, controlling private water bestowed prestige upon those able to do so, but this prestige was practical in form. It would not take long, however, for aristocrats to begin to use their private water supply in a conspicuous manner, such as for irrigation of their private gardens, which played important roles in the public image of Roman aristocrats.[31] A more direct use of water took the form of fountains and, later *nymphaea* shrines, consecrated to the water nymphs that were often made to look like natural springs. Though the evidence for *nymphaea* in Republican Rome is scant, a great number are known from Pompeii, only a century or so later. It can therefore be inferred that the *nymphaeum*, or the idea of a large fountain made to look like a natural water source, was present in the aristocratic mind at least by the Late Republican period.

In any case, the construction of personal fountains as well as *nymphaea* represents the use of private water for monumental purposes. Both were, of course, attractive spectacles, and would have been impressive from a purely aesthetic standpoint, advertising the aristocrat's ability to spend his wealth on beautifying the city. Perhaps in a more subtle way, fountains and *nymhpaea* were symbols of not only the aristocrat's control of the aqueduct water, but of water in general. The *nymphaeum* was purposely constructed to resemble natural springs, which were considered sacred by nature. The *nymphaeum* then was, artistically speaking, a representation of a source of water not accessible to urban dwellers, who took their water from the aqueducts or from wells, rainwater, and other sources not connected to the main hydraulic system. The water in an aristocrat's private *nymphaeum* therefore repre-

[29] Gerda de Kleijn, *The Water Supply of Ancient Rome: City Area, Water, and Population* (Ann Arbor, 2001), 77-82.
[30] *Ibid*., 116-120.
[31] Barbara A. Kellum, "The Construction of Landscape in Augustan Rome: The Garden Room at the Villa ad Gallinas," *The Art Bulletin* 76 (1994), 211.
[32] Frontin. *Aq*. 1.4.

sented a completely different type of water than that taken from the public works, more akin to spring water than aqueduct water. Therefore, among city dwellers, the ultra-aristocracy had exclusive access to spring water, which held special significance among Romans. Frontinus explained that spring waters were greatly esteemed and "observed with veneration. They are believed to bring healing to the sick."[32] Spring water was more desirable than water in the public domain, a status probably derived both from folklore surrounding springs and from the fact that it was so inaccessible to most Romans. Thus, the use of aqueduct water to create artificial structures that represented natural springs was another way in which the Roman aqueduct in the Republic was used to create monumental prestige.

The dichotomy created in the study of *euergetism* in Republican Rome between practical and monumental prestige is, like so many others in ancient history, a false one. Structures that appear purely practical and utilitarian on the surface, such as the aqueducts of Republican Rome, rarely are so. Though the impetus for building most aqueducts was the need for water in the city, after the decision was made by the Senate to construct it, the task became a means for the aristocrat in charge to glorify himself. This glorification was achieved in several ways, including, but not limited to, the practical supply of water. The massive scale of the Republican aqueducts, in addition to the fact that supervision of their construction fell to only very high magistrates, reveals that the construction of an aqueduct was an opportunity to monumentalise one's deeds. Furthermore, the scale of the projects demonstrated the might and civilization of the Roman people to other Italian cities, an important process in the agenda of the Republican aristocracy. Republican ultra-aristocrats were also capable of utilizing the water, to which they alone were granted private access, and further increased their monumental prestige in the form of the elaborate fountains and *nymphaea,* which they constructed on their land. Thus, though the water supply of Rome primarily fulfilled the basic needs for drinking, bathing, cooking, and so forth among the Roman populace, the impact of water on the sociological structure of Rome was much more profound than merely satisfying the city's physical wants.

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