Analyzing the Annona: a Source of Imperial Power

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Analyzing the Annona:
A Source of Imperial Power

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Abstract

One of the earliest forms of social welfare could be found in Ancient Imperial Rome, known as the grain dole, it featured a state-run allotment of grain to every adult male citizen in the city of Rome. The successes of the dole encouraged the emperors to expand their roles in managing bureaucratic affairs as the empire expanded and reacted positively to their influence. Previously, the dominant research conducted on the grain trade and dole of Ancient Rome focused primarily on the scale of the economy and the processes in which grain was distributed to the various neighborhoods of Rome. In this thesis, I will examine how the grain dole became integral to the idea of the empire from the rule of Augustus to emperor Trajan – and why the decades-long facilitation of the grain dole became a legitimizing factor in proving each emperor's link to divinity and their competence in ruling the empire. This study will utilize a combination of analysis of the dominant secondary literature, evidence of archaeological remains, and examination of primary literature in order to demonstrate the key factors of the grain dole and to tease out the dole's role in Imperial statecraft. Overall, the analysis will demonstrate how the first emperor, Augustus, established a lasting bureaucratic system for the facilitation of the grain dole, followed by his successors who adapted his system in order to better their own political position and to assuage the fear of famine. Therefore, by the time of emperor Trajan, the grain dole had become a sure sign of a civilized state due to its continual success in spite of its scale of production and distribution and through its abilities to calm the populace of Rome.

Dedication

I would like to offer a brief dedication to my parents who mean the world to me and have done everything in their power to help support my education from my childhood, college years, and beyond. Without their love and care I doubt I would be here today.

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To my Mammaw in Georgia, who was a joy to update and whom I love unconditionally,

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1. Introduction and Road Map

Introduction

The function of a city is inherently unnatural, they gather far too many people in one place to be feasible without the food surplus granted from the advent of agriculture. Through thousands of years of human history, the largest concern in maintaining a population was consistent supply of food. In an age where crop failures could cause the downfall of cities, how did the Roman Empire maintain a population in its capital bordering on hundreds of thousands? The answer is seemingly simple, the grain dole – a constant supply of grain institutionalized at the start of the Early Empire under Augustus (~27 BCE), a program that remained one of the most consistent necessities of the Roman commercial world, even as the centuries passed. The principal part of maintaining the integrity of the capital was keeping the people fed and safe, and each emperor upheld the promise to the citizens in new ways. The dole dominated the Roman state, becoming one of the state's largest expenditures – outside the maintenance of the extensive Roman military. As the empire spread and developed, new regional centers, like Carthage and Egypt, allowed for mass levying of grain exports from their abundant and fertile farms – helping to prevent grain shortages through diversification of labor.

In what follows, we will explore the effects of the Roman grain dole, or *annona*, on the state and its population during[1] the period from Augustus to the reign of emperor Trajan. The

[1] Throughout this paper I will use the terms grain dole and *annona* interchangeably, this is due to the latter being a title of the grain dole granted to it by the work of Augustus as will be explored further in Chapter 2. There is not a meaningful enough difference in these terms that one over the other would be preferable, however, if the term

beginning of this time period also coincides with the *Pax Romana*, an era of relative peace within the Empire – as while successive emperors expanded the territorial boundaries (peaking under Trajan in 117 CE),[2] the internal political and economic union of the Roman provinces remained stable. The peace ensured by the *Pax Romana* is crucial for understanding why one of the principal efforts of the emperors became to support the grain dole – maintaining that internal stability throughout the century. The Roman state ensured stability throughout the Empire: domestic trade was able to flourish, private merchants, tradesmen, and wealthy noble patrons were able to profit from the vast roadways and waterways of the Empire, forming a complex system of trade networks which the emperors would routinely exploit in order to organize the flow of grain to their cities and supply funds for their armies.

In the following chapters, I will make use of a range of methodologies to sort out the facts of the Roman grain dole, and analyze how the primary and secondary sources support the argument that the grain dole became an institutionalized tool of Roman bureaucracy under Imperial Rome, one that became as crucial to the identity of the empire as the Senate or army. As bold as these claims are, I will support them through an analysis of primary sources, ranging from material culture found as archaeological remains within the city of Rome—such as ports, warehouses, and grain silos—as well as an analysis of literary and textual evidence related to the facilitation of the grain dole by the emperors, the logistical capabilities of the empire to import grain to the capital, the laws that relate directly to the officers of the dole, transport of grain, or boons given to private citizens and residents who helped to facilitate the system of production, shipment, and distribution of grain. The analysis of material culture will also be supported by a

annona is used to refer to allotments of grain from the late Republican period that would be incorrect (see Chapter 1).

[2] Dmitriev, Sviatoslav. "'Good Emperors' and Emperors of the Third Century." pp. 1-4.

battery of secondary sources which range from the work of archaeologists, historians, and economists and who will provide contextualization to the primary sources as well as aid in strengthening of the argument. I will also examine differing opinions on the role of the grain dole under imperial power and its debated importance in the eyes of the emperors.

Road Map

As stated, this paper explores the grain dole through the social, economic, and political eras of the emperors ranging from Augustus to Trajan. The paper breaks down the process of the grain dole step-by-step in order to help explain the magnitude of effort and cost that would need to be maintained in order to merely help subsidize the food supply of the people of Rome. Furthermore, the paper will analyze the monumental efforts of the first emperor, Augustus, to establish the beginnings of a permanent grain dole. I then give an overview of several emperors' efforts to expand or reform the dole, from Tiberius to Trajan. Having analyzed all these factors, the paper will showcase how the grain dole came to be, and how within one hundred years it became a critically important institution for the support of Imperial power.

My first chapter, "How the Grain Dole Functioned," describes a brief history of grain subsidies within Ancient Rome, ranging from its inception during the Republic as merely state subsidies on the price of grain, to the one-off free handouts of the competing the political figures of the last days of the Republic, to the institution formed by Augustus to combat continual grain shortages and famine within the city at the turn of the millennium. Following the historical overview, the chapter shows how the grain dole functioned from the harvesting to the transportation and distribution of the grain to the citizens of Rome. Furthermore, the goals of the

chapter include sharing the growing political influence of imperial appointees on the dole's bureaucracy and administration.

The second chapter, "The Reign of Augustus: Forming the Annona," focuses on Augustus's role in shaping the dole to become a permanent institution of the Roman state. The chapter relates Augustus's opinions on the grain dole and his attempts to stamp out its use before inevitably relenting and reforming it to become an efficient and manageable organization (one that would not immediately bankrupt the state). The chapter explores how Augustus's motivations for political dominance over the state and its capital city led him to link the name of grain dole with the goddesses of Rome (*annona*), providing an association between the divinity of the Augustus and his ability to feed the citizens of Rome, thus granting legitimacy to his power. Additionally, the chapter explores how the political opportunities granted by the new positions of the grain dole allowed Augustus to secure more power over the Senate, gain favor with his subordinates, and to push for a continuance of the grain dole – despite its high costs.

Chapter Three, "Tiberius to Trajan: the *Annona*'s Impact," explores how the policies of individual emperors impacted the grain dole, as well as exploring the boons the dole supplied to their various reigns. The chapter begins with emperor Tiberius, Augustus's heir, and explores his early relationship with the grain dole as a *quaestor* under Augustus and the impact that would have on his rule with the facilitation of the *annona.* I continue with the work of emperor Claudius, who faced his own issues with food instability and imperial management. He is followed by Nero, Domitian, and finally Trajan. The chapter primarily utilizes evidence from Suetonius, but also includes a section on the letters between Pliny the Younger and Trajan. These are important to include because they offer evidence of the power and effects of the grain dole because of the continued and expanded influence of the emperor over imperial matters outside

merely just the military or capital. The expanded role of the emperors is important to analyze through this lens because without the presence of similar letters in earlier time periods leaves great gaps in the knowledge of the historians in analyzing the scope of the emperors' power. However, because of the existence of the letters between Pliny and Trajan, the essay seeks to explore how the mundane management of the grain dole within the city of Rome would expand as later emperors appeared to be more involved in the provincial powers of the empire, such as Pliny's posting in Anatolia. It is because of the increased observation of Trajan that it makes for a greater understanding of imperial power in relation to the grain dole.

