

**Friendship among the Romans**  
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The Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World

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Print Publication Date: Feb 2011

Subject: Classical Studies, Ancient Roman History

Online Publication Date: Sep 2012

DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195188004.013.0019

This article discusses the nature and origins of friendship among Romans. Friendship was formed due to the usefulness that might arise from the connection, affinity, or the longing for comradeship. It looks at the modern views and ethics of Roman friendship, and studies what the Romans thought they were doing when they formed and cemented relationships that involved friendship. It also studies friendship and patronage, where an element of deference existed between the “lesser” or younger friend and the “greater” or older friend. The article ends with a section on the features of gift exchanges and friendship in social practice.

**Introduction: Roman Views**

FRIENDSHIP loomed large in the Roman mind, and was much reflected upon. Greek philosophy—not surprisingly, perhaps—usually provided the intellectual framework.<sup>1</sup> Aristotle had distinguished three types of friendship (*philia*) based on three different grounds for affection: utility, pleasure, and virtue. Only the last was constant because it was based on love for the ‘absolute good’ that friends perceived in each other. Friendship based on utility or pleasure endured only so long as it was useful or pleasant, and was ultimately based on self-love. Therefore, *philia* based on virtue was primary, and provided the standards by which this kind of relationship should be judged altogether. Nevertheless, Aristotle rejected the idea that only *philia* based on virtue was ‘real,’ because this was in conflict with observed reality (*EE* 1236b 21: *biazesthai ta phainomena*—what is apparent constrains [us]).<sup>2</sup>

Epicurus argued that all friendship could be traced back to the universal human need for others: “All *philia* is a virtue in itself, but

draws its origin from assistance” (*Sent. Vat.* 23). The Stoics, on the other hand, reaffirmed the primacy of virtue as the only basis of true friendship. Now, although neither school denied that affection (p. 405) was essential, the Epicureans believed that this arose in response to the expected assistance from others, while Stoics thought that it was a response to the perception of virtue.

Roman intellectuals, then, usually adopted either the Epicurean, or a (mitigated) version of the Stoic viewpoint. Cicero's influential essay *Laelius de amicitia* defined friendship as an “agreement (*consensio*) with goodwill (*benevolentia*) and affection (*caritas*) on all things divine and human” (*Cic. Amic.* 20).

The source of goodwill was *amor* (love), from which the word *amicitia* (friendship) derived (*Cic. Amic.* 26). We should also note that the idea of friendship based on *consensio* was widespread. Sallust's *Catiline* asserts that “to want and not want the same thing, that is truly firm friendship” (*Cat.* 20. 4).

Cicero added that true friendship could exist only between virtuous men (*boni viri*, *Amic.* 18). However, he rejected the Stoic contention that because true friendship depended on virtue, and only the wise were truly virtuous, only wise men could truly be friends. Theoretically yes, Cicero acknowledged, but the Stoic definition of wisdom was such that no mortal man had ever reached this ideal (*Amic.* 18). Cicero's ideas, however, were not always so straightforward, nor were they accepted by everyone (Fiore 1996). Social practice was often presented as being in conflict with ideals and philosophy. Thus, the *Laelius* claimed to be about “true and perfect” (*vera et perfecta*) friendship, not the “vulgar or ordinary” sort (*Amic.* 22). Usual practice was to love those friends most from whom one expected to reap the greatest benefit (*Amic.* 79). And so, in his *De Inventione*, Cicero included *amicitia* because it was useful, and could be sought after for the material rewards it entailed. “Some people believe that *amicitia* is desirable only for its usefulness, others for itself only, again others for itself and its usefulness ... in oratory friendship should be sought for both reasons” (*Inv.* 2. 167). In his oration for Roscius Amerinus, Cicero affirms that friendships were formed “to manage a common advantage (*commune commodum*) through mutual services (*mutuis officiis*)” (*Rosc. Am.* 111).

Elsewhere, namely, in his *Laelius*, Cicero contended that friendship should be sought after because it was delightful in itself, as generosity was desirable for its own sake and not for the *gratia* (goodwill) it engendered (*Amic.* 31). Aulus Gellius tells us that Cicero was criticized for this passage because the motives behind generosity were often dubious. He concluded that Cicero spoke only in a philosophical sense (Gel. 17. 5. 10: *ita ut philosophi*—just like the philosophers).

Leaving Cicero behind, we find the idea that *amicitia* consisted in the exchange of gifts and services to be ubiquitous in Roman literature. Terence, for example, very early on had spoken of “procuring friends by services rendered” (*Eu.* 148). Fronto distinguishes *amor* from *amicitia* because the latter exists only through the exchange of *officia* whereas the former arises rather from impulse than from calculation (*Aur.* 1. 3. 5: *impetus potius quam ratione*).

What emerges from the ancient sources, then, are roughly two veins of thought regarding the origins, or the nature, of friendship. On the one hand, it could be argued that true *amicitia* derived from the longing of all human beings for comradeship. (p. 406) Here, virtue, in one or another of its manifestations, would lie at the heart of the relationship. Others, however, claimed to see a more unsentimental kind of bond as predominant. According to such views, one sought friends not because of affinity, or as the result of a moral estimation of the potential friend, but instead, because of the usefulness that might arise from the connection.

