

# Studying Roman Economy and Imperial Food Supply. Conceptual and Historical Premises of the Study of the Economic Initiatives of the Emperors in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD

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## ABSTRACT

This paper is aimed at providing a scrupulous conceptual and historical framework in which to contextualize further investigations concerning the imperial economic initiatives in the first two centuries of the Roman Empire. I will focus mainly on the problem of food supply. Indeed, this theme was at the core of imperial economic concerns and had, to a certain extent, a role within the development of Roman economic channels themselves. I will argue that grain euergetism was able to represent an effective means of positively affecting provincial food supply, given the fact that central control was structurally limited in the territories of the Empire. For this same reason, I also believe that imperial grain *beneficia* in the provinces represented an actual attempt to increase central control over imperial grain management.

**Keywords:** Roman economy. Food supply. *Annona*. Frumentarian euergetism. Centre vs periphery. Market. Redistribution.

## Estudiar la economía romana y la gestión imperial del abastecimiento de trigo. Marco conceptual y contexto histórico para el estudio de las iniciativas económicas imperiales durante los siglos I y II d.C.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo tiene como objeto la delineación del marco conceptual y del contexto histórico para desarrollar nuevas investigaciones sobre las iniciativas imperiales en el ámbito económico durante los dos primeros siglos del Imperio romano. Me centraré, sobre todo, en el problema del abastecimiento de trigo a las ciudades del Imperio, porque el tema ocupaba un lugar central en las preocupaciones económicas imperiales y tuvo una cierta incidencia en la misma evolución de los canales económicos del Imperio. Sugeriré que el “euergetismo” frumentario fue una estrategia efectiva para contribuir al abastecimiento de trigo en las provincias, donde el control imperial era estructuralmente limitado. Por la misma razón, creo que los *beneficia* imperiales de trigo en las ciudades provinciales fueron un intento de fortalecer el control imperial sobre la gestión frumentaria.

**Palabras clave:** Economía romana. Abastecimiento de trigo. *Annona*. Euergetismo frumentario. Centro vs. periferia. Mercado. Redistribución.

**Contents:** 1. Introduction. 2. Tendencies in Roman economy in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century in the light of different interpretative models. 3. Roman economy in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century: a complex and dynamic model. 4. Food supply of Rome and the provinces: an emblematic problem of Roman economy. 5. The coins: a special documentary source regarding the grain supply of Rome. 6. The impact of the Roman Empire on the local food supply in the provinces. 7. The role of euergetism in imperial food supply. 8. Conclusions.

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

While references to the Emperors are obviously to be found in almost every work concerning imperial Roman economy, monographies focused on the economic initiatives of individual Emperors are scarce. Indeed, analysing the government of an Emperor from an economic point of view is particularly tricky, since it implies combining both *macroscale* and *microscale* perspectives. Besides, the methodology and categories used by the historians of ancient economy—often borrowed from other fields of study—<sup>2</sup> may sound somewhat unfamiliar to many biographers and scholars who are instead used to dealing with mainly literary and epigraphic sources with a prosopographical or *événementiel* approach. We also have to consider that the history of ancient economy itself offers the scholars increasing challenges. In fact, the diatribe between different and sometimes opposite interpretations and modelizations of Roman economy is far from being concluded. It is clear that a study focused on the economic policies of individual Emperors cannot avoid such questions. No doubt, a long-term diachronic perspective must be considered as well, in order to clarify whether each of these policies did indeed mark an evolution, and if so, to what degree?

Last but not least, clarification is required as to whether the sources—literary, epigraphic, and archaeological—are in fact sufficient in order to chart a thorough history of the economic policies of the individual Emperors. Hence a further problem arises, which has been duly described by Panciera in the 90's.<sup>3</sup> This scholar has observed that while on the one hand, more and more sophisticated local *corpora*, excavation reports and catalogues have been published, we are still without *corpora* “unitariamente concepiti e coordinati fra loro che siano veramente in grado di chiarire il quadro della produzione e distribuzione” and the imperial economy of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century in general.<sup>4</sup> The traditional absence of such *corpora* has undoubtedly contributed to the lack of studies which integrate into an economic scenario the “old” prosopographical and *événementiel* perspective focused on the individual Emperors.

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the Deutsche Akademische Austauschdienst (DAAD) for having funded my research project “Wheat Management During the Hadrian Empire” between Autumn 2013 and Spring 2014 and the University of Verona for having funded my research between 2015 and 2016. I would also like to express my gratitude to Prof. José Remesal Rodríguez of the University of Barcelona, Principal Investigator of the group CEIPAC: *Production and Distribution of Food during the Roman Empire: Economic and Political Dynamics*, for his support and suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> The title of a volume edited by Peter F. Bang, Mamoru Ikeguchi and Harmut G. Ziche (BANG *et alii* 2006) sounds emblematic.

<sup>3</sup> PANCIERA 1993, 31.

<sup>4</sup> Regarding this obstacle see also ERDKAMP 2005, 1-2: for the epigraphic and literary record, he warns us that we have to deal with possible distortions and representations of only ideal situations.

Nevertheless, many progresses have been made in the last decade regarding our overall knowledge of Roman production and distribution. I recall for instance the achievements of the group “Production and Distribution of Food during the Roman Empire: Economic and Political Dynamics” led by Remesal Rodríguez, whose goal is precisely “to set up an innovative framework to investigate the political and economical mechanisms that characterized the dynamics of the commercial trade system during the Roman Empire”.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the debate concerning these themes is at present particularly intense. New publications are expected and monographies on individual Emperors from an economic point of view will be most welcomed.

This paper is precisely aimed at providing a scrupulous conceptual and historical framework in which to contextualize further investigations concerning the economic initiatives of individual Emperors in the first two centuries of the Roman Empire. In particular, I will draw a synthetic and up-to-date *status quaestionis* of the academic debate on Roman economy and its dilemmas. On the other hand, I will outline an introductory diachronic panorama of the Roman economy of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries. I will focus mostly on the problem of food supply. Indeed, as we will see, this theme was at the core of imperial economic concerns and had, to a certain extent, a role within the development of Roman economic channels themselves. Moreover, a few original considerations regarding the role of the Emperor within provincial food supply will be put forward in the last paragraph of this work.

## 2. Tendencies in Roman economy in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century in the light of different interpretative models

The overall interpretation of Roman economy is by no means an easy task. The old diatribe between a primitivistic *versus* modernistic interpretation of it is to some extent still open.<sup>6</sup> The position of Weber,<sup>7</sup> who interpreted Roman economy as a form of *Raubkapitalismus* heading for decline with the establishment of the *Pax Augusta*, has been somewhat radicalized in the 1970's by Finley.<sup>8</sup> Finley, the promoter of the so-called “new orthodoxy”, offers a “primitivistic” interpretation of Roman economy, denying its dynamism, its integration and the importance of the market. He comprehends the imperial economy as strongly centralized, a “commanded” economy. The primitivistic vision presumes that the economy of the Romans was constructed on power relations, centred on institutions such as labour, tribute and tenancy. This position has been largely adopted by Garnsey and Saller<sup>9</sup> and by Jongman.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, the negative interpretation of Weber has already been discussed by Rostovtzeff, who observed that objects produced in a corner of the Empire appear in very distant

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.roman-ep.net/epnet/#>.

<sup>6</sup> It is very clearly summarized by LO CASCIO 1991; WITSCHEL 2001 and REMESAL RODRÍGUEZ 2008. See also the summary provided by HARRIS 1993.

<sup>7</sup> WEBER 1909.

<sup>8</sup> FINLEY 1973.

<sup>9</sup> GARNSEY – SALLER 1987.

<sup>10</sup> JONGMAN 1988.

places from where they were produced, and gave the phenomenon a “modernistic” interpretation. Using modern parameters, he interpreted Roman imperial economy as a “capitalistic” system, based on the development of production and market. Such process was thus stimulated by the urban growth in the early Empire and the birth of an urban “bourgeoisie”, especially in the provinces, after the establishment of the *Pax Augusta*.<sup>11</sup>

Nowadays Rostovtzeff’s position sounds somewhat outdated, since all agree that we cannot systematically apply our modern categories to the Roman world.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, many contemporary scholars generally disagree with a pure primitivistic perspective, which does not seem to take into account the archaeological evidence that clearly demonstrates the existence of a wide net of exchanges within the Roman Empire. The extension of such a net presupposes a very complex and various scenario. As Harris observes, the point is to describe a system which was certainly not modern, but not necessarily primitive, unsophisticated and small-scale.<sup>13</sup> Hence new theories have been developed which all claim the importance of market relations along with power relations.

Already in the 80’s Remesal Rodríguez underscored the coexistence within Roman economy of centrifugal elements and centralism. In particular, from the study of production and commerce of Baetican oil, he demonstrates that an organized and centralized system actually existed at least for those products which could not be found in the majority of regions where the legions were settled.<sup>14</sup> According to this scholar this organized system was the *annona*. Harris, for his part, observes that an element of dynamism in Roman economy was represented by inter-local exchanges and provoked by the presence of “consuming” centres, namely the cities.<sup>15</sup> Pleket argues for a similarity between Roman economy and the economies of pre-industrial Europe,<sup>16</sup> whereas Carandini somewhat recognizes an “economic rationality” in the Roman world, especially in the villas of central Italy run by slave labor.<sup>17</sup>

An important and successful theory explaining the intrinsic dynamism of Roman economy had already been proposed by Hopkins. His “taxes and trade” model states that trade in the Roman Empire was stimulated by the Roman fiscal system:<sup>18</sup> the regions subject to money taxes (“tax producing regions”) were compelled to sell their goods to the “tax consuming regions” in order to earn enough money to provide the same “tax consuming regions” with the required revenues. Such a process undoubtedly stimulated the dynamism of Roman economy.

<sup>11</sup> ROSTOVITZEFF 1926.

<sup>12</sup> The economist POLANYI (1968) was one of the first researchers to deny the existence of the “market” in ancient societies: he believed that before the industrial era the economies were based upon mechanisms of reciprocity and redistribution: a critique of Polanyi’s notion of “redistribution” is proposed by VEYNE 1976, 67-74.

<sup>13</sup> HARRIS 1993, 15.

<sup>14</sup> REMESAL RODRÍGUEZ 1986; *Id.* 1995.

<sup>15</sup> HARRIS 2000.

<sup>16</sup> PLEKET 1990.

<sup>17</sup> CARANDINI 1988. More recently, the relative integration of trade in the Roman Empire has been reaffirmed by WITSCHERL 2001.

<sup>18</sup> HOPKINS 1980; *Id.* 1983.