Finally, the paper will conclude with an analysis of each of the strongest points relating to the grain dole providing an outlet of various emperors' power within the imperial legacy. Meaning that as the power of the state advanced throughout the decades, the maintenance of administrative bureaucracy that managed such as large-scale effort to support the people of Rome – like the grain dole, led the emperors to become more involved in the minutia of running the empire, increasing centralization and the powers that citizens of Rome considered to be imperially manifested. That is to say the grain dole caused emperors to be more involved with their people because it helped subdue the threat of local unrest within the empire's most important city, and that influence helped convince the emperors to expand their power throughout the empire.

2. How the Grain Dole Functioned

How the Grain Dole Functioned

Now in order to understand how the grain dole became an integral part of the Imperial bureaucracy as a tool of the emperors, I must first explain how the dole came to be and how it functioned. The grain dole was institutionalized under emperor Augustus and continued by his successors, but he was not the first to institute the concept of grain handouts – Rome had a long history of subsidizing the grain market to alleviate the pressure placed on the urban poor. In this chapter I will explain how these initial Republican-era subsidies paved the way for the regulated monthly grain dole under Augustus. Even as Augustus utilized the empire's commercial and logistical capacity to execute the feeding of hundreds of thousands of citizens of the city of Rome on a monthly basis (as will be discussed further in Chapter Two), routine effort had to be maintained in order to keep the process flowing smoothly. Thus, in this chapter I will additionally examine how exactly the *annona* was run, from harvest to transportation, the storage in warehouses, the duties of clerical offices, and how the grain was given to the citizens of Rome. The process of harvest, transportation, storage, administration, and distribution by which emperor Augustus organized the grain dole was influential in showing Imperial power. Establishing how Augustus formed the grain dole will allow us to examine how later emperors changed and expanded the dole in order to utilize it as a method for which the empire could influence the mood of the people of the capital.

For centuries following the establishment of the Roman Republic, the city of Rome had been divided into four – relatively unchanged – regions (*regiones*) that were subdivided into various neighborhoods which determined grounds for taxation and law. Following the deadly and long civil wars of the final years of the Republic, Augustus would order censuses and reconstitute Rome into 14 regions, which were in turn subdivided into 265 *vici*, which were managed by a *vicimagistratius*, or neighborhood magistrate.[3] Augustus's maneuver was likely done to better organize the structure of the Roman capital, aiding in taxation, conscription, and management of law within the city – but also would make a convenient aid in the facilitation and distribution of the grain dole – which in turn followed a series of winding paths to arrive in the mouths of their hungry citizens.

Transportation

The borders of the Roman empire by the death of Augustus encompassed lands ranging from Iberia to North Africa to the Near East – a vast population owed allegiance to the Roman state. By the establishment of the empire, Rome had a long history of trade that was carried out from the port city of Ostia along the Tiber River to Rome's southern warehouses. During the Republic, the food supply of Rome remained a constant area of contention as food instability consistently angered the plebs and encouraged the tribunes and magistrates alike to dedicate time to assuaging them through the supply of cheap grain. Championed by the Gracchi brothers of the beginning of the Late Republic, grain was offered at low cost through the wealth of private citizens and the State (free doles would come during the actions of Clodius in the Late Republic).

[3] Robinson, O.F. "Chapter 1: The Physical City," *Ancient Rome: City Planning and Administration*. pp. 6-7, 11.

These private grain subsidies sought to manage both the threat of famine and to prevent inflation. As historian O. F. Robinson writes,

> C. Gracchus introduced the enduring concept of a permanent government concern with a sufficient and cheap supply of grain, the staple of the Roman diet, but even before his time we hear of occasional official interventions in the victualling of Rome. In so far as military needs were paramount, the consuls and praetors, as the magistrates with *imperium*, were naturally concerned with food supplies, but the aediles too had their role in the *cura urbis*. Thus in 203 and 201 BC the aediles had grain from Spain and Africa to distribute at a low price – by neighborhood (*vicatim*)… The porticus *Aemiliana* was built by the aediles of 193 BC, and the trading quarter – the Emporium – developed…[4]

The grain doles of Republic could not be classified as such; they acted more as temporary boons to prevent inflation and drum up favor for certain political officials and importantly, only offered discounts on purchasing grain – their cost limiting the poorest of plebs from receiving their benefits. However, as Robinson states, the early infrastructure of the Rome from the projects of Republican officials would lead future magistrates and curators to maintain a base of support along the river that catered to the needs of the citizens. These infrastructure projects, like the marketplace of Porticus Aemilius and the nearby Forum Boarium[5] allowed citizens easy access to warehouses and granaries fed by the influx of grain from various individual and contracted merchants. The efforts made by the Gracchi family would promote the building of public granaries, or *horrea,* which could be used to store a consistent surplus rather than to rent storage from private citizens.[6] In the time of Augustus, these warehouses and marketplaces were incorporated into the strategy of the *annona* and allowed for a larger bureaucratic system to manifest because of the centuries of river infrastructure that made up the city of Rome. The increase in the frequency of state interference in the economy of grain within the city led C.

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[4] Robinson, O. F. "Chapter 10 Feeding the City", *Ancient Rome: City Planning and Administration*. pp. 144-145.

[5] Colini, A. M. "Il Porto Fluviale Del Foro Boario a Roma (The River Port of the Forum Boarium at Rome)." Translated Abstract.

[6] Robinson, O.F. pp. 145.

Gracchi to order a price limit to the cost of privately traded grain, at a rate of six and one-third *asses* a *modius*,[7] efforts to combat rising discontent within the city, attempting to quell runaway inflation and overcharging the growing population of urban poor.[8] The effort to combat prices and corruption within the economy of private citizens was also mirrored in the organization of these early grain subsidies, Robinson stated, "In 189 BC the aediles were fining those merchants who hoarded gain, but this is the only recorded Republican case of prosecution for manipulation of the grain supply."[9] The transition into an organized system of grain dole had its roots in earlier Republican attempts to manage the constant danger of starvation inherent within the city limits. Additionally, while such interventions by the aediles were rare during the Late Republic, they would evolve into the mission of many magistrates, praetors, and curators to combat corruption and the manipulation of the price of grain – either through the distribution of the grain dole – or through price limits set by the *praefectus annonae* (or directly by Augustus).[10] According to the *Enchiridion*, a historical account from Roman historian Sextus Pomponius during the time of Hadrian, the *praefectus annonae* was a permanent official, personally chosen by the emperor, and who received a position second only to the prefects of Egypt and the Praetorians, becoming highly valued within the Equestrian social class.."[11] The high rank of the *praefectus annonae* indicated that Augustus valued the work of the grain official to a great extent, and wished to deeply reward those who filled the position.

As Augustus strove to feed the hundreds of thousands of citizens within the limits of the city of Rome, he relied heavily on grain producing regions of the empire. According to Roman

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[7] *Modius,* plural *modii,* was a Roman unit of measurement for quantifying grain. A single basic *modius* would equate to 8.6185 metric liters. From: Duncan-Jones, R.P. "The Chonix, the Artaba and the Modius." pp. 1.

[8] Robinson, O.F. "Chapter 10: Feeding the City." pp. 149.