## Modern Views

Modern scholars are divided in their approaches to the ancient testimony. In his epoch-making study on the Roman nobility, Matthias Gelzer classified Roman friendship, together with patronage and *hospitium*, as “(reciprocal) relations of closeness and loyalty” (*[gegenseitiger] Nah- und Treuverhältnisse*), all of these based on *fides* (good faith, trust) and *officium* (duty), not affection (Gelzer 1969: 65–68).<sup>3</sup> Gelzer argued that the nobility controlled political institutions through their networks of friends and clients. His thesis lay at the origin of the prosopographic approach to Roman political history. Ronald Syme would subsequently write that

“*amicitia* was a weapon of politics, not a sentiment based on congeniality” (Syme 1939: 157), while Lily Ross Taylor argued that *amicitia* was simply “the old Roman substitute for party” (Taylor 1949: 7–8).

A similar view prevailed outside the field of political history. Wilhelm Kroll thought that the idea of emotional friendship was a Greek invention (Kroll 1933: 55–60). Of course, Romans were not incapable of feeling friendly affection for each other, but such emotions were irrelevant in forming or maintaining friendship relations, which instead were founded on mutual interests and obligations. Genuine affection was a plus, not a must.

Then, in the 1950s, the instrumental approach to *amicitia* was theoretically underpinned by the anthropological concept of gift exchange. This notion became particularly popular among Greek historians under the influence of Moses Finley, whose *World of Odysseus* laid the basis for explaining *philia* (friendship) as an instrumental relation based on gift exchange. The legal historian Jacques Michel thus compared the moral obligations of *amicitia* and *gratia* described by Roman authors to those described by anthropologists for gift exchange relations in ‘primitive’ cultures (Michel 1962: 433–595). Richard Saller would some twenty years later argue that “the ideals of common interests and selfless service represent a philosophical view of *amicitia* ... in the common view *amicitia* was expected basically to entail reciprocal exchange of *officia* (favors, debts, obligations) and *beneficia* (benefits, kindnesses)” (Saller 1982: 13; cf. recently Burton 2004).

Current research is still very largely dominated by this anthropological paradigm, which usually reduces the emotional discourse of *amicitia* to the conventional (p. 407) underpinning of the principle of altruism evoked in gift exchange. The view of *amicitia* as a gift-exchange relationship finds support in the fact that instrumental friendship is very common in comparative perspective.

Anthropologists tend to assume that instrumental friendship is pervasive in non-modern cultures (e.g. Schmidt et al. 1977; Pitt-Rivers 1973; Wolf 1966). Beyond this, modern historians have stressed the instrumental nature of friendship in early modern Europe (e.g., Kettering 1986 and 1992).

A sweeping critique, however, was formulated by Peter Brunt in 1964, who defended Cicero's view of affection as the basis of friendship (Brunt 1988a). Of course, the language and poses of friendship were often used to cover up instrumental motives, but that is quite a different matter. More recently, David Konstan, in a number of publications since the early 1990s, has seriously challenged the instrumental view of ancient friendship. He believes that “(*philia*) constituted in principle, as modern friendship, a space of personal intimacy and unselfish affection distinct from the norms regulating public and commercial life.” The ancient world and modern society “perhaps for entirely different reasons—did produce a space for sympathy and altruism under the name of friendship that stands as an alternative to structured forms of interaction based on kinship, civic identity, or commercial activity” (Konstan 1997: 5–6). Few social historians as yet have accepted Konstan's argument in its entirety, but his work is important because it ties the study of ancient friendship to the growing field of the history of emotions.

### **The Ethics of Roman Friendship**

Let us leave aside, for the moment, the question of how genuine the affection was that Roman friends claimed to feel, and look at the enunciated norms and ideals underlying *amicitia*. What we want to see, precisely, is what the Romans told themselves they were doing when they formed and fostered relationships that involved friendship.<sup>4</sup>

#### ***Benevolentia* (Goodwill) and *Benignitas* (Kindness, Generosity)**

According to Cicero *benevolentia* is essential in *amicitia*. One could conceivably remove goodwill from kinship, as he thinks, but not from friendship (*Amic.* 19). Contrary to kinship, friendship is a voluntary (an ‘achieved’) relation. *Benevolentia* itself is inseparable from another quality, namely, *benignitas*. The former denotes a feeling, while the latter denotes this feeling in action.

Working from this stance, Cicero then holds that *benignitas* and *iustitia* (justice) are the two most important virtues under-pinning society; *iustitia* (p. 408) makes a person abstain from evil, while *benignitas* induces him to do good (*Off.* 1. 20). *Benignitas*

denotes the disposition (or as the Romans would say, the virtue) from which *beneficia* (favors, benefactions) spring. It implies voluntariness, sincerity, and altruism. Or, as Seneca the Younger would put things, “Whoever gives *beneficia* imitates the gods, whoever asks for a return (imitates) usurers” (Sen. *Ben.* 3. 15. 4 ; cf. Cic. *Am.* 31). Now, if *benevolentia* was essential to friendship and *benignitas* inseparable from it, then friendship could not exist without the exchange of *beneficia*. Accordingly, *benignitas* was a duty for friends; and in turn, in any true friendship, *beneficia*

(voluntary acts of kindness) were also *officia*—in other words, acts of duty, symbolizing goodwill and affection (Saller 1982: 15–21). *Beneficia/officia* thus signified a commitment on the part of the giver, serving as a pledge for future services: “To have received is an entitlement to receive again” (*Avoir reçu est un titre à recevoir encore*: Michel 1962: 454). Pliny the Younger made a very similar remark ages before: “The merit of a bygone service (*veteris officii meritum*), seemed in need of being preserved by a new one. For it is the case, that you subvert older kindnesses when you do not add later ones to them” (Plin. *Ep.* 3. 4. 6).

