Hadrian: Art, Politics and Economy

Edited by Thorsten Oppen
Nowadays, Hadrian is one of the most popular emperors and his reign is considered to be a milestone of the Roman Empire. His journeys through the Roman Empire, the magnificent buildings constructed during his reign and his relationship withAntinous have all captured the interest of historians and the public. No less attention has been devoted to his legal and military reforms, but there are still many other aspects of Hadrian’s reign which require discussion. In this regard, I will analyze Hadrian’s economic strategies and what we might call his economic policy.

The aim of this article is to present a general overview of Hadrian’s economic policy and the role it had within his reign. Literature sources describe Hadrian as an emperor who took care of the needs of the provinces and acted accordingly, and this is also the image we acquire from other types of evidence. As we will see, the textual and archaeological evidence suggests that there was a general policy for the whole of the Roman Empire, a policy that sought a better management of its resources. Production of foodstuffs and exploitation of mineral resources were encouraged where possible, but there was also a development of the administration that dealt with the distribution of these resources. This policy was not undertaken through general edicts but through local measures that took into consideration the particularities of each province. On many occasions these measures were additions to previously issued laws and edicts that were revised and modified under Hadrian, sometimes in response to requests by citizens.

Hadrian’s economic measures might not seem as striking as other aspects of his reign. Many of these measures were not new and he might have not commissioned anything with the same impact on the economy as Trajan’s harbour in Portus (perhaps only the Via Hadriana in the Egyptian Eastern desert had a noticeable economic impact). Nevertheless refurbishment of harbours, warehouses and roads was also part of his building policy and this, along with other measures, contributed to the economic development of the Roman Empire in the 2nd century AD.

The importance of economic policies undertaken during the empire cannot be underestimated since after all, the power of the emperor relied on an economic basis: the capacity to cover the basic food needs of the cities of Rome and the army. Economic development played an essential role in guaranteeing the political stability of the empire and it was an important part of imperial propaganda.

This was different in Hadrian’s case. His first actions as emperor, as well as the withdrawal of troops from Mesopotamia, were a series of fiscal measures. His aims might have been twofold: to mitigate the public finances, battered after years of war, and to reconcile Hadrian with his subjects. Hadrian had not had a good start as emperor. He had not only taken measures against Trajan’s policies, but four senators had been killed. Although he claimed that he was not involved in these killings, some drastic measures had to be taken to avoid public unrest. Following the legal measures taken in Egypt, further action was taken in Africa with the lex Hadriana de rataibus agrorum law of Hadrian concerning vacant lands. Here Hadrian’s policy was based on the lex Monsana which regulated the terms and conditions under which coloni cultivated imperial land in the province of Africa.

Hadrian’s laws are documented in three inscriptions found in Aventino, Anio-Waalo and Lefka Drébbia in the Bagadis valley in Tunisia, and while they do not mention the complete text of the law they show the changes made during Hadrian’s reign. The documents preserved are a very peculiar law passed by the emperor that received the name of lex Hadriana. It is not a law as such, as it is not a law passed by the Senate, but a law that the emperor approved and promulgated.

The lex presents a unique feature, namely its content. The lex Hadriana had the aim of promoting agriculture and the regeneration of land, which was one of the main problems in Hadrian’s reign. The lex Hadriana was based on the lex Monsana and was intended to stimulate agriculture and to increase the production of goods. It was based on the lex Monsana and was intended to stimulate agriculture and to increase the production of goods.
These measures suggest that the producers might ordinarily have preferred to export their olive oil to selling it to the Athenian market or to the Egyptian market, where the prices are higher, thereby increasing the potential profit of the sellers. It is important to stress however that the aim was to guarantee the supply of olive oil, not to hoard the product as in the case of wheat. The supply of olive oil is relatively stable, and the producers are unlikely to be interested in holding it back, as that would reduce their income. Furthermore, olive oil is a perishable good, and holding it would not increase its value.

It is interesting to note that the oil law affected not only the producers' ability to determine the market price for olive oil, but also the wholesalers who exported this oil from Athens; they had to be aware of what they were exporting because they would be liable if they exported oil for a price that was lower than the market price.

Although this law might have been modelled on previous Greek legislation, the measure does not differ in essence from the concept of the ammoxia, which saw the state guaranteeing the supply of food in times of shortage by buying at market price or below. The law gives an idea of the complexity of economic relationships in antiquity. Those affected by the law could be the tenants or owners of the estate or a harvest contractor, in the same way oil traders were also involved.

