

## HONORIFIC INSCRIPTIONS AND THEIR PONTIC RECIPIENTS\*

by

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**ABSTRACT:** This article discusses the phenomenon of public munificence as seen in the Greek cities on the western/northern Black Sea coast between the fifth c. BC and the third c. AD. The analysis of over three hundred local honorific inscriptions demonstrated that certain trends, such as the growing popularity of euergetism in the second c. AD, closely resembled those seen in other communities of the Eastern Mediterranean. Nonetheless, the occurrence of particular deeds in the material that was analysed deviates from the contemporaneous standards of the Eastern Mediterranean. More expensive contributions, such as building funds or large direct donations, were relatively rare in western and northern Pontic Greek cities, possibly due to their precarious political and financial position. The material that was analysed showcases that the Greek *poleis* from the northwest Pontic region initially experienced constant pressure from the hinterland tribes. Records of envoys to natives decline in number between the Hellenistic and Roman periods, proving that, thanks to the *pax Romana*, the barbarian threat was substantially reduced.

Public munificence in antiquity has its roots in liturgies carried out by citizens to their cities during the classical period. The idea of euergetism (a term used by modern scholars) was to contribute goods or services to the community and to receive a public award in return. The ancient Greeks used the word *euergesia* in reference to a deed committed by a *euergetes*, a benefactor. Being a benefactor often equalled having wealth and influence, also connoting the need to flaunt one's high social status. The majority of acts of euergetism benefitted the *euergetes'* city; in other cases, services were offered to groups of people (councillors) or unions of cities. The salient feature of public munificence was a drive to distinguish oneself by making an extraordinary and previously unheard-of contribution to one's community. Significantly, economic and social aspects of *euergesia* are often highlighted in many works concerning public munificence<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> To read more about euergetism, see: GAUTHIER 1985; VEYNE 1990; SARTRE 1991; MIGEOTTE 1997; ZUIDERHOEK 2009.