

Book XI.
Title XXV. (XXIV)

Concerning Public bread rations.
(De annonis civilibus).

Headnote.¹

Food supplies for cities.

The problem of food supplies for cities, particularly inland cities was very great. Many shippers on the seas were compelled to work for the state, and large amount of food supplies were monopolized for the benefit of the army. The grain and other supplies raised on the imperial lands, which were extensive, seldom found their way to the public market. The territory surrounding the large cities did not produce enough to supply the people, and a great share of the supplies were required to be imported, some of them from distant lands. Each of the cities of any size seems to have had a curator of grain and other supplies, whose duties it was to see that sufficient supplies were on hand. The prices were ordinarily supervised and regulated, though difficulties in that respect were naturally always encountered. How far cities outside of the capital, and a few other favored cities, attempted to make free distributions of corn or bread is somewhat uncertain. In some cases these were made, but that was probably not the general rule. Rostovtzeff, Soc. & Econ. Hist. of the Roman Empire 137-371; Reid, The Municipalities of the Roman Empire 461; Finlay, Greece Under the Romans c. 13.

Free Distribution in the capitals and Alexandria.

A law passed in 123 B.C. whereby the people in Rome were supplied with grain much below the market price. Certain conditions were fixed to the delivery of this grain at such price, which probably naturally excluded the nobility from taking advantage thereof. This or similar laws existed down to the time of Caesar. In 57 or 58 B.C., free distribution of grain was directed to be made to the people for the first time. The recipients thereof numbered 320,000 for some years; the number was reduced to 150,000 by Caesar, but was again increased to 200,000 under Augustus at which figure it seems to have remained for at least two centuries, for that number of free recipients is mentioned under the reign of Septimius Severus. Under Augustus a recipient was required to be a citizen; each received a certain quantity of grain, probably 5 pecks, monthly, and while the really indigent received the grain absolutely free, others were required to pay a small sum. Later the distribution seems to have become entirely gratuitous. Each corn receiver was provided with a ticket, called tessera, which became a property right and could be sold or left by will. Transfer of such tickets is frequently mentioned in the Code. While every citizen was competent to receive such grain, in actual practice all people of station and wealth were probably excluded from the bounty of the law, because of certain requirements in obtaining the ticket. In the third century - the exact time being uncertain - bread was furnished instead of grain. This bread was baked by the public bakers, who delivered in to various depots in the city, where it was received by the holders of the

¹ At the top of this page, Blume penciled in: "See 'Frumentum' in Pauly-Wiss."

tickets