[9] Robinson, O. F. "Chapter 10: Feeding the City." pp. 147. (Note Livy 38.35.).

[10] Robinson, O. F. "Chapter 10: Feeding the City." pp. 148.

[11] Ibid.

imperial historian Aurelius Victor, under Augustus Rome was receiving over 20 million *modii* of grain annually (ca. 135,000 tons), a staggering level that needed to be sourced from all around the Mediterranean. [12] Rome's traditional sources of grain came from Sicily, North Africa, Iberia, and Egypt – and while mentions of earlier sources declined by the time of the empire, it is clear that they continued to utilize all sources of grain – the provinces of Egypt and North Africa became known as breadbaskets due to their fertile farmland and the consistent will of individual traders to cater to the needs of the empire. In short, Rome, since the era of the Republic had sources of grain from every corner of the empire – but as Augustus regularized the *annona*, certain regions became key logistical centers for mass transportation of grain – like the fabulously wealthy regions of Roman Egypt and Carthage. Following Augustus's victory over Egypt in 30 BCE, he gained the ability to supply the subsidized grain to the *plebs frumentaria*, upwards of 12 million *modii* of grain – that according to Robinson, accounted for "up to one third of all of Rome's need for grain."[13] By cementing control over Egypt, Augustus had secured the fate of Rome because of its industrial-level of agricultural production – the Nile serving as a constant and predictable source of fertile farmland would allow merchants (and by association the state) to procure grain at affordable rates, and to deliver that grain to the ever-hungry denizens of Rome. It is estimated to that throughout the 1st century CE the overall tax rate placed upon Egyptian harvests was twenty percent, taking 10% of crops grown on private land and 30-40% grown on public land.[14] By and large this supply of grain was carried by sea transportation and picked up in droves at the coastal warehouses of Rome's southern side.[15]

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[12] Casson, Lionel. "The Role of the State in Rome's Grain Trade." pp. 1.

[13] Robinson, O. F. "Chapter 10: Feeding the City," *Ancient Rome: City Planning and Administration.* pp. 147.

[14] Erdkamp, Paul. "Roman and the Corn Provinces." *The Grain Market in the Roman Empire*. pp. 237.

[15] Rickman, G. E. "The Grain Trade under the Roman Empire." pp. 4

Warehouses

This chapter briefly mentioned the importance of warehouses along the southern ports of Rome, as the low flats of the *Portus Aemiliana* lent easy access to the Tiber via various docks and quays, merchants and businesses found that storage could be easily obtained nearby. During the Republic, foodstuff, goods, and luxuries were facilitated by these warehouses and allowed merchandise to enter Rome. [16] As stated, the granaries and warehouses surrounding the Emporium and *Portus Aemilana* served a purpose for the grain trade within the city, with the state routinely commissioning private property to hold grain for the state before its allotment. This was a practice that continued during the time of Augustus, first as a temporary measure in order to combat the famines of the 22 BCE, and later as a byproduct of the state grain dole controlled directly by the *praefectus annonae* and consulars from 6 CE onwards.[17] Augustus's measures were further forced by untimely and disastrous flooding that built upon the uncertainty in food supply from over twenty years of war. As Robinson describes, "In 27 BC the Tiber flooded again, and again in 23 when the *pons Sublicius* was carried away once more, and for 3 days the city was navigable by boat. In 22 BC the floods were one of the factors leading to the crisis in the food supply for which Augustus appointed *praefecti frumenti dandi*."[18] Despite a reluctance to maintain the grain dole from his own funds (as the state-run dole would come later), the consistent threat of floods left a deep-seated fear of famine within the city, which could not be tolerated by Augustus as the new sole ruler of Rome – who would then invest more effort in preventing the worsening effects of a lack of a stable supply of grain. The fight against the

[16] Warehouses Found at Rome." *Scientific American* 53. pp. 1.
[17] Robinson, O.F. "Chapter 10: Feeding the City." pp. 145-150.
[18] Robinson, O. F. "Chapter 6: The Tiber", *Ancient Rome: City Planning and Administration*. pp. 86-87. Robinson in turn references Dio 53.20; 53.33; and 54.1.

effects of flooding limiting access to foodstuff was an uphill battle, literally because the majority of the forums and marketplaces would be flooded, leaving many isolated on the hills of Rome until the waters receded or calmed.[19] Independently, the location of the *Portus Aemiliana* and the Emporium follow the curve of the river, and the location of the hills would probably shield the areas from direct flooding – probably helping to establish their locations as secure for the warehouses and granaries of the city – however the valleys north of their position, containing the heart of the cities markets and forums would have been completely swamped – preventing the Emporium's use as a source of imported foodstuff. One element that contributed to the permanence of the grain dole was the infrastructure put in place by Augustus to prevent further famine within the city – who by the time of his death, had experienced various floods of Rome and knew that the capital needed to have several layers of protection to prevent both the starvation and revolt of its people. As floods continued to affect Rome throughout the decades, emperors would be encouraged to keep the grain dole in place to help alleviate the stress of the disasters.

Distribution

As Augustan officials managed the procurement of grain for the various warehouses and granaries of Rome, other major cities around the empire would find their own methods of grain doles for feeding their mass of populated citizens. In Roman Egyptian cities like Alexandria, officials would outfit bakeries and production plants within the city to order the feeding of citizens through their products. In his book, *Honor Among Thieves,* historian and economist, Philip Venticinque examined various contracts and records of Roman Alexandria in order to

[19] Robinson, O. F. "Chapter 6: The Tiber." pp. 87.

discuss the influence the various craftsmen, merchants, and businesses had on the local economy. He found that many levels of the private economy were intertwined with public mandates for various goods and services, including the distribution of food to the people (c. 75 CE). One such contract detailed an agreement between six officials to order six bakeries and mills to process 3600 *artabae*[20] of wheat for the city.[21] Furthermore, Venticinque found that a group of bakers around 116 CE had also agreed to bake bread with grain assigned to them by a city official in order to sell it in the local market.[22] These stories of state contracts between private citizens and proctors of the grain trade indicate clear connections between the Roman process of grain handouts and showcase how the *annona* in the city of Rome may have become an influence for cities throughout the empire as the years went by. The process by which state and private businesses worked together to feed their local populaces even within cities not subsidized by the emperors indicates that they followed a successful model laid out by the city *cura* of Rome – and shows us how the empire could have continued to maintain the constant supply of food to its citizens, guaranteeing that the grain would be utilized and turned into food that would feed the masses. We can see this process occur within Rome as the officials of the *annona* were tasked in both securing grain from around the empire and facilitating the grain to the districts of Rome set out by Augustus.[23] In a similar manner to the benefits afforded to bakeries and mills, Augustan officials would allow for the pardoning of service to various aspects of the state if the individual in question had served for several years in the service of the grain trade or dole. According to

[20] *Artabae* refers to an Egyptian Roman style of measurement widely used acrossed Hellenistic territories. One *artaba* would be equivalent to 4.5 *modii* or 38.78 metric liters of grain. From: Duncan-Jones, R.P. "The Chonix, the Artaba and the Modius." pp. 2.

[21] Venticinque, Philip F. "Chapter 4." In *Honor Among Thieves: Craftsmen, Merchants, and Associations in Roman and Late Roman Egypt*. pp. 144.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Robinson, O. F. "Chapter 10: Feeding the City," *Ancient Rome: City Planning and Administration.* pp. 148.