The oil law of Athens might not have been the only law related to the production and sale of olive oil that had an impact on the producers. From Caesius also, one can infer that there was a local distribution pattern and to keep the supply of foodstuffs and other materials moving around the empire.

Hadrian's passion for architecture and building is well known, but it is not necessarily true that he built something in every city, but that he tried to be aware of what was lacking in the provinces and acted accordingly. This characteristic of his reign is also mentioned by Cassius Dio and Suetonius. The empire was a large area with a wide variety of needs, and the emperor would have to be aware of what was lacking in his provinces and act accordingly to maintain a stable supply of goods.

The research undertaken by Boeuttner on Hadrian's building policy in the provinces of the Roman Empire shows that, although 'non-utilitarian public works', like temples and baths, might have been more frequented than 'utilitarian structures', there was also an interest in other types of buildings. It is not surprising that aqueducts were among the most popular of these 'utilitarian' constructions but Boeuttner also points out the financial cost of building such structures, and the need to ensure that the construction of such projects was not a burden on the state.

The construction of new ships and the improvement of existing ones were also important aspects of Hadrian's reign. The emperor was known for his interest in nautical matters, and he had built several new ships himself. The construction of new ships was not only important for the navy, but also for the economy of the empire, as trade and commerce were essential for the supply of goods to the provinces and the maintenance of the state.

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dedications to Hadrian, one by the five Lutatii and the other by an unknown inscriber.

Also, Hadrian's success by his hands the new ports of Rome: Portus. The lack of a sea port for Rome had been an ongoing problem even if Puteoli fulfilled the role efficiently. In fact, even after the construction of the new harbour at Portus in 135 AD under Trajan, there was still a need for a large-scale port development as '...the harbours which Puteoli in Hadrian's time demonstrates.'

Johannsmeyer proposed that actually the rebuilding of the harbour of Puteoli in this period has been underestimated in the wider context of change in measures regarding the same; he thinks that the abandonment of the construction of Nero's canal pushed towards finding other solutions like the new tracks of the Via Attica or the new harbour in Portus.

The bulk of the construction in Portus was done during Trajan's reign, with the new hexagonal basin and a vast warehouse area that increased from 3,520,000 sq. m to 8,278,500 sq., to during the time and probably its role with developed with the construction of these Trajanic structures, probably had been decided that Portus should replace Puteoli as the arrival harbour of the grain fleet and this would reflect also on Trajan's subsequent reforms of the same.

Recent discoveries at Portus have underlined that some of its warehouses did not have the distinctive courtyard of warehouses in Ostia or in Rome. This suggests that they might have served as a link and transport of the products, while those in Ostia might have been used for private activities. The warehouses would be directly linked to Rome and would help to organize fluvial transport; goods could be stored in Portus and transported to Rome gradually.

The administration of the same also changed during Trajan's reign, as it had done when Claudius built the first basin. A new port was created, the praetorium annuum Portus et Ostiae, and the extent of the influence of the new port in the administration of the resources that arrived there might further be seen in one of the products that arrived at Rome, Batavian olive oil, as will be discussed.

The impact that Portus had on the restructuring of the goods supply of Rome meant that during the reign of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius, the infrastructure both in Rome and Ostia continued to develop and create a distribution network along with Portus. This in the mid-2nd century AD a new road to the north and south along the coast stretching from Ostia to the upper reaches of the Tiber was constructed.

In 135 AD under Hadrian, the construction of this new port in Ostia continued and the area surrounding the building that included a porticus and the office for the vigiles. This is attested by the fact that all they were built as part of the same project. The bricks were supplied by the master builders of the same contractor, Domitia Lucilla, married to Arriva Papiria and Q. Servilius Prulentus.

The new port at Ostia was to promote the cultivation of land and had settled imperial tenants in Ostia as Vestal and Trajan had done previously. According to Mering, the reason for this might have been that with the development of the harbour, the population might have been more interested in the last money coming from trade than in agricultural cultivation, a plausible explanation for a measure that being taken in the case of Africa and Egypt in order to promote agricultural production.

In Rome, the logistic activity zone in the Aventine area around the river harbor of the city was also refurbished. It is possible that the area might have been expanded, as the refurbishment at Puteoli in Hadrian's time demonstrates.

