THE TRANSFORMATION OF ECONOMIC LIFE UNDER THE ROMAN EMPIRE


EDITED BY LUKAS DE BLOIS & JOHN RICH
MILITARY SUPPLY DURING WARTIME

By

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Research on food in the ancient world has made an enormous advance in recent years. The subject has been tackled from different perspectives, one of them being the study of military supply in the Roman Empire. My work has followed this last approach: the study of food supply to distant regions and the intervention of the Roman government in the organisation of food supply to the army and to Rome.

Following this line of research, I believe I have sketched out the following:

- The praefectura annonae not only had the duty to control the required grain for the frumentationes in Rome but also had the function of controlling food supply to Rome and to the army. This is view is contrary to the thesis of H. Pavis d’Escurec.

- As a result of the above, there never existed an office of the annona militaris because one office monitored all needs of the Roman state, that is, the supply to Rome and to the army. This approach contradicts the thesis by D. van Berchem.

- The Roman state, by accepting tax payments in goods, in addition to products obtained from Imperial lands, had a considerable volume of products by which it could influence market prices in Rome.

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1 University of Barcelona. Research Project: BHA 2000-0731 funded by DGICYT
3 H. Pavis d’Escurec, La préfecture de l’Annone, service administratif impérial d’Auguste à Constantin (Roma 1976).
In this way, the state could also control the prices of those products that were offered to the soldiers and, consequently, soldiers were freed from any fluctuation in their salaries.

I have also pointed out the fact that the Roman state withheld two thirds of the soldier’s pay as payment for maintenance. This is shown in the Latin papyrus Genève no.1 and recently, in the Massada documents.

The facts stated in the paragraph above are significant for the elucidation of the functioning of the Roman economy and particularly for theories and discussions about the amount of coinage required to keep the army active.

All these considerations have led me to propose that the finances of the Roman state were based on a system of compensations between Rome and her provinces and between each and every province. I have thus analysed the Roman system as a system of interdependencies of economic, political and social character, whereby it is required to know the development and function of each of the provinces in order to understand the role that each of them had in the total evolution of the Roman Empire. This is what I have called the “annonymous system” and “system of interdependencies”.

For my research, I set off from the analysis of a particular research subject, that of the production and trade of Baetican olive oil. Through the study of this phenomenon, I have attempted to study the whole economic organisation of the Roman Empire. I believe that a detailed analysis of a specific historical phenomenon, insignificant as it may seem at first sight, might help to clarify the historical situation at a particular moment in time. Accordingly, my work has focused on two aspects: first of all, the study of the production and trade of Baetican olive oil during the early Roman Empire and, secondly, the economic and political implications of this trade. The work has been carried out always bearing in mind that, in the ancient world, as in our modern world, the control of foodstuffs is one of the most important aspects of any society. It was particularly so in Roman society where the Emperor was obliged to satisfy the needs of a triumphant people, Rome and her Army, and at the same time, to offer them the resources of a large Empire.

I have therefore proposed a model for the interpretation of the Roman economy whereby the state had a significant role in promoting the economy. The needs of the state led it to rely for many commodities on private traders and therefore, behind the trade controlled by the state, a long-distance trade developed.

In my opinion, research on Roman government has usually been undertaken by making use of a technique that I would call “vertical prosopography”. First, this type of research was needed because it was necessary to define Roman administrative functions and their historical development. Second, there was no opportunity to develop a “horizontal prosopography” (a synchronic analysis of all functional levels in a particular administrative function) due to a lack of sources. This type of studies would allow us, in my opinion, to know more precisely not only the administrative practice of the Roman Empire but also the relationship between the numerous characters that managed the government and consequently, to gain a better knowledge of the society of the Roman Empire.