### **Gratia (Goodwill, Kindness)**

*Beneficia* were by definition gratuitous, but failure to return a good deed was shameful and impermissible for a decent man (*viro bono*, Cic. *Off.* 1. 48). However, *gratia* lay not in the act, as such, of returning a kindness. Like *benignitas*, *gratia* was primarily a state of mind. While *benignitas* was the disposition generating *beneficia*, *gratia* was the disposition that ensured a response to *beneficia*. The point was that regardless of a friend's material ability to return a kindness, his disposition should be the same: he should feel genuinely obliged. “For even a poor man, provided he is a good man, even though he cannot return *gratia*, can surely have it” (Cic. *Off.* 2. 69).

*Gratia* could, or should, also be expressed symbolically. The philosopher Artemidorus received financial aid from Pliny when he was exiled by Domitian. After his return, he seized every occasion to praise his benefactor, thereby expressing his *gratia* and increasing Pliny's reputation. “The benign nature of our Artemidorus is such that he extols the dutiful services from his friends (*officia amicorum*) too much” (Plin. *Ep.* 3. 11. 1). Such praise, especially when offered in a

public context, was worth roughly its weight in gold to a man like Pliny.

Conversely, *gratia* obligations did not end with the delivery of a return gift, or a service. Seneca warns that one should be more careful about the persons from whom one accepted *beneficia* than about those from whom to request a loan. For financial debts extinguish once they are repaid, whereas a debt of *gratia* never expires: “For I owe (still) when I have returned, start again, but friendship stays” (*Ben.* 2. 18. 5; cf. *Cic. Off.* 1. 69).

Dutiful acts of kindness were thus thought to bring friends closer together. The parties involved became bound by *gratia*, or it could be said that they were tied together by favors (*beneficiis devincti*). Cicero put things this way: “Great indeed is that union (*communitas*) that is forged from good deeds bestowed and received (p. 409) in turn, which, while they are mutual and pleasing, bind in firm partnership those between whom they are given” (*Cic. Off.* 1. 56). Seneca refers to the most sacred law (*sacratissimum ius*) of *beneficia*, from which *amicitia* is born (*Ben.* 2. 18. 5). Moreover, because *beneficia* were (ideologically) gratuitous acts of kindness, return gifts and favors were themselves *beneficia*: “There are two kinds of generosity (*liberalitas*), one that consists in giving a *beneficium*, the other of returning one” (*Cic. Off.* 1. 48).

### ***Fides* (Trust, Good Faith)**

Whether as cause or as consequence, *amicitia* just could not exist in Roman eyes without the exchange of gifts and services. Even Cicero's *Laelius* affirmed that it was a distinctive feature of friendship “to give and receive deserved favors (*meritis*)” (*Amic.* 26). Ideologically, however, what was being ‘exchanged’ were not gifts and services, as such, but tokens symbolizing a package of dispositions that inevitably resulted in actions. Thus, the object of the exchange always included the confirmation of the friendship bond.

Time was an essential ingredient in this bond. Friendship itself was by definition open-ended and ideally enduring. Accordingly, the exchange signifying this bond was never immediate. The time lag between the reception of a gift/service and the bestowal of a counter-

gift/service signified the trust and solidarity required of friends. Romans expressed this by the concept of *fides*, which signified both trust and trustworthiness.

In the context of friendship, *fides* denoted the faith friends had in each other's *benignitas* and *gratia*. Conversely, *fides* implied solidarity, which had to be shown by acts of kindness that in turn generated *gratia*. *Fides* guaranteed that obligations were upheld. Therefore, any *beneficium* signified *fides*, as well as *benignitas* and/or *gratia*.

*Fides* was, however, a broad concept. According to Cicero *fides* was the very “foundation of justice” (*fundamentum iustitiae*, *Off.* 1. 23). There was, then, a common *fides* owed to all mankind, and a more specific sort of *fides*, which was owed to fellow citizens. *Fides* underlay and guaranteed international treaties and private contracts. It expressed both a debtor's creditworthiness and his moral credibility (Verboven 2002: 40–41).

Most of all, however, *fides* was the cement of personal relations in general, and of friendship in particular. “*Fides* alone is the rennet of friendship” (Pub. *Sent.* 249). It is the “prop of the stability and constancy we seek in friendship” (Cic. *Amic.* 65). Or, as Cicero put this elsewhere, “As a place without a port cannot be safe for ships, so a soul with no *fides* cannot be steadfast for friends” (Cic. *Inv.* 1. 47).

### ***Amor* (Affection, Love)**

The ultimate source of goodwill (*benevolentia*), according to Cicero, was affection (*amor*), from which the word *amicitia* was derived (*Amic.* 26). We already saw that philosophers agreed on the importance of affection, but disagreed on where this affection (p. 410) came from. Did it originate from the perception of virtue in the other (as Cicero and the Stoics believed), or was it generated by the awareness that the other was helpful or useful to oneself (as the Epicureans believed)? This matter was resolved neither by the ancients nor has it been resolved by modern scholars studying the Romans.

