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Institutional Framework of the Food Supply System

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Abstract:
The study of the institutional framework of the food supply system in ancient Italy extends beyond simply analyzing supply mechanisms. It delves into the very nature of the Roman state: the limits of its intervention in the economy, its legal and administrative instruments, its relationship to the social structure, and its mechanisms for resource redistribution. This study also opens the door to a comparative approach to forms of economic organization in ancient societies, highlighting how food security contributed to shaping and reproducing the Roman power structure over the centuries.
Keywords:
Food supply, institutional framework, Roman state, supply, food system.

Introduction:

The food supply system in ancient Italy was one of the most prominent institutional manifestations of the Roman state's capacity for organization and administration within a growing urban society and an expanding economy with broad Mediterranean reach. Securing food, particularly grain, was closely linked to political and social stability, and from the late Republican period onward, it became a strategic issue affecting the legitimacy of the state and its balance with the populace. Consequently, the institutional framework governing food supply evolved into a complex system integrating administrative, financial, legal, and military dimensions, all within the state's efforts to control markets, regulate imports, and ensure the equitable and stable distribution of essential goods.

This institutional framework has taken many forms throughout history, from early republican initiatives linked to exceptional interventions in times of crisis, to the establishment of a permanent administrative apparatus in the imperial era under the supervision of competent officials. This system was based on a vast logistical network that included production areas in Sicily, North Africa and Egypt, and on advanced infrastructure of ports, warehouses and land and river roads, which enabled the formation of an integrated Mediterranean market managed by Rome from its political center.

<u>I- A Shift in the Functions of the Tax Office:</u>

The custodians were among the first[1] officials in Rome tasked with managing food supplies. They were previously responsible for distributing in-kind and monetary aid at the entrance to the Temple of Ceras, and were thus pre-appointed to manage a department that included

[1] T. Mommsen, Staatsresht, Il, P. 483.

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assisting the poor and simultaneously supplying the city. The custodians were defined as "the city's custodian, the tax collector, and others." This differed from the city administration exercised by each custodian individually within their assigned district. The custodians exercised their authority simultaneously and throughout the entire city.

Their general role encompassed everything related to supplying Rome, including ensuring a diverse range of goods in the market, maintaining order, guaranteeing the quality of goods, especially grain, according to weights and measures, and preventing price gouging, monopolies, and usury on grain. To maintain market prices, the custodians would purchase significant quantities of wheat imported from Umbria, Etruria, and Sicily[2] at an early stage.

The jurisdiction of the idyllies in these cases included the following penalties: they themselves resolved cases of violations of police orders issued by them. Their court was located in the Forum, at the entrance to the Shrine of Cira. If the matter concerned more serious cases such as usury and hoarding, they pursued the offender and passed judgment before the people. The idyl sat before the Assembly of the People, and the others before the Assembly of the Commons.[3]

Finally, the fine was placed in a special fund managed by the idyllies, which was used either for games or for public works. However, with the expansion of Rome, the idyllies could no longer bear the burden of their numerous duties. Caesar (44 BC)[4] appointed two new officials exclusively to administer the annunah, choosing them from among the common people. These officials were called the Grain Supervisors. As for their jurisdiction over disputes, it seems that this was assigned to two Grain Magistrates, who were appointed at the same time as the Grain Supervisors. The idyllies had important assistants, including the provincial governors, who were assigned specific tasks. In this area, the Chassen-Ostia was also responsible for monitoring goods arriving by sea. Alongside the edel, we find the Senate, which, in emergencies, sometimes included special commissioners tasked with temporary and specific duties related to supplying the city[5]. The edel's responsibilities could not extend beyond Rome; they lacked the authority to take supply measures in the provinces. This necessitated the appointment of new officials, who were appointed sometimes by a decision of the Senate and sometimes by popular vote, and were chosen from among the prominent figures of the Republic. The first example we recall is Menocius Agurinus, who, in 440 BC, managed to protect Rome from famine. He made several purchases in Imperia and Sicily, and after averting the danger, he resigned from his post.[6]

At the same time, Pompey was entrusted with the same duties for five years (57 BC), accompanied by fifteen senators. He was granted discretionary power that allowed him to control all public treasury resources, equip fleets, and even command the ships of the admirals. Pertus Cassius was granted similar powers after Caesar's death in 44 BC. Finally, Augustus was given the same duties by the people, and he maintained them for a time, assisted in the

[2] De Ruyt (C.), and (Macellum), Roman food market, Louvzin. The New. (183).