Many recent theories agree that central control in Roman economy was enacted to a certain extent by market institutions and –as opposed to the old pessimistic position of Weber– that the Roman Empire saw a substantial growth of production between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century, as demonstrated by the amount of archeological findings. Lo Cascio<sup>19</sup> believes that this phenomenon cannot be exclusively interpreted as a consequence of demographic growth. Instead –he suggests– it seems to have been the result of the implemented primary sector. According to him this process was connected both to the expansion of fairly integrated market relations<sup>20</sup> and monetization, and to urbanization and imperial fiscal system.<sup>21</sup> He believes that within the Roman imperial world “primitivistic” mechanisms such as reciprocity and redistribution –based on power relations– seem to have played less important a role than the market. The elements outlined by Lo Cascio –integrated market relations, monetization, urbanization and imperial fiscal system– were undoubtedly interconnected. According to Kessler and Temin, for example, the integration of the market was precisely a consequence of the fact that in the first two centuries AD the Roman Empire was fully monetized (as they infer by studying the grain prices).<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, Katsari believes that the monetization of the Empire was a consequence of the attractive power of urban centres, which attracted peasants, merchants and, in the frontier zones, soldiers.<sup>23</sup>

In 2005 Erdkamp challenges to some extent such an interpretation of Roman economy, by focusing, in particular, on the Roman grain market and food supply.<sup>24</sup> In fact, he states the very low level of integration of the Roman trade and is convinced that the weight of free market within long distances should not be overemphasized. Instead he believes that the food supply of towns was controlled by the élites, and that the peasants remained fundamentally excluded from the massive scale market.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, the dynamism of Roman economy of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries and the importance of commerce have been recently reaffirmed by many experts in Roman economy on the basis of the material evidence. As such, from a theoretical perspective, Remesal Rodríguez strongly promotes the overcoming of a rigid dichotomy between primitivism and modernism.<sup>26</sup> Bang,<sup>27</sup> in his turn, presents the “industrial bazaar” model, typical of Eastern bazaars, as a sort of bridge between “primitive”

<sup>19</sup> LO CASCIO 1991, 324-330.

<sup>20</sup> Concerning not only luxury products, but also staple foods.

<sup>21</sup> LO CASCIO 1991, 351-358, underlining the existence of “tax consuming” and “tax producing” regions, adopts the model “taxes and trade” proposed by Hopkins: nevertheless he suggests certain adjustments.

<sup>22</sup> KESSLER – TEMIN 2008.

<sup>23</sup> KATSARI 2008.

<sup>24</sup> ERDKAMP 2005.

<sup>25</sup> On this particular aspect see the different position of LEMAK 2006, who recalls that in a number of circumstances peasants were able to create large-scale, inter-regional agricultural systems. He quotes in particular BROOKFIELD 2001; MAYER 2002 and SCARBOROUGH 2003.

<sup>26</sup> REMESAL RODRÍGUEZ 2008, 155: “Like the primitivists, I recognize that the means of production and of transportation were very limited in the ancient world. Nevertheless, this limitation cannot make us deny the existence of long-distance commerce in the Roman Empire. The archaeological evidence demonstrates that such commerce existed, so the question here is to explain how and why, despite all the limitations highlighted by the primitivists, such traffic of goods ever existed. The point is to explain why this commerce existed and not to deny it, as the primitivists do”. Already REMESAL RODRÍGUEZ 2002.

<sup>27</sup> BANG 2006.

interchange and modern market, and believes that this system is closer to the mechanisms of Roman economy.

In the *Cambridge Economic History of the Graeco-Roman world* these very problems are dealt from alternative viewpoints.<sup>28</sup> Morley,<sup>29</sup> in particular, is convinced that the political and cultural integration of the Empire went hand in hand with its economic integration that connected widely separated regions through the movement of goods. He states that distribution –as means of managing risk of glut and dearth– was organized through both networks of kinship, friendship or patronage, and market. Following Remesal Rodríguez’s considerations concerning the *annona militaris* and the supply of Rome, he recalls that the archaeological findings have confirmed the wide range of distribution and connects the phenomenon to the development of centres of demand for foodstuffs and other basic materials –the legions, Rome and other big cities– which could never be fully supplied locally and necessitated the development of more elaborate systems of distribution.<sup>30</sup> Also the fiscal system –Morely believes echoing Hopkins– stimulated the movement of goods and the production of coinage oiled the wheels of distribution. In any case –Morely concludes echoing Remesal Rodríguez– the patterns of distribution and the structures of inter-regional exchange in the Roman Empire were not autonomous, since they always reflected the needs of the state and the élite. Alcock,<sup>31</sup> in her turn, focusing on the Eastern Mediterranean, reaffirms the importance of trade in the Roman Empire and the role of Romanization in this phenomenon.<sup>32</sup> Lo Cascio has contributed, too, to the *Cambridge Economic History*<sup>33</sup> and suggests that the Emperor “set the rules” of the economic game, influencing both the central and provincial administration and the single urban communities.<sup>34</sup>

More recently, Adams, in the *Cambridge Companion to Roman Economy* edited by Scheidel,<sup>35</sup> reaffirms the integration of the market in the Roman Empire. The scholar claims that the regional diversity in the Mediterranean sea<sup>36</sup> naturally undermines one of the two key limitations placed on ancient economy by primitivist approaches, “that due to the similarities of climate and topography, areas adjoining the Mediterranean had the same needs and surpluses, thus there was little stimulus to trade. This notion depends us imagining, as Harris as pointed out, widespread autarky, but would specifically rule out a regional nature to the Mediterranean. The reality was quite different, there was short and long trade, cabotage, ferrying, and long voyages, both by land and sea”.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>28</sup> SCHEIDEL *et alii* 2007.

<sup>29</sup> MORLEY 2007.

<sup>30</sup> As seen, Remesal Rodríguez believes that, in the case of the legions and Rome, this system was the *annona*.

<sup>31</sup> ALCOCK 2007.

<sup>32</sup> “Entry into an imperial system, it is clear, led to substantial change in all important aspects of eastern economic behavior –in external demands and expectations, in productive goals and capacities, in modes and distances of distribution, in civic and individual habits of consumption” (ALCOCK 2007, 696).

<sup>33</sup> LO CASCIO 2007.

<sup>34</sup> FERRER MAESTRO 2012, 248, in his turn, will speak of “procedimiento estatal forzado por las necesidades de gestión pública. Un comercio por orden del emperador y ejercitado bajo su control”.

<sup>35</sup> ADAMS 2012.

<sup>36</sup> Quite recently underlined by HORDEN – PURCELL 2000.

<sup>37</sup> HORDEN – PURCELL 2000, 219.

In 2013 a book by Temin significantly entitled *The Roman Market Economy* was published. This scholar strongly disagrees with the primitivist point of view and argues that Roman society was wholly determined by commercial links and that ancient landowners and workers acted as modern capitalists and wage-earners.<sup>38</sup> Undoubtedly, we find here an echo of the old diatribe between primitivists and modernists.

On the other hand, in 2009 Chic García has rightly reaffirmed the importance of overcoming such opposition. He has put forward a new interpretative model of ancient economy, by identifying two fundamental and complementary economic aspects: market and prestige.<sup>39</sup> In particular, on the basis that every historical period saw a combination of prestige economy and impersonal market, he has observed how in Rome at the beginning the State was weak and left free initiative to particulars. In such a scenario private initiative filled up the spaces left by the state control. When the Roman Empire started developing an economy comparable with the ancient Middle-East palatial economies, it relied on private initiative (mostly of the *liberti*). The State put in motion the great part of the markets but most merchants were particular: there was a sort of commercial individualism which was bound to be a very dynamic element in the development of the organizing rationality of the human community. As centralism got stronger, the private merchants went on doing their business, but the State tended to convert them into commercial agents, and their relationship was mediated by professional guilds. Roman economy implied further phenomenon which hampered a full development of market economy. First of all Roman Economy always had a strong military orientation. The second aspect was the clientelism at the basis of Roman society: this always affects market relations.

Ferrer Maestro<sup>40</sup> has also underlined the complexity of Roman Imperial economy. The so-called “rural” and “domestic” economy, implying barter exchange and auto-consumption, always coexisted with the attested large scale market:<sup>41</sup> the respective predominance depended on the geographical environment –territories more or less marginal and urbanized– and historical context –periods of crisis or stability. By taking into account the data he presents, and the modern definition of “market” he recalls,<sup>42</sup> we realize once more how we can hardly speak of “free market” regarding a society of administered prices, at least as far as grain was concerned.

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<sup>38</sup> TEMIN 2013. In his opinion the state intervention implied by the mechanisms of the *annona* is also to contextualize in a predominantly free market scenario and in a single, large, integrated grain market. His hypotheses were discussed by ERKAMP 2014. Temin had already expressed a few of his hypotheses in a book published in 2008 with Kessler: KESSLER – TEMIN 2008. By studying the grain prices they argue that in the first two centuries AD the Roman Empire was fully monetized: they believe that the result was a fully integrated market.

<sup>39</sup> CHIC GARCÍA 2009.

<sup>40</sup> FERRER MAESTRO 2012.

<sup>41</sup> LO CASCIO 1991, 324-330, also warned us not to forget the residual importance of auto-consumption based on what he calls “peasant economy”.

<sup>42</sup> FRASER 1937, 131-132.

### 3. Roman 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century economy: a complex and dynamic model

On the basis of all these considerations we can conclude that the Roman economy during the Empire was a system particularly complex and characterized by a strong dynamism, both in space and in time. The first aspect, recognized by most of contemporary scholars, is the high vitality in Roman economy during the first two centuries of the Empire, a vitality which is expressed by a significant increase in production –and therefore in the overall “wealth”. Many scholars, as we have seen, connected such a phenomenon with a relative integration of the market and a certain degree of free market within the Empire. The second aspect is the presence in such a scenario of fundamental sectors organized according to a centralistic logic, such as the food supply of the army and Rome. In this case the patterns of distribution and the structures of inter-regional exchange in the Roman Empire cannot be considered autonomous, since they clearly reflected the needs of the state.