Be that as it may, affection was subject to certain types of social regulation. *Amici* were simply and plainly *expected* to feel affection (*amor*, in some sense) for each other. This norm of affection was inextricably bound up with the norms of reciprocity, solidarity, and

loyalty. Pliny the Younger claimed that the emperor Trajan had so great a capacity to put his friends under an obligation that only an ingrate could fail to love him (Plin. *Pan.* 85. 8). Seneca noted that love in response to favors was part of the natural order of things; even wild beasts were induced to love those who cared for them (*Ben.* 1. 2. 5). In turn, affection had to manifest itself in *beneficia* that would kindle *gratia* in the receiver.

*Amicitia*, in other words, was a complex relationship, in which reciprocity, affection, and loyalty were mingled, and advantage and altruism intertwined, all of these together producing, and being produced by, acts of kindness. To receive a *beneficium* was thus gratifying, and had to kindle *amor* and *gratia*. Dionysius from Halicarnassus notes that whoever loves another favors the one he loves, and whoever is favored loves the one who favors him (D.H. 8. 34. 1).

No doubt friendly affection was often shallow (‘liking’ rather than truly ‘loving’), and sometimes was surely feigned (as it is today). But such manipulation was (and is) possible only because the norm of affection—as that of reciprocity—was (and is) generally acknowledged. As a modern sociologist has put it, “A minimal element of affect remains an important ingredient in the relation. If not present, it must be feigned. When the instrumental purposes of the relation clearly take the upper hand, the bond is in danger of disruption” (Wolf 1966: 13).

Thus, the practical implications of this ‘norm of affection’ should not be underestimated. The anthropologist Pitt-Rivers noted that appeals to the obligation to reciprocate are not permitted in friendship, because they violate the ‘amity’ underlying the relation (Pitt-Rivers 1973: 96–97). However, appeals to affection *are* allowed, both among the people in modern Andalusia studied by Pitt-Rivers and among the ancient Romans. They are common, for instance, in Cicero’s letters of recommendation, which play heavily upon the idea that mutual affection has to be shown through mutual services, and that services received will both (re-)confirm and kindle affection. Cicero often presents the recommendation itself as due to the *commendatus* on account of the affection between himself and the recommender: “I love Precilius dearly for his modesty, humanity,

character and exceptional love for me” (*Fam.* 13. 15. 1); “Curius, who does business in Patrae, is loved by me for many important reasons” (*Fam.* 13. 17. 1).

### ***Existimatio* (Reputation)**

The ethical norms described above served as guidelines for how friends should behave, and as standards by which their behavior was judged. The honorable man was *benignus* (generous), *gratus* (appreciative), *fidus* (faithful), and (p. 411) *benevolens* (well-wishing) with respect to his friends. Stinginess, ingratitude, disloyalty, or indifference destroyed a person's reputation—and such a loss of face, in Cicero's opinion, was worse than death (*Quinct.* 49; 98; *Q. Rosc.* 16). No one desired *amicitia* with a person who was reputedly *illiberalis* (stingy), *ingratus* (unappreciative), and *infidus* (treacherous) (Michel 1962: 589–90). Honor and prestige depended on a person's ability to live up to social obligations, and to do so in the ways we have been sketching. Consequently, the exchange of sentiments and services between friends put one's reputation (*existimatio*) on the line, and hence (in Roman eyes), one's honor (on which, see Lendon in this volume).

The emphasis on honor and obligation thus added strength to friendships that might otherwise have been emotionally rather shallow. This is why friendship was so often publicly expressed and insisted upon, even for relations that were patently ‘political.’ In order for reputation and honor to be effective in consolidating instrumental friendship, it had to be made public. Only when the existence of an *amicitia* was publicly recognized, and gifts and services were known to have been exchanged, could public opinion be called upon to censure breach of faith, ingratitude, and indifference.

### **A Web of Expectations**

There is no such thing as *the* ‘real’ Roman friendship. For *amicitia* to be genuine, *beneficia*, as tokens of goodwill, gratitude, trust, solidarity, and affection, were indispensable, and put the reputations of the partners at stake. Some friendships were very intimate; in others affection was more a question of liking than

loving; still others were primarily instrumental relations in which affection was accessory; others again were primarily pleasurable. *Amicitia* was not genuine without goodwill and concern, but friendship in which goodwill and concern were not made manifest by an exchange of *officia* was unreal.

Providing our data are sound, we can sometimes distinguish friendships that were (more) affectionate from ones that were (more) instrumental, but simply to distinguish between emotional and instrumental friendship, let alone to discard one or the other as an anachronism or a sociologist's illusion, is to ignore the complexity of Roman friendship. *Amicitia* presupposed an exchange relationship subject to the rules of *gratia*, but the bond was never *only* an exchange relationship. He who merely failed to return a gift was an ingrate; he who failed to do so as a friend was mean, ungrateful, disloyal, and selfish. What we must recognize, then, is that Roman friendship continuously evolved in a complex web of expectations and obligations (Verboven 2002: 35–48). Specific relations and interactions may be situated at various points in this web, but only the web as a whole defined the constraints and possibilities inherent in *amicitia*.

(p. 412) Now, the question of sincerity (another important requirement) needs to be factored into this perspective. Inevitably, in friendship a tension existed between the principles of altruism and self-interest. Attitudes regarding *beneficia* and *gratia* were ambiguous, though, because the same actions could be motivated by altruism or self-interest. The norms of *amicitia* were therefore inherently ambivalent, having an internal psychological side (feeling goodwill, feeling grateful, trusting in, feeling affection, caring for one's reputation) and an outward social side (exchanging *beneficia*, showing solidarity, showing concern, living up to one's obligations).