[3] .P. V. D. (Balsdon), “Panem et cirenses”, H.M.R, T. 02, coll, Latonus, vol. 102, (Brussels 1969), pp. 57-60.

[4] (E.) Robert, The Century of Augustus, 2nd ed. Colin. (Paris 1989), p. 65.

[5] Titus Livius. Roman History, ed. and trans. by various authors, ed. J. Perret, CUF. (Paris, 1978-1980).

[6] Bang. Peter Fibiger. "The Ancient Economy and New Institutional Economics." The Journal of Roman Studies, vol. 99, (2009), pp. 194-206.

distribution by two former praetors. Four years later, he established the permanent office of Procurator of the Anunna, under his direct authority, composed of four former praetors appointed by election. Thus, the office of Procurator of the Anunna, in the Republican era, was a form of dictatorship, endowed with broad powers granted by the people during times of famine, until it evolved in the Imperial era into a permanent office with clearly defined responsibilities.[7]

II- Mechanisms of Tax Collection:

During the reign of Augustus, Rome received sixty million bushels annually[8]. Aurelius Victor tells us that Egypt sent twenty million bushels to Rome, enough to cover its consumption for four months, with the remainder supplied by Africa. Twelve million bushels of this amount were allocated for free distribution to two hundred thousand beneficiaries, at a rate of sixty bushels per person. Septimius Severus, wanting to prevent famines in Rome caused by lean years with poor harvests or delays in the arrival of supply fleets, reformed the tax collection system. He ensured that public granaries were stocked seven years in advance. This measure was excessive, as a large portion of the wheat spoiled, and the remainder was sold at a loss or generously distributed by his successors to the Praetors. The wheat intended for supplying Rome was mostly brought into the city, while the remaining three hundred thousand mediums were given to the bakers of Ostia to make the bread known as Ostian bread or tax bread, which was sold at reduced prices by the tax office. This price, after several fluctuations, was fixed by Honorius at a bronze drachma, with a prohibition against any future increases.[9]

Octavian and his successors established a comprehensive and detailed "Imperial Census" of the tax share contributed by each province to the supply of Rome[10]. Before each tax collection, the emperor personally determined the general situation, indicating the quantities to be collected. Specialized schedules, based on the general schedule and prepared by the praetor's secretaries, were sent to all provinces and carefully circulated by the governors well before the start of the tax collection. Schedules for Egypt were published within two months. The purpose of these measures was to prevent tax collectors from overcharging. Finally, the landowners in each city compiled distribution schedules based on the number of acres they owned. It should be noted that in-kind payments, in addition to taxes, were not due to the farmers themselves, but rather to the landowners who employed them. The welfare of the food system was linked to land ownership and was imposed on all landowners, regardless of their social or political class[11]. All senators with interests in the provinces, especially in Africa[12], were required to appoint tax collectors to collect their taxes in their name. To prevent embezzlement, governors were ordered to send a tax collection notice at the end of each tax collection period. A year was

[7] (M.) Rostovtzfeff. Studies on the History of the Roman Colonies, Leipzig, (1910), p.

[8] Modius: a unit of weight for wheat, equal to 8.75 g. See:

-(F.) Gaffiot, D.L.F, Hachette, (paris 2001). p. 467.

[9] Mommsen (th.), Die R. tribes, p. 179, Note 04.

[10] Auelius (Victor.), Book from Caesar, ed. P. Dufraigne, CUF, (Paris 1975).

[11] Adant (Gabriel), History of taxes from antiquity to the 16th century, Ed Fayard, (Paris 1971), p. 47.

[12] G.H.)Stevenson, Roman provincial administration till the age of The Antonines, Oxford, (Black well, 1959). p. 58.

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allocated for the duties they had neglected to pay. Special officials, such as census takers, inspectors, and treasurers, were tasked with ensuring the equitable distribution of services among all taxpayers. In addition to the emperors' great concern with guaranteeing Rome's food supply through an annual wheat distribution law, one of their constant preoccupations was preventing shortages, any deficits that might occur. No waiver or redemption in cash was permitted for these duties. This prohibition, seemingly replicated by the emperors Theodosius, Valentinian, and Honorius, appears to have been generally extended to all taxes paid in kind until Justinian's reign, as the Theodosian law was not reinstated. In all cases, this emperor retained the right to redeem wheat duties. Imperial decrees themselves were ineffective against this principle, applying the higher order which grants no exemption to private individuals contrary to the public interest[13]. Thus, the laws not only declared the matter invalid in advance but also fined both those who requested it and the governors who issued it. However, if others could not To prevent any preferential reduction, they could at least grant reductions upon request from those concerned regarding heavily taxed properties. Later, when entire regions were abandoned and neglected, inspectors and treasurers could be appointed by the emperor, at the request of cities and provinces, to reduce their tax burden. Based on their report, a new schedule would be carefully drawn up by the prefect of the praetorium. However, visits by these officials were usually feared more than welcomed. One instance that allowed for a reduction in land tax was when it was abandoned by settlers and left uncultivated. Even so, a distinction must be made: if the same farm contained both good-quality and fallow land, the law would compensate for one with the other.