Roman historian Callistratus, different professions or participation in menial guilds could allow a person exemption or disqualification from the burdens of public office due to the utility of their trade. Additionally, he mentioned that the groups connected to the supply of the *annona* were the most prominent and highly regarded private workers – as they helped facilitation of the subsidized food supply. [24] A constant supply of grain needed to be continually encouraged by the Roman state, because due to the price limits placed on grain within the city of Rome, it was not the most profitable to trade directly to the state, and thus many merchants would focus on more lucrative goods to sell within the grand markets of Rome. In order to induce the level of grain needed to supply the grain dole, the officers of Augustus would routinely grant the dispensations allowing merchants to avoid public service – in exchange for encouraging a market of continuous production, transportation, and distribution of grain. A practice that must have been considered successful, as it was continued by subsequent emperors following the maintenance of their own grain doles.

Conclusions

The methods by which the grain dole expanded over the course of the Late Republic cannot be ignored when describing the process of the Augustan *annona*, centuries of riverside infrastructure and fleet maintenance would allow for the ease of transportation, wealth of storage, and experience of officers and bureaucrats of the state to manage an extremely onerous task of monitoring the monthly intake of grain – ultimately succeeding in their efforts to supply the city with a steady supply of free grain, supplementing private trade and local country-side

[24] Robinson, O. F. "Chapter 9: Control of Services", *Ancient Rome: City Planning and Administration*. pp. 140. Robinson references her chapter 10 for the *annona*, but for Callistratus – D.50.6.6.12.

production. The process of harvesting, transporting, accounting, storing, and distributing the grain would require arduous and constant management by Imperial officials at every step of the way, hounding at the treasury and support of the new emperor – a task and cost that was fundamentally deemed worthy due to its benefit to the stability of the capital (and therefore state), and to the benefit of the emperor – whose public image was bolstered with every month that the free dole continued. As the Republic finally died alongside Augustus with the transference of power to his adopted son Tiberius, the grain dole would remain for the centuries to follow – altered and maintained by the subsequent emperors to fulfill their own purposes and maintain the image of a powerful Roman state.

3. The Reign of Augustus: Forming the Annona

Emperor Augustus

In this chapter, I examine how Augustus utilized the grain dole in order to shore up his political position as the ruler of Rome and how Augustus painted the dole to become associated with the divinity of the goddess Annona, therefore granting him the approval of the gods. The decades leading up to the end of the Roman Republic were a time of great instability and social disorder. The leaders of Rome were increasingly decided by the power of the generals and their popularity with the citizens of the capital – who could be swayed by any number of bribes, concessions, or lands that had long been controlled by the wealthy senate. One such method, as discussed in-depth in the previous chapter, was the grain dole. Wealthy Roman citizens could be seen as benefactors for the people of Rome, spreading free handouts to its vast urban population, and convincing many to offer their political allegiance to one group after another.

The victory of Octavian Caesar over Marc Antony in 31 BCE is largely considered as the mark of the end of the Roman Republic, and as no other political force was able to challenge his reign he was granted the title of "Augustus" in 27 BCE.[25] A lack of political challenge that was in part due to his brutal victories, but also due to his constant efforts to promote trade, entertainment, and the growth of wealth in an era that would later become known to historians as the *Pax Romana*, or 'Roman peace' that indicated a period of general economic growth and

[25] Charlesworth, M.P. "Prologue. *The Roman Empire*. pp. 5.

stability.[26] Furthermore, Augustus would strive to put in place measures (laws, propaganda, or official positions) that would not allow any one citizen the ability to gain the popularity of the people of Rome or the Senate (like he had), thus securing his reign and the rule of his successors. The scope of Augustus's reign would be difficult to analyze fully within a single paper, which is why this chapter will simply examine his masterful organization of the informal grain dole into an empire-wide effort to feed the city of Rome, and how it created an institution that could be used a tool by which the emperors controlled the politics of the capital, earning loyalty and legitimacy from its providence, and tempering the anger of the masses in the face of high food costs.

Augustus the Bureaucrat

The battle of Actium proved that Augustus was to become the sole hegemon of the Roman Empire, leaving no others powerful enough to challenge his reign.[27] Through his own efforts many aspects of former Republican life became institutionalized in the new Imperial agenda. Augustus legitimized himself by retaining the traditional positions of the Republic while simultaneously working to improve how each position could aid the longevity of his power and form a renewed cultural heritage. One of the most important steps of this process was to limit the number of political officials, senators, and military officers that could influence the population of empire's capital, the many civil wars and conflicts between popular officials could be attributed to their sway over the citizens of Rome – whether it be by the granting of boons, food, entertainment, or placements in government. Historian Stephen Dyson stated the motivations of

[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

Augustus in his contribution to the development of a stable autocracy, “One of the most important leaders of the previous generation had been Publius Clodius, who master the art of rallying the citizen populace for his political faction. One of the major tasks of Octavian and his successors was turning the Romans from active to passive citizens, conscious of political right but not of formal political action.”[28] The actions of Clodius would lead to a chain of political officials and generals seeking to win the approval of the public by sponsoring food for the masses, lending to a period of instability during the rule of the first and second triumvirates, this constant back and forth of allegiances deeply hurt the legitimacy of legal positions within the Republic. So, I would forgive one if they thought that the motivation of Augustus would be to eliminate these positions and prevent anyone from taking advantage of his reign. However, it was certainly not the goal of Augustus to eliminate them, merely adjust the ability of anyone other than the emperor to grant them. Furthermore, in addressing these gaps in his power, Augustus sought to let the people of Rome perceive that it was done in legal methods, in accordance to the laws that he strove the Republic to maintain, helping to improve the authority of the state, even as every power that was granted to himself meant that the republic was slipping further from sight (into autocracy/empire).[29] One such method was through utilizing the grain dole as a source of public propaganda..

As Augustus inherited a haphazard system of grain giveaways from his republican-era forebears like his late adoptive uncle, Julius Caesar, he was forced to personally take control of the situation which was risking total collapse – if not the provenance of a new popular figure. As stated by economist and historian G.E. Rickman:

[28] Dyson, Stephen. “The City of Rome.” pp. 189.
[29] Charlesworth, M.P. “The Emperor.” *The Roman Empire*. pp. 11-12.

> In the late Republic and early Empire the problem of securing enough grain for the city of Rome had reached alarming proportions. The free distributions of grain (*frumentationes*) under both Julius and Augustus rose to the point where they were being issued, if only briefly, to some 320,000 recipients at a rate of 5 *modii* per month. For these men alone more than 19 million *modii* a year were needed, that is over 120,00 tons.[30]

The great quantity of grain indicated that the task of Augustus in managing the grain dole was to be monumental and expensive. Therefore, any successful sponsorship of the grain dole would be greatly influential in legitimizing Augustus's competence and ability to rule in the minds of the many masses who would owe him their fealty in exchange for free rations. The steps which the emperor would take to maintain a regular dole would prove that the empire was capable of producing the sheer quantity of feed that would allow the capital to remain in spirits. In proving that the empire is strong, Augustus would need a bureaucracy to regulate the destiny of various merchants and ships, requiring tons of grain to enter the city daily – and causing the emperor to exert his influence upon them in order to force and favor enough grain to maintain the city. Furthermore, in support of this new bureaucracy, Augustus would lean on efforts to promote renewed cultural heritage throughout his new empire. As mentioned previously, Augustus created the position of *praefectus annonae*, a powerful office that granted the wielder immense prestige for the successful management of the grain dole. Yet, the position was not wholly his own invention, rather, Augustus reinstated the office from the 400s BCE, which fell out of use centuries prior, during the Middle Republic, an age that many looked back upon reverently.[31]

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[30] Rickman, G. E. pp. 3.
[31] Erdkamp, Paul. "Feeding Rome or Feeding Mars?" pp. 3-4.