Voluntariness and altruism were insisted upon, but the system was prone to manipulation. It was not difficult to hold that “[only] vile or stupid persons think *beneficia* are gifts” (Pub. *Sent.* B37). And the proverbial image of gifts as bait on an angler's hook is commonly found in authors such as Martial, Horace, and Pliny (e.g., Mart. 5. 18. 7–10; Hor. *Ep.* 1. 7. 73; S. 2. 5. 25; Plin. *Ep.* 9. 30). Cicero's letters of recommendation contain frequent hints about *gratia* and the favors

expected to be returned (e.g., *Fam.* 13. 65. 2; *Att.* 16. 16a. 5). And so, in what might be called the typical Roman fashion, calculation in friendship was generally disapproved of, while commonly practiced. And in the end, the positive emphasis on reciprocity, reputation, and status added considerable stability and weight to instrumental or emotionally shallow friendships.

### Friendship and Patronage

The relationship between *amicitia* and patronage is ambiguous. Despite the ideal of equality prescribed for friendship, some friendships were very unequal. Moreover, such inequality was not limited to differences in status or age that inevitably imposed an element of deference in the ‘lesser’ or younger friend toward the ‘greater’ or older friend, but could also result from differences in wealth or access to resources, that affected the possibilities for exchange of *officia*.

Now, a typical feature of gift exchange is that it is competitive. The recipient of a gift or favor who is unable to return one becomes morally bound. In the words of Publilius Syrus, “To accept a kindness (*beneficium*) is to sell your liberty” (*Pub. Sent.* B5). If a balance could not be struck, friendship became asymmetrical. Richard Saller has thus argued that such ‘lop-sided’ friendships could more rightly be called patron-client relations (Saller 1982 and 1989). Other scholars reject this idea, and stress the uniqueness of Roman patronage as a historical and cultural phenomenon (Eilers 2002: 1–83).

The debate is confusing because the two sides tend to use different concepts of patronage. In sociology, patronage denotes a specific *type* of exchange relation, or system, that occurs in different forms in different cultural contexts. The Roman concepts of *patrocinium* (being a patron) and *clientela* (clientship), however, denote (p. 413) a specific type of interpersonal relationship in Roman society and culture, with its own symbols, rituals, and history. The sociological concept of patronage may thus provide an analytical perspective to study Roman *patrocinium-clientela*, but the uniquely Roman cultural construct of *patrocinium-clientela* cannot be reduced to the theoretical construct of ‘sociological’ patronage. The contribution of sociology should be seen to lie in the possibility of

cross-cultural comparison and the analysis of social dynamics, not in the re-definition of ancient concepts.

But even so, difficulty remains. Except in the case of municipal or collegial patronage, or of patron-freedmen relations, the *patrocinium-clientela* complex, despite its cultural specificity, was not a formally defined relationship. All attempts to postulate formal initiation rites for private patron-client relations have failed. *Clientela* was a matter of public avowal and voluntary submission. Of course, social opinion could pressure a person to accept the role of client, and the ideology of patronage prescribed that the relationship could not honorably be broken; but these were generally understood moral constraints, not formal rules. Like *amicitia*, the *patrocinium-clientela* bond implied *benignitas*, *fides*, and *gratia*. Inevitably, the borderline between *patrocinium-clientela* and *amicitia* remained much less than clear-cut.

*Patrocinium-clientela* was a question of role patterns that could be adopted, rejected, or (morally) imposed by public opinion. Cicero notes that the rich and powerful often refused to acknowledge that they were *beneficio obligati* (obligated by a favor), because they feared to be labeled *clientes* (clients—*Off.* 2. 69). According to Fronto, his friendship with Gavius Clarus was so intimate that Clarus did not hesitate to do for Fronto everything a client or a faithful freedman would do for his patron (*Ver.* 2. 7. 2). The implication is that such hesitation would not have been unnatural. Clarus was a senator of praetorian rank at the time and would surely have objected to being labeled Fronto's client, although clearly Fronto was Clarus' senior and outranked him.

The businessman M' Curius, who lived in Patrae, was an intimate (*familiaris*) of Atticus, who recommended him to Cicero as a possible host for the return journey from Cilicia, where Cicero had been governor. Curius took the opportunity to oblige Cicero by writing him into his will, and by taking care of Cicero's favorite freedman, Tiro, who had fallen ill and had to stay behind. An *amicitia* ensued between Cicero and Curius, and the friendship subsequently lasted many years. Cicero seems genuinely to have liked Curius, but the difference between them in status, wealth, and influence was unbridgeable. Curius appropriately addressed Cicero as *amice magne* (my great friend) and *patrone mi* (my patron), although he insisted that Atticus

would always take pride of place (*Fam.* 7. 29; cf. Verboven 2002: 215; Deniaux 1993: 487–89).

The principle of equality in friendship, then, did not imply social or political equality, but the effective irrelevance of such inequalities. Thus, *amicitia* and *clientela* were not mutually exclusive, but the language of friendship was preferable to that of patronage, which implied inferiority and dependency. The greater the factual inequality between friends was, the more difficult it was credibly to claim a principle equality between them.

#### **(p. 414) Friendship in Social Practice**

*Amicitia* was, to put the matter simply, essential for participation in Roman society. A Roman's social life was firmly set in his circle of friends. Friends dined and wined together, went to the baths and games together, acted as witnesses to wills and contracts for one another, asked each other's opinions on betrothals and marriages, wrote when absent to exchange news and gossip.<sup>5</sup> In short, friends were enmeshed in webs of social obligations signifying reciprocal commitments of goodwill, assistance, loyalty and affection.