This legal stratagem, known in taxation as "acceptance," involved transferring the taxes owed by the former to the latter. All lands known to belong to the same farm, all lands acquired through the same method of ownership, whether for consideration or free of charge through inheritance, such as: Thus, a reduction in fallow land could only occur in two cases: if all other lands belonging to the same farm or inherited were of poor quality.[14]

- If the property to be taxed was acquired through a separate purchase, the right to the tax reduction granted to the buyer was not passed on to their heirs. Later, the distinction we discussed faded away and eventually disappeared. Anyone who owned fertile land was obligated to pay taxes on both that land and the adjacent uncultivated land. Furthermore, they were obligated to reclaim the land; otherwise, all their property would be confiscated. If no one was found to purchase it, the proceeds would be placed directly at the expense of the district council members.

At the same time, these landowners were forced to provide guarantees for the payment of their taxes. What can be said about such measures? They are considered ineffective, malicious, and arbitrary in principle.

Since the lands remained uncultivated, taxes were not paid under these laws[15]. What can be said about such measures, which nevertheless remained ineffective and were unjust and arbitrary in

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[13] Mustafa (Al-Abbasi), The Roman Empire, Dar Al-Nahda Al-Arabiya, (Beirut 1981).

[14] Piganiol (André), History of Rome, imp-fontana. (Algiers 1992); Dury victor, History of the Romans, T.II, ed Hachette, (Paris 1880).

[15] Willems (Paul). Roman Public Law..........P

principle? The countryside was neglected, and taxes suffered as a result of imperial decrees. In the Eastern Empire, similar measures were implemented, but the entitlements were not met.
The last legal provision in this area is recorded in Article 166 of Justinian's Code. It stipulated that in the case of uncultivated fields, taxes, whether in cash or in kind, were levied on the taxpayer as collateral for other properties derived from the same estate[16]. This collateral was to be placed in the following order: on other properties belonging to the same taxpayer and derived from the same estate. If none existed, then on other properties of the same origin owned by co-heirs. If no co-heirs existed, then on other properties of the same origin acquired by others.
It was preferable to impose taxes on the closest heirs. If there were several heirs of the same degree, or several with a shared interest, each was taxed according to their share of the original property. Thus, we observe that the legislator's primary concern was securing tax revenue, rather than the status of the land, its yield, or the situation of its owner—a trend that was reflected in the second imperial era.

III- The Head of the Central Food Administration:

From the beginning of the imperial era, Augustus became the chief judge of the people, wielding virtually unlimited power. He abolished the tax collection system entirely, taking it into his own hands with equal authority to Pompey[17].
However, he quickly delegated some of his powers to two, then four praetorian officials (in 18 BC), and finally to two consuls appointed by him to oversee grain distribution. These officials were known as the Grain Director or Governors. This successful experiment led Augustus, in his later years (14-8 AD), to transform these temporary positions into permanent ones with expanded powers, entrusting them to a single individual who became known from then on as the Governor of the Tax Office.[18]
The term of this office was not fixed, which was the general rule under the imperial system; the duration of these positions was determined solely by the emperor's will and was usually long. From the reign of Augustus to that of Constantine, the Governor of the Food Office was one of the most influential figures, ranking directly after the consuls and the city governor. But his role lost much of its importance when the empire moved to Constantinople. Although Cassidor always boasted of his distinguished duties, the truth is that from this period, or even before, the higher administration of the food office was no longer in his hands and fell into the hands of the city's governor, thus becoming his primary subordinate. He was chosen from among the knights and had a distinct chamberlainship (separate from that of the city's governor), as well as two guards and personal attendants. In the third century, he received the full title, then the full title, then the clarisimos, and Constantius granted him the title of Sword of Truth, a title that was revoked from him in 360 AD[19]. Moreover, he was allowed to accompany the city's

[16] Vasilev. History of the Byzantine Empire, Vol. I, p. 77.