Augustus the Zealot

Another method in which Augustus afforded himself power was through the conferring of a religious superiority to himself, retaining positions of power within the college of priests, and patiently waiting to afford himself the title of *pontifex maximus*, which had been illegally granted to a former ally, Lepidus.[32] The position of *pontifex maximus* was the highest that a priest could attain during the time of the Republic, and was greatly strengthened by Augustus, who sought to link his heritage to the gods, especially Vesta. In order to better link his heritage with the supposed mythological forebears of the Latin people as related in the Aeneid and the long-time ancestors of Rome – who had originally hailed from Troy. This was the same mythological story that was also recounted in the *Aeneid* by Augustus's personal historian and favored philosopher – Virgil. The familiarity between Augustus and the gods of Rome would help to cement the emperor as the religious head of government, a title that all emperors would inherit in order to maintain their own legitimacy as divine rulers – which would often end with their personal deification. Efforts by Augustus to improve the power of Vestal Virgins, would eventually lead them to play key roles in the maintenance of the Imperial Cult and the activities deemed by the emperor.

Given his efforts to legitimize his divinity by claiming heritage to Vesta and the ancient Trojans, it may not come as a surprise that Augustus attempted to cement the grain dole as another form of religious control. The plebians of the early Roman Republic had long supported Ceres as the Roman goddess of the harvests, and who remained an important figure in Roman agriculture, even as many Romans began approaching ideas of skepticism inherent to adopted

[32] Beard, Mary; et all. "Chapter 4: The Place of religion: Rome in the Early Empire." *Religions of Rome*. pp. 188-189.

Greek philosophies.[33] In this fusion of religious ideals, Augustus decided to have a patron goddess support the grain dole itself – and have the Roman people associate its success to a level akin to divinity – one that was supported by the old Roman goddess Annona, who would resurface at the beginning of the empire, becoming a tool by which Augustus could promote the success of his logistical masterpiece.[34] Certainly, pushing the goals of the dole to become synonymous with religious importance was useful for the soliciting of favors from Roman citizens, but would later become a problem as the Empire Christianized and older reforms done by Augustus would be considered paganism. Historian Jorg Rupke briefly mentions how a relationship between imperial cults and the grain dole would lead to resistance from potential monotheist recipients during the reign of Nero, as around the 60s CE, Christians would be reluctant to rely on the distribution of grain because of its connection to the goddess Annona. A byproduct of the linkage between the emperors and the *annona* also meant that poor actions by the emperor could lead to anger from the masses – even in spite of the allotments of free grain (as will be explored further in the next chapter).[35] Even in the early empire, the association between the power of the *pontifex maximus* and the goddess Annona, (for which the *cura annona* takes its name) would lead to issues within its issuing. However, the problems that later Christians would have helps to showcase how the dole had been a proven success in getting Roman citizens to exhibit more docile behaviors. The earlier proposal by Stephen Dyson that suggested that Augustus's goal had been to move Roman citizens from being 'active participants' to 'passive ones' had serious implications even within the scope of the grain dole, which when

[33] Beard, Mary. "Chapter 4: The Place of religion: Rome in the Early Empire." pp. 169.

[34] It is here where the grain dole begins to be synonymous with the term *annona* and used interchangeably to reference the dole. In part showing how successful Augutus's propaganda attempts were in convincing the people of Rome to his goals.

[35] Rüpke, Jörg. *A Companion to Roman Religion*. pp. 428.

compared to a religious lens indicated that the Roman people were considerate of the role the state religion aided the process of obtaining their food, and would be more likely to associate the emperor with the power of the divine. [36] In order to ignite a broad program of cultural and religious renewal, Augustus utilized the 'rebirth' of Annona in order to change his public perception and alter the economic heart of Rome – through the facilitation of the grain dole.

In comparison, Mary Beard proposes a counterargument to the Augustan era of 'revival' as while he orchestrated massive changes in Roman state and livelihood, some may argue that the level at which he brought back the 'glory' of Rome is far too overstated:

> The Augustan restructuring of the earlier republican system was represented at the time as 'restoration': just as Augustus had 'restored the *res publica*', also he had 'restored traditional cults' – reviving the rituals that had faded away, rebuilding the temples that had fallen down, filling the priesthoods that had been vacant. Modern scholars have often held that this view was indeed broadly correct. They have diverged from the Augustan perspective mainly to argue that since the decline was real, the Augustan revival could only be artificial; meaningful religious energies… were located in other contexts.[37]

The relevance of the religious movements of Augustus are important to conceptualize, as they reflected a broader movement of it even more so to emphasize the strength of the state that Augustus had won, and that in order to suggest that the empire was in decline, it would likely belabor the point that the Empire was able to facilitate large-scale expansion and bureaucracies that would otherwise be impossible in the proposed model. It is more appropriate that the efforts of Augustus should be stated as a 'renovation' of the institutions of Late Republican Rome. This sentiment is furthered by Beard's later counterargument. She argues that the transitionary period between Republic and Empire was a time of social and political upheaval, but that the actions of Augustus by no means indicated a 'decline' in the values of the state – rather the actions of

[36] Dyson, Stephen. "The City of Rome." pp. 189.
[37] Beard, Mary. "Chapter 4: The Place of Religion: Rome in the Early Empire." pp. 168.

Augustus served to reignite a fire in the cultural heritage of the Romans.[38] The very nature of the *annona* lay in the center of Augustus's plans – to use the practical benefits of the grain dole and to offer a reason for why the gods had granted him the special dispensation to give the people of Rome their own boons in turn. By offering their loyalty to Augustus, he showed them that the gods were loyal to him as well – in the actions that he took to assuage the threat of famine. The core tenets of the Augustus's new cultural hegemony placed the grain dole front and center, as a divine promise to the Roman people that if they supported him, he would keep the gods friendly and the city fed.

Conclusions

The first emperor of Rome, Augustus, had come into power at a time of mass political upheaval, the Republic of Rome had been shattered by decades of civil war. Despite this, the territories of the empire lay nearly at their zenith, the military – while hardened from fighting one another in relentless conflicts between the autocrats of Rome, they remained the fighting force of the empire. The economy of Rome was thriving, and great wealth heaped upon the Roman citizens, flourishing in the boons granted by the wide boundaries of the empire. Throughout all of the empire's abundant conflict, it remained stable enough for Augustus to reform into his own systems. He solidified his hegemony over the Roman Senate and enabled his successors to retain the powers that he had bestowed upon himself. In orchestrating his perpetual rule through political appointments and religious domination, Augustus was able to wield the power of the empire, literally feeding his legitimacy in his systematic organization of the grain dole. Therefore, the grain dole could be seen as one large 'tool' that Augustus established for the

[38] Beard, Mary. "Chapter 4: The Place of Religion: Rome in the Early Empire." pp. 169.

emperors to maintain in their own favor, an idea that would be tested by Augustus's second choice as heir, his adoptive son, Tiberius.

4. Tiberius to Trajan: The Annona's Impact

Chapter Preface

Previously, we learned about the creation of the grain dole in Late Republican Rome, how it evolved from a series of handouts to combat famine to a method for politicians and generals to sway the opinion of the masses, and subsequently to the organized monthly process under Augustus. We have analyzed the social, political, and religious importance of the grain dole, or *annona*, underneath the first emperor, and discussed the roles of new officials, or curators, in the procurement and distribution of the grain, which indicated the rising role of the empire to meet the hunger of the wide class of citizen-poor of the city of Rome. The grain dole under Augustus met new heights unparalleled by the subsidies of the Republic. It surpassed the distribution of the era of civil wars immediately preceding Octavian's victory because of its recuring and regularized nature. Augustus saw the returning benefits of the dole year after year and reignited a cultural fervor that led to an institutionalized role of the officers, aediles, and curators in the process of the *annona*; a process that would seemingly continue after the death of Augustus, as his empire passed to his adoptive son, Tiberius.