However, the services provided by *amici* far exceeded the boundaries of mere sociability. Reading Cicero's letters, for instance, we find that friends were expected to provide services that we would hardly dare to ask even from our parents. Friends could legitimately expect each other to lend assistance in court, to use influence in administrative or political affairs, to help pay off debts, and so forth. Non-delivery constituted a breach of faith and jeopardized the relation itself.

As a corollary of all this, the tension between private obligations and universal or public obligations was very real (Veyne 1976: 411). The question of how much friends could rightfully expect from each other is expressly addressed in Cicero's *Laelius*, which emphasizes respect for institutions and universalist ethical norms. However, the dictates of friendship might at any moment weigh quite heavily on any and all other considerations.

#### **Politics**

Scholars now generally agree that *amicitia* and *clientela* were not substitutes for political parties under the republic. Networks built on ‘friendship’ and patronage were inherently unstable alliances that rarely set the political agenda, were incapable of generating long-term common action, and could not control popular assemblies (Yakobsen 1999: 65–123). However, although *amicitia* did not dictate Roman politics, those who lacked ‘friends’ and followers were politically impotent and doomed to suffer a short-lived career.

The Roman state almost completely lacked an effective institutional and administrative apparatus to regulate the distribution and delegation of power or the allocation of positions and resources. Personal networks and recommendations were pretty well the only means available to obtain official positions, to influence political decisions, or to petition for government or administrative action (Cotton 1981; Cotton 1986; Deniaux 1993; Verboven 2002: 324–29). Saller showed that the same mechanisms prevailed under the empire. The only difference was that instead of the (p. 415) numerous competing noble families of the republic, there was now one undisputable *summus amicus* (supreme friend) or patron, namely, the emperor (Saller 1982).

At the level of the senatorial and equestrian elites, though, things continued much as before. Thus, Fronto describes how, as governor of Asia, he formed his staff by appealing to his relatives and friends (*Ant.* 8), just as his republican predecessors had done. The young jurist, Trebatius Testa, was introduced by Cicero to Caesar (*Fam.* 7. 5. 3), just as Pliny introduced his protégé Voconius Romanus to his friend Priscus (*Ep.* 2. 13).

A young politician, then, whether he lived during the republic or the empire, started his career under the protection of a senior politician, who was expected to use his influence on his protégé’s behalf, and to introduce the young man into the ‘friendship’ of others. A classic example is that of M. Caelius Rufus, who was entrusted by his father into the care of Cicero, and thence quickly made his way in society circles. Cicero himself had been similarly introduced to the circle of Scaevola the Augur. Pliny the Younger’s early career was promoted by the influential Q. Corellius Rufus (Plin. *Ep.* 4. 17).

But aside from the obvious realm of personal political careers, minor political decisions could likewise be obtained or obstructed through the use of ‘friends.’ And so, when the city of Salamis on Cyprus desperately needed a loan, but found that a Gabinian law forbade loans to foreign ambassadors, their patron, M. Brutus, used his influence (*gratia*) to obtain two *senatus consulta* (decrees of the senate) granting an exception to the law (*Att.* 5. 21. 10–13).<sup>6</sup>

Access to courts of law and legal proceedings, too, could be facilitated or blocked through the use of friends. Cicero wrote several letters of recommendation for M. Fabius Gallus in connection with a legal dispute between Gallus and his brother. Cicero asked Caelius Rufus to act as court patron (*Fam.* 2. 14), and he asked the *praetor*, Curtius Peducaeanus (who would preside the case), to facilitate Gallus as much as possible (*Fam.* 13. 59). Papirius Paetus was asked to use his influence to reconcile the two brothers and avert the case's coming to court (*Fam.* 9. 25. 2–3).

### Private Affairs

Most gifts between *amici* were purely symbolic. Valuable gifts are recorded primarily in a (sociologically) patronal context. Pliny, for instance, donated 300,000 sesterces to Romatius Firmus, so that Firmus could achieve equestrian status, and added that their long-standing friendship assured him that Firmus would dutifully remember this gift (*Ep.* 1. 19). Between friends of equal standing, valuable gifts occur mainly in times of crisis. Cicero, for example, received very considerable amounts of cash from his friends when he left Rome to go into exile—Atticus alone gave 250,000 sesterces (*Nep. Att.* 4. 4; *Cic. Att.* 3. 19. 3; 20. 2).

(p. 416) What we must recognize, though, is that assistance to friends in need was absolutely vital in a world without religious charity or social security. The expectation that friends would help to overcome financial difficulties was so self-evident that satirical authors construed an ancient version of insurance fraud on it. Tongilianus bought a house for 200,000 sesterces. When it burned down, his friends raised a million in compensation. And so, the satirist could with effect put the question, “Pray would you not yourself seem to have set fire to it, Tongilianus?” (*Mart.* 3. 52; cf. *Iuv.* 3. 220).