There is a third, important, aspect of the Roman economy during this given period: the progressive concentration of wealth in the hands of the provincial élites, often at the expense of the middle classes and the weaker social groups. Such a phenomenon is most likely related to the growth of production itself, which, as we have seen, characterized the first two centuries of the Empire.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, as Zuiderhoek explained, the growth of population<sup>44</sup> must also have had a crucial role, at least as far as the progressive “oligarchization of wealth” is concerned. In fact, if population grows, land becomes more and more scarce in relation to labour, so it means there is more demand than supply. This means that rents start to rise, advantaging the land-owners and affecting small peasants, farmers and wage labourers.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, as underlined by Chic García,<sup>46</sup> the urban development did not see a parallel development of land production aimed at feeding the increasingly consuming population. Landowners were not interested in increasing the productivity of their enterprises<sup>47</sup> and looked rather at performing activities (such as naval investments addressed to state food supply) which would exempt them from fiscal duties. As a consequence, the fiscal pressure on the middle classes grew harder: this undoubtedly contributed to the

<sup>43</sup> ZUIDERHOEK 2009, 59, has precisely connected the dramatic increase in euergetism and in the number of eastern *homines novi* in the Senate in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century to a significant rise in prosperity among Eastern urban élites in that period.

<sup>44</sup> Undoubtedly connected to the growth of production.

<sup>45</sup> ZUIDERHOEK 2009, 53-70. See also JONGMAN 2006, 247-250 and, as far as grain is concerned, ERDKAMP 2007, especially 258-259: “Wealthy landowners had much better access to the grain market than their poorer neighbors, hampering the latter’s ability to sell their occasional surpluses”. Moreover, Erdkamp observes that the rents were generally paid in kind; therefore, the landowners end up controlling a large part of the marketable surplus. See also ALCOCK, 2007, 678, who focuses mainly on the Eastern provinces, observing that here but also elsewhere in the Empire the trend was towards an increasing stratification in the control of agricultural wealth. Regarding the growth of the wealth of the provincial élites it may be worth recalling also a study where PLEKET 1983, suggests the Eastern élites involvement in business affairs.

<sup>46</sup> CHIC GARCÍA 2014, 586 and *passim*.

<sup>47</sup> We may well label this lack of entrepreneurial spirit of the élite as a “primitivistic”, pre-industrial trait of the Roman economy: see also FERRER MAESTRO 2012, 249.



oligarchization of wealth. Elsewhere<sup>48</sup> Chic García connects this phenomenon to the crisis occurred during the reign of Marcus Aurelius. The military campaigns against the Partians and Germanic and Sarmatic tribes emptied the state coffers and, along with a plague, provoked a collapse of manpower and production. Money inflation and the increasing of fiscal pressure were further consequences. No doubt all these events exasperated the intrinsic economic limits of the State, which tended to consume more than it produced. As a result, the State properties were enlarged and the great entrepreneurs were the only capable of overcoming the crisis, at the expenses of smaller competitors.<sup>49</sup>

No doubt, the progressive oligarchization of society implied by the concentration of wealth can be interpreted as an element of “regression” and primitivism of Roman economy, in contrast with its intrinsic vitality. In such a scenario, like in the military supply, the patterns of distribution cannot be considered autonomous: they were linked to the needs of the power, in this case the élites. As we will see below, this oligarchization went abreast with the increasing euergetism among the cities of the Roman Empire.

#### 4. Food Supply of Rome and the provinces: an emblematic problem of Roman economy

At this point, I would like to focus primarily on the specific theme of food supply. In fact, it is somewhat emblematic since it encompasses almost all the questions just singled out, such as production, *surplus*, distribution and consumption. Moreover, food supply is particularly interesting within eventual studies of Roman economy focused on the role of individual Emperors, since the rulers were directly involved in the process, as we shall shortly see.

Several works have been devoted to Roman food supply, from various viewpoints and based on different typologies of sources.<sup>50</sup> The quite recent book edited by Marin and Virlovet, *Nourrir les cités de la Méditerranée*, definitely stands out as a proof of interest with this theme.<sup>51</sup> As we shall see, the diatribe between more or less dy-

<sup>48</sup> CHIC GARCÍA 1988 (updated version), especially 155-161.

<sup>49</sup> As the scholar points out, such a phenomenon is suggested by the amphoric epigraphy of *Baetica*: in this period there is a particular diffusion of seals in the *tria nomina* form, which are to be interpreted as a sign of the high social status of the producer. In the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century the seals of the Guadalquivir area also suggest a concentration in production.

<sup>50</sup> To date we do not have many studies which compare the Roman system in this field and the food supply mechanisms of previous imperial systems such as the Babylonian and Assyrian Empires and Pharaonic Egypt: they would be of utmost interest indeed. In Eastern palatial societies, strongly hierarchized, production and food supply were strictly controlled by the central power and followed a redistributive, a “common good” logic. An analysis of the peculiarities of ancient Eastern societies in this field is provided by CHIC GARCÍA 2009, 231-270. As this scholar observes (*Ibid.*, 165), however, the “collective perspective” of these societies did not rule out individual initiative. No doubt, interesting point of contacts with the Roman system may be recognized here.

<sup>51</sup> MARIN – VIRLOUVET 2004. Ten years before the proceedings of a conference on this topic were also published: see CENTRE JEAN BÉRARD (ed.) 1994.

namic interpretations of Roman economy involves this topic as well. The control of *annona*, the system which regulated the Roman grain supply, along with the supply of the army,<sup>52</sup> was crucial for imperial power and *consensus*.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising that the *annona* system was officially run by the Emperor himself (along with his *praefectus annonae*), who supervised the whole system, grounded on a wide range of movements both of men and products within the large boundaries of the Empire, across countless trade routes. The imperial *annona* manoeuvred the whole mechanism of the inter-provincial trade by purchasing and transporting an enormous amount of wheat and other essential goods. The largest amount of grain arrived in Rome from Africa (mainly from the hinterlands of Cyrene and Carthage) and Egypt. Nevertheless, also Sicily –which had been the most important source of grain during the Republic– continued to play a very important role.<sup>54</sup>

Along with a monography of Pavis d'Escourac, which explores the administrative aspects of the imperial *annona*,<sup>55</sup> the starting point of the examination of Roman grain supply is the study of Rickman published in 1980.<sup>56</sup> He focuses mainly on the imperial age, dealing with transport, storage, prices and *frumentationes*.<sup>57</sup>

We know that the *annona* system was based upon provincial taxes, products from imperial estates and to some extent upon private purchase by either the state or by individuals.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, which were the precise mechanisms of distribution? Rickman believes that during the early Empire fixed taxes in cash had taken the place of tithes, except in Egypt.<sup>59</sup> Therefore –he concludes– if there were fewer taxes in kind than previously, and yet the need in Rome for grain to eat was certainly no less than before, the important role that private grain merchants played is clearly evident. More precisely, as far as transport and distribution are concerned, Rickman believes that the imperial control over grain supply relied upon private traders and private ships. According to the scholar, in fact, the state lacked an adequate distribution structure.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>52</sup> As we have seen this is the idea of REMESAL RODRÍGUEZ (1986 and 1999) and of other scholars which followed this interpretation vs Pavis d'Escourac's reductive description of the *annona* as an institution only addressed to Rome (PAVIS D'ESCURAC 1976). A bibliography on these themes is provided by REMESAL RODRÍGUEZ 2002a, 121, footnote 17.

<sup>53</sup> REMESAL RODRÍGUEZ 1999, 248-249, *Id.* 2002a; also *Id.* 2008, 155-156. The scholar underlines how the state understood the importance of facilitating the acquisition by citizens living in Rome of a certain amount of grain at a reduced price. The scholar reaffirms this concept in REMESAL RODRÍGUEZ 2012, 220 in particular. Regarding this theme I recall, for instance, the emblematic case of Vespasianus: as Tacitus explained (*Hist.* 2.82; 3.8), the general seized the power in Rome once he got the control of Egypt, "*claustra annonae*", that is the "key" of *annona*. See already GRAY 1923, 26.

<sup>54</sup> *Sardinia*, Gaul and *Hispania* also provided subsidiary supplies of potential significance.

<sup>55</sup> PAVIS D'ESCURAC 1976.

<sup>56</sup> RICKMAN 1980.

<sup>57</sup> For a general history of Roman *frumentationes* see in particular 156-197 and 213-217. Rickman believes that the *frumentationes* were the core of the *annona* system. This interpretation, however, has been opposed by Remesal Rodríguez. The scholar defends the idea that the distributions were a privilege for a reduced group of Roman citizens, whereas the action of the *praefectura annonae* was addressed to all, and should keep social peace in Rome by keeping everyone's belly full: REMESAL RODRÍGUEZ 1986. On the grain distributions in Rome see also VIRLOUVET 1995 and 2009 where she analyses the "*plebs frumentaria*".

<sup>58</sup> RICKMAN 1980, 72-74.

<sup>59</sup> It is the idea of ALCOCK 2007, especially 676, as well.

<sup>60</sup> Rickman has developed this theme in a further study: RICKMAN 1980a.

This presumed lack of systematic organization of imperial food supply is to some extent claimed by Garnsey as well. By focusing, in particular, on food supply emergencies –that is dearth and famine– this scholar observes that from August onwards a standard imperial response to crisis was “largesse”: Emperors generally rejected price-fixing in favour of the grand gesture, the furnishing of grain or cash by special distribution.<sup>61</sup>

Nevertheless, Rickman’s explanation of the role of free merchants on the basis of the prevalence of taxes in cash during the first Empire appears to be arguable. Indeed, as Remesal Rodríguez has outlined, the amount of products that came from the imperial properties –and he demonstrates, through the archaeological evidence, that grain was not the only *annonarius* product– fulfilled a large percentage of the basic needs of the Roman *plebs*, army and servants to the administration, without the use of money.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, between the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the Emperors increased the amount of grain available: large private granaries fell increasingly into imperial ownership through confiscation, legacy and inheritance.<sup>63</sup> On the basis of this consideration, Remesal Rodríguez interprets the economy of the Roman Empire as an administrative compensation system among the provinces and between them and Rome. The functions of the *praefectura annonae* were thus to control all these resources and be responsible of their redistribution.

Moreover, regarding the presumed lack of systematic organization of imperial food supply it must be observed that between the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> century the more responsible Emperors<sup>64</sup> made structural improvements within the system of supply and distribution, a fact that Rickman himself admits, recognizing a progressive centralization of the *annona* system.<sup>65</sup> In particular, the Emperors introduced changes in the administration of the *annona*, sought to attract additional traders into the service of food supply, and improved the port facilities of Rome, first at Puteoli and later at Ostia.<sup>66</sup> Augustus himself was particularly interested in the *annona* and added Egypt as a major supplier of the capital. In 22 BC he accepted the *cura annonaria* and this event is the first political fact mentioned in the *Res Gestae* after the list of the imperial deeds.<sup>67</sup> The first Emperor also claims to have distributed grain from his own grana-

<sup>61</sup> GARNSEY 1988. On famine in the Roman world see already VIRLOUVET 1985.