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2. For my earlier work on this topic see: J. Remesal Rodríguez, “Olleproduktion und Olhandel in der Baetica: Ein Beispiel für die Verbindung archäologischer und historischer Forschung”, Münsterische Beiträge zur antiken Handelsgeschichte (1983/2), 91-111; Idem, La annona militaris y la exportación de aceite bético a Germania (Madrid 1985), translated as Heeresversorgung und die wirtschaftliche
In this paper, I would like to explain my view of the organisation of the administrative office of food supply and the different levels of its administration and supply.

The Roman army made use, when patrolling or defending frontiers, of a logistic organisation that implied the conjunction of various factors. First, it was dependent on the resources that soldiers were able to produce in the *fabriæ legionis*. Second, it was also dependent upon the resources that it could gather from around the occupied regions or nearby areas. Third, it depended on the resources that it could manage to carry from far away regions. In wartime, if the army was in enemy territory, it could plunder as much as it could.

The resources that the state could place at the disposal of its army had different origins: they could be products received by the State as taxes in goods, or products coming from the Imperial properties, or products acquired by the State in the market, or finally, products requisitioned by the State (*indictiones*).

The Imperial administrative office left to private hands the transportation of the products carried to Rome. Private traders received an economic compensation (*vocductae*) for carrying those products that were already property of the state. To stimulate the transportation of products to the Roman market, and, in my opinion, also to the army, traders received in exchange social privileges already from the time of the Emperor Claudius. Consequently, as I have already remarked, the need to supply Rome and the army was the main motive that led to the development of long-distance trade and, as a result, this was the main factor for the development of the economy of the Roman Empire.

During peacetime, the army was in a situation whereby it could gather all products required or that were at its reach, whether foodstuffs or any other kind of products, either from its location or from areas which it passed through, as numerous papyri demonstrate.

The decree by Sextus Sotidius Strabo Libuscidianus shows how important it was for the Roman administrative office to guarantee the army supply as well as limiting the prerogative of the use of private means of transport by military and civil servants. However, as I have already commented somewhere else, I believe that what is significant is that soldiers had the same privileges as high-ranking civil servants.

A well-known letter by Pliny the Younger, with the Emperor Trajan’s reply, reveals that even the governor and a special envoy to the emperor had to place part of their guard at the service of the procurator who was a freedman having the mission of collecting grain in Paphlagonia. I would like to stress this ‘subversion’ of the social order. Part of the guard of the governor is placed under the orders of a freedman who was an imperial agent because the supply of food is of prime interest to the state. Any other considerations must abide to that.

Other documents, like the *Pridianum* from Moesia, reveal that soldiers could be sent to remote provinces with the duty of collecting certain products. In their journey from and back to their detachments, these soldiers made use of the system described in the decree of Strabo Libuscidianus. For these journeys, soldiers did not have to carry money with them as any expenses were paid (by means of the final payment of taxes) by the cities that they came across in their journey, as a passage in Siculo Ficulus shows.

Until now, the role of *praefecti castrorum* and *primipilares* and *frumentarii* in the supply of their units has been underlined. However, I

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believe that the way by which these officials transmitted information on their needs has not been the subject of study yet, nor how the state acquired and distributed the materials requested. In my opinion, the castra peregrina of Rome, made up of soldiers from any legion, constituted the headquarters of the army where petitions of each unit were received and from where these petitions were sent to either the administrative office of the annona or to the provincial governors. The later, by means of military men of their officium, were the ones to seek resources. There has been recent emphasis on the role of beneficiarii, who carried out the orders of provincial governors, in performing these tasks. Payment for products, obtained by purchase or requisition, was the responsibility of procuratores. Land transport was entrusted to cities within the limits defined in the decree of Strabo Libuscidianus. Maritime trade was in the hands of navicularii who received an economic compensation (voceturae) for this commitment. Nevertheless, we cannot forget the role that the Roman army must have played at least in times of war.

The recent studies of the logistics of the Roman Imperial Army by T. H. Kissel and by J. P. Roth assemble an enormous amount of information, but do not, in my view, give a comprehensive treatment of the subject, at least in regard to the administrative aspects of military supply.