Posthumous gifts, in the form of legacies and inheritances, were strongly expected from friends. Cicero claimed, in 43 BC, that over the years he had received 20 million sesterces in legacies and inheritances (*Phil.* 2. 40). Several testators are known from his letters. Cluvius from Puteoli, for instance, instituted Cicero, Caesar, and a Campanian businessman, T. Hordeonius, as heirs. Cicero acquired part of a building block with shops yielding 100,000 sesterces a year, besides a large amount of cash and silverware (*Att.* 13. 45. 3; 14. 9. 1; 10. 3; 11. 2). Cluvius had acted as financial middleman for Cicero and Pompey, and thus owed his fortune partly to these great friends. In a letter of recommendation Cicero describes him as “very attentive to me” (*valde me observat*) and very “intimate with me” (*valde mihi familiaris*) (*Fam.* 13. 56).

The *officia testamentaria* (duties in connection with inheritances) were not limited to legacies and inheritance shares. At least as important was guardianship over the testator's under-age children and the women subject to his *patria potestas*. It was customary that a testator appointed several of his closest friends as *tutores* (guardians). Such an appointment was highly honorable. It signified the deepest possible trust in a friend's *fides*. Great men (senators, important knights, and municipal nobles) were typically also the guardians of many of their deceased friends' children. Most *tutores* were honorary guardians, and were not involved in the daily operations of their pupil's affairs. But, they were expected to supervise the overall administration of those matters, and their help and influence would be called upon if necessary.

The businessman P. Iunius appointed four guardians for his son: his brother Marcus, his friend P. Titius, his business partner L. Rabonius, and the noble M. Claudius Marcellus. When Rabonius struck a deal with the infamous Verres to defraud young Iunius, the other guardians convened, and Marcellus was called in—in vain as it turned out. Much to Marcellus's dismay Verres refused to yield, and young Iunius was forced to pay an extortionate amount of ‘damages’ for adjustment works on the temple of Castor and Pollux that his father had contracted to repair (*Cic. Ver.* 1. 130–156). Cicero himself was *tutor* of the young T. Pinnius, whose father had probably been a private banker (*faenerator*) in the East. Cicero wrote a letter of recommendation on behalf of his pupil to the governor of Bithynia

regarding a debt of 8 million sesterces, which the city of Nicaea owed to Pinnius (*Fam.* 13. 61). Cicero was hardly the person to keep the records of debts owed to his ward. However, when it came time to collect from an important community that was indebted to Pinnius, then the influential guardian would naturally step in.

Loans were traditionally part of the exchange between friends, although they were not always interest-free (Verboven 2002: 120–25). The examples we have of free loans occur mostly either in a patron-client context, or in an obviously political (p. 417) context. Crassus and Caesar, for example, built their political power bases by extending ‘friendly’ loans to their political *amici* (Sal. *Cat.* 48. 5; Suet. *Jul.* 27. 1). The thus-created economic connection bound the ‘friends’ even more tightly to one another. Cato is said to have used an inheritance from a cousin to extend loans to his friends (Plut. *Cat. Min.* 6. 4). Otherwise, free loans occur primarily in contexts of crisis, and differ little from expressly labeled gifts. Cicero gave his friend Axius' son a free loan despite being short of cash himself, and agreed grudgingly to accord a remission of payment when the debt became due (Cic. *Att.* 10. 11. 2; 15. 4).

More important than loans were personal securities, which were often provided by *amici*. The close link between credit-worthiness (*fides*) and honor meant that to sustain a friend's *fides* vis à vis the world at large was an imperative duty. And even when no formal security was given, friends could be called upon for financial assistance. Cicero, for example, paid the debts of Tullius Montanus, because he considered that to be his duty (*pertinet ad nostrum officium*—it is [part of] my duty toward him, Cic. *Att.* 12. 52. 1).

Friends played a role also in the management and supervision of each other's patrimony. They served as agents and representatives in cases where slaves and freedmen would be less suitable to undertake these tasks. *Mandata* (contractual commissions), in particular, were considered *officia amicorum* (the dutiful service of friends). The jurist Paulus asserted that “there is no *mandatum* unless it is unremunerated, because it springs from personal duty (*officium*) and friendship, and payment is opposed to duty” (*Dig.* 17. 1. 1. 4). As *procuratores* (managers), friends supervised the general management of estates or affairs in the absence of their owner, or

assisted the latter even when he was present. Atticus, for instance, was *procurator* for the Cicerones, M. Cato, Q. Hortensius, and A. Torquatus, as well as for numerous Roman knights (Nep. *Att.* 15. 1–3).

To turn to yet another practical matter, letters of recommendation illustrate the importance of *amicitia* to sway influence. Approximately 25–30% of Cicero's recommendations concern businessmen (Deniaux 1993; Cotton 1986). These individuals received introductions, help in enforcing contracts, official positions, and so forth from the pen of Cicero. The businessman M. Scaptius obtained a *praefectura* (a command) and a cavalry squadron from the governor of Cilicia, Appius Claudius, to force the city of Salamis to pay the debt it owed to Scaptius and his associate P. Matinius. Brutus—who was the city's real creditor, and who was hiding behind Scaptius and Matinius, subsequently asked Appius' successor, Cicero, to renew Scaptius' command, and to help ‘persuade’ the city. Cicero refused that request, but mediated nonetheless, and eventually forbade Salamis to deposit the sum due in a temple, thus leaving the matter to his successor.

It would be pointless to continue to list the many more ways in which friends assisted and accommodated each other in private affairs of every kind. They would only further illustrate the same basic reality; *amicitia* bypassed formal procedures and provided help where formal institutions and family ties failed, or as Saller put it, “Roman friendship was a corollary of the underdevelopment of rational, impersonal institutions for the provision of services” (Saller 1982: 14). But what also must be said is that this all took place in a highly formalized atmosphere. Friends did not simply, out (p. 418) of the goodness of their hearts, or spontaneously, do these kinds of favors for other friends. Rather, the whole nexus of friendship, as comprehended by the Romans, placed expectations on friends that were tantamount to being compulsory.