<sup>62</sup> REMESAL RODRÍGUEZ 1986 (see also *Id.* 1999; *Id.* 2002).

<sup>63</sup> GARNSEY 1988, 239 and 250. See also RICKMAN 1980, 139. Regarding the phenomenon of confiscation of lands and goods by the Emperor see REMESAL RODRÍGUEZ 2012: at 221-222 he focuses especially on Tiberius: “El emperador necesitaba de recursos ‘propios’ para poder justificar su preeminencia, era él, como Augusto, quien, con sus ‘propios’ recursos, mantenía el imperio”; at 226 he focuses on Neron, the *depredator par excellence*.

<sup>64</sup> See REMESAL RODRÍGUEZ 2002a, regarding the *providentia* of the Emperors.

<sup>65</sup> “The Emperor’s finance clerks availing themselves of the ubiquitous *procuratores* of the Emperor, who were in every province of the Empire, either looking after the Emperor’s private property, or his public revenues, came to have the best overall grasp of the total financial picture of the Empire” (RICKMAN 1980, 77-78).

<sup>66</sup> GARNSEY 1988, 231. A thorough analysis of the evolution of the *annona* system, its progressive centralization and the role of the Emperors is also provided by CHIC GARCÍA 1988 (updated version).

<sup>67</sup> REMESAL RODRÍGUEZ 2008, 156.

ries.<sup>68</sup> At the end of his reign, when he was certain he had control over the whole supply system, Augustus left the direct control of the *praefectura annonae* in the hands of two former praetors who should be appointed every year to carry out these function.<sup>69</sup> As regards Claudius, he promoted the winter navigation of merchants and tried to attract them into the service of *annona* by means of offering privileges to shipbuilders and ship-owners.<sup>70</sup> According to Garnsey, after Claudius, the next Emperor known to have dealt with these issues is Hadrian.<sup>71</sup> He ruled that only those who invested the major part of their resources into the service of the *annona* could enjoy immunity from public liturgies.<sup>72</sup> As a passage by Seneca the Younger suggests, under Nero, or shortly before, an “Alexandrian fleet” was created, bringing all or most of the grain from Egypt to Rome.<sup>73</sup> Trajan, in his turn, promoted state purchases which eased the *annona*, as we learn from the Plinian Panegyric.<sup>74</sup> Thanks to this Emperor the larger ships were able to sail direct to Ostia to unload their grain in relative safety. The promotion of public works also attests the imperial concern with Rome’s supply, since it provided people with job and thus with money for food, as we learn from the famous anecdote involving Vespasian recalled by Svetonius.<sup>75</sup>

On the basis of all these considerations, we are allowed to conclude that, between the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the Emperors were strongly concerned with the food supply of Rome. Private traders might have played a certain role, since bringing in the grain was a profit-making enterprise, which became more attractive thanks to the favourable terms provided by the state.<sup>76</sup> Under this point of view, we cannot totally ex-

<sup>68</sup> *Res Gestae* 18: *Inde ab eo anno, quo Cn. et P. Lentuli consules fuerunt, cum deficerent vectigalia, tum centum millibus hominum tum pluribus multo frumentarias et nummarias tesseras ex aere et patrimonio meo dedi.*

<sup>69</sup> REMESAL RODRÍGUEZ 1986; *Id.* 1995; *Id.* 2008.

<sup>70</sup> Suet. *Claud.* 18.2: *Urbis annonaeque curam sollicitissime semper egit. Cum Aemiliana pertinacius arderent, in diribitorio duabus noctibus mansit ac deficiente militum ac familiarum turba auxilio plebem per magistratus ex omnibus uicis conuocauit ac positus ante se cum pecunia fisci ad subueniendum hortatus est, repraesentans pro opera dignam cuique mercedem. Artiore autem annona ob assiduas sterilitates detentus quondam medio foro a turba conuiciisque et simul fragminibus panis ita infestatus, ut aegre nec nisi postico euadere in Palatium ualuerit, nihil non ex[eo]cogitauit ad inuehentos etiam tempore hiberno commeatus. Nam et negotiatoribus certa lucra proposuit suscepto in se damno, si cui quid per tempestates accidisset, et naues mercaturae causa fabricantibus magna commoda constituit pro condicione cuiusque.* See also Tac. *Ann.* 12.43 and Orosius 7.6.17.

<sup>71</sup> We should however recall a measure of Neron who established that the ship of a *negotiator* serving Rome should not be rated with the rest of his taxable property but be exempt from *tributum* (Tac. *Ann.* 13.51): see RICKMAN 1980, 76. Regarding the privileges granted by Claudius, Hadrian and following Emperors to the *negotiatorii* see also PAVIS D’ESCURAC 1976, 215-220.

<sup>72</sup> GARNSEY 1988, 223 and 233-235.

<sup>73</sup> *Epistula* 77.1: *Subito nobis hodie Alexandrinae naues apparuerunt, quae praemitti solent et nuntiare securatae classis adventum: tabellarias vocant. Gratus illarum Campaniae aspectus est: omnis in pilis Puteolorum turba consistit et ex ipso genere velorum Alexandrinas quamvis in magna turba nauium intellegit, etc.:* he recalls the arrival of the Alexandrine fleet in Puteoli, welcomed by many people who were standing on the docks.

<sup>74</sup> 29.4-5. See also RICKMAN 1980, 85-86.

<sup>75</sup> *Vesp.* 18: *Mechanico quoque grandis columnas exigua impensa perducturum in Capitolium pollicenti praemium pro commento non mediocre optulit, operam remisit praefatus sineret se plebiculam pascere:* see REMESAL RODRÍGUEZ 1986, 123.

<sup>76</sup> GARNSEY 1988, 74.

clude a certain role of free market in the *annona* system, as suggested for example by Sirks,<sup>77</sup> Hoebenreich,<sup>78</sup> Harris,<sup>79</sup> Lo Cascio<sup>80</sup> and Witschel.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, the role of the central government within the Roman food supply and its interventism –clear in the measures taken by Claudius– cannot be denied.<sup>82</sup> Regarding the “commercial activities” which materially provided Rome with food, they were merely an aspect of a system of food supply fundamentally redistributive.<sup>83</sup>

It must also be recalled that the crisis of Marcus Aurelius’s reign mentioned above had a strong impact on the *annona* system. Money inflation and lack of liquidity had the following result: the State could not compensate producers and merchants for basic staples (grain but also oil) and transport, and these products and services became taxes in kind. Therefore dealing with grain and oil production and transport was not as convenient as before and just the richest entrepreneurs could actually survive, at the expenses of the smaller producers.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> SIRKS 1991, 13.

<sup>78</sup> HOEBENREICH 1997. She thinks that the governmental organization of the supply sector even during the Principate was limited to intervention at times of crises, and that the market, which was dominated by private trade, was in large part left without public protection against its structural fluctuations.

<sup>79</sup> HARRIS 2000, 717: he thinks that most of the grain which was imported in Rome was not the government’s at all but rather the object of private commerce.

<sup>80</sup> LO CASCIO 2000: he is convinced that the provisioning of Rome or the armies did not by-pass the market. *Contra* ERDKAMP 2005, who goes back to a rather centralized interpretation of Roman *annona*. He thinks that the sustenance of the capital city of Rome and the Roman armies required the intervention of the state on the basis of coercive, non-market channels. He admits that the state relied on private shippers and traders for transportation and distribution, but claims that the grain market in Rome functioned in a strictly regulated environment. In such a scenario two main kinds of intervention could be distinguished: the corn dole, and the transportation and storage of public grain. The answer of LO CASCIO (2007, 641) is worth quoting: “The range and nature of the state intervention might be taken to suggest the food supply of the capital did not rely on market mechanisms and that we are dealing with an example of “administrated trade”. It is certainly true that tax and rent grain accounted for a substantial and growing share of the grain that arrived at Rome. However, private merchants and shippers were involved in this operation, and their status as private entrepreneurs remained unaffected”.

<sup>81</sup> WITSCHERL 2001, 122: concerning the *annona* system, he observes that although the central government strengthened its control over the *navicularii*, who transported the grain, private initiative enjoyed large freedom of action in the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

<sup>82</sup> REMESAL RODRÍGUEZ 2012, 225.

<sup>83</sup> See REMESAL RODRÍGUEZ 2008, 158: “This redistributive function cannot be understood as true commerce, even though it generated an economic activity, because those in charge of transportation received a payment, the *vecturae*, from the state and because under the shadow of this redistribution free commercial activities could be accomplished. Those activities, since Claudio’s time, were encouraged by the concession of social privileges to those who dedicated themselves to satisfying the needs of the Roman market”. ERDKAMP 2002a, 65-68, proposes analogous considerations regarding the military supply, saying that the *frumentum emptum* should not be confused with trade.

<sup>84</sup> This phenomenon is attested, e. g., by the prevalence of names of rich families in the seals on the Baetican oil amphorae of this period: CHIC GARCÍA 1988, 155-162 (updated version) and 2014, 592-594.

## 5. The coins: a special documentary source regarding the grain supply of Rome

As we have seen, the intrinsic coin value and its fluctuations had a strong impact on the Roman economy and, more particularly, on the *annona* system. Nevertheless, coins had a further, fundamental role as means of propaganda. Focusing on the imperial role, Rickman interprets the coins which bear symbols of the *annona* as a reference to an increasing intention of the Emperors to advertise their role in the Roman grain supply.<sup>85</sup> Regarding the republican emissions, there is apparently no consistent attempt by the Senate to express a state concern for corn supply. The same can be said of Augustus and Tiberius.<sup>86</sup> With Claudius and Nero things changed, and references to *annona* on the coins became explicit.<sup>87</sup> After Nero, there was a new impetus in the use of coinage propaganda and reassurance about the corn supply of the capital: both Galba and Otho celebrated Ceres in their coins. Vitellius faced Vespasian, who was in control of Egypt, and therefore of Egyptian grain. It was important to reassure the population of Rome that all was well with corn supply: this fact may explain the occurrence of references to *annona* in his coins.<sup>88</sup> According to Rickman, Vespasian, as the real controller of Rome's *annona*, was less in need of advertising the safeguarding of sea-borne supply. This may explain why we find a series with *Annona*, Ceres and *modii* only towards the end of his reign. These types may refer in particular to an improvement of Italian agriculture in that precise period.<sup>89</sup> *Annona* types also appear under Titus<sup>90</sup> and Domitian, when the legend ANNONA AUG S. C. appears associated with a ship prow,<sup>91</sup> a type which would come again under Hadrian and Septimius Severus. With Trajan, instead, no coin bears a legend referring to corn supply, and neither ANNONA nor CERES find mention on coins. However, we do have two coin issues showing a woman which may be interpreted as the personification of *annona*.<sup>92</sup> Rickman mentions briefly the Ceres and *Annona* types issued under Hadrian and claims that such themes enjoyed great fortune under Antoninus Pius. He underlines in particular a new type dated between AD 145 and 161, never repeated by later Emperors.<sup>93</sup> Parts of two ships appear with the personification of *Annona*, one

<sup>85</sup> REMESAL RODRÍGUEZ 2002a, 125, also claims the importance of coins in this field, underlining how these were used by the Emperors to claim their *providentia* regarding food supply.

