

# Grain Distribution in Late Republican Rome

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*Il problema dell'approvvigionamento granario di Roma attraversa tutta la lunga fase antica della storia della città: l'Urbe infatti fu il più grande mercato del mondo antico, il cui rifornimento alimentare, in particolare di cereali – l'elemento di base della dieta dei suoi abitanti – costituiva una sfida complessa in un'epoca che non conosceva gli odierni progressi sia nelle tecniche agricole sia nei trasporti. In questa vicenda le distribuzioni di grano a prezzo ribassato o totalmente gratuite, che furono oggetto di diverse leggi frumentarie in età tardorepubblicana, aprono un capitolo nuovo, che segna per la prima volta un profondo coinvolgimento dello stato nel problema annonario. Nella dottrina scientifica, sulla base del giudizio che si trova nelle fonti antiche, le leggi frumentarie sono state spesso considerate solamente un'arma politica per guadagnare il consenso della plebe di Roma. In questo contributo mi propongo dunque di mostrare come le frumentationes ebbero anche e soprattutto lo scopo di porre rimedio ad un reale problema di approvvigionamento granario di Roma. Proprio nell'intreccio di fattori economici, sociali e politici il sistema delle distribuzioni frumentarie dell'antica Roma anticipa in qualche misura le tematiche del welfare state moderno.*

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Among the diverse themes which cross through Roman history, from its origins until Late Antiquity, the grain provisioning of the city of Rome is certainly one of the most interesting. Although there is still debate over how many inhabitants it had in the age of its maximum expansion, it is clear that Rome was undoubtedly the largest “market” of the ancient world. Supplying the city, particularly with cereals, which constituted the basis of its inhabitants’ diet, was a complex challenge for a world that did not yet have the technical knowledge about agricultural methods and transportation that we have today.

In this long history, distributions of grain at a low price or even completely for free were the object of different grain laws in Late Republican times. These laws open a new chapter, marking for the first time a deep involvement of the state in the provisioning problem.

The practice of distributing grain at a reduced price, or even for free, was not a novelty in absolute: in the Roman annals we find record of numerous instances in the Early and Middle Republican period in which Roman magistrates had distributed low-cost or free grain; the grain was obtained from the provinces as taxes or else voluntarily sent to Rome by friendly or subject states, or even by purchase on the market. Such measures, however, always had an episodic character, linked to a dearth or a sudden rise in prices. Such is the case, for example, of the episode which is revealed to us by an epigraph from Thessaly. In a year which was probably 129 B.C. the questor Q. Caecilius Metellus turned to the Thessalian League in order to organise a shipment of grain to Rome, suffering from a famine. What is new in the period of the grain laws is the permanent and regular character that the grain distributions (*frumentationes*) now came to have.

In the scholarly debate, on the basis of judgements which we find in ancient sources, the grain laws are often considered to be, mainly, a political tool used to win approval from the Roman plebs. In this chapter I propose to verify whether that verdict is justified or whether the *frumentationes* did not have also and above all the aim of remedying a concrete provisioning problem which Rome actually had. To this end, I shall consider in particular the problem of the number of inhabitants that benefited from the distributions, the requisites necessary in order to receive grain, and the debate on the financial burden which the *frumentationes* placed on the state. Special attention will be given to the best documented examples: that is, Gaius Graccus' *lex frumentaria* (grain law) of 123 B.C., the *senatus consultum* promoted by Cato in 62 B.C. and the *lex Clodia frumentaria* of 58 B.C.

## THE LEX SEMPRONIA FRUMENTARIA

Our starting point is fixed in 123 B.C., when the tribune of the plebs Gaius Sempronius Graccus had a law approved providing for the regular distribution in Rome of a certain quantity of grain at a subsidised price. The novel character of the measure that Gaius Graccus had approved and its instrumental political function are strongly underlined by Appian:

*Elected in the most brilliant manner, he immediately prepared traps for the Senate, establishing the distribution, at the expense of the state treasury, of a certain quantity of grain for each citizen each month, a thing which up until that time was not normally done. And thus, certainly, with a single measure, he obtained the consent of the people, having the collaboration of Fulvius Flaccus. And immediately, following that, he was elected tribune of the plebs for the next year as well. [Source 1]*

The price of the grain distributed on the basis of Gaius Graccus' *lex Sempronia* was fixed at 6 and 1/3 asses for a *modius* (a Roman measure used for dry foods and equivalent roughly to 9 litres, that is, about 7-8 kilogrammes), as we are informed in another passage.

The judgement of the ancient sources on Graccus' law is generally very severe: the measure in their view was highly demagogical, encouraged sloth and at the same time prostrated the public treasury. Cicero's opinion is particularly significant:

*And last, the law on grain proposed by Gaius Graccus: a measure appreciated by the plebs, who received plentiful food without working; whereas good citizens were against it, because they thought it would draw the plebeians away from work, throwing them into the arms of sloth, and they were aware that it would exhaust the public finances. [Source 2]*

Cicero's opinion is influenced by the fact that in his day the grain distribution problem no longer was judged on its concrete merits; rather it had now become an object of political conflict in itself and of itself, particularly ever since Cicero's most bitter enemy, Publius Clodius, had had a law approved which provided for grain distribution completely free of charge: in other words, Cicero, by condemning Gaius Gracchus for having put grain on sale at a low price, condemned even more strongly Clodius, who actually gave it away free. But was this verdict justified respect to the time when the *lex Sempronia frumentaria* was presented?

To answer this question we can observe in the first place that Rome's grain provisioning problem in the times of Gaius Gracchus was real, and hence legislation aimed at solving it was not at all unmotivated. The problem had become more serious in the second half of the 2nd century B.C. because of the strong increase in the number of the city's inhabitants, because of a series of contingent events which had caused a fall in grain production in some regions and speculation on the part of private merchants, and lastly, because of the constant presence of a centre of consumption which to some degree competed with Rome, that is, the army.

To complete these general considerations, we can observe furthermore that Gaius Gracchus' *lex frumentaria* did not appear as an improvised measure, born only from contingent considerations of political tactics; rather it has an organic place in the general context of the tribune of the plebs' legislative action.

The *lex Sempronia de provincia Asia*, which provided for farming out, within Rome itself, the gathering of taxes in the very wealthy Eastern province and providing that payment would be in the form of money, made available the financial means necessary to sustain the expense of the grain distributions.

Furthermore, Gaius Gracchus' action of founding a colony on the site of Carthage, which had been destroyed, would have had, among its effects, that of remedying the Roman grain provisioning problem indirectly, by removing many mouths to feed from Rome – and also directly, by increasing cereal production: Gaius Gracchus' initiative, which included giving large lots of land (about 25 hectares) to 6,000 colonists, would have resulted in the cultivation of extensive lands in North Africa, which were particularly well suited to grain cultivation, and hence, in the future could be expected to give an important contribution to provisioning the mother city.

Gaius Gracchus' grain law hence appears to be a coherent part of a policy designed to solve the problems created by the phenomenon of immigration to the city, which in the last decades of the 2nd century A.D. had reached worrisome proportions. Having said that, however, we have not answered one of Cicero's objections: did the *lex Sempronia frumentaria* really exhaust the public coffers? And what effect did the amount of grain distributed thanks to the law have on the overall problem of provisioning Rome? In order to give an exhaustive answer to these questions, we would need to know certain data exactly – but unfortunately they escape us and at the most we can formulate hypotheses.

The doubts begin when we try to follow the market price of grain in that period: it was subject to variation according to how the harvest was going and according to the locality where it was purchased. If we put together in a series the data we possess relative to the late republican age, we have the impression that the price of 6 1/3 asses which G. Gracchus asked



**Fig. 1**

White Proconnesian marble sarcophagus (second half of the 3rd century A.D.). Museo Nazionale Romano, inv. n. 40799, perhaps of a prefect of Annona <sup>1</sup>.

From: *Misurare la terra: centuriazione e coloni nel mondo romano. Città, agricoltura e commercio: materiali da Roma e dal suburbio*, Modena, p. 240, fig. 207.

for from the beneficiaries of his grain law was lower than the market price, even in the most favourable years, but nonetheless, it was not a purely symbolic amount.

It is even more difficult to measure the financial burden which Graccus' *frumentationes* represented for the state. In order to answer this query we would need to know to what degree the grain the Roman state received as taxes (for example, the tithe from Sicily) was used and whether grain was also purchased (at market price or at a reduced price), and furthermore we would also need to know the costs for transport, unloading and storing the grain.

Among researchers it is the common opinion that the maximum quantity of grain that, per month, was distributed to each beneficiary of Graccus' *frumentationes* was the same as that which is declared explicitly in M. Emilius Lepidus' measure and in the *Terentia Cassia* law, that is, 5 *modii* a month per person. This theory can perhaps find support in the fact that, if we multiply the price of 6  $\frac{1}{3}$  *asses* by 5 we obtain close to the round figure of 2 *denarii* (to be precise 31  $\frac{2}{3}$  *asses*, whereas 2 *denarii* correspond exactly to 32 *asses*).

If truly the quantity distributed was 5 *modii* a month per person, what part of the nutritional requirements of a Roman citizen was covered by Graccus' grain law? On the basis of the calorie requirement of an active adult, it is thought that this amount of grain was certainly more than that needed by a single individual, but surely it would not have been enough to feed an entire family.

As to the number of people who had the right to participate in the purchase of grain at a "political" price, scholars in general agree in stating that the right was limited to adult male Roman citizens who were present in person at the distributions: in fact Appian explicitly states that the grain was for "each of the citizens" (*ἐκάστῳ τῶν δημοτῶν*). Undoubtedly Gaius Graccus' measure was particularly designed to benefit the less wealthy part of the Roman citizenry. For this reason in some sources we find that the distributions were for the poor. Nonetheless, they were not reserved exclusively to the weaker social strata: we will

see below that even an ex-consul came to get his grain ration. But when we look closer at this issue we realise that scholarly opinion is very diversified.

C. Viriouvét, a researcher who has reflected at length on the theme of the beneficiaries of the grain distributions in the Late Republican period, points out that about 123 B.C. the number of Roman citizens must have been around 400,000. Certainly those who lived far from Rome were automatically excluded from Graccus' distributions, but what about those who lived at a few hours' or even a day's march from Rome, who, particularly if there were famine or dearth in their place of residence, might have thought it worthwhile to undertake a brief trip in order to obtain an appreciable quantity of grain? If the *lex Sempronia* had not defined more precisely who the beneficiaries were to be, there would have been a sharp variation, from one year to the next, in the number of those presenting themselves for the grain distribution, creating grave difficulties for the state, unable to foresee accurately the amount of grain necessary to satisfy all the requests. In Viriouvét's view the problem can be solved only by supposing that G. Graccus had provided that there be a list of beneficiaries and that only those whose names appeared in this list could take part in the *frumentationes*.

Viriouvét finds support for her hypothesis in the anecdote which Cicero includes in his *Tusculanae disputationes*:

*Gaius Graccus too first emptied the treasury with his mad prodigality and then, in words, defended it: why listen to the words, when the facts are there to be seen? The famous Lucius Piso, who had the nickname Frugi [Frugal], had always fought against the grain law. When the law was approved, he too, an ex-consul, came to receive his ration. Graccus noticed him, standing in the crowd or assembly: then, in front of everybody, he asked him whether on his part it was an act of coherency to take the grain on the basis of the law which he had fought against so strongly. And Piso answered, "I, Graccus, wouldn't want you to have the idea of dividing my possessions among everyone; how-*



**Fig. 2**  
Celebrative coin of the Emperor Vespasian (71 D.C.)<sup>2</sup>.  
From: C. Viriouvét, *Tessera frumentaria*, Rome 1995, tav. XI, fig. 17.

ever, if you did it, I would like to have my part". Did not that wise and sensible man make it understood well that with the *lex Sempronia* the public patrimony would go up in smoke? Reading Graccus' orations, however, you would say that he was the defender of the treasury. [Source 3]

Gaius Graccus saw hence with great surprise the ex-consul Piso "Frugi" come to receive the public grain, after he had fought strenuously against the grain law; the scene took place in *contione*, in the course of a meeting whose nature is not specified, but which, according to Virlouvet, is to be identified as the occasion in which the list of the beneficiaries of the grain distributions was to be established.

As to the criterion for compiling the list, it seems logical to think that the benefits of the law were reserved to the Roman citizens residing in the city itself or in its immediate surroundings.

The overall population of Rome at the time of Graccus is estimated at between 200,000 and 400,000 inhabitants. On the basis of this figure, Virlouvet calculates that the number of adult male citizens who could have benefited from the *frumentationes* was between 43,000 and 86,000, a calculation that hides numerous uncertainties, but which has the advantage of providing us with a plausible order of magnitude.

Recently Elio Lo Cascio has made some justified objections to Virlouvet's hypothesis: aside from the administrative difficulties posed by the redaction of a list of such complexity, Lo Cascio points out that in the sources there is no sure reference to the existence of these lists before Caesar; Lo Cascio further discusses the fact that if the grain laws from the beginning had foreseen a list of those admitted to its benefits limited to those resident in Rome, it would be hard to understand the strong impulse given to immigration towards Rome which the ancient sources link to these provisions. Let us observe for example what Sallust writes in his account of the Catilinian Conspiracy:

*Furthermore youths, who in the countryside had dragged out a life of misery by the fatigue of their bodies, encouraged by the public distributions, preferred city leisure to undesirable labour.* [Source 4]

It is clear that the lack of a list of those admitted to the *frumentationes* in possession of specific requisites would have led in time to a strong increase in the beneficiaries and hence to an increase in the expense for the state; but if we return to the problem we proposed to analyse, the incidence of Graccus' legislation on the problem of grain provisioning in Rome, we must recognise that in any case Graccus' grain distributions had far-reaching effects, and that they originated in a precise project and not from mere political tactics: a significant proportion of the Roman population could now depend on a monthly distribution of a fundamental food, grain, at a fixed price, lower than the market price. The financial burden on the state, at least at the beginning, should not have been impossible to sustain, if we consider that the contribution of  $6 \frac{1}{3}$  *asses* per *modius* paid by the recipients was not a purely symbolic sum, and that Graccus' law on farming the taxes for the province of Asia could ensure what today we would call financial coverage for the *frumentationes*.

## **THE EVOLUTION OF THE GRAIN QUESTION FROM THE END OF THE 2ND CENTURY B.C. TO THE BEGINNING OF THE 1ST CENTURY A.D.**

There are hence good reasons to affirm that that of Gaius Graccus was an action of broad import, aimed at solving a concrete problem of the city of Rome. The facts show however

that in the following decades the *lex frumentaria* became a political flag that the *populares* felt obliged to carry forward and that the *optimates* wanted to neutralise.

Indeed we know that the *lex Sempronia frumentaria* was abrogated by a *lex Octavia* which Cicero defined as capable of conciliating the needs of the plebs with the possibilities of the state. From this we can deduce that the new law must have in some way reduced the burden on the treasury, even if we do not know whether the aim was reached by restricting the number of beneficiaries, by increasing the price at which the grain was put on the market, or by diminishing the quantity of grain distributed. Nonetheless, according to Cicero, the law was approved by a crowded assembly and hence apparently with broad public consensus – which would be better justified if the *lex Octavia* did not worsen the conditions at which the plebeians were allowed to purchase grain at a favourable price. Nothing else can be posited: even the precise date of the new law is unknown and much debated.

The grain question was taken up again by L. Appuleius Saturninus, who, on one of the occasions when he was tribune of the plebs in 103 or 100 B.C., supported a proposal to reform the subsidised grain distribution system. The relevant aspect of Saturninus' provision regards the price at which the grain was to be sold:  $\frac{5}{6}$  of an *as*, much lower hence than the  $\frac{6}{23}$  *asses* established by Gaius Gracchus' *lex Sempronia*. Saturninus' proposal did



**Fig. 3**  
Mosaic at the seat of the maritime shippers organization (*navicularii*) from Ostia (2nd century A.D.)<sup>3</sup>.  
From S. Settis (ed.), *Civiltà dei Romani. La città, il territorio, l'impero*, Milano 1990, p. 241, fig. 329.

not become law, because the assembly which should have approved it was dispersed before the vote by the violent action of those opposed to it.

For the following years, the elements in our possession are vague: we have indications of a grain law proposed by the tribune of the plebs, Livius Drusus, in 91 B.C., on whose contents we can say nothing certain; of the probable abrogation of the price-controlled grain distributions on the part of Silla, during his dictatorship from 81-80 B.C., and lastly of their re-establishment by the consul M. Emilius Lepidus in 78 B.C., a provision about which we are informed by the historian Granius Licinianus. He is the first to tell us explicitly the quantity of grain which was to be distributed each month, that is, 5 *modii*. Granius Licinianus however does not write how much was to be paid for each *modius*: this circumstance has led some scholars to hypothesize that Lepidus had provided for *frumentationes* free of charge, already putting into effect one of the dispositions of Clodius' grain law of 58 B.C. This hypothesis however seems unlikely, in consideration of the fact that such a clause could hardly have passed with no resistance, as Granius tells us was the case.

### **THE LEX TERENTIA CASSIA OF 73 B.C.**

We come back onto firmer ground with the *lex Terentia Cassia*, proposed by the consuls of 73 B.C., M Terentius Varro and C. Cassius Longinus. A passage from Sallust's *Historiae* informs us that the law confirmed the monthly ration of 5 *modii*, as well as the subsidised price of 6  $\frac{1}{3}$  *asses*.

Combining this figure with a well-known statement by Cicero on the quantity of grain necessary to nourish the Roman plebs for a month in this period, the hypothesis has been formulated that the number of persons benefited by the Terentia Cassia law could not have been much higher than 40,000. The number of the beneficiaries of the *frumentationes* of 73 B.C. hence should not have grown from the time of the *lex Sempronia* in 123 B.C.; in fact it even would appear to have been slightly lower. This result, considering the continuous demographic growth of Rome between the 2nd century B.C. and the beginning of the following century, can only have been reached with a more rigorous definition of the requisites necessary in order to take part in the distributions: domicile in Rome, in case this had not already been specified in Gracchus' law, or perhaps free birth, which would have excluded the growing number of freed slaves that crowded Rome.

### **CATO'S SENATUS CONSULTUM OF 62 B.C.**

It is only starting from 62 B.C. that we begin to have precise indications that there was a strong rise in the number of the beneficiaries of the *frumentationes* and of an ever tighter connection between the grain question and the political struggle. For that year, Plutarch informs us that the Senate, stimulated by Cato, took action with regard to the *frumentationes*, in order to contrast the growing popularity of Caesar among the plebs.

*After the execution of Lentulus and his companions, Caesar, because of the accusations and criticisms launched by the Senate against him, sought support in the people; because he excited and attracted the greater unhealthy and corrupt part of the citizenry, Cato, worried, convinced the*

*Senate to conciliate the poor and indigent mass with a grain distribution. This comported an annual outlay of 1,250 talents, but it is evident that precisely this humane and charitable act dissipated the threat of sedition. [Source 5]*

In substance the measure supported by Cato provided for increasing the number of beneficiaries, including the members of the poorest classes, which until that time had been excluded. Plutarch records that this measure cost the state 1,250 talents, that is, 30 million sesterces in Roman money. It is not clear however whether Plutarch is referring to the total expense of the *frumentationes* or to the increase in financial outlay for the state as a consequence of the *senatus consultum* of 62 B.C., to which hence would have been added to the amount already allotted for the grain distributions regulated by the Terentia Cassia law.

There has been an attempt at calculating, at least in an approximate way, what might have been the number of beneficiaries of the grain distributions from 62 B.C. on, on the basis of 30 million sesterces: Virlovet judges that this sum would have been sufficient to acquire on the market rations for about 160,000 individuals. If we hold that the figure of 30 million sesterces refers only to the increase in expenditure caused by the *senatus consultum* and not to the total sum dedicated to the *frumentationes*, we should add the roughly 40,000 individuals that already had a right to the distributions according to the regulations of the Terentia Cassia law. In evaluating these figures we must as always use great caution: in reality we do not know exactly the market price of grain, which in any case could vary significantly, nor the costs of transport and storage; furthermore we do not know whether all the grain used for the distributions was acquired at market price: at least in part it could have come from the fiscal revenues of the Roman state. The tendency towards an increase in the number of the beneficiaries is however undeniable and demonstrated, beyond the uncertain calculations which we can make, by Plutarch, who states that with this measure Cato intended to conciliate towards the Senate τὸν ἄπορον καὶ ἀνέμητον ὄχλον, “the poor and indigent mass”.

## **THE *LEX CLODIA* OF 58 B.C.**

With the following *lex frumentaria*, proposed by the tribune of the plebs P. Clodius in 58 B.C., the question of the grain distributions enters into the very heart of the political struggle. But this provision too still maintains a connection with the concrete problems of provisioning the city of Rome with grain, proposing to make an overall regulation of the whole question, and the institution of a sort of general office to oversee the provisioning, from what we find in a text by Cicero:

*But of course: with your law you have entrusted all the public and private grain, all grain-producing provinces, all the tax farmers and the keys of all the granaries to a filthy exploiter, to the enjoyer of your lust, to a member of your race, Sextus Clelius, one who with his tongue has succeeded in detaching even your sister from you. This law has caused first an increase in prices and then penury; now we are threatened by dearth, fires, massacres, looting; your fury threatens the goods and the fortunes of all. [Source 6]*

According to Cicero, a partisan of Clodius, Sextus Clelius, had in his hands power over the grain brought to Rome as taxes or by forced purchase on the part of the state, as well as what arrived through the normal channels of private commerce, over the provinces that

produced grain, over the people that had in concession the transportation of the public grain to the city, and, finally, over the granaries where the grain was stored.

The ancient sources unfortunately do not linger over these aspects of the grain provisioning administration, which would be of great interest for us, but they prefer to concentrate on the more revolutionary aspect of the *lex Clodia*, the fact that the grain distributions which it provided for were to be completely free of charge – thus emphasizing the demogical character of the law and the enormous increase in expense for the treasury that it caused.

Cicero, in a passage in his oration *In defence of Sextius*, quantifies in a relative way the expense caused by the *lex Clodia frumentaria*, declaring that it was almost 1/5 of the state revenues. The figure supplied by Cicero naturally has drawn scholars to try to estimate, in absolute terms, the sum that the Roman state would have needed to employ in order to sustain Gracchus' *frumentationes*, starting from a debated passage in Plutarch, according to which the revenues of the *res publica*, after Pompey's conquests in the Orient, went from 200 to 340 million sesterces a year.

If the *frumentationes* cost the state 1/5 of its annual income, this means that the sum provided was sufficient to ensure free grain distributions to about 245,000 persons, with a spectacular increase, if we compare this figure with that obtained for the beneficiaries of the grain distributions of 62 B.C.

Such an increase is understandable if we consider that the abolition of the "political price" of 6 1/3 asses, in vigour since the *lex Sempronia*, by now allowed even those citizens who lived in an absolute state of indigence to the benefits of the grain distributions. On the other hand, the increase must also have been the result of reduced rigour of the criteria which established the possible beneficiaries, an attitude which must already have been assumed on occasion of the *senatus consultum* of 62 B.C. We know that Pompey, when he was in charge of the provisioning in 57 B.C. tried in some way to reorder the lists of beneficiaries, compiling in particular a list of the slaves recently freed for the specific purpose of relieving the state from the expense necessary for them.

Nonetheless it is probable that Clodius succeeded in nullifying this check too: from various passages in Cicero's writings we know in fact that the tribune of the plebs had the Temple of the Nymphs burned down in order to destroy the official documentation of the so-called *recensio*, probably a special kind of census aimed at establishing a list of the beneficiaries of the *frumentationes*. It is hence extremely probable that Clodius' action had the aim of nullifying Pompey's attempt at limiting the expense to the public treasury for the grain distributions.

## CONCLUSIONS

The most important point seems to be that the uncontrolled increase in the number of beneficiaries which took place beginning with the *senatus consultum* of 62 B.C. and even more strongly with the *lex Clodia* of 57 B.C. caused a crisis in the grain distribution system: the regular distribution of grain at a price fixed by law, inaugurated in order to solve the problem of grain provisioning for Rome, by attracting to Rome a mass of indigents and favouring a

wave of manumissions of slaves, ended up by making more serious the problem it was intended to solve. In 46 B.C. there were 320,000 beneficiaries of the free distributions of grain in Rome, and certainly that number includes not only native Roman citizens resident in Rome, but also citizens who lived elsewhere, freed slaves, and perhaps even foreigners.

The fall in the number of those having a right to the grain distributions prescribed by Caesar and the even more radical measures undertaken by Augustus changed the character of the *frumentationes* sharply: under the Empire they represent not only an important subsidy for the urban plebs, but above all constitute the mark of a privileged condition, that of a *civis Romanus domo Roma* – a Roman citizen living in Rome. The general problem of the grain provisioning of the immense capital was now dealt with in a different way, with the development of the specific administrative office known as the *annona*.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This image and the other two reproduced here refer to a period much later than the late Roman republic, which is dealt with in the text; but as for this last period iconographic documents about the grain supply are lacking, it has seemed useful to include some pictures about the same subject, even if they refer to the imperial period and therefore to a different social and political context.

The sarcophagus represented in Fig. 1 refers to the second half of the 3rd century A.D. In the centre it shows the deceased man and wife shaking each other's right hand; for our purposes the four standing figures at the extremities of the scene are of particular interest: on the left appears the personification of harbour of Ostia, identified with the small lighthouse she is holding in the right hand. The Ostia harbour was in fact the most important landing point for ships that transported grain to Rome. To Ostia's right we see *Annona*, food supply service for Rome, personified; she is connotated by an oar (which alludes to the transport of corn from Ostia upstream to the river port of Rome on the Tiber) and by a *tessera frumentaria*, the tickets which had to be exhibited by the people entitled to receive free grain. On the right side of the scene we see *Abundantia*, holding a cornucopia full of produce and with two *modii* placed at her feet. The scene is completed by the personification of Africa, one of the most important grain supplying provinces, with a head covering in the form of a Elephant. The subject of the pictures suggests identifying sarcophagus' owner with a prefect of the *Annona*.

<sup>2</sup> On the reverse the coin apparently shows a scene of grain distribution: on the right a person is putting grain into a *modius*; a second man in the centre is levelling it and finally a third man is going away satisfied with a sack on his shoulders.

<sup>3</sup> The mosaic depicts a vivid scene, which shows on the right the *mensores*, who had to measure the grain carefully and perhaps check its quality. On the left appears another person with a sack of grain on his shoulders.



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## SOURCES

1. καὶ περιφανέστατα αἰρεθεῖς εὐθύς ἐπεβούλευε τῇ βουλῇ, σιτηρέσιον ἔμμηνον ὀρίσας ἐκάστω τῶν δημοτῶν ἀπὸ τῶν κοινῶν χρημάτων, οὐ πρότερον εἰωθὸς διαδίδοσθαι. καὶ ὁ μὲν ὀξέως οὕτως ἐνὶ πολιτεύματι τὸν δῆμον ὑπηγάγετο, συμπράξαντος αὐτῷ Φουλβίου Φλάκκου. καὶ εὐθύς ἐπὶ τῷδε καὶ ἐς τὸ μέλλον ἤρετο δημαρχεῖν.  
[Appian, *Civil Wars*, I, 21, 89-90].

2. *Frumentariam legem C. Gracchus ferebat. Iucunda res plebei: victus enim suppedibatur large sine labore. Repugnabant boni, quod et ab industriam plebem ad desidiam avocari puta-*

*bant et aerarium exahuriri videbatur.*  
[Cicero, *In defence of Sextius*, 103].

3. *C. Gracchus, cum largitiones maximas fecisset et effudisset aerarium, verbis tamen defendebat aerarium. Quid verba audiam, cum facta videam? L. Piso ille Frugi semper contra legem frumentariam dixerat. Is lege lata consularis ad frumentum venerat. Animum advertit Gracchus in contione Pisonem stantem; quaerit audiente populo Romano, qui sibi constet, cum ea lege frumentum petat, quam dissuaserit. "Nolit", inquit "mea bona, Gracche, tibi viritim dividere libeat, sed, si facias, partem petam". Parumne declaravit vir gravis et sapiens lege Sempronia patrimonium publicum dissipari? Lege orationes Gracchi, patronum aerari esse dices.*  
[Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, III, 48].

4. *Praeterea iuventus, quae in agris manuum mercede inopiam toleraverat, privatis atque publicis largitionibus excita, urbanum otium ingrato labori praetulerat.*  
[Sallust, *The Conspiracy of Catiline*, 37, 7].

5. Τῶν δὲ περὶ τὸν Λέντλον ἀναيرهθέντων, καὶ τοῦ Καίσαρος, περὶ ᾧν εἰσηγγέλη καὶ διεβλήθη πρὸς τὴν σύγκλητον, εἰς τὸν δῆμον καταφυγόντος καὶ τὰ πολλὰ νοσοῦντα καὶ διεφθαμμένα τῆς πολιτείας μέρη ταραττοντος καὶ συνάγοντος πρὸς αὐτόν, ὁ Κάτων φοβηθεὶς ἔπεισε τὴν βουλὴν ἀναλαβεῖν τὸν ἄπορον καὶ ἀνέμητον ὄχλον εἰς τὸ σιτηρέσιον, ἀναλώματος μὲν ὄντος ἐνιαυσίου χιλίων καὶ διακοσίων καὶ πενήκοντα ταλάντων, περιφανῶς δὲ τῇ φιλανθρωπίᾳ ταύτῃ καὶ χάριτι τῆς ἀπειλῆς ἐκείνης διαλυθείσης.  
[Plutarch, *Cato the Younger*, 26, 1].

6. *Scilicet tu helluoni spurcatissimo, praegustatori libidinum tuarum, homini egentissimo et facinosissimo, Sex. Cloelio, socio tui sanguinis, qui sua lingua etiam sororem tuam a te abalienavit, omne frumentum privatum et publicum, omnis provincias frumentarias, omnis mancipis, omnis horreorum clavis lege tua tradidisti; qua ex lege primum caritas nata est, deinde inopia. Impendebat fames, incendia, caedes, direptio: imminebat tuus furor omnium fortunis et bonis.*  
[Cicero, *On his house*, 25].