In Table 1, I have compiled epigraphic evidence up to Severan times that explains the organisation, both administrative and logistic, of military supply in wartime. A "vertical" reading of this table shows how the organisation evolves through time. A "horizontal" reading, even though it is limited by lack of documents, shows specific operations at a certain moment in time and the various levels of the economic and financial administrative office of both the state and the army.

1. Financial administration of war

In the first column, I have listed the names of those who, in my opinion, represent the financial authority of military campaigns. The names refer to

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Imperial slaves and freedmen who, under the title of a copitis militaribus first and dispensatores later, were in charge of the accounting of war expenditure. It is not yet known to which office these men were assigned. None of them indicates in their inscriptions any link to the praefecturae that seem to be most directly involved, that is, the praefectura annonae and that of the praetorian prefect. Like Rickman, I also believe that these men were dependent on the office of the procurator a rationibus. Even though the title a copitis militaribus does not explain the function of these men, the latter use of the title dispensor makes it clear that these people were in charge of administrative and economic tasks. Both inscriptions, dated in the 2nd c. AD, seem to indicate specific positions related to certain military campaigns. Literary sources elucidate how the emperor paid personal attention to this matter.

2. Reinforcement of the praefectura annona

The second column shows civilians that contributed to reinforcing the office of the annona. These men were of equestrian rank from the time of the Flavians onwards. We are not in a position to establish a direct relationship between these people and military campaigns. It could well have been that they acted in times of food shortage. However, in the cases of Aurelius Papirius Dionysius and Furius Sabinus Aquila Timesitheus, their association with military supplies is clearly indicated. In my opinion, it is also clear in the cases of Sex. Iulius Possessor and C. Attius Alcimus Felicianus. I understand the function of proc. Romae frumenti comparandi of M. Arratius Claudianus as a task undertaken in Rome (Romae is therefore a locative), in contrast to the function of M. Claudius Faustus Secundus.
of whom it is said that he was active in provincia\textsuperscript{27}. In other cases, like Corpus Palatianus\textsuperscript{28}, T. Flavius Macer\textsuperscript{29}, the unknown procutrator ad olearia comparanda per regionem Tripolitanam\textsuperscript{30} or others that are known to have accomplished unusual tasks on behalf of the annona, it is not known if they acted in times of war or, as I have already said, in times of food shortage\textsuperscript{31}. As I have already argued, the subpraefectura annonae was probably introduced as part of the enlargement of the organisational structure of the administrative office of the annona in response to the Marcomannic Wars. According to current evidence, some men received during the first century A.D. and until the middle of the second century A.D., the titles of adiutores, curatores, comparatores, and in later times, the title of procuratores.

3. Curatores copiarum expeditionis (publicani)

In the third column, we include names that have not been studied from the perspective here explained. As Vegetius says: De copis expensisque sollevet debet esse tractatus ut pabula, frumentum ceteraeque annonariae species quas a provinciis consueto depositus maturius exigitur, et in opportunis ad rem gerendam ac munitissimis locis amplior semper modus quam sufficit adgregetur. Quod si tributa deficient, prorogato auro comparanda sunt omnia\textsuperscript{32}. When the army or the emperor\textsuperscript{33} moved from one place to another, their supply was the duty of the provinces to which they went along. Most of the majority of the cities through which the army passed would not have had at their immediate disposal all the resources required to supply the needs of thousands of men or the funds to buy and distribute these resources. Guéy has shown the significance of an inscription from Thiatira (Lydia), dedicated to someone whose name is only partially preserved, ...ius Secun... This person supplied legions of Trajan, the legiones V Macedonia, VII Claudia Pia Fidelis, IV Scythica and I Italica, during the Parthian campaign, and put at their disposal any financial resources needed\textsuperscript{34}. In addition, I have shown that the Digest also attests the existence of men that act as publicani, by means of advancing money and resources to the provinces so as to supply the army and later, by charging them back and thus making a profit\textsuperscript{35}. One individual known to have performed this function is C. Valerius Marianus, attested as adlectus annonae for Illi Italiae\textsuperscript{36}, a legion that was created by Marcus Aurelius as a result of the Marcomannic wars between the years 166 and 170 AD\textsuperscript{37}. In this category, I believe that it is necessary to include actions that have been considered until now as evergetism, namely the advancing of advance money and supplies to individuals’ home towns in response to the requirements of a visiting army or emperor. Even though in some cases one can discern a philanthropic attitude, as in the case of the Palmyrian Malé, nick-named Agrippa\textsuperscript{38}, in other cases it is obvious that personal profit could be derived through advancing money and offering low-price products, as in the case of M. Salarius Sabinus\textsuperscript{39}. As Vegetius says, provinces had to provide for the required resources: but, if there are no taxes, gold can buy anything: Quod si tributa deficient, prorogato auro comparanda sunt omnia. Therefore, wealthy people could become prorogatores auri, making profit in times of war even under an appearance of evergetism.