<sup>86</sup> The only development is the identification between Ceres and the Empress—in this case Livia—which starts under Augustus and by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD had become common place: RICKMAN 1980, 259-260.

<sup>87</sup> Rickman recalls in particular the Claudian issue of CERES AUGUSTA SC and a further type showing a *modius* surrounded by the Emperor's names: RICKMAN 1980, 74-75 (see RIC, I, Claudius, n° 94 and the *modius* types listed in RIC, I, p. 126). Nero, in his turn, in 64 issued the great bronze *sestertii* with the legend ANNONA AUGUSTI CERES SC associated with a ship prow (RIC, I, Nero, types listed at 159, 161, 173-4, 177, 180, 183).

<sup>88</sup> RIC I, 275-277.

<sup>89</sup> RICKMAN 1980, 262.

<sup>90</sup> RIC II, Titus, nn. 86 and 87.

<sup>91</sup> RIC II, Domitianus, n° 262.

<sup>92</sup> In the first type the alleged *Annona* (interpreted by Mattingly as *Abundantia*) faces a child, and the legend is SPQR OPTIMO PRINCIPUI ALIM ITAL (RIC II, Trajan, n° 243). The second type shows *Annona* (also interpreted by Mattingly as *Abundantia*) associated with a prow (RIC II, Trajan, n° 165 and 166).

<sup>93</sup> RIC, III, Antoninus Pius, n° 757.

carrying a *modius* with corn ears and poppy, and a lighthouse. This emission may be an allusion to the improvement in the situation concerning corn supply and the role played by a lighthouse. Rickman recalls in particular a passage from the *Historia Augusta*,<sup>94</sup> stating that, among the building works promoted by Antoninus, a restoration of a lighthouse (probably that of Alexandria) took place.<sup>95</sup> Coins referring to *annona* also appeared with Marcus Aurelius,<sup>96</sup> Commodus and Septimius Severus. From this analysis, we can presume that, from Claudius onwards, all Emperors of the first two centuries AD were interested in advertising their grain policy.

## 6. The impact of Roman Empire on the local food supply in the provinces

As regards the supply of the other parts of the Empire, we must take a step back and consider the situation before the birth of the Principate, in order to appreciate the elements of continuity and discontinuity in the passage within the channels of Roman administration. Apart from the exceptional case of big metropolis such as Alexandria and Antioch, the Mediterranean cities attempted to live on their own products as far as was possible, and above all on the grain which they themselves were able to grow.<sup>97</sup> Wealth was essentially in the hands of an élite. The city authorities, who belonged to the same élite, assumed offices or undertook public services for the community, and showed generosity to the citizens in times of crisis. In particular, the city grain commissioners worked with benefactors who put up the money for grain purchase from abroad or provided grain for sale below market prices. The city authorities were therefore dependent upon the benefactions of private individuals: euergetism was thus the basis of food supply.<sup>98</sup> In any case, as Garnsey has suggested, it seems that euergetism was essentially an *ad hoc* response, not a lasting solution. He concludes that on the whole the ancient urban administrations did not develop an extensive framework of institutions capable of protecting citizens from starvation, a risk always present in the Mediterranean context, subject as it was to periodical productive crises.<sup>99</sup> A question thus arises: what was the impact of the Roman Empire on provincial food supply?

<sup>94</sup> *Antoninus* 8.2.

<sup>95</sup> RICKMAN 1980, 265.

<sup>96</sup> According to Rickman certain *annona* coins of Marcus Aurelius –dated between 174-175– were aimed at reassuring the population of Rome regarding wheat supply: the years are those of the revolt of Avidius Cassius in the East: RICKMAN 1980, 265.

<sup>97</sup> ERDKAMP 2005, 260, and already MITCHELL 1993, 244. Recently, see HARRIS 2000, 716, who focuses on Mediterranean under the Romans.

<sup>98</sup> GARNSEY 1988, 82. For this interpretation see also KLOFT 1988; QUASS 1993, 247; GARNSEY – MORRIS 1989. Also STRUBBE 1989, and in particular 116-117, who claims that the urban funds apparently consisted mainly of contributions from private benefactors. As a proof of this phenomenon, the scholars have commented on a large number of inscriptions celebrating the generosity of local benefactors who gave grain, oil and wine or sold it cheap, contributed to funds for the food purchase, and served as grain commissioners.

<sup>99</sup> GARNSEY 1988.

As a matter of fact, the mechanisms of Hellenistic food supply did survive during the Roman period:<sup>100</sup> as the *tituli* reported in certain inscriptions demonstrate, the civic magistrates who, thanks to the euergesia of local notables, dealt with food supply –with eventual grain purchases from abroad– did not change their name in the new imperial regime.<sup>101</sup> Nevertheless, we have numerous documents proving that in particular circumstances of emergency the Roman authorities –and sometimes the Emperor himself– intervened in provincial food supply. As such, in dealing with this issue, the dialectic between central government and local institutions cannot be overlooked. Furthermore, we could ask whether these government actions are interpretable as occasional initiatives modeled upon those provided by the local benefactors, or rather attempts at regulating the market, with a somewhat centralizing effort. What then was the role of the Roman central government?

The first quite evident aspect is strictly geopolitical and concerns the new centrality of Rome in the Mediterranean world: an event that significantly altered the Mediterranean equilibrium and the channels of trade and food supply. The Romans became, more or less abruptly, the custodians of other people's grain.<sup>102</sup> During occasional supply crises, Egypt, Sicily, the Black Sea, Cyrene and Cyprus had exported grain to various city-states for centuries, especially since the Ptolemaic period, often with the intermediation of Rhodes. But now these all came under the control of Rome and this old equilibrium was broken.<sup>103</sup> Egypt, in particular, became a private property of the Emperor. Although it is possible that this region was not the main contributor of grain to Rome,<sup>104</sup> there is little doubt that this event had strong consequences in the Mediterranean context. A city could now import Egyptian grain only with the permission of the Emperor. This phenomenon is attested by a handful of inscriptions, such as two famous epigraphs found respectively in Tralleis<sup>105</sup> and in Ephesus,<sup>106</sup> claiming

<sup>100</sup> In the Western provinces, instead, where there was no Hellenistic substratum, the mechanisms of food supply under the Roman rule were different: DARDAINE – PAVIS D'ESCURAC 1986 have focused on this theme, suggesting that in the West the distributions by local notables were occasional, and the alimentary crises, too.

<sup>101</sup> Regarding food supply magistrates between Hellenism and Roman time see already ROSTOVITZEFF 1926, 145-146; BALLAND 1981, who –as PLEKET – STROUD 1981 point out– analyses the traditional *σιτομέτρια* in Greek cities, destined for all citizens and financed either from regular municipal funds or from more or less occasional gifts of magistrates and benefactors. Balland focuses on the privileged group of *σιτομετρούμενοι ἄνδρες* (...), who were citizens and (freedmen)-metics. See also FANTASIA 1989; FRÉZOULS 1991, 6-7; PAVIS D'ESCURAC 1987 and QUASS 1993. See also, especially for the Hellenistic age, MIGEOTTE 1998 and COUILLOU-LE DINAHET 1988. On further problems concerning Hellenistic and Roman grain supply see the already quoted KLOFT 1988. DESCAT 2004 describes the measures of the Greek towns for their grain supply and the control of their grain trade, reporting several epigraphs. STRUBBE 1994 focuses on the feeding of the poor and needy. In further papers he focuses on *seitionia*, that is grain purchase, a custom that he considers typical of Asia Minor: STRUBBE 1987 and 1989. The hypotheses of Strubbe have been discussed also by ERDKAMP 2005, 268-283. See also the recent BRESSON 2008, concerning urban grain funds and grain functionaries, and DIRSCHERL 2000: he provides a huge bibliography and comments on many inscriptions.

<sup>102</sup> See REMESAL RODRÍGUEZ 1995, 356.

<sup>103</sup> See RICKMAN 1980, 118-119.

<sup>104</sup> Regarding this aspect the scholars have different positions and a few scholars (as GARNSEY 1988, 255) claim that the main grain contributor was the African province.

<sup>105</sup> *I Tralles* 80 (=CIG 292=DÜRR 1881, 107, n° 23).

<sup>106</sup> *I Ephesos* 211, SEG LII 2002, n° 1132. On this document see firstly WÖRRLE 1971. A recent comment on the letter is by DE ROMANIS 2002: he thinks that the measure did not pertain to an emergency but had



that Emperor Hadrian allows these towns to import Egyptian wheat. Also Cyzicus received from Hadrian the authorization to import Egyptian grain.<sup>107</sup> Garnsey believes that provincial import of Egyptian grain was not systematically planned. No doubt, all the requests had to go through the prefect's office in Rome, and it is unlikely that the Emperor was always consulted: the prefect could sell as much grain as he liked to whomsoever he wished, although it is likely that he had to justify his conduct in front of the Emperor at a later date. In addition, considering the fact that in the above mentioned inscription, excluding Rome, the Ephesians were presented as the first grain recipients, we can suppose that there was more than one city that regularly needed to import grain from Egypt.<sup>108</sup> Garnsey's overall description of the imperial impact on provincial food supply echoes his centralistic and to a certain extent primitivistic interpretation of Roman economy.<sup>109</sup>

Concerning the interaction between centre and province in the field of food supply, we must recall Remesal Rodríguez's position, based upon his redistributive interpretation of imperial management of food supply. As we have seen, he describes the relationships that emerged between Rome and each of the provinces, and those among the provinces, as modelled upon the Roman State's needs which were basically the needs of the army and of the population of Rome. The Emperors were aware of such an interdependence between centre and periphery. Indeed, they tried to keep an equilibrium between the interests of the State and those of the provinces and the single people, an effort which determined the role and the fortune of each of the provinces and, more generally, the political and administrative evolution of the Roman Empire. Such an equilibrium was created by Augustus, protected by the Antonine Emperors and collapsed under the Severian dynasty.<sup>110</sup>

Regarding the impact of the Empire on food supply, the recent considerations of Erdkampf, which to some extent echo both the "primitivistic" interpretation of

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general validity.