[17] Plutarch. Lives of Illustrious Men, translated by Gérard Walter, Gallimard, (Paris 1951).

[18] Tacite, Annale, 1, 7; Cod. Th, XI, 5, of indiction; C. J. X, 23, of canon, Largit; G.E.F. Chilver, “Principles and frumentations”, in American Journal of philology, Vol. LXX, II, Baltmore, (1949), p.17.

[19] Pavis d'Exurac (H), "The Prefecture of the Annona, Imperial Administrative Service from Augustus to Constantine," B.E.F.A.R., 226. Rome: Alexandre (khyzhda (ed.), "Praetorian Prefect," Oxford Dictionary of

governor wherever he went, so that when the people saw him participating in the same ceremonies, Cassidor says, he would gain even more respect and esteem. Finally, among the most important privileges related to this position was exemption from all guardianship or garrisoning, whether future or existing. The governor of the food office had duties of three different kinds: administrative, judicial, and police.

1- Mutual Control in the Tax System[20]:

Regarding the management of supplies, their formation, transport, possession, distribution, monitoring, and accounting, the tax collector first collected the quantities of wheat in the provinces designated for Rome's annual consumption. He initially corresponded directly with the provincial governors, and later through the prefect of the praetorium. Furthermore, under his authority in the provinces were tax collectors or trustees tasked with purchasing wheat to supplement distribution in case of shortages.[21]

- Wheat destined for Rome as a tax from Africa constituted the most important portion of its supply. Therefore, the tax collector had to ensure its careful management, to the point that a special tax collector was appointed in Carthage to oversee shipping and delivery.[22]
- This was placed under the authority of the tax collector in Rome, who was required to report on the collection status and dispatch period and to expedite departure.[23]
- In case of unforeseen obstacles, the city's governor, and even the emperor himself if necessary, could intervene. The latter would then take the necessary measures, and would even usually send an officer from his office to expedite the departure of the fleet, as any slight delay could starve the capital. The second-ranking governor of the Anunna was responsible for ensuring the arrival of the Anunna in full and without shortages. Consequently, he had to travel to the port of Ostia to await the arrival of the goods, inspect them, and check the shipping documents or bills of lading as soon as the ships arrived, pending the city governor's inspection, which took place within five days.[24]

Regarding distribution, the tax collector was responsible for verifying, through regular inspection, that the wheat, and later the bread delivered to him, was of the correct weight and quality. He also exercised oversight of the register of tax recipients to prevent any falsification or fraudulent practices. With the introduction of the list of administrative officials, the task of ensuring the arrival of supplies to Rome fell to the Prefect of Carthage, the governor of the

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Byzantine, Vol. 3, New York and Oxford University Press, (1991), 1st ed., Vol. 3, p. 1710; Joh. Le Droit, "Die rom schiffahebeit in stromgebeit des Rheins," Kulturgesch wegweiser durch das rom-germ zentral, 12, (1930).

[20] Vignaux, "Essay on the History of the Prefecture Urbia in Rome," R.G.D., (Paris, 1885).

[21] Cagnat (R.), "The Annona of Africa", Memoirs of the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres, Vol. XL, 116, pp. 247-277; Cagnat (R.). "The Annona of Africa", Extract from the Memoirs of the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres, Vol. XL. (1916), pp. 44-46.

[22]The governor of Carthage, Anunna, was mentioned several times in Theodosius's Code. See:
Code th, XI7, 1.4: 1,13: XII, 5; XIII, 9

[23] W. Liebenam, stadteverwalting im roinishen kaiserreich, Leipzig, Denker und Humblot,
(1900), p. 242.

[24] Code Th, XIII, 5; XIII, 9; Cod. Th, XIII, 5; XIII, 9; Meiggs (R)., Roman ostia, (Oxford, 1973); Achal (Saint Paul), “Du trésor public, ses organisations et ses droits à Rome”, J.E.,
(Paris, 1875)

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Anunna in Carthage, who was under his direct command. His counterpart in Rome retained only oversight and the management of distribution.[25]

1- The Administrative Responsibilities of the Food Service:

Exercising such a wide range of powers placed a very heavy responsibility on the Prefect of Provisions. The true provider of the people, he was tasked with keeping the three hundred granaries in Rome fully stocked. Any mistake or negligence on his part could lead to famine and rebellion. To help him bear this burden, the emperors granted him broad judicial authority, allowing him to act swiftly and decisively. His territorial jurisdiction extended throughout the entire empire.[26]

Furthermore, the Prefect of Provisions had legal authority over all matters pertaining to his district. However, his decrees and regulations could initially be appealed to the Praetor (city), and then, from the third century onwards, to the Prefect of the city. In addition to this legal authority, the Prefect of Provisions also had the power to policing and supervising all professional guilds employed in this service, particularly the bakers' and sailors' guilds. He was responsible for ensuring that they performed their duties to the fullest extent and that no one evaded their responsibilities, regardless of the reason or privilege.