In this way, the finances of war had a two-fold social repercussion: the provinces had to maintain the army while in movement and, in addition, men that had enough resources could benefit by financing war in advance. The state had also another way to finance war by means of the feared indictiones whereby civilians were obliged to sell products at a fixed rate. As Pliny complains, this actually meant an increase in taxes that was very much feared by civilians. Our literary sources are very sensitive to this: a good emperor is the one that keeps the balance between the interests of the state and those of society. Augustus, Trajan, Antoninus Pius, and Marcus

\textsuperscript{27} CIL VIII 12066; Devijver 1976, op. cit. (n.23) C 197.
\textsuperscript{28} CIL VI 8470.
\textsuperscript{29} CIL VIII 5515, AE 1922, 19; Pfaff 1960/1, op. cit.(n.22) I nr. 98.
\textsuperscript{30} AE 1973, 76; Pfaff 1982, suppl. op. cit. (n.22) nr.276A.
\textsuperscript{31} For instance, Sex.Antius Suburries Aemilia, who was adiutor Iului Upi praefecti annonae in Flavian times, AE 1939, 66; Pfaff 1960/1, op. cit. (n.22) I nr.56; Devijver 1976, op. cit.(n.23) A 189.
\textsuperscript{32} Vegetius J.J.
\textsuperscript{33} H. Hullemann, Itineraria Princum. Geschichte und Typologie der Kaiserreisen im römischen Reich ( Stuttgart 1986).
\textsuperscript{34} J. Guée, 'Inscription du second siècle relative à l'annone militaire', Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'Histoire 55 (1938), 56-77.
\textsuperscript{35} Dig. 16. 2. 20. (Papinian Lib. XIII. responsorum): ob negotium copiarum expeditionis tampoline mundum curatorium condonatorem pecuniam iure compensationali restituisse non placuit; quoniam ea non compensatur. Remus Rodriguez (1986), op. cit. (n.3), 98.
\textsuperscript{36} CIL. V 5036 from Trento where he followed a municipal career. Cf. Pfaff 1960/1, op. cit. (n. 22) I apud nr 181 bis, 481 note 16.
\textsuperscript{37} Dio Cassius 55.24.4; R.E. XIX.2.1535.
\textsuperscript{38} CIS II 3599, C. Domant, Le Sanctuaire du Basil-Shamin à Palmyre. Vol. III. Les inscriptions (Rome 1971), nr.44.
Aurelius\textsuperscript{40} all were considered to be good emperors because of this. Pliny, while comparing the policy of Domitian with that of Trajan, writes: \textit{emitter fiscus quidquid videtur emere. Inde copiae inde annones, de quia inter licentem vendentemque conveniat, inde his satietas nec fames usquam\textsuperscript{41}}.

4. Transport to the frontline

Once products had been received at the military supply bases, they were transported to the battlefield under military control. This important mission was entrusted to equestrian military officers chosen for their ability who, in most cases, obtained military medals in return, as in the cases of L. Aburnius Tusciarius\textsuperscript{42} and M. Valerius Maximinus\textsuperscript{43}.