<sup>107</sup> OGIS 389 (see PAVIS D'ESCURAC 1976, 131). We have evidence of such imperial permits from the first decade of Augustus' Principate to the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

<sup>108</sup> GARNSEY 1988, 256-257.

<sup>109</sup> "The period of the Principate witnessed increased interference in local affairs and a gradual decline in the civic spirit, which served as a shield against hunger and starvation. (...) The argument for the erosion of local initiative and patriotism might take in also the regulation and modification of the system of compulsory services or liturgies, the mounting burden of such services and other demands of central government to local communities, and the absolute reduction of local resources through expropriation by Roman Emperors and aristocrats. The impact of Roman rule was of course felt unequally. Egypt suffered most. (...) The surplus extracted from the provinces was consumed by the city of Rome, the court, the bureaucracy and the military. (...) In general, it may be suspected that the mass of ordinary cities of the Empire frequently lost out in the competition for grain to states which were favoured by prefects or Emperors for political or personal reasons" (GARNSEY 1988, 267-268). Quite similar considerations are expressed by ALCOCK 2007, 691: "Appeals for state assistance in the food supply of Eastern cities are periodically recorded (...). Paradoxically, the physical presence of the Emperor, and all that he brought with him, could apparently trigger subsistence problems, as when Sparta, around the time of a Hadrianic visit, was also given permission to buy Egyptian wheat. Gifts of money (in times of trouble, such as earthquakes) and of goods such as marble columns (by petition) are other imperial additives to the Eastern economic mix".

<sup>110</sup> REMESAL RODRÍGUEZ 1995; *Id.* 2008, 158, and *Id.* 2002a, 124: "La necesidad de proveer a Roma y al ejército determinó, en gran medida, el desarrollo político del imperio romano"; see also *Id.* 1999.

Garnsey and the redistributive model of Remesal Rodríguez, are also worth recalling: “the presence of Roman authorities significantly altered the working of market intervention and regulation. On the one hand, the Roman Emperor controlled huge amounts of corn and on occasion made these stocks available to provincial cities. On the other hand, urban rulers and their subjects could count on the intervention of provincial governors, who had the power and authority to force foreign traders, rich landowners and neighbouring communities into compliance”.<sup>111</sup> In particular, the imperial officials intervened occasionally against speculators, in order to ensure an adequate supply to the markets.<sup>112</sup>

The imperial control on the provincial cities was possible thanks to an articulated network of relationships. The cooperation between the central government and local élites through imperial officials was fundamental. As Burton explains, at least as far as the collection of taxes and the maintenance of order were involved, the central government produced some restrictions on the freedom of action of the local authorities, and could constrain and underpin the powers of local institutions.<sup>113</sup> A further aspect of such a network of relations between centre and periphery in the field of food supply is the phenomenon of the provincial requests sent directly to the Emperor, such as those of Tralleis and Ephesus already mentioned.<sup>114</sup> Such a peculiar dialogue can be considered a centralizing trait in the provincial food supply.<sup>115</sup> In any case, we cannot think of a central controlled system in a modern sense, since, as Erdkamp underlines, in the Roman Empire “regulations are of limited scope. Ancient market regulation reflects the general reliance on local suppliers and their responses to dearth. (...) Provincial authorities offered support in the implementation of local regulations, but they did not intervene on their own initiative in local affairs. Throughout the imperial period, towns and cities remained self-governing bodies. The Roman authorities expected the local élite to rule their communities by influence and authority, while they supported prominent cities by subventions of corn and access to external markets”.<sup>116</sup> According to Erdkamp, in particular, the limits of the intervention of Roman authorities also laid in a lack of means to address the shortcoming of the mar-

<sup>111</sup> ERDKAMP 2005, 267.

<sup>112</sup> ERDKAMP 2005, 265. On the problem represented by speculators in the Eastern provinces see Dio Chrysostomus, *Or.* 7.104, who speaks of sharp money-landing and accumulation of tenements, ships and slaves by the élites (see ALCOCK 2007, 692). Regarding the pressures on the local élites by the Emperor or his officials see also KOKKINIA 2004, 42.

<sup>113</sup> BURTON 2001.

<sup>114</sup> See in particular SIRKS 2001, 121.

<sup>115</sup> Furthermore we may well interpret this phenomenon as an aspect of “primitivism” in Roman economy, since it fundamentally implies a relationship of power.

<sup>116</sup> ERDKAMP 2005, 266-268. See also BURTON 2001, 212 and BOATWRIGHT 2002, 8 and 53-54. Such a scenario of the rather limited possibilities of the imperial intervention through governors is underlined also by KOKKINIA 2004, 57, who focuses especially on the East: “It is common knowledge that Roman rule in the East was based on the cooperation of local élites. But since Roman provincial authorities were not in a position to demand or impose such cooperation by force, we must conclude that the limits of governmental power were set by local realities”.

ket. Consistently, state price fixing, as far as epigraphic evidence demonstrates, was rarely practiced in the first three centuries AD.<sup>117</sup>

Given these considerations we can conclude that the impact of the Empire on provincial food supply was a rather complex phenomenon. No doubt, it was characterized by centripetal forces and aspects of centralization.<sup>118</sup> Nevertheless, it did not exclude the presence of centrifugal dynamics, aspects of “free” market and urban independent initiative.<sup>119</sup> Indeed, although the Roman government, through its provincial representatives, showed occasional concern for the municipal grain supply and took a few specific initiatives, given the intrinsic limits of its intervention and control on the market, it usually left this task to the municipalities of provincial towns. The latter, therefore, tried to live off the produce of their hinterland,<sup>120</sup> relying –more or less occasionally– on the private initiative of the wealthiest citizens, as they had done before the Roman conquest. Indeed, the growth of imperial properties between the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD did not prevent the local élites from building up enormous fortunes and accumulate lands: the most prominent citizens, therefore, continued to support their cities as they had done before the Roman conquest, by protecting them from the unpredictability of the market.<sup>121</sup>

## 7. The role of euergetism in imperial food supply

Following Garnsey, we have seen that such “private initiatives” of the wealthiest citizens, which had played an important role within Mediterranean food supply even before the Roman conquest, are to be ascribed to the realm of euergetism.<sup>122</sup> We can therefore conclude that the Greek culture of euergetism, frumentarian euergetism included, was perfectly integrated into the new Roman Empire. In particular, it is clear

<sup>117</sup> ERDKAMP 2005, 283-306.

<sup>118</sup> Since, as we have seen, the necessity of food supply of Rome and the army strongly affected the overall Mediterranean economy, and the Emperor and his officials could in theory impose their decisions locally.

<sup>119</sup> Such a duplicity is to some extent comparable to what we have seen regarding the organization of the *annona* of Rome: here, too, the imperial control had to rely on the “free” initiative of private merchants.

<sup>120</sup> See also HOPKINS 1983, 94.

<sup>121</sup> The local élites’ support of urban supply in the Roman world has been underscored by REMESAL RODRÍGUEZ 2012, 225: “El sistema urbano del mundo romano se basaba en que la elite de cada núcleo urbano estuviese interesada en iniciar sus carreras políticas dentro de su propia ciudad, contribuyendo al mantenimiento de la misma”. This interpretation is partly echoed by JONGMAN 2007; also *Id.* 2000 and JONGMAN – DEKKER 1989. Jongman underlines that public subsistence support was one of the salient features of life in Rome and elsewhere in the Empire and that the high level of Roman urbanization was underwritten by systematic public intervention in the urban food supply.

<sup>122</sup> I follow the definition of euergetism provided by ZUIDERHOEK 2009, 6: “Euergetism was a form of gift-exchange between a rich citizen and his (occasionally her) city/community of fellow citizens”. As Zuiderhoek points out, in ancient Greek *euergesia* was the term commonly used for a benefaction. “Euergetism” is a modern neologism: the Latin and Greek correspondents were *liberalitas* and *philotimia*, although both have wider connotations. A general analysis of euergetism in the Hellenistic and Roman cities, with its sociological implications, is provided by VEYNE 1976, 20-43. On the frumentarian euergetism see FRÉZOULS 1991.

that the Emperor took over the role of “first euergetes”.<sup>123</sup> An aspect of this process was the establishment of a direct dialogue between the Emperors and the provincial communities during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century.<sup>124</sup> The relationship between the centre and the various provinces usually followed similar patterns and the system of communication was basically monarchic, more or less from the start.<sup>125</sup> The model proposed by Millar is “petition and response”. When possible, the Emperor dialogued directly with the urban communities, an action which had no doubt a strong ideological impact.<sup>126</sup> Otherwise, the most eminent urban personalities acted as a kind of broker between the local town and the central government.<sup>127</sup> Millar provides us with many examples of legacies sent to the Emperor by provincial towns, especially by Eastern regions,<sup>128</sup> and imperial responses. The requests and communications submitted to the Emperor concerned the most diverse matters: disputes on local ceremonials and cult-observances, accusations, legal questions, dossiers of the honours awarded to local benefactors soliciting the Emperor’s approval.<sup>129</sup> Additionally we find requests for, or the confirming of privileges<sup>130</sup> as well as financial support which was based on money gifts or tax exemptions. Regarding this particular theme, as Millar points out, it became progressively hard to distinguish between money of the Emperor and that of the State.<sup>131</sup> Therefore, it was a matter of choice whether the Emperor “gave” money, or a remission of taxation: both measures could easily be ideologically interpreted as manifestations of the imperial private liberality, his *providentia*.<sup>132</sup> In such a

<sup>123</sup> See MILLAR 1977, 133-134 and 192. Also NUTTON 1978, 209-210 and 217, and VEYNE 1976, 621-632. See also PAVIS D’ESCURAC 1987, 127-128, who also claims that regarding food supply the Roman Emperors took over the role of *euergetai* previously bestowed to Hellenistic kings. Also FERRARY 1997. Regarding the philosophical basis of Greek euergetism see MORETTI 1977.

<sup>124</sup> Such a process was anticipated by a phenomenon occurred in the late republican period, when many individuals from the East were able to build relationships with the Roman occupiers, obtaining many privileges for their communities: see THÉRIAULT 2003.

<sup>125</sup> EICH 2012, 87.

<sup>126</sup> See MILLAR 1977, 374-375.

<sup>127</sup> HEMELRIJK 2004. See also BOATWRIGHT 2002, 1-17, 45-46 and *passim*.

<sup>128</sup> This may depend on the fact that “it was there [i. e. in the East] that the concept of a city had the strongest hold, and the need for that status most keenly felt” (MILLAR 1977, 409).