2- Judicial Powers:[27]

The head of the food office had two types of judicial powers: civil and criminal. It seems that this type of power was not originally granted to him, as he was merely an administrative employee and only later became a governor. Thus, his authority was always felt from a criminal perspective and was exercised only in a limited way with regard to grain merchants and associations affiliated with the tax collection department. Even concerning them, all serious cases were referred to the city governor, the administrative head of the governor of the tax office, who at that time had only the powers of an investigating judge.[28]

Finally, we should add that some tax officials, thanks to a special privilege, especially the top three employers such as the boatmen of the Tiber River and the wheat weighers, became directly subject to the city governor in all forms of offenses and completely escaped the tax governor's penalties. In civil matters, the governor of the tax office was familiar with disputes that arose between sailors, weighers, bakers, and grain merchants, as well as procedures for payment or compensation for foodstuffs. He was generally competent in all civil cases related to supplies. His rulings could not be appealed to the Emperor, just as in all matters where the latter delegated his authority to his officials.[29]

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[25] Picard (GH). "Nero and the wheat of Africa". C.T, (1956), T. 04, pp. 163-173.

[26] Marquardt, op.cit, p.165.

- This is a special body called the Minores possessores, which monitors the quality and weight of grain to prevent adulteration. See:- Cod, th. XI, 83: 7. 12.

[27] Walter, No. 471, 844; Bethmam Hollweg, III, S135, 139, 146; Dio Cassius, LVII, 23.

[28] Montesquieu, The Spirit of the Laws, XI, 19. p. 218; Laboulay, Essay on the criminal laws of the Romans concerning the responsibility of magistrates, (Paris 1845).

- A special body for transporting the annunah from the port of Osti to Rome, according to Marquardt, see:

- Cod. Th, 14, 4, 9, 15, 1, 3, 2; Orelli, No. 1084, c. 1. L. VI, 1624, 163, comp, c. 1. L,XIV; Varro, vol. II, p. 246.

[29] Willem, op.cit, p.479; L. De (Salvo), Economie privata e publici servizi nell impero romano, Messina (1992).

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- Regarding criminal matters, he had jurisdiction to adjudicate all misdemeanors and minor offenses committed by his subordinates, and any violation of the regulations he issued. Generally, he had the authority to pursue and deter any crime or transgression committed against the interests entrusted to him. He was responsible for investigating all breaches of duty, all collusion, and all criminal maneuvers aimed at monopolizing and raising the prices of foodstuffs. However, in the latter cases, his authority was limited to investigation: due to their seriousness, the matter exceeded his jurisdiction and was referred to the prefect of the city. The prefect alone, in effect, had the right to know the grounds for execution, whether in Rome or within ten miles. The prefect of the praetorium for the rest of Italy and the governors of the provinces shared the same privileges, and their rulings could always be appealed to the Emperor.[30]
- We should add that the prefect of rations (the annunciation) could have jurisdiction to adjudicate criminal cases by special delegation from the prefect of the city. [31]

IV- The Bureaucratic Structure of the Food Bureau:

1- The Prefect of the City:

He was the supreme and direct head of the Food Bureau. He had ultimate control over the tax collection department, authority over professional associations and their members and their property. His territorial jurisdiction included Rome and its suburbs up to a distance of one hundred miles. Beyond that, the jurisdiction of the Prefect of the Porteware fell to him. However, it seems that neither of these officials participated in this department until the reign of Constantine. Moreover, it appears that harmony did not always last between the Prefect of the Anunna and the Prefect of the City[32]. The latter ended up being relieved of his powers over his subordinates, which was the source of many disputes among the administrators. To put an end to this, Valentinian ordered the prefects to act independently and in consultation. He also ordered the Prefect of the Anunna to submit to the authority of the Prefect of the City, that the latter should treat his colleague with respect, and that he should not take any action or make any arrangements without consulting him, and to put an end to the overreach of his employees in the Anunna department[33]. Several laws distributed throughout the two codes clearly indicate this parallel and simultaneous action by these two governors. Two examples are: all public granary workers were required to carefully consume all existing supplies before resorting to new ones, and spoiled wheat was to be mixed with good quality wheat to prevent losses to the state treasury. Valentianus tasked the governors with overseeing the implementation of this dual measure. If a ship's cargo was found to be short by more than the permitted amount, the governors were to conduct a parallel investigation, in consultation, within five days of the cargo's arrival in Ostia.[34]

[30] Cod. Th. XIV, 23, 1, of patronuis horrerum portuensuim; Bouchard, op.cit; p. 463:

[31] Jones, “The purposand organization of the alimenta”, In P.B.S.R, (1964), p. 123-146.