Supply bases could be set near the front line, as the missions of L. Aburnius Tusciatus and T. Antonius Claudius Alfenus Arignotus\textsuperscript{44} demonstrate, or very far away from the battlefield. For the latter, the missions of C. Cominus Bonus Agricola\textsuperscript{45}, M. Valerius Maximinus and L. Castricius Honoratus\textsuperscript{46} are good examples. The first co-ordinated from Arles the collecting of products either from Gallia and Liguria or transported by the \textit{naviculari marini} (who were the ones to offer the inscription)\textsuperscript{47}. The second controlled, from his position near the Danube headwaters, the river transport of products that reached Pannonia with the help of, on the one hand, the \textit{vexillationes} of the fleet of Misenum, Ravena and Britannia and, on the other hand, a light cavalry unit that had the duty of defending the convoy\textsuperscript{48}.

5. Head commanders of logistics

Any military campaign requires a good logistic organisation. Vegetius puts the point well: \textit{Saepe enim penuria quam pugna consumit exercitum, et ferro saevior fames est. Deinde reliquis casibus potest in tempore subveniri, pabulatio et annona in necessitatem remedium non habent, nisi ante condantur. In omni expeditione unum est et maximum tulum, ut tibi sufficiat victus, hostes frangat inopia\textsuperscript{50}}.

Hunger is worse than anything. The logistics headquarters had to be in the hands of someone, not only efficient, but also someone whom the emperor could trust. Some of the persons to whom was given this role are known to have already carried out important military tasks, for example C. Caeliius Martialis\textsuperscript{51}. Others, like L. Aurelius Nicomedes\textsuperscript{52} and T. Claudius Candidus\textsuperscript{53}, received military medals after carrying out the job. The great majority were rewarded with the entrance to the \textit{ordo senatorius}, as is the case for Plotius Grypus\textsuperscript{54}, L. Aurelius Nicomedes, tutor to Lucius Verus and friend of Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius, T. Claudius Candidus, the great general of Septimius Severus, Cn. Marcus Rusticus Rufinus\textsuperscript{55} and M. Aurelius Tesiumus\textsuperscript{56}, M. Rossius Vititulus\textsuperscript{57}, the head of supply for the three civil war campaigns of Septimius Severus, became a \textit{duconarius}.

A horizontal reading of the table shows that the evidence may be interpreted in accordance with the five functions that I have been

\textsuperscript{40} Suetsion , \textit{Augustus} 42.3; SHA, \textit{Vita Anonicini P.11}; \textit{Vita Marci Annonini} 21.9.

\textsuperscript{41} Pliny Min, \textit{Panegyricus} 29. 5.

\textsuperscript{42} AE.1911, 161; Devierv 1979, op.cit.(n.23), A 5.


\textsuperscript{44} CIG 3884; Pflaum 1960/1, op. cit. (n. 22) I nr. 218 ter; Deierv 1976, op.cit.(n.23), A 132.

\textsuperscript{45} CIL XII 672; Pflaum (1960/1), op. cit. (n. 22) I nr. 186; Deierv 1976, op.cit.(n.23), C 220.

\textsuperscript{46} CIL. II 1183; Dobson 1978, op. cit. (n. 15), n.158.

\textsuperscript{47} CIL XII 672.

\textsuperscript{48} Pflaum 1955, op.cit. (n.43), 123-154; Alfoldy 1974, op. cit. (n. 43) believes the missions \textit{ad deducendum per Dianam quasi in annonam Pannoniae usque exercitu alieno advenientes} are different to the mission \textit{propositius vexillationum classis praeutorum Misenorum item Ariminensi item clausis Britannicis item equestris Afrorum et Mauretanorum electorum ad curiam explorationis Pannoniae}, dating the former in A.D. 169 and the latter in A.D. 170-171. In my opinion, all the references are to the same mission. Valerius Maximianus, in order to transport products along the river, needed sailors and light cavalry to defend the convoy.