<sup>129</sup> See MILLAR 1977, 419. An example of such dossiers is provided by the immense inscription from Rhodiapolis in Lycia (138-150 AD) which provides a list of the honours awarded to a local millionaire, Opramoas: *TAM* II 905 (see the quite recent KOKKINIA 2000). See also the letters sent by the new league of “Panhellenes” instituted by Hadrian to both the *koinon* of Hellenes in Asia and to Antoninus Pius, regarding to the services of M. Ulpius Eurycles of Aezani in Asia: *OGIS* 504-7 (see KEARSLEY 1987).

<sup>130</sup> See, for instance, the passage where Dio Chrysostomus recalls the benefactions given by Trajan to Smyrne (*Or.* 40.14). Dio also defends his conduct toward his motherland Prusa by enumerating Trajan’s service to him at his request (*Or.* 40.15 and 45.3): “Even in normal times the Emperor was besieged with requests, and his friends could use their influence with him to secure titles and privileges for their home towns” (NUTTON 1978, 216).

<sup>131</sup> See the famous opening passage of the *Res Gestae*, where Augustus claims that he had created a State *privato consilio et privata impensa* (REMESAL RODRÍGUEZ 2002a, 124-125).

<sup>132</sup> MILLAR 1977, 425. VEYNE 1976, believes that *stricto sensu* the Emperor was not the owner of the Empire: “Il n’est pas propriétaire de son Empire, mais il peut en être le mécène” (621) and “rien de bon ne doit être fait par personne dans l’Empire sans que l’Empereur n’en soit le vrai évergète” (640). Nevertheless, that the Emperor was felt as “owner” –at least in the case of Augustus and his successors– is indicated by Seneca, who writes (*De ben.* 7.6.3) that *Caesar omnia habet, fiscus eius privata tantum ac sua et universa in*

complex diplomatic network between centre and periphery, the solicitation and consequent grant of grain benefices evidently played an important role. If the state capital that was generated from fiscal revenues was now indistinguishable from the imperial treasure, a similar process involved grain, since, as we have seen, a great deal of this cereal was now formally in the hands of the Emperor.<sup>133</sup> The obvious consequence of such a phenomenon was this: grain supply measures, as far as the Emperor was involved, had to be reinterpreted according to the ideology of *euergesia*.<sup>134</sup>

As the literary sources confirm, until the Late Empire the Emperors made grain distributions in the provinces like those performed in Rome. For instance, the grain donation by the potential imperial successor Germanicus in favour of Alexandria is one of many cases in point.<sup>135</sup> It is worth observing that Emperor Tiberius' complaints to the Senate regarding Germanicus' initiative confirm that the control over grain was a major concern of the imperial power.<sup>136</sup> Trajan, in his turn, ordered grain to be sent from Rome to Egypt, during an Egyptian food crisis, as we learn from Plinius' *Panegyricus*.<sup>137</sup> The *Panegyricus* implies a strong propagandistic message concerning the imperial *Providentia*: the idea is that a good Emperor is someone who takes care of the needs of the people.<sup>138</sup> A passage by Cassius Dio recalls a corn dole in Athens promoted by Hadrian.<sup>139</sup> The same city was granted grain also by Costantine, as we learn from Julian.<sup>140</sup> We have already recalled the permission given by Hadrian to Tralleis and Ephesus to import Egyptian grain. As some coin types from Tarsos demonstrate, both Caracalla and Severus Alexander provided this city with Egyptian grain.<sup>141</sup> As Millar has rightly underlined, we should make a distinction between permission to import and grain gifts.<sup>142</sup> In any case, since Egyptian grain belonged formally to the Emperor, both actions were probably interpreted as acts of liberality by him.

Among the imperial grain benefactions we can also cite Trajan's alimentary programme in Italy, although it may be argued that this was not an *euergesia* in the

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*imperio eius sunt, in patrimonio propria*. Indeed, the idea at the basis of the Julio-Claudian dominion, clearly expressed in the *Res Gestae*, was that the Emperor took care of the Empire by means of his own *patrimonium* (see REMESAL RODRÍGUEZ 2012).

<sup>133</sup> The similar destiny shared by fiscal money and grain is not surprising: grain and money were always considered on a par to each other, as the presence in the Empire of both money taxes and taxes in kind demonstrates.

<sup>134</sup> See also LO CASCIO 2007, 632: "Other expenses were ideologically construed as emanating from the *liberalitas* of the Princeps. Distributions of coin (*congiaria*) and of corn (*frumentationes*) to the metropolitan *plebs*, handouts to the troops (*donativa*), and more generally personal gifts of the Emperor were the clearest expression of this ideology".

<sup>135</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 2.59: *M. Silano L. Norbano consulibus Germanicus Aegyptum proficiscitur cognoscendae antiquitatis. Sed cura provinciae praetendebatur, levavitque apertis horreis pretia frugum multaue in vulgus grata usurpavit.*

<sup>136</sup> REMESAL RODRÍGUEZ 2002a, 122.

<sup>137</sup> Plin. *Panegyricus* 31. See also RICKMAN 1980, 115 and GARNSEY 1988, 251-252.

<sup>138</sup> REMESAL RODRÍGUEZ 2002a, 125.

<sup>139</sup> 69.16.1-2. Grain gifts are mentioned among Hadrian's benefactions also in Cass. Dio 69.5.2-3.

<sup>140</sup> *Or.* I, 6/8d.

<sup>141</sup> ZIEGLER 1977: the coins are described at 34-35 (pl. 3).

<sup>142</sup> MILLAR 1977, 422.

strict sense.<sup>143</sup> This programme implied that the interest on the loans taken out by landowners would go towards youths in need.<sup>144</sup> Moreover, it extended the right of receiving wheat distributions, whereas the previous *frumentationes* had been confined to Rome alone.<sup>145</sup> Such a measure, along with the institution of grain doles imitating the Roman *frumentationes*, seems to have been exceptional.<sup>146</sup> Apart from the already mentioned grain dole granted by Hadrian in Athens, we know that the same Emperor also created an alimentary scheme for children in Antinoopolis.<sup>147</sup>

From all these examples a central question arises: what relationship was there between imperial grain benefactions and the traditional frumentarian *euergesiai* that were made by the local élites? Did the Emperors aim at somewhat providing an example? Despite all these testimonies, it is rather problematic to build a unitary picture of the economic impact of imperial frumentarian euergetism given the essentially sporadic epigraphic and literary evidence.<sup>148</sup> No doubt, we should approach the phenomenon of grain euergetism considering the differences among geographical areas and evaluating the single contexts, whilst integrating when possible the biased epigraphic evidence with the archaeological data. Indeed, the understanding of ancient euergetism on the whole is ultimately complicated further by the bias of the ancient sources attesting euergetic measures, which are invariably commissioned by the *euergetes* himself, or by his entourage and supporters. Moreover, such documents usually say nothing of the reasons of benefaction and the sum of money provided, which was not always necessarily conspicuous.<sup>149</sup> Therefore, it seems difficult to clarify the relations between imperial and non-imperial, Roman and pre-Roman euergetism and to what extent imperial euergetic measures influenced private initiative and viceversa. As a matter of fact, the scholarly debate is still open.<sup>150</sup> Nevertheless, a few considerations are possible.

According to Eck we should make a distinction between imperial munificence and euergetic measures of private citizens.<sup>151</sup> And yet the similarity between the form and vocabulary of imperial and private euergetism is undeniable. Moreover, the provincial *euergetes* belongs to that very élite which plays the role of intermediary between the Emperor and the urban communities, as we have already seen, and is generally bound

<sup>143</sup> But see BOSSU 1989, who underlines the “euergetic” value of the programme. See also VEYNE 1976, 648, who points out that such an imperial measure was everywhere interpreted as a form of *indulgentia*.

<sup>144</sup> See RICKMAN 1980, 73-79 and GARNSEY 1988, 252. See also the recent PAGE 2004.

<sup>145</sup> See DUNCAN-JONES 1964, in particular 142-144. Regarding the Augustan limitations to wheat gifts and Trajan generosity in distributions see RICKMAN 1980, 181-182. See also WOLF 1990.

<sup>146</sup> GARNSEY 1988, 252 and ERDKAMP 2005, 276, who underlines that evidence for corn doles outside Rome is limited to a few cities in Lycia in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD and Egypt in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

<sup>147</sup> Pap. Lond. Inv. 1905: see BELL 1940.

<sup>148</sup> Sporadic both chronologically and geographically.

<sup>149</sup> See NUTTON 1978, 219, who observes that these documents reveal very little about the attitude of the provincials to the gifts and the giver.

<sup>150</sup> On these structural problems of the evidence regarding euergetism see ECK 1997, in particular 315-324. The bias of many inscriptions attesting euergetism – in particular of those from the Latin West – has been fairly examined by WITSCHEL – THOMAS 1992: they argued that often the archaeological evidence diminishes the grandiose claims reported on the buildings. See also MITCHELL 1987, in particular 343-344.

<sup>151</sup> ECK 1997, 306, footnote 2.

to the Emperor by friendship.<sup>152</sup> This fact does not seem a coincidence: the Emperor might well have provided a model to emulate.<sup>153</sup> In this regard, it is interesting to note that a benefactor of the Phrygian Nacolea bequeathed a sum of money to his city: the interests produced in the subsequent three years were to be allocated to a grain fund and later divided among the citizens on Hadrian's birthday.<sup>154</sup> The strict connection between the frumentarian *beneficium* and the Emperor is remarkable. Moreover, it is conceivable that the privately funded alimentary projects known in Lycia and Egypt were influenced by Trajan's alimentary programme in Italy.<sup>155</sup>

A recurrent academic interpretation considers benefactions as gifts destined only to limited groups of privileged citizens: in this perspective euergetism appears simply a matter of coercion and self-interest, the mere attempt of the élites to legitimize their power and thus preserve their social position.<sup>156</sup> Similarly, the Emperor, being the largest landowner in the Empire, practiced euergetism in order to fulfill the political and social role that was expected of him.<sup>157</sup> No doubt, it seems undeniable that there was a strict connection between euergetic measures plus social hierarchization and the accumulation of wealth in few hands –the Emperor and the provincial élites commonly bound to him.<sup>158</sup> From this viewpoint euergetism appears more a “primi-

<sup>152</sup> BARRESI 2003, 205-210: he focuses mainly on the building euergetism.