The Changing Role of the Grain Dole

The grain dole, or *annona*, under the emperor Augustus served as a tool with which he could alleviate anger from the capital populace and keep the citizens from rebelling against him. Yet as the Roman state transitioned into a hereditary empire, the dole would continue to evolve

as well, transforming into a more direct source of legitimacy for the emperors. The *annona* became an entity of the state that was as synonymous with Roman power as the ever-present military, and the later emperors came to realize that if the dole was tampered with, or came to function poorly it would directly impact their ability to rule – forcing the emperors to invest in its efficiency, which allowed the city to be fed and their power to remain unchecked from the residents of the capital.

To preface this chapter, I would like to explain the importance of the primary sources used to explore the roles of the various emperors. The use of the *Lives of the Caesars* from Tranquillus Suetonius is instrumental in my analysis of the emperors: Tiberius, Claudius, Nero, and Domitian. These include in-depth analyses of translations of his texts, relating to grain dole, food instability, or each emperor's relationship with the bureaucracy that they inherited. Additionally, as with Suetonius, the Roman historian and biographer who served under emperors Trajan and Hadrian, this methodological deep dive will continue with the author Pliny the Younger of whom was a personal correspondent to the emperor Trajan – whose letters provide a great service in understanding the scope of which the emperor had his hand on provincial politics, which is useful for engaging how important bureaucratic management of the state had reached, 100 years after the death of Augustus.

The Reign of Tiberius

The life of the first official emperor, Tiberius, adoptive heir of Augustus was described in great detail by Suetonius. It is in Suetonius's writings that we learn that Tiberius's history with the grain dole began not as emperor, but as an officer of the *anonna* underneath his adoptive

father Augustus, first starting as an officer of law and later being appointed to fix a deficiency in the grain supply:

> He began his civil career by a defense of king Archelaus, the people of Tralles, and those of Thessaly, before the judgment seat of Augustus, the charge in each case being different… Fannius Caepio, who had conspired with Varro Murena against Augustus, he arraigned for high treason and secured his condemnation. In the meantime he undertook two public charges: that of the grain supply, which, as it happened, was deficient; and the investigation of the slave-prisons throughout Italy, the owners of which had gained a bad reputation; for they were charged with holding in durance not only travelers, but also those whom dread of military service had driven to such places of concealment.[39]

Tiberius's relationship with the bureaucracies put into place by the emperor Augustus would lead into his own experiences as emperor, understanding the grain dole's importance in keeping the people of Rome pacified, but also in the importance of the official positions that the emperor could utilize in rewarding those for supporting their rule. The quote from Suetonius shows us that the power of the grain dole could be extraordinarily political. It allowed the emperors to be directly responsible for political assignments and earn favor from officers who were basically give immediate boosts to their careers (essentially begetting loyal servants), which was an avenue of political progression that the ever-paranoid emperor Tiberius would not easily forget in his proceeding efforts to maintain both his personal safety and likeability. Admittedly, it is odd to picture an agricultural grain dole as a source of political power and stability for an emperor who would have had the vast militaries and religious mandate at their direct control. However, it was precisely because of the intrigue of the Roman court that a figure like Augustus or Tiberius would need space for positions of power to be given out as a reward for political loyalty, much like Augustus had granted Tiberius along his own road to power.

[39] Suetonius, The Lives of the Caesars, "The Life of Tiberius" (Loeb Classical Library, 1913) pp.305.

As emperor, Tiberius managed an efficient and effective bureaucracy granted to him by the great efforts of Augustus but still made his own efforts to better secure his position as ruler and solidify the power of the Imperial state. Despite the stability of the empire following many years of internal peace, the city of Rome fell into turmoil soon after Tiberius's ascension, public concern over the grain supply resulted in violent riots which had started from the city's theatres. [40] The riots emphasized a need for a way to combat the mercurial nature of the Roman populace, pushing Tiberius to exercise his power in regulating the various entertainment complexes of the city. While simultaneously dealing with additional pressures from the Roman Senate's reckless moneylending. Which had been causing runaway inflation, hurting the urban poor's ability to pay for grain, and increasing the numbers of those who demanded grain from the *annona*. [41] Tiberius attempted to halt the moneylending in order to prevent the runaway inflation.[42] However, because the wider Roman market relied on the physical coins provided by the wealthy senators, Tiberius had no choice but to revoke his decree. While the law regulating commercial lending was short-lived it was a definite sign that the Roman state (especially the emperor) needed to have an eye on key trading positions and would need to protect the economy when necessary. Although Tiberius's plan failed it would not be his last attempt to regulate the Roman market. In 19 CE, he proposed that the Senate set yearly caps on grain prices within the city in order to help alleviate the burden that the dole had to carry out within the city.[43] Thus, further implying the crucial nature of the regulation of the price of grain and the reliable rollout of the

[40] Robinson, O. F. "Chapter 13: Public Order," *Ancient Rome: City Planning and Administration*. pp. 197. Referencing Tacitus *Annals* 1.77 and 6.13.

[41] Fitzpatrick, Mathhew, "Provincializing Rome," pp. 37.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Rickman, G. E. "The Grain Trade under the Roman Empire." pp. 3.

annona. The economic battle that Tiberius waged in order to regulate grain prices would outlive him, continuing to plague successive emperors for the centuries to come.

The Reign of Claudius

The emperor Claudius was an unlikely fit for emperor of the Roman state. Following months of brutality and the executions of many of his family and friends, the clubfooted and bumbling historian and tertiary member of the Julio-Claudian dynasty seemed to be an odd choice for emperor.[44] However, his reign turned out to be decidedly successful (bar his eventual assassination), and he was able to commence several infrastructure projects for the betterment of the empire and the stability of Rome. One such project included the new *Portus Claudia*, an extension to the harbor of Ostia, which played a crucial role in supporting trading ships entering the southern harbors and grain silos of Rome, as depicted in Suetonius:

> The public works which he [Claudius] completed were great and essential rather than numerous; they were in particular the following: an aqueduct begun by Gaius; also the outlet of Lake Fucinus and the harbour at Ostia, although in the case of the last two he knew that Augustus had refused the former to the Marsians in spite of their frequent requests, and that the latter had often been thought of by the Deified Julius, but given up because of its difficulty…. He constructed the harbour at Ostia by building curving breakwaters on the right and left, while before the entrance he placed a mole in deep water. To give this mole a firmer foundation, he first sank the ship in which the great obelisk had been brought from Egypt, and then securing it by piles, built upon it a very lofty tower after the model of the Pharos at Alexandria, to be lighted at night and guide the course of ships.[45]

The Tiber River was notably a very silty river prone to flooding (as we have examined in previous chapters), meaning that the riverside harbors of the port town of Ostia had to be consistently dredged to avoid blockage and allow for ships to remain in loading zones or at

[44] McAlindon, D. "Claudius and the Senators." *The American Journal of Philology*. pp. 2-3.
[45] Suetonius, The Lives of the Caesars, "The Life of Claudius" (Loeb Classical Library, 1913) pp.39.

anchor. Thus, a new harbor north of the estuary of the Tiber River allowed merchants to safely store their ships at port while transporting grain, trade goods, and luxuries up the river to Rome. Furthermore, the port was connected to the Tiber River through canals, that led to easier transportation of the goods (but which ultimately led to additional need to dredge the new harbor). As we will see later under Trajan, this problem is remedied through and expansion to the port system.[46] By expanding the port at Ostia, Claudius proved that the Roman emperors retained a deep understanding of the importance of a reliable trade system to the capital, thus supporting the grain management systems put into place under Augustus and previous regimes.