### ***Amicitia* in International Relations**

Contrary to the (private) *patrocinium-clientela* relationship (reputedly instituted by Romulus), *amicitia* did not have a foundation myth, or legend, although it was central to many very ancient Roman stories. Nonetheless, the language of *amicitia* was commonly used

metaphorically to describe deep-rooted social and political relations that had little to do with interpersonal friendship.

Thus, *amicitia* was a central notion in the political discourse of international relations. Allied kings and nations were bestowed with the title *amicus sociusque* (friend and ally). Such formal *amicitiae* obviously lacked anything like real emotional content, but as ideological constructs, these friendships served a clear purpose. The title *amicus* carried with it—just as was the case in interpersonal relationships—the idea (and responsibilities) of equality and sovereignty, but also of goodwill, trust, and solidarity. It implied that the moral obligations and sanctions of *amicitia* could be appealed to, and that assistance was owed beyond what might generally be stipulated in formal treaties.

### **Did Roman Friendship Have a History? Some Conclusions**

A last and difficult question is whether Roman friendship had a history. Did *amicitia* change over the centuries? Did its moral imperatives change? *David Konstan has argued that the notion of friendship changed in late antiquity under the influence of Christianity, which led to a greater emphasis on self-disclosure between friends* (Konstan 1997: 149–73). This may be true, but over the roughly 500 years that separate Plautus from the triumph of Christianity, we find very little apparent change in how Romans thought about *amicitia*.

The lack of privacy, the manifold tokens affirming and ‘publicizing’ friendship, the link with honor and reputation, the emphasis on practical assistance, and the tension between altruism and self-interest mark Roman friendship over the ages.<sup>7</sup> To the extent, then, that Roman friendship was distinct, that was not, perhaps, because Roman *amicitia* in itself was profoundly different from friendship in other cultures, but rather, because *it occupied such an especially central position in Roman social culture* (p. 419) overall. Roman friendship was intimately linked to one of Roman culture’s most basic premises: total personal moral accountability toward the community (*existimatio*), rather than to (say) a transcendent God or his representatives on earth. *Put simply and plainly, a Roman’s personal identity was predominantly determined by the gaze of his or*

*her community, and that gaze was very largely fixed on how that person dealt with his or her friends. Roman culture and society was, then, in a very essential way, friendly. We must understand that friendliness, however, in Roman terms.*

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## Suggested Reading

The literature on *amicitia* is vast, and the following notes can do no more than offer a few starting points. They may be used in combination with the ‘bibliographical essay’ found in Konstan [1997](#): 174–76. The only recent general introduction to ancient friendship in English is Konstan [1997](#), which is also the best place to start for learning more about affection in ancient friendship. Brunt’s superb essays on *amicitia* and *clientela* (1988a and 1988b) remain indispensable for aristocratic friendship in the late republic. Michel [1962](#) is still important for its detailed comparison of the morality of *gratia* and *amicitia* with anthropological data from ‘primitive’ cultures. Saller [1982](#) provides a good introduction to *amicitia* as a reciprocity relation. More recently, Burton [2004](#) offers a good example of how Bourdieu’s theory on gift-exchange relations may be useful. For a critical view of friendship and gift exchange, see Konstan [1995](#), Konstan [1997](#) *passim*, and (although focused on the Greek world) Konstan [1998](#). Michel’s study of the role of *amicitia* in the development of Roman law has (to my knowledge) never been surpassed. On the impact of *amicitia* in the law of obligations and inheritances, Verboven [2002](#) will be useful, and also a good access point for the role of *amicitia* in private social practice. For *amici* as testators, Champlin [1991](#): 131–54 provides a good introduction. There is no general up-to-date reassessment of the role played by *amicitia* in republican politics, but Brunt [1988a](#) is still relevant, and Yakobsen [1999](#): 64–123 provides valuable insights. Saller [1982](#) is indispensable for the principate. On the relation of *amicitia* with patronage Saller [1989](#), Konstan [1995](#), and Verboven [2002](#): 49–62 2003 will be useful. For the use of (the discourse on) *amicitia* in international relations, Badian [1958](#) remains fundamental, together with Braund [1984](#). A good introduction to client kings for undergraduates may be found in Braund [1989b](#).

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### Notes:

- (1.) With regard to philosophy and Roman education, hence, the Roman worldview, see Hahn in this volume.
- (2.) Friendship is extensively treated in the *Ethica Eudemia* (book 7), the *Ethica Nicomachea* (book 8), and the *Magna Moralia* (book 2).
- (3.) On Roman notions of hospitality, see Nicols in this volume.
- (4.) More fully in Verboven 2002: 35–48.

(5.) Dinner parties, the baths, the games, and the law courts as places where social relationships were cultivated are all treated in this volume. See Dunbabin and Slater, Fagan, Coleman, and Bablitz, respectively.

(6.) On the implications of the case, see Braund 1989a: 143–45. For the complete dossier, see Migeotte 1984: 254–59.

(7.) With respect to publicizing friendship, cf. Nicols in this volume on hospitality, and the tablets that served to make those relationships known; and on honor, cf. Lendon in this volume.

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