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Extra ordinem utilitatis causa constituti sunt: an update of the prosopography of Praefecti annonae

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CALDELLI, M. L. 2020. *I prefetti dell'annona da Augusto a Costantino*. Collection de l'École française de Rome 577. Rome: École française de Rome. Pp. 154.
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There are themes in the history of Rome that, due to the poverty or complexity of data, test our objectivity as researchers, such as the birth of the Roman Republic after a victory of the monarchist faction; the violation of the Treaty of the Ebro as *casus belli* of the Second Punic War; and, above all, the crisis – or crises – of the 3rd c. CE. Reflection on the administrative service of the *annona* and its head, the *praefectus annonae*, is also one of these controversial topics. Our perception of the attributions of the *annona* and of the jurisdiction of the *praefectus annonae* depends on two factors: first, the degree of positivism, conscious or unconscious, with which we construct our syllogisms, or the intrinsic and objective

* This book review has been updated to correct an error in the title of the book reviewed. See DOI:10.1017/S1047759422000289.

value we grant to the data, in this case, essentially honorific inscriptions in stone; and second, our perception of the Roman economy, or position between the two traditional and exclusive positions: the “modernist” one (which accepts long-distance trade, banks, the free market, and the ability of the state to process its own balance sheet) and the “primitivist” one (which denies these).

The year 2020 was an excellent one for scholars of the prefecture of annona. After more than 40 years since the publication of Henriette Pavis d’Escurac’s (1925–2021) foundational work,¹ the volume under review has appeared, and so too a very recent reproduction of the work of Henriette Pavis d’Escurac, who passed away in March 2021.

Caldelli’s interesting book provides important elements for the debate about the annona. This is an update on the topic, necessary and relevant for the new inscriptions that have been published in recent years. At 154 pages, including bibliography and indices, the volume is short, and it is written in a concise and laconic style. The brevity suggests that the author did not want to enter into the merits of the problem: to determine the precise nature of the attributions of the administrative service of the annona. The book arranges the new data with great efficiency and clarity but refuses to position itself on the historical problems surrounding the praefectus annonae. Moreover, two years before this current study, there was an article, which contained the main ideas that the author develops in this volume.²

The volume begins with a short introduction (1–4), where the author justifies the need for the book by virtue of the appearance of new inscriptions in recent decades and the advancement of knowledge regarding the equestrian cursus in general. Following that is a list of publications (said to be “per il problema più in generale sono da considerarsi essenziali,” 2), in which several works by José Remesal Rodríguez that deal with the administrative service of the annona are missing, with respect to both the supply of Rome and the army, and of course its praefecti in command.³ The inclusion of works by this author would be fully justified, given that they inevitably served to renew discussion, which had focused since the 19th c. exclusively on accumulating the epigraphic evidence of those holding the title of praefectus annonae; Remesal Rodríguez proposed a model for the general function of the annona, which focused on the supply of both Rome *and* the army. These ideas have been followed by many researchers, to the point that today they are common opinion, as reflected in reference works such as the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* and the *Encyclopedia of the Roman Army*.⁴

The fundamental chapter, “Prosopografia dei prefetti dell’annona” (5–72), is organized as a catalog, in chronological order, of the well-known personalities who held the office of praefectus annonae – currently a total of 48 names. A single asterisk indicates the new praefecti not included in Pavis d’Escurac’s book (seven individuals), and two asterisks indicate praefecti for which the author modifies the previous chronology (12 individuals). Those of the first group are, in my opinion, particularly relevant: C. Valerius Paullinus (8–10, no. 6, dated after 70 but before 73–74 CE); C. Poppea Sabinianus (14–16, no. 10, 82/83–? CE); T. Statilus Optatus (21–23, no. 16, Hadrianic period); Sex. Tigridius Perennis (34–35, no. 24, 177 CE), which is very doubtful because his passage through the service of the annona

¹ Pavis d’Escurac 1976 [2020].

² Caldelli 2018.

³ E.g., Remesal Rodríguez 1986; Remesal Rodríguez 1999.

⁴ De Nardis 2015; Erdkamp 2016; Machado 2018.

was proposed only by the alleged hierarchical order with which the knights were presented in the *Tabula Banasitana*,⁵ [– *Ae*]lius vel [– *Iu*]lius *Iulia[nus]* (42–44, no. 29, late 2nd–early 3rd c. CE); anonymous (51–53, no. 34, period of Macrinus or Heliogabalus); anonymous (59–60, no. 39, mid-second half of the 3rd c. CE). The author also offers a list of 15 persons excluded from the previous catalog for various reasons (75–80), as well as an appendix with the prosopographic list of chronologically ordered praefecti (82–94) and another appendix (“*Fasti vecchi e nuovi*”), indicating the changes she proposes in the chronology (121–24).

The summary chapter (95–120) of the data offered in the previous corpus is organized into useful and efficient sections, such as “Consistenza del corpus,” “Denominazione della carica,” “Titoli ufficiali,” “Durata della carica,” etc. There are no major breakthroughs here in the knowledge of the praefecti annonae cursus, but there are two small innovations: first, the confirmation of the existence in Ostia and Portus of buildings linked to the annona, even if it cannot be said with certainty that they are *stationes*,⁶ and second, the hierarchical relationships that the praefectus established with the various professional orders (115–20) with which it had conflicts over specific spaces in Rome, Ostia, and Portus (i.e., *pistores*, *codicarii/caudicarii*, *saborrarii/saburrarii*, *fabri tignuarii*).

The historical trajectory of the praefectus annonae was long and complex. The office was established with Augustus, even if the first reference in an inscription is from Nero’s time (no. 4, Claudius Athenodorus). The name of the office was undoubtedly praefectus annonae from Augustus (although also first attested in the time of Nero; see no. 4) to Caracalla, when *sacrae Urbis* was added punctually and in a non-generalized way (no. 33, Q. Marcius Dioga, and no. 36, Domiziano Ulpiano). This office lasted as long as the emperor wanted because – and the author does well to remind – *non sunt magistratus, extra ordinem utilitatis causa constituti sunt*.⁷ Caldelli does, however, propose that the average duration was 6–7 years in the Julio-Claudian age, 3–4 in the Flavian age, 2–3 in the Antonine and Severan era, and 2 in the Constantinian age. The praefecti were recruited in Italy (14 cases, of which 9 were of the 2nd c. CE), in Narbonensis (3 cases, all from the 1st c. CE), in Baetica (2 cases), in Africa (5 cases), and in the east of the Empire (2 cases). Compared to the responsibilities attached to previous positions held within the cursus, the economic and legal functions here predominated, which is logical given the great fiscal powers that this position assumed; up to the mid-3rd c., many, in turn, proceeded along the cursus to become praefectus Aegypti (15 cases). The headquarters of the prefecture were in Rome, Ostia, and Portus (114). There is no new data that can help us understand the associated responsibilities, but at least in Ostia, the office seems to have been responsible for public buildings at the time of Probus:⁸

Se i nuovi documenti non sono in grado di mostrare come le funzione giudiziarie dei preffetti dell’annona divengano progressivamente sempre più pesanti (...) essi, invece, mostrano bene come i loro poteri si estendessero progressivamente a domini che non avevano nulla a che fare con le loro funzioni originarie. (120)

⁵ IAM [= Euzennat et al. 1982], 94, and Suppl. [= Labory 2003], 41.

⁶ Ostia: no. 6, C. *Valerius Paullinus*; Portus: no. 31, *Pr(–) Ant (–) v. p.*, reinterpretation of *CIL* 6 1474 = 41176.

⁷ “[The praefectus annonae and the *praefectus vigili*] are not magistrates, but hold extraordinary appointments in the public interest,” Pomp. *Dig.* 1.2.33 (transl. Watson 1998, 7).

⁸ *CIL* 14 134.

The author summarizes the new epigraphic information in a clear and effective way and does not aim to go deeply into the essence of the scholarly problem (3, 9), yet more in-depth reflection on the nature of this administrative position is necessary to better understand the inscriptions. First, we should take into account the polysemantic character that the term *annona* takes on in epigraphy and other sources: on the one hand, in the early and late Empire, as regards the supply of Rome, the term described the very fact of food supply and, by extension, the administrative service that organized it; on the other hand, also in the early and late Empire, in relation to the army, it described the food ration each soldier received. But it also described a tax on agricultural assets, collected in kind, especially after the monetary devaluations of the 3rd c. CE. Finally, in the plural, the term could also reflect a unit of payment in kind, which appears in the 4th c. CE.⁹ Remesal Rodríguez proposed that the *Praefectura annonae* dealt with the supply of both Rome and the army.¹⁰ The reason why so far no explicit references have appeared in the epigraph to *annona militaris* or to military positions directly attributable to it can be found in the very structure of the supply administration; the emperor was the one who directed the entire process, given that control of the supply of Rome and the army brought major political power to the one who held it.¹¹ He could delegate part of his powers: at the level of the whole Empire, to the *praefectus annonae* of Rome; at the provincial level, to the *Procuratores Augusti*, in charge of the collection of products;¹² and at the local or regional level, through some military functionaries integrated into the governor's officium, who were the ones actually collecting the products.¹³

Second, Roman jurists clearly indicate for the *praefecti annonae*, as has already been noted, that they were not magistrates (*non sunt magistratus, extra ordinem causa constituti sunt*),¹⁴ but so called in common use, as if out of the norm (*extra ordinem*) and for practical reasons (*utilitatis causa*). The Roman jurists from the beginning of the 1st c. CE until the end of the classical period – especially Papinian, Ulpian, and Paulus – relied very often on the rationale or argument of *utilitas* to explain the acceptability of a technically indefensible solution.¹⁵ In other words, jurists accepted and made decisions for practical reasons contrary to strict dogmatic rules in cases in which the application of these rules would otherwise lead to unacceptable practical results.¹⁶ The emperor did the same. It would certainly have been unacceptable for the emperor if the supply of Rome and the army had been left in the hands of what would correspond in the traditional constitutional order to a magistrate with limits to his office (annual appointment, collegiality, responsibility). But in reality, the office was *extra ordinem* (“outside the system,” strictly speaking), with its duration, powers, economic possibilities, and the evaluation of its mission being dependent on the

⁹ Chastagnol 1994, CLXV–LXIX; Pons Pujol 2009, 39–42; Pons Pujol 2013, 110.

¹⁰ Remesal Rodríguez 1986, 95–108.

¹¹ Remesal Rodríguez 1990 [1995].

¹² Remesal Rodríguez 1986, 87–89; Kissel 1995, 124–42 (*praefectus annonae*) and 142–51 (*Procuratores augusti*).

¹³ Remesal Rodríguez 1986, 89.

¹⁴ See above, n. 7.

¹⁵ Ankum 1968; Ankum 2010; Ankum 2016.

¹⁶ Ankum 2010, 21–22: “In all the cases in which expressions with *utilitatis causa* or *propter utilitatem* can be connected with gerundivum constructions, *utilitatis causa* (or *propter utilitatem*) is the argument for a dogmatically indefensible decision taken by the jurist (...) the function of an argument used by the jurist who wrote the text.”

will of each emperor. Moreover, *utilitatis causa* (“for practical reasons”), the office was empowered to carry out its work, enjoying total freedom with respect to the other powers of the state.¹⁷

In short, this interesting and useful book, written from a prosopographical point of view, offers a necessary update. It is essential to understand this collected data through the careers of the members of the equestrian order – especially, how they managed the enormous economic power of the prefecture of annona without becoming dangerous political rivals for the emperor.

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¹⁷ Eck 2006, with answer in Remesal Rodríguez 2006.

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De las estructuras de almacenaje a su dimensión socioeconómica: una nueva lectura histórico-arqueológica

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VAN OYEN, A. 2020. *The Socio-Economics of Roman Storage: Agriculture, Trade, and Family*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 296, figs. ISBN 9781108495530.

En honor a Simon Keay

El libro de Van Oyen es una nueva contribución al estudio de los almacenes de época romana. Tiene la particularidad de centrarse en los aspectos sociales y económicos dando dinamismo a un análisis tan estático como es el de los espacios y estructuras de almacenaje. En una excelente y cuidada edición de Cambridge University Press, esta monografía actualiza y revisa los últimos datos procedentes de importantes establecimientos rurales, urbanos y portuarios romanos. Pone especial énfasis en el análisis de la presencia de espacios de almacenaje y, en ocasiones, en su ausencia. Esta monografía es un magnífico ejemplo de cómo, desde hace varias décadas, varios investigadores de gran renombre están ofreciendo luz sobre espacios y estructuras tan poco conocidos como son los silos, despensas, bodegas, depósitos y graneros en época romana. Ese desconocimiento en cierto modo venía dado por ser espacios que no han merecido la necesaria atención por parte de los especialistas y que, en ocasiones, no han sabido comprenderse a nivel científico o ni siquiera se han identificado o han sido mal interpretados. Nuestro desconocimiento no procedía de la inexistencia de documentación literaria sobre estos periodos, ni mucho menos de la ausencia de restos arqueológicos y de cultura material asociada, sino del generalizado desinterés por comprender estas estructuras desde unos puntos de vista tan limitados.

El libro en su contexto historiográfico

La subsistencia y el desarrollo de una economía eminentemente rural, rasgos que caracterizan a las sociedades preindustriales, de las que el mundo romano no se vio privado, explican la necesidad de mantener la cosecha agrícola a buen recaudo. Por ello se conservaba en construcciones perfectamente adaptadas a las necesidades climáticas, edafológicas