The developments of Claudius were not limited merely to infrastructural gain. He also restructured law codes that involved bonuses for civil servants who supported maintaining a fair cost for grain and the continuing function of the grain dole itself. As Suetonius writes:

> He [Claudius] always gave scrupulous attention to the care of the city and the supply of grain…When there was a scarcity of grain because of long-continued droughts, he was once stopped in the middle of the Forum by a mob and so pelted with abuse and at the same time with pieces of bread, that he was barely able to make his escape to the Palace by a back door; and after this experience he resorted to every possible means to bring grain to Rome, even in the winter season. To the merchants he held out the certainty of profit by assuming the expense of any loss that they might suffer from storms, and offered to those who would build merchant ships large bounties, adapted to the condition of each: to a citizen exemption from the *lex Papia Poppaea*; to a Latin the rights of Roman citizenship; to women the privileges allowed the mothers of four children. And all these provisions are in force to-day.[47]

It is important to note that the diligence of Claudius in supporting the city of Rome appeared to be revival in the competence shown by emperors Tiberius and Augustus. He appeared to be reverently attempting to check in on the status of Roman food supply – and when

[46] Robinson, O.F. "Chapter 10: Feeding the City." pp. 156-157.

[47] Suetonius, The Lives of the Caesars, "The Life of Claudius" (Loeb Classical Library, 1913) pp.37. (*lex Papia Poppaea* refers to the Augustan law that allowed certain merchants to avoid mandatory civil service, pp 201, note number 65).

faced by a riot, was spurred into action to attempt to fix it and alleviate further famine (food instability) by expanding the civil codes necessary to support the grain dole. Claudius's efforts to regulate control of the grain supply are evident through his actions in attempting to reform the *lex Papia Poppaea*, indicating that he was still willing to afford the expense to promote the trading and carrying of grain to Rome with exemptions from public service due to the necessity of grain deliveries to the city. The quote tells us that in order to fully control the city of Rome, emperors needed complete food security, not merely the promise of food given by the grain dole. Eventually riots appeared to be method by which the people of Rome could address the emperor, threatening their security if stability was not maintained, showing a sign of how the loss of the effects of the grain dole could lead to violent repercussions (indicating a loss of public legitimacy).

The Reign of Nero

The stepson and adopted heir of Claudius, Nero, was a divisive figure who is seen as the quite the pickle across the academic sphere. That being said, it is important to also understand that emperor Nero was oftentimes slandered after his death both by the oft-hyperbolic historian Suetonius, as well as potential Christian revisionism in the face of a classically anti-Christian ruler. This chapter does not dive into the minutia of the problematic nature behind analyzing the evidence remaining of the emperor but instead examines a quote from Suetonius regarding the continuing nature of the grain dole, maintained by Nero after his adopted father's assassination:

> The bitter feeling against him was increased because he also turned the high cost of grain to his profit; for indeed, it so fell out that while the people were

> suffering from hunger it was reported that a ship had arrived from Alexandria, bringing sand for the court wrestlers.[48]

By taking a brief interlude into the life and actions of Nero, the accounts of Suetonius show us that even as the grain dole was maintained throughout differing levels of imperial competency and effectiveness, the process was deeply engrained in the society of the people of Rome. It was the pompousness the emperor Nero to request a public ship to fulfill the request of bringing mere sand from Egypt to fill a wrestling court – rather than satisfying the public service of bringing grain from the famously fertile lands. The indignation the Roman people reacted with mirrors the food riots as seen during Claudius's reign, further indicating that by this point of Imperial history, if the quality of the food supply was not guaranteed – even with the benefits of the dole – any actions the emperor took outside that scope could lead to repercussions to Imperial stability. Jeopardizing the legitimacy of the emperor's seat in the face of increasingly conniving candidates.

In spite of possible biases expressed by Suetonius or further translations of his biographies, for the purpose of this essay, we will trust the information that the translation provides – that problems in food stability could lead the mundane actions of the emperor to be seen as contrary to the livelihood of its people, a sure sign of the massive role the grain dole had taken within the public consciousness over the past five decades. After his reign, the Imperial line of Augustus ended, the Julio-Claudian dynasty gave way to an era of political turmoil known as the Year of the Four Emperors, in which brief civil wars led to high casualties. Despite this,

[48] Suetonius, The Lives of the Caesars, "The Life of Nero" (Loeb Classical Library, 1913) pp.169-170.

the grain dole – as a facet of Imperial power and Roman bureaucracy persevered and became tools of the new Flavian dynasty (as well as those who followed).[49]

The Reign of Domitian

The roles of Vespasian and Titus are important to the stability of the Flavian dynasty that ruled Rome following the Year of the Four Emperors, granting the Roman state the ability to recover from several years of bloody civil war, and for the status of Roman bureaucracy to return to normalcy. Following his victories the formal general Vespasian learned the art of statecraft and began to engage in Roman policy alongside his sons Titus and Domitian. It is with the rule of Domitian (following his father and brother), that we once again see changes to the scene of grain maintenance and Imperial meddling in the stable supply of food to Rome. As seen through Suetonius's description:

> He [Domitian] made many innovations also in common customs. He did away with the distribution of food to the people and revived that of formal dinners. ... Once upon the occasion of a plentiful wine crop, attended with a scarcity of grain, thinking that the fields were neglected through too much attention to the vineyards, he made an edict forbidding anyone to plant more vines in Italy and ordering that the vineyards in the provinces be cut down, or but half of them at most be left standing; but he did not persist in carrying out the measure.[50]

Suetonius's reference to Domitian's "away with the distribution of food to the people" is less about the grain dole and more closely linked to the distribution of food tickets to people during festivals or events. This law is a continuance from the time of Nero who wanted to curtail

[49] A note on Galba, Otho, and Vitellus of whom made up the first three parties of the Year of Four Emperors, their time 'in office' was short and much of what is known of them remains to be the epic of the battles between the legions during the civil war. However, it can be assumed that the grain dole in the capital of Rome was maintained – if not by the emperors themselves, but by the mechanics of the Roman bureaucracy. Evidence of this from Suetonius comes from the execution of Galba, of whom a common soldier who slew him came directly from a distribution of grain (20.pp223), although this may have been referring to a military grain dole, the direct evidence is unclear.

[50] Suetonius, The Lives of the Caesars, "The Life of Domitian" (Loeb Classical Library, 1913) pp.353.

spending and limit the influence of chariot racing teams on the mood and opinion of the capital. Violent mobs had been likely to form after the loss of one team over the other and the gifts that officials were expected to grant to attendees were expected to be granted no matter the temperance of the crowd. Such gifts or 'tickets' ranged from distributions of grain to official positions, to even grants of land.[51] Thus, emperors like Nero and later Domitian sought to curtail this form of government expenditure in favor of more stable avenues of public benefices. This form of state control over the additional supply of food and benefits is further supported by Domitian's additional reinstatement of "formal dinners" which acted as calmer ways that the emperor could show favor to self-respecting citizens and grant broad boons without violating sumptuary decency (i.e. without becoming overly extravagant). Additionally, Domitian still made clear efforts to regulate the production of grain throughout the Italian peninsula, and therefore manage prices, limiting the cost of the *annona* through reducing the needs of the urban poor and allowing for easier procurement of public grain.

Trajan and Pliny

The final emperor that this paper will analyze is emperor Trajan; known as one of the Five Good Emperors of Rome, his rule is often seen as both successful militarily and economically. The overall goal of this paper is to emphasize the role that the grain dole played as a legitimizing factor in Imperial legacy and as a tool with which the emperors could manage the oft-riotous population. However, this portion of the chapter will focus on the efforts of Trajan in increasing the responsibilities of the emperor, a title that had been slowly evolving from a strictly military position to that of a courtly bureaucrat since the days of Augustus. We will examine the

[51] Suetonius, The Lives of the Caesars, "The Life of Nero" (Loeb Classical Library, 1913) pp.103.

correspondence between Pliny the Younger and Trajan, not only in relation to the procurement of grain, but also the extensive depth to which the emperor played an active role in political and economic organization across the corners of the empire. The primary focus of which will be in analyzing Letters 27 and 28, which relate directly to orders from emperor Trajan to Pliny to support his civil agents who were seeking out reliable sources for grain. When analyzing the letters sent between Pliny and Trajan, one does have to acknowledge the caveats inherent to the value of the letters given Pliny's self-admitted disorganization of the dates of the events. Classicist Roy Gibson warns against viewing the letters as a perfect example of autobiographical data and to remember to address their generally simple chronology with a grain of salt.[52]

The goals of emperor's grain officers had long been to facilitate the process of the *annona* or to guarantee the sale of low-cost grain throughout the *vici* of Rome, by the *aediles* or *cura annonae*. However, with the turn of the 2nd century CE, new roles began appearing alongside traditional methods of obtaining grain, as seen with the *procurator Augusti ad Minuciam*, which was first found under the rule of emperor Trajan.[53] The new position indicated the emperor's growing call for a more effective and efficient bureaucracy – which demanded officials who could routinely perform the same task, rather than rely on the broad positions like the *aediles*, who could be responsible for a multitude of tasks across their career. Furthermore, the appearance of the *procurator Augusti* would allow the emperor to grant more appointments without giving up political power to the Senate. The institution of these new positions did not seem to abolish previous ones and under Trajan three different *praefecti annonae* (a position

[52] Gibson, Roy K., and Morello, Ruth. "Pliny's Letters as an Autobiography," *Reading the Letters of Pliny the Younger*. pp. 14-15.

[53] O.F. Robinson, "Feeding the City," pp. 158. Minuciae referring to Porticus Minucia, a new entrance for grain transport into the city of Rome.

previously established by Augustus), graduated from their roles to become *praefectus Aegypti*.[54] As a reminder these offices were some of the most highly ranked positions in the empire, and the frequency to which the *annonae* officials became prefects of Egypt demonstrates how the province remained a vital source of grain for the Roman Empire.

The roles of the state grain officers rose in appearance and power underneath emperor Trajan, who would worry about the stability of the empire's food supply, even as he beat back invading enemies and secured his position. The *procurators* that supplied the granaries and warehouses of the Roman grain dole would begin to go farther afield to supply the necessary grain and make sure that a supply chain could be established. As referenced in letters 27 and 28 of Pliny's Letters:

> **27** *Pliny to Trajan* "Your freedman and procurator Maximus… needs six soldiers more. I thought that for the moment those soldiers should be left in his retinue as I found them, especially as he was travelling to Paphlagonia to obtain grain. I had in fact at his request given him two calvarymen in addition as bodyguards. Please let me know what procedure you wish to maintain in the future."
>
> **28** *Trajan to Pliny* "You acted rightly in equipping my freedman Maximus with troops, as he was setting out at the time to collect grain, for he was undertaking a special mission. When he returns to his former activity the two soldiers you assigned to him will be enough for him, together with the same number supplied by my procurator Virdius Gemellinus, whose assistant he is."[55]

Letters 27 and 28 are extremely crucial evidence for both the importance of the procurement of grain for the emperor and the increased involvement of the emperor directly with the bureaucracy and management of provincial government – not just Rome or the military. Furthermore, by referencing the role of the freedman Maximus, tells us that the role of procurators had expanded to an involved role in Imperial borders, the empire having granted

[54] Erdkamp, Paul. "Roman and the Corn Provinces." *The Grain Market in the Roman Empire*. pp. 235.
[55] Pliny the Younger, Gaius. *The Complete Letters*. pp. 252.

them the authority to find support in the provinces in order to fulfill their tasks of obtaining grain. Admittedly, the letters do not specifically state that this grain would go on to Rome, rather than procuring grain for the various legions of the empire. However, one can assume that this 'procurement' of grain was in fact for the capital because of the general relationship between the emperor and his new *annona* officers. Additionally, these letters are dated to 109-110 CE by translator P.G. Walsh, which would correlate with a break in between the military campaigns of Trajan, with the years of peace following the end of the Dacian wars and predating the beginning of the Parthian campaign by three years (113 CE).[56]

As we have discussed, emperor Trajan enacted several sweeping changes in expanding the role of the Imperial bureaucracy, but there were also considerable continuities in the expansion of the grain dole during his rule. For instance, Trajan maintained the practice of rewarding public merchants and producers of grain with exemption from service. Robinson states, "Trajan gave citizenship to a Latin who built a mill grinding at least 100 bushels of corn a day and operated it for three years."[57] Thus showcasing how the emperors continued to support a reward system for the supply of the capital's grain and necessitating a routine method for which the state could encourage grain production over more lucrative goods.

Overall, the reign of emperors Tiberius to Trajan engaged in a tradition of supporting the grain dole because of its benefits to the stability of their reigns - allowing them to prevent food riots in the city of Rome by avoiding famine, and through the additional political positions that they could grant to officers who would remain loyal to the emperors. The emperors also discovered that once the *annona* had permeated into the Roman consciousness they could no

[56] Ibid.
[57] O.F. Robinson, "Feeding the City," pp. 155.

longer revoke or defund the dole lest they face riots from the populace, as Claudius and Nero discovered even the most mundane deviations from the support of the grain dole could lead to violence and immediate disloyalty. So, while the *annona* had become a sign of Imperial power, it also became a necessary bureaucratic feature of the Roman state, where if it fell, so too would the supportive base of the emperors. The primary literary evidence left by Suetonius and Pliny the Younger surrounding the emperors in this chapter proved that the grain dole was a complex system of logistics, intertwining political unity, religious, fervor, and public approval in order to form a uniquely Roman organization.

5. Conclusions

Over the course of this essay, I have examined the nature of the *annona* ranging from the production and transportation of grain to the city of Rome, the bureaucratic nature of Roman distribution, starting with the aediles and quaestors as general officers of state, and then evolving to have unique positions dedicated to smoothly and efficiently like the *curators*, *procurator Augusti*, and *procurator Minuciae* (among others). I have argued that grain dole acted as a source of Imperial power and helped to legitimize the rule of the emperors to the people of Rome because of the doles manufactured links with the divine goddess Annona – granted through the empire's ability to transfer millions of *modii*-worth of grain every year. The *annona* represented a herculean task accomplished by ancient Roman bureaucrats and tradesmen that not only provided food for hundreds of thousands of people every month, but eventually inspired similar programs throughout the empire, by the time of Trajan.

Fundamentally, proof of the *annona* came from primary source literature, from biographers and historians who dedicated their lives to recording the values of their civilization, who thought even briefly to mention their mundane interactions with the grain supply of the empire, and who without would leave our academic knowledge about the grain dole and feeding of the population of Rome fairly sparse. It is through the resources provided by Suetonius and Pliny the Younger that the secrets of the grain dole can be unlocked. Therefore, by combining the archaeological evidence of the harbors and markets of Rome and Ostia, ranging from the *Porticus Aemiliana* to the Emporium, all the way to the ports of Claudius and Trajan, I linked the logistical production, transportation, distribution, and allotment with the desires of the emperors

to retain and expand their powers, allowing the *annona* to supply the city of Rome for the centuries to come, even as Rome continued to grow and expand. Essentially, the grain dole was only possible due to the efforts of the emperors engaging with strength of the logistical and bureaucratic strengths of the empire, granting stability and legitimacy to the rulers of Rome, but also leading to the development of a more dynamic bureaucracy and a set of shackles that prevented the later emperors from stopping the grain dole without a fight.

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