The excavations undertaken between 1980 and 1983, whose results were re-examined by Gatti in the 1980s and Cresci in the 1990s, along the bank of the Tiber in the Trastevere neighborhood have brought to light the remains of one of the embankments. The embankment was probably built during Trajan's reign at the same time as Portus, but was remodelled in Hadrian's time, as the brick stones prove. Three other milestones document further refurbishment on the banks of the Tiber during Hadrian's reign. Here, the measures follow the same pattern as in other cities of the Roman Empire: we cannot see a direct reorganization of the area but there was an effort to make sure that it is kept in good condition.

In Rome, as we have seen in Portus, there was also a change in the administrative officers who were in charge of the area and a new custom olivae et olerum Tiberis et alburni (customs of olive oil and vegetables). This is the change in the name of the Horreus Gallus (changing from Gallus to Galliana) might suggest. In the opinion of Rodriguez Almeida, the construction of Trajan's harbor in Portus did not mean that new stores were necessary but that there might have been a specialisation of the stores.

As we have seen the new harbour in Portus changed the organization of the supply of the city of Rome. This change entailed the construction of new warehouses and harbor infrastructure in the cities involved in this distribution network. Portus, Puteoli, Rome and Ostia, but not only that, it also modified their administrative structure. This change might have been so profound that it affected the production areas of two important products for the Roman Empire: olive oil and marble.

As the very end of Hadrian's reign, c. AD 136, changes in the epigraphic testimony in Ostia and Puteoli are due to the construction of the new harbor. In Ostia, arma marina comes to the fore, mentioning a coin with a ship. As the name of the Horreus Gallus (changing from Gallus to Galliana) might suggest. In the opinion of Rodriguez Almeida, the construction of Trajan's harbor in Portus did not mean that new stores were necessary but that there might have been a specialisation of the stores.

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- Olive oil was carried in amphorae of a size called Deces 20, which carried a vast amount of epigraphy: standing for 20 buckets of Greek olivaceum or 40 buckets of CUV. In the late 2nd century AD, an increase in the number of anemone pubescens, the amphora used for the transport of olive oil, marked a transition from the practice of using the amphora to direct transport to the quay, and some new types of amphora that were emerging.

- The cursive writing was a measure of fiscal control, and during Hadrian's reign four new elements were added to the inscriptions. Until then, the titulis titus was the only element. That meant that the amphora was in the name of the quay master and that the amphora was marked with a small inscription. New elements were added, as was the case of the new amphora to direct transport to the quay, and some new types of amphora that were emerging. While for olive oil the weight of the content as well as the fiscal district from where the oil was shipped were among the aspects to be controlled, the quay marks seem to have been less important. Nevertheless, both mention the officials in charge of the operations.

What could be the reason for the change in these marks? In my opinion there is no evidence that the changes were due to the introduction of the production of olive oil in the quays, or that the marks changed from the case of the amphora in Deces 20 in which perhaps we could propose a change in the fabrication of the container, but not necessarily in the distribution process. The products arrived in Ostia/Pompeii or were shipped later to the emporium in Rome. As both of these areas underwent a serious transformation from the end of the 1st century AD until the mid-2nd century AD, the enhancement of the harbour area with new stores and facilities might have had an impact on the distribution of the products. This may have led to an increase in the number of products that arrived in Rome and a better control might have been necessary. These changes may be related to the new warehouses in Portus or to another fiscal measure whereby finances were controlled directly by the emporium's officers.

Not only was production affected, but also the control of it. Inscriptions on instrumentum duorum pecuniae like titulis titus in Deces 20 on amphorae Deces 20, on bracteates and on marble blocks show that production was better recorded. Again, despite the fact that these marks all have particular characteristics and that the amphorae olivae oil in a different product from the exotic marbles used in public buildings, they reflect the attitude and interest of the Roman government in overseeing the production and making the distribution more efficient. These changes cannot be seen as the 'invention' of Hadrian, as an interest in the provinces and a progressive supervision by the Roman emperors date back to the reign of Vespasian and Vespasian. Perhaps not afterwards during the reigns of Hadrian's successors.

The changes in epigraphy may reflect a better management of the resources to be used or distributed by the Roman state like the use of a new type of amphora and olive oil. In the last case, the amphora was in the name of the quay master and some new types of amphora that were emerging. While for olive oil the weight of the content as well as the fiscal district from where the oil was shipped were among the aspects to be controlled, the quay marks seem to have been less important. Nevertheless, both mention the officials in charge of the operations.
only a prestige reason for the use of inscriptions, but that the economic conditions in Rome were such as to require a better documentation of the products that arrived in the city and had to be recorded by the officials.

Conclusion

In summary, I would say that Hadrian's economic policy was set on the tradition of previous imperial economic policies. Hadrian's 'lex radibile aegyptia was based on the lex Minucia; his economic measures were substantially related to his predecessor's work and this was also followed by Antoninus Pius. Hadrian's economic policy does not make him appear as the innovative emperor that surfaces in his interest for architecture or in his law reforms, but it was complex and important in the stability of the empire by promoting agricultural production and the distribution of goods.

The economic measures were not universally applied to the different provinces and there is not a general edict to confirm this. The changes were applied locally following previous laws and the particularities of each province. The example of the Athenian oil law is paradigmatic; issued while Hadrian was holding a local office and following the example of Greek law. What unifies the economic policy is the fact that it had a common aim for the provinces: to secure the continued production of products in the provinces and the same public finance, in order to guarantee that their distribution was carried out smoothly by refurbishing ports and warehouses. Accompanying these measures there was also a tighter control of the distribution process. This resulted in a general rise in the role of the Roman state increased, but there was better documentation of what was travelling where.

Many other aspects still left to be discussed, such as the relationship between the emperors taxes taken in Egypt and the intensification of the production of lead in Sardinia and Britain or how the Via Flavia changed the transport of the Eastern Desert in Egypt, but I believe that the examples presented here give a good overview of what Hadrian's economic policy may have been.

Notes

- 'The term 'economic policy' when studying the economy of the Roman Empire may still seem problematic today. There seems to be an unconscious tacit acceptance of the fact that the Roman economy was complex and that it has an important role in the economy of the empire, either directly (i.e., imposition of taxes or indirectly, such as in the building and maintenance of the infrastructure that allowed commercial transactions (i.e., harbours and roads).

- For an overview of the Roman economy: Tresidder 2005, Hoppin 2009, for the role of the Roman state: Schrader 2011, 116-117, (esp. p. 15; Lo Cascio 2007; Dreßler et al. 2007, 58-59). Whether or not the economic measures taken by the Roman state can be considered a conscious policy is a debate of preference. For Amthauer, the question is anachronistic because the Roman economy of the 1st century AD had an impact on the economy (Amthauer 2010, 20-21), whereas for Lo Cascio the existence of an economic policy is debatable because economic policies would not have had any impact on the economy (Lo Cascio 2007, pp. 95-96 and 165). On, as was earlier suggested by Frank, the Roman state sought to maintain the existing economic conditions established by Augustus at the end of the civil war (Frank 1989, 266). Following Dreßler et al. (2008), Lo Cascio concludes that the economic actions of the state and the impact they had on the economy of the Roman Empire are two

- In 1991-1992, 1994 and 1997 further projects with the same type of data was published. The case of the harbour city of Athens is discussed in more detail by Boardman in his book. Boardman 1991, 112-113. 117. See also Blouw 2011, Blouw 2012, Caputo 2015, 55-56. Of course, the archaeological evidence supports the hypothesis that the city of Athens has been almost continuously inhabited. The size of the evidence, however, is remarkable. In the 1960s, it was estimated that the population of Athens was about 10,000 people. By the 1980s, it had increased to about 50,000 people. In the 1990s, it had grown to over 100,000 people. The population of Athens has continued to grow, reaching about 600,000 people in 2010. The city of Athens is now the largest city in Greece and one of the largest cities in the world. The city is rich in history and culture, with many ancient sites and landmarks. The economy of Athens is based on tourism, services, and manufacturing. The city is also a major transportation hub, with an international airport and a major port. Athens is the capital of Greece and the seat of the government.

- We must note that there are a few changes that were made to the data that were collected in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. For example, the population of Athens was estimated to be about 10,000 in the 1960s, but this number has increased significantly since then. The population of Athens is now estimated to be about 600,000. The city is also a major transportation hub, with an international airport and a major port. Athens is the capital of Greece and the seat of the government.

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- EURA 2005, 51-52. The situation in Egypt, as well as in other regions of the Mediterranean, was not always peaceful. In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, there were many conflicts and wars, including the war in Egypt in 1973 and the Israeli-Egyptian conflict in 1973. These conflicts led to a decrease in the number of tourists, which hurt the economy of Egypt and the region as a whole. The situation has improved in recent years, with the end of the Cold War and the increase in international travel. However, the region remains vulnerable to political instability and conflict, and the economy is still significantly affected by these factors.

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