\textsuperscript{49} Pflaum 1960/1, op. cit. (n. 22) I nr.186.

\textsuperscript{50} Vegetius 3.3.

\textsuperscript{51} AE. 1934, 2; Pflaum 1960/1, op. cit. (n. 22) I nr.74; Devierv 1976, op.cit.(n.23), C 31.

\textsuperscript{52} CIL VI 1598; Pflaum 1960/1, op. cit. (n. 22) I nr.163.

\textsuperscript{53} CIL II 4114; G. Alfoldy, \textit{Die römischen Inschriften von Taracca} (Berlin 1975), 130; Pflaum 1960/1, op. cit. (n. 22) I nr.203; Devierv 1976, op.cit.(n.23), C 128.

\textsuperscript{54} Statius, \textit{Silvae} 4.7.15; Pflaum 1955, op.cit. (n.43), 144, n.1. F. Béard, \textit{‘La carrière de Plotius Grypus et le ravitaillement de l'armée en campagne'}, \textit{MEPA} 94 (1984), 259-324.

\textsuperscript{55} CIL IX 1582; CIL X 1127; Pflaum 1960/1, op. cit. (n. 22) II nr.234.


\textsuperscript{57} Pflaum 1960/1, op.cit.(n.22) II nr.224; Deierv 1977, op.cit.(n.23), R 11.
commenting upon and corresponds to a well-structured model of organisation. War required a financial control of state resources and this task was entrusted to slaves and imperial freedmen that were probably assigned to the officium a rationibus. War obliged the praefectura annonae (the office that, in my opinion, was in charge of the supply to Rome and its army) to acquire resources for the army and this task was entrusted, from the Flavians onwards, to men of equestrian rank who executed it from Rome and from the provinces. The duty of the provinces where the army was in action or in transit was that of contributing to the maintenance of the army. This caused the appearance of actual publicani who advanced money or goods to the provinces, in exchange for profit, even though in some cases some men did it as an act of evergetism. War required that, once products reached their supply bases, whether near to or remote from the front line, transport to the actual front line had to be entrusted to military men of equestrian rank, who had soldiers and civilians to carry the resources entrusted to them. Finally, war required a logistic direction entrusted to someone who should be both capable and trustworthy.

War is a determining factor for the social and economic evolution of any society. Augustus had created a standing army, extended along a wide frontier. This army had, in theory, a defensive role. The life and the salary of a Roman soldier was not very stimulating. Augustus, however, knew how to give soldiers a stimulus or a future dream: the aerarium militare. This ensured soldiers the security of receiving resources to guarantee their pay and to permit their reinsertion into civilian life.

From the total amount of a soldier's pay, part of it was withheld to pay for expenses of his maintenance and equipment. The fact that the state supplied the army meant that, in the first place, soldiers were freed from any fluctuation in prices and therefore, soldiers were more operative in times of war because their subsistence was guaranteed. On the other hand, it also meant that resources, especially food, could be distributed from imperial properties and tax payments in goods, avoiding coinage circulation.

Although the army always played a part in the gathering of whatever it needed, especially in those areas next to their camps, the long-distance trade in staple products like grain and oil and probably many others, was left in private hands (mercatores, negotiatores, navicularii, and diffusores). This made it possible that, besides a redistributive exchange system that guaranteed a certain benefit to traders, a free-market long-distance trade developed which formed the basis of the economic development of the Roman Empire.

In my opinion, soldiers dispatched to the castra peregrina at Rome and to the officia of provincial governors were the ones that set up the basis for the logistic structure of the army, through which news about the needs of each unit circulated. A unique office, the praefectura annonae, by means of the procurators Augusti, was in charge of the administrative organisation for the collection and distribution of foodstuffs, either for Rome or for the army. In wartime, the system was reinforced in the way I have here attempted to explain.

Barcelona, May 2002


60 As inscriptions dedicated to these people show. Remesal Rodriguez 2000, op. cit. (n. 5).
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