[32] Delmaire (R.), “The institutions of the Late Empire, from Constantine to Justinian”, Revue de l’histoire des religions, (1996), p 355-356.

[33] Berchan (D. Van), “The military annone in the Roman empire in the 2nd century”, M.S.A.F, No. 08, T. LXXX, (Paris 1937), pp. 117-202.

[34] Code Th. XIII, 5: Becati, “Giovcanni, Scavidi di ostia”, IV, I, mosaici ei pavimenti marmori, Rome, (1961).

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A. Administrative Powers:

As the direct superior of the governor of the Anunna, the city's governor held significant supervisory responsibilities, though some powers were exclusive to him. For example, he had the right to oversee the associations of weighers and manual laborers in Rome employed in the supply service, ensuring their employment and the transfer of their inherited property. He also had the authority to inspect and monitor all meat supplies. In times of famine, the city's governor could also impose additional taxes and monitor production. At all times, he was responsible for ensuring that wheat was not removed from public granaries before the entire annual wheat harvest was accounted for.[35]

Finally, he was required to travel to Ostia at the usual times of the arrival of the African fleet to offer a sacrifice at the temple of Castor and Pollux and to obtain favorable winds, as navigation was difficult at the mouth of the Tiber River.[36]

B. Judicial Powers:[37]

The city governor also possessed judicial powers: in civil matters, he was responsible for intervening in all objections related to registration on the free distribution lists. In criminal matters, he served as the appellate judge for all offenses known to the procurator. He had exclusive knowledge of fines, the first three employers (caudicari and port authorities), and generally all serious offenses against the interests of the public. In addition to ordinary penalties, if the offender was a merchant, he had the right to prohibit them from all trade, whether in Rome or throughout his entire jurisdiction, either temporarily or for life.[38]

An exception was made when thefts, extortion, or other crimes against the public supply were discovered on board ships arriving in Ostia. The city governor did not have the authority to determine whether the accused were shipowners; in such cases, he was required to refer them to the judge of the province from which the ship's cargo originated. In fact, the province from which these criminals came, and the losses resulting from their actions, had every right to try them themselves. The same principle applied when a similar incident was discovered during a stopover: the prefect of the praetorium to which the port of stop belonged would act in the same manner.[39]

2- Powers of the Prefect of the Praetorium:

The powers of the prefects of the praetorium in their duchies, relating to the administration of the granary, were almost identical to those of the prefect of the city in Rome.

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[35] Code th, XI, 14; G.E.F, (Chilver), "Princips and frumentationes", Amer, Journal of philology, LXX, 1, (1949), p.17.

[36] Le galle (J.), « Le fleuve, la mer et les hommes aux bouches du Tibre », in déplacement des lignes de rivage en Méditerranée d'après les données de l'archéologie, (paris 1987), pp. 89-93.

[37] Mommsen, Staastrech, 2ed, Il. p. 195, 216, 980. 982.

[38] Ammien Marcellin, XIX. 10.

[39] Rougé (Jean), Recherches sur l'organisation du commerce maritime en Méditerranée sous l'empire romain, Ecole pratique des Hautes Études-SEVPEN, (Paris 1966).

* See:

- (See) Humbert, in Daremberg and Saglio, Dictionnaire des antiquités, Vol. 1, p. 1133.

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A- Judicial Powers:[40]

Like the prefect of the city in Rome, he had deterrent powers over all offenses committed against the supply within his jurisdiction and against any official or administrator who was not faithful to his duties in this department. In particular, he was required to severely punish any breach of duty in the collection of wheat revenues and to combat monopolies and speculation by grain merchants aimed at causing price increases.[41]

B. Administrative Powers:

In administrative matters, they were responsible for ensuring the distribution, collection, and transfer of taxes in general, and in particular, supply taxes. They were also responsible for refusing to approve or allow their employees to agree to any reduction or redistribution of wheat levies in cash, in short, for absolutely opposing any change or substitution of the usual quantities of wheat revenues. To facilitate the collection process and to prevent and thwart any fraud, the praetors of the praetorate provided each year to the various agents and officials under their authority a schedule for the distribution of in-kind levies to be submitted by those under their administration. They also had full administrative and judicial powers over the professional associations appointed to the supply service throughout their jurisdiction. The employment and supervision of shipowners, their personal status and property, the monitoring of navigation in ports, the construction and allocation of ships intended for the transport of public wheat, the requisitioning of private vessels in urgent cases, the loading and departure of caravans in suitable seasons, and investigations into shipwrecks—these were the most important powers of the praetors of the praetorate, and in this respect, they were similar, as we can see, in all respects to the powers of the prefect within Rome.[42]

In addition to overseeing the regular supply of grain, the praetorians were also responsible for monitoring all additional wheat purchases made by order of the Senate or the Emperor for Rome and other cities. They were tasked with ensuring that no taxpayer was exempt from this compulsory sale, and conversely, that no tax [43]collector was deprived of the wheat necessary for their sustenance. To assist them in these numerous duties, the praetorians had key assistants and vicars, one in each province. Furthermore, there were vicars in major cities like Alexandria and Carthage, similar to those in Rome.[44]

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[40] Jacques (François), “Le privilège de Liberté politique impériale et autonomie municipale dans les cités et l'occident romain” (161-244), R.B.ph. et his., (Rome 1984).

[41] Cébeillac (Gervasoni Mireille), “Ostia et le blé au II siècle après J.C., dans le réserve en blé de Rome et des centres urbains des débuts de la République jusqu'au haut Empire,” A.C.N, 1991, Rome. (Nepis, 1994), p. 47-59.

[42] Humbert, "Essay on Finances. T.1, p367: Vector, Political Economy of the Romans, T. 1. p. 43-311.

[43] Chastagnol (André), The Roman Senate in the Imperial Era, (Paris 1994), p. 159-194.

[44] The main provinces supplying Rome were: Sicily, Sardinia, and Africa, which were required to provide all the contents of the annuity, bearing in mind that these provinces were also subject to the tithe. When agriculture became neglected in Sicily and Sardinia, and we were unable to provide its substitutes, the pressure fell on the provinces of Africa. See:

- J. Pigenneau, “The Roman Annone”. RAR (1886). p. 221, 224.

Moreover, the vicars were in direct contact with the praetorians regarding all matters of common interest. They were required to submit annually a list of Roman citizens within their jurisdiction who owned property subject to the vicarians' taxation, along with its value.[45]

V- Sub-Directorate of the Food Office:

The sub-directorate is a fundamental pillar in the organizational structure of public institutions, representing the executive level responsible for implementing public policies and translating them into practical programs at the field level. The Food Office, as a specialized organizational unit within the sub-directorate, is tasked with organizing, regulating, and coordinating activities related to food security, supply, and monitoring essential commodities. This body derives its importance from its direct connection to the basic needs of society and its role as a link between central authorities and local communities regarding food resource management and ensuring market stability.

Conceptually, the Food Office is defined as a sub-administrative unit responsible for organizing food distribution, monitoring market supplies, controlling prices, and monitoring the quality of food products in coordination with relevant regulatory bodies. This office operates within an organizational structure governed by national legislation regulating the trade, supply, and public health sectors. It is also based on the principles of modern public administration, particularly the principle of administrative decentralization, which grants local authorities executive powers within the bounds of the law, enabling a rapid response to the needs of the population.

Historically, the emergence of food bureaus has been linked to the development of the modern state and its growing social role, particularly during periods of economic crisis and war, when the need arose for regulatory bodies to manage the equitable distribution of food resources. In many countries, food supply agencies and bureaus were established during the two World Wars to ensure fairness in the distribution of essential goods and to prevent monopolies and speculation. With the development of the welfare state concept, the food bureau became part of the social protection system, contributing to food security and social stability.

Organizationally, a food bureau typically comprises several functional departments, including a supply and inventory monitoring department, a price control department, a quality control and health and safety department, and a statistics and data collection department. The bureau relies on integrated management information systems to track the movement of goods from supplier to consumer, analyze supply and demand indicators, and forecast potential crises. Coordination between the food bureau and other entities—such as trade directorates, veterinary services, and health authorities—is essential for ensuring effective performance. The Food Office plays a pivotal role in achieving local food security, defined as the ability of a state or society to provide sufficient, safe, and nutritious food for all its members at all times. This is achieved through various mechanisms, including monitoring supply chains, intervening to regulate the market in the event of imbalances, combating monopolies, and ensuring compliance with health standards. The Food Office also contributes to the preparation of periodic reports on the supply and price situation, which are submitted to higher authorities for appropriate decision-making.

[45] Thibault (Fabien), "Direct taxes under the late Roman Empire", R.G.D.F.E. Vol. 23, (Paris 1899).

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Economically, the Food Office contributes to balancing market freedom with the requirements of administrative regulation. While modern economic systems rely on supply and demand mechanisms, the Food Office's intervention becomes necessary in emergencies or crises, such as sudden price increases or shortages of strategic goods. Here, the Food Office's function as a regulatory tool ensures transparency and fairness, and prevents any disruption to the principle of fair competition. It also contributes to protecting the purchasing power of citizens, particularly vulnerable groups.

- From a governance perspective, the performance of the Food Office is linked to the quality of public administration and the effectiveness of public policies. The more internal control mechanisms, periodic evaluation systems, and performance indicators are available, the more efficient administrative intervention becomes. Adopting the principles of transparency and accountability strengthens trust between the administration and citizens and reduces instances of administrative corruption or market manipulation. Digitalization and the use of modern databases are among the most prominent tools for developing the work of food offices in the current era.

However, the Food Office's sub-administration faces several challenges, most notably limited human and financial resources, overlapping jurisdictions among different bodies, and the difficulty of regulating informal markets. Furthermore, global economic shifts, rising commodity prices, and international crises—such as pandemics or conflicts—complicate the office's tasks and necessitate the development of proactive strategies based on long-term planning.

In light of the above, it is clear that the Food Office, as a sub-administration, constitutes a vital element within the public administration system, combining regulatory, supervisory, and social functions. It is not merely an administrative body for managing supplies, but a strategic instrument for achieving food security and economic and social stability. Therefore, developing this system requires modernizing its organizational structure, enhancing its human resources, and adopting advanced information systems, in line with the principles of modern management and the requirements of sustainable development.[46]

Conclusion:

An analysis of the institutional framework of the food supply system in ancient Italy reveals that the issue of supply was not merely an administrative function or a circumstantial response to consumer needs, but rather a structural pillar in the formation and development of the Roman state. From the late Republican period onward, food security was linked to political stability, and controlling the flow and distribution of grain became a strategic tool for maintaining social equilibrium and bolstering the legitimacy of authority. Consequently, the annona system transformed from an exceptional measure into a permanent institutional apparatus with clear structures and defined powers, reflecting a high degree of administrative efficiency and economic planning.

[46] The reign of the Severan family (193-235 AD) See:
- Stein (Ernest), op.cit, p

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-This system demonstrated the Roman state's capacity to construct a multi-layered system in which legal, financial, logistical, and military functions were integrated. The regulation of imports from the provinces, the control of maritime and land transport, the management of granaries, and the establishment of distribution mechanisms all revealed an institutional awareness of the importance of continuity and centralized control. Furthermore, the creation of the office of praefectus annonae during the imperial era represented a significant step in solidifying the bureaucratic character of the system and directly linking supply policy to imperial authority. This reinforced the centralization of decision-making and mitigated the political instability that characterized the republican period.

-However, this institutional framework was not isolated from the broader socio-economic structure. It contributed to reshaping the relationship between the state and its citizens, particularly in major cities, most notably Rome. The policy of regular grain distribution not only alleviated social tensions but also fostered a pattern of interdependence between the state and the populace, where food security became an element of the unspoken "social contract." Simultaneously, this system deepened economic integration between Italy and its provinces, reinforcing the Mediterranean character of the Roman economy and reorienting production and exchange networks according to a center-periphery dynamic.

-On an analytical level, studying the institutional framework of the food supply system reveals the unique nature of the Roman experience in resource management within a vast imperial space. Market mechanisms intertwined with forms of organized government intervention, without either negating the other. Trade and private actors remained an essential part of the process, yet the state retained the tools of regulation and guidance, particularly concerning strategic goods. Thus, the food supply system can be viewed as an early model of partial centralized economic organization, based on a balance between private initiative and public oversight.

-Ultimately, the institutional framework of the food supply system in ancient Italy emerges as one of the most important factors contributing to the sustainability of the Roman state over the centuries. It was not merely a technical mechanism for providing grain, but rather an integrated political and economic structure that constituted one of the pillars of imperial power and a tool for its reproduction and consolidation. Therefore, understanding this system allows for a deeper reading of the nature of the Roman state, its concept of public administration, and the close relationship between food and power in ancient societies.