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In this analysis of literary sources ranging from Cicero to Cyprian, Angela Ganter foregrounds two problems and related ideas that lead toward a comprehensive understanding of the place of patronage in the literary and social history of the Roman empire. First, in thematizing patronage as integral to Roman society, Ganter reevaluates the sources for evidence of a collective mentality of the Roman people. There is no question but that patronage existed; Ganter seeks to expose its methods and operations. In particular she is in search of the ways that patronal postures inflect political influence. Second, with the preposition zwischen, Ganter plays on the tension between continuity and change. „Between Cicero and Cyprian“ could be misunderstood as a reference to synchronous patronal relations between the persons Cicero and Cyprian; however, this potentially confusing formulation is preferred because it avoids the appearance of a teleology inherent in the formulation „from Cicero to Cyprian.“ Patronage did not begin in the first century BC or end in the third century AD; rather, lines of continuity are perceptible in sources that represent changes over time. Ganter is therefore sensitive to the individual contexts of the acts of patronage under scrutiny as she develops a systematic understanding of the institution over the course of seven chapters.

After the introduction that lays out the definition, method, and approach, chapter two traces four different phases of Cicero’s life, beginning with his early career in court with examinations of his complementary roles as defense attorney in the Pro Quinctio and prosecutor in the In Caelio; his participation in election campaigns as a politician in the Commentariolum consulatus petitionis and the Pro Murena; his role as advisor and statesman as evidenced in his letters and especially his letters of recommendation, and finally his retreat from political life to philosophy in the De Officiis and De Amicitia. The Republic is configured as a community of individual networks best served by building lasting bonds which bind society together on the basis of mutual trust and shared virtues. Permanent social ties were omnipresent in spite of the bilateral, non-binding nature of the patron-client relations, especially during elections and despite the normative claims to the contrary.

Chapter three examines how the stories of patronage from legendary Rome are depicted retrospectively in Dionysius of Halicarnassus in the Antiquities, Cicero in the Republic, and Plutarch in the Life of Romulus. Furthermore, attitudes found in Roman comedy are also echoed in later writers. In Plautus’ Menaechmi, Menaechmus complains that patronage is measured in terms of quantity, not quality; and in Terence’s Eunuch, the immorality and corruption of both patron and client challenge the social structures such that the patron ends up depending on the parasite. Thus in Roman comedy we see discrepancies between social realities and an ideal world, such as are transposed by Dionysius to the foundation legends. Texts of Ennius, Polybius, Sallust, Caesar, and Livy are also marshaled to understand patronage in the early Republic. While they differ in the details regarding communication between patrons and clients, they all express that the asymmetrical division of society into patres and plebs must be preserved, and they all point to ideal conditions in the past which have been removed and to which one must return.

Chapter four takes a triangulated approach to one of the most famous patron-client relationships in ancient Rome, the Augustan poet Horace and his friend Maecenas. After examining the image of Maecenas the patron as portrayed in Horace’s lyric poetry, Ganter then calls upon three works generally attributed to the first century AD, the Panegyricus Messallae, the Elegiae in Maecenatem, and the Laus Pisonis, in order to understand the extent to which the descriptions of the role of the patron changed from Republic to early principate. Finally, against these two bodies of evidence Ganter measures the idealized scenario of the patron-client relationship as described by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, contemporary of Horace and Maecenas.

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Chapter five looks at the economics of the patron-client relationship by comparing passages from Martial’s epigrams and Juvenal’s satires, before turning to Seneca, for whom the durability and reciprocity of the patron-client relationship guaranteed the social cohesion that stems from a balance between reciprocal benevolence and two-sided virtuosity. The attitudes of Juvenal and Martial are more difficult to ascertain, since they partake in centuries-old literary traditions and discourses of decadence. Juvenal broaches issues such as the imminent loss of freedom and the utilitarian orientation towards material enrichment, but he does so against an overall change in social backdrop. Juvenal’s recognizable conservatism leads to a defeatist position because social mobility creates anxiety in a system in which the elites understand themselves as the losers of social change. And indeed, Ganter asserts, many a representative of the old elites may have identified with Juvenal’s position. So whether one responded like Pliny, whose ambivalent attitudes toward patron-client relationships resulted from the need to broker his identity between aristocratic claims and the presence of a princeps, or like Juvenal with his satirical defeatist observations, the social ties that bound the Roman world together were as important to social stability as ever.

Chapter six is devoted to Pliny the Younger and Fronto, whose everyday lives were shaped by the activities of patronage, such as appearing in court as a patronus, writing letters of recommendation, or honoring commitments to certain communities. Letters of commendation were especially necessary since one could no longer achieve a high profile before the people but instead relied on the princeps or the Senate. Unlike Republican senators, Pliny struggled with ambivalences that derived from a society that focused on the princeps, a situation that also underlies the correspondence between Marcus Aurelius and Fronto, in which, under historically different conditions, the relationship between Horace and Maecenas played out in the negotiation and development of their differing roles which could alternate and even overlap one another.

The final chapter brings us to Cyprian, bishop of Carthage in the 3rd century AD. At the center of analysis is the concern not just with structures and functions of patronage but with possible changes in attitudes, in order to conclude that however much Cyprian endeavored to design and implement an alternative to the Roman world view, his church ultimately paralleled the Roman world in which the guarantee of social cohesion was as decisive as in the non-Christian context. Imbued with a classical education, Cyprian could deftly deploy the medium of the epistle from exile; but for him, a letter was a poor substitute for face-to-face communication; as such, human relationships become analogous to the proximity of God, which ought to be steadfast and permanent. In short, Cyprian presents us with „the Roman education system in Christian guise“ („das römische Bindungswesen in christlichem Gewand“, p. 337).

Although the book is ambitious in scope, two features of the research design lend pleasing unity. „Letters mingle souls,” in the words of English poet John Donne, and the letters of Cicero, Horace, Seneca, Pliny, Fronto, and Cyprian reveal to us a wealth of information about the workings of patronage: the willingness of the patron and client to engage in the relationship; its duration; its asymmetry, its reciprocity. In every chapter, Ganter is at her best when teasing these themes out of the epistles. Secondly, the central question of the book consistently reminds us that the cohesion of Roman society should not be taken for granted and that it was negotiated every day, with every social interaction.

The book is well grounded in the seminal scholarship on patronage that grew from the work of Richard Saller, inter alia, in the 1980s; however, Ganter also accounts for contributions published since 2012. The index of passages cited and the list of persons mentioned provide fingertip access for readers looking for specifics. The driving question of the investigation, „What held the Roman world together?“ is as timely as ever for those who live in societies that are characterized by increasingly tenuous political bonds and widening gaps in socio-economic status. Because

1 Richard Saller, Personal Patronage under the Early Empire, Cambridge 1982.
Ganter provides novel ways for understanding complex social relationships while simultaneously minding the temporal contexts of her sources so carefully, in the end the book seems to speak to our own motivations and desires for keeping our world together.