<sup>153</sup> According to BOATWRIGHT 2002, 6-8, who deals with the imperial euergetism in general, the individualized attention to towns provided by the Emperor was instrumental to the system of personal patronage underlying the social structure of the Roman Empire. It was one way Hadrian and other Emperors encouraged the provincial élites to contribute to their cities and Rome. The existence and repetition of these interactions reveal that imperial patronage was intrinsic to the endurance of the Empire. Although members of the municipal élite often played the role of brokers, the city benefited as a whole.

<sup>154</sup> ILS 7196. See GARNSEY 1988, 264.

<sup>155</sup> GARNSEY 1988, 262. See also BALLAND 1981, who suggests that the *σιτομετρούμενοι ἄνδρες* could be the municipal reflection of the Roman *plebs frumentaria*. According to MILLAR 1977, 192 and 200, on the other hand, the imperial euergetic measures, including the frumentarian *euergesiai*, were occasional and neither integrated nor long-term oriented, apart from Trajan's alimentary programme. See also PAVIS D'ESCURAC 1976, 132: “Sans doute y a-t-il eu de la part du gouvernement impérial une action concertée; mais son application s'est faite cité par cité. Il apparaît toutefois que le plus souvent solutions ou palliatifs des crises annonnaires des cités d'Asie Mineure leur vinrent de l'évergétisme des particuliers”. According to this interpretation the attitude of the Emperor appears fairly passive. BURASELIS 2006, however, observed that there are still a handful of Emperors that by no means can be classed as passive, and Hadrian above all. Indeed, the reign of Hadrian represented somewhat a turning point in the field of imperial benefactions towards the cities: in this case the relationship between imperial and local *euergesiai* appears to be strong. See BOATWRIGHT 2002, 11-14: “His travels, ceaseless correspondence, and reception of embassies, often even his largesse itself, were mediated by cities' grandees, whose social and political standing was concomitantly advanced by their association with the Emperor”.

<sup>156</sup> See ZUIDERHOEK 2009, 32-36, who underlines as the occasional euergetic distributions of goods were gifts to the city or the citizens, not to the poor citizens, a category which –as BROWN 2002 has argued– did not exist as a social group in the pagan civic world view. See also VEYNE 1976, 94-163, who offers a general perspective regarding the sociological aspects of euergetism and its economic meaning: at page 95 he analyses the aspects of “*ostentation et narcissisme*” implied by euergetism. Also the specific case of grain distribution has been interpreted in this way, since we have evidence that the grain receivers were not the poorest people (see, e. g., the *σιτομετρούμενοι ἄνδρες* of the Lycian corn doles: GARNSEY 1988, 262-265): see, for example, VAN NIJF 1997.

<sup>157</sup> ERDKAMP 2007, 260.

<sup>158</sup> See ALCOCK 2007, 678: “Increasing stratification in the control of agricultural wealth is manifest, not least in the material munificence in civic and (to a lesser extent) rural display”. See also ERDKAMP 2007, 258:

tivistic” economic measure –primitivistic since it obviously implies a power relationship and a social hierarchy– than a positive strategy aimed at stimulating economy.<sup>159</sup> It is also worth considering, as Eck has demonstrated, that the imperial towns had generally various sources of public wealth: *summae honorariae*, tolls, products of the public lands. Thus, they normally managed to cope with their basic expenses without the contributions of benefactors.<sup>160</sup> Therefore, Eck concludes that the economic role of euergetism in the urban provincial scenario should not in fact be emphasized.

Regarding the already discussed possibility of the imperial *exemplum* influencing the provincial benefactors, the position expressed by Zuiderhoek reflects his social interpretation of euergetism.<sup>161</sup> If the Roman imperial system had a major influence on the proliferation of public offerings, this was mainly because it significantly contributed to the growing oligarchization of political life and the increasing accumulation of wealth in the hands of small groups of rich families during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. Therefore, the euergetic ideology, which gave the role of “fathers of the community” to persons –the Emperor and the local notables– able to show *philotimia*, *philopatria* and *liberalitas*, was an effective strategy to justify such an increasing hierarchization of society. Thus, although it is possible that local benefactions in the provinces were indeed imitations of the imperial *euergesiai*, it was the reality of power, its increasingly unequal distribution and the social tensions this created, that primarily stimulated the proliferation of provincial munificence during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

No doubt, all these considerations are convincing and encourage us to approach the phenomenon of grain euergetism by taking into account superstructural aspects –culture, ideology, propaganda, and social relations–, which are to a great extent inseparable from the dynamics of the economy. Nevertheless, as Zuiderhoek himself points out, frumentarian euergetism –essentially represented by grain distributions or gifts of money to buy grain– was a quite exceptional event. In fact, as far as evidence from Asia Minor indicates, the frequency of distributions among the benefactions was just 17 % *versus* 58 % of building *euergesiai*. Moreover, regarding the type of building, the number of structures connected to grain supply is negligible, while among the goods involved in public distributions, oil (presumably destined to *gymnasia*) and money were far and away more popular than grain.<sup>162</sup> Therefore, we can legitimately hypothesize that the aim of grain benefaction was rather different from the scope of other kinds of *euergesiai*. In particular, its occasionality suggests that such a measure responded to specific needs in particular circumstances. Why should we in fact exclude the very logical conclusion that occasional grain benefactions respond-

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“The towns and cities served as it were as the stage on which the landowning élite performed its social role, which encompassed much conspicuous consumption and acts of euergetism, that is, the expenditure on behalf of the community of citizens - primarily conceived as the citizens residing in the towns”.

<sup>159</sup> This idea is very clearly expressed by ZUIDERHOEK 2009, 113-153 and *passim*: “Euergetism, of course, *presupposes* social inequality, i. e. hierarchy. It could only exist and function when there were enough sufficiently wealthy people who were able to act as benefactors. Its aim was not to abolish inequality, but to ensure the stable functioning of an oligarchic political system” (94).

<sup>160</sup> ECK 1997, 307-315, and ZUIDERHOEK 2009, 23-52.

<sup>161</sup> ZUIDERHOEK 2009, 108-112.

<sup>162</sup> See ZUIDERHOEK 2009, 79-80 and 89, figs. 5.1, 5.2, 5.3 and 5.5.



ed to occasional situations of real shortage? Indeed, as Erdkamp recalls, although the Mediterranean cities generally managed to cope with their basic needs, dearth remained a serious risk and grain benefactions might well be a deliberate means of avoiding famine and helping the poorest people.<sup>163</sup> As far as the specific role of the Emperors is concerned, since, as we have seen, other kinds of imperial euergetism encouraged civic munificence, we may well hypothesize the same regarding frumentarian euergetism. In particular, I believe that in the Roman Empire –which, as we have seen, was a scenario of central “limited control” on local food supplies– imperial promotion of local frumentarian euergetism<sup>164</sup> may well be a feasible empirical strategy to positively affect the local food supplies.<sup>165</sup> Imperial promotion of local euergetism in this field may be interpreted as a sort of counter measure against the traditional rapacity and greed of landowners and dealers, who often speculated in grain and basic staples, as we learn above from a passage by Dio Chrysostomus.<sup>166</sup> Moreover, state promotion of grain euergetism would prove an effective device in order to improve both the influence of the Emperor on his subjects (since what was previously free initiative would become “highly recommended”) and the imperial control over grain management that, as we have seen, was becoming more and more centralized in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.

## 8. Conclusions

Roman economy during the first two centuries of the Empire, before the crisis of Marcus Aurelius’s time, was a particularly complex system. It was characterized by a strong vitality, which led to an increase in production promoted by the existence of a large-scale market, monetization and centres of consumption, but also by elements typical of a centralized “prestige economy”, such as state control, power relations and

<sup>163</sup> This idea mirrors Erdkamp’s interpretation of Roman grain economy, basically redistributive. Someone could recall the position of VEYNE 1976, 729: “En ces temps lointains où l’économie n’était pas encore une profession, la classe politique ne considérait ses avantages économiques que comme les moyens de ses supériorités politiques et sociales. L’évérgetisme comme redistribution, cela a existé, mais accessoirement”. And yet ERDKAMP 2005, 315, is right when writes that “the most prominent citizens of the towns and cities were the closest to the fire when things went wrong”. The fact that these measures adopted the language of euergetism is not surprising in the context of Eastern Mediterranean, so strictly imbued with this ideology.

<sup>164</sup> Through both direct distributions and the permission to import grain from abroad.

<sup>165</sup> But see VEYNE 1976, 647-651, who minimises the possibility of recognising an “economic intention” below imperial *euergesiai* (also BOATWRIGHT 2002, 72, who focuses on the very reign of Hadrian). Nevertheless, Veyne focuses only on Trajan’s *alimenta*. His methodological suggestion sounds particularly useful: “Il ne faut pas juger des intentions de Trajan d’après la rationalité de ses mesures, telle qu’elle apparaît à des yeux modernes”. The hypothesis I suggest –that “state” promotion of local grain euergetism may well be a particularly feasible strategy to positively affect the local food supplies– may thus appear a mere modern “superinterpretation”. Nevertheless, I do not take into account the intentions (more or less conscious) of the Roman Emperors: that is the reason why I have described the imperial promotion of local grain euergetism as an *empirical* measure (that is, a basically occasional measure).

<sup>166</sup> See also FERRER MAESTRO 2012, who quotes, for example, Emperor Julian’s initiatives against the food speculators in Antiochia during a drought: Jul. *Misopog.* 41. Julian speaks precisely of “greediness of the owners”.

redistribution. This trend was particularly visible in sectors organized according to a centralistic logic, such as the food supply of the army and of Rome. In this case the patterns of distribution and the structures of inter-regional exchange in the Roman Empire clearly reflected the needs of the State.

Secondly, we have seen how between the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> century the Emperors were strongly concerned with the food supply of Rome. Private traders must have played a role, since bringing in the grain was a profit-making enterprise, which became more attractive thanks to the favourable conditions offered by the state. Nevertheless, the preeminence of central government within the Roman food supply and its interventism cannot be denied. The “commercial activities” which materially provided Rome with food were merely an aspect of a fundamentally redistributive system of food supply.

As far as the impact of the Empire on provincial food supply is concerned, it was characterized by centripetal forces and aspects of centralization. Nevertheless, it did not exclude the presence of centrifugal dynamics, aspects of “free” market and free initiative by cities. Indeed, although the Roman government, through its provincial representatives, showed occasional concern for the municipal grain supply and took a few specific initiatives, given the intrinsic limits of its intervention and control on the market, it usually left this task to the municipalities of provincial towns. In this context grain euergetism –promoted by the Emperors through their example– could represent an effective means of positively affecting provincial food supply, given the fact that central control was structurally limited in the territories of the Empire. For this same reason, I also believe that imperial grain *beneficia* in the provinces represented an attempt to increase central control over imperial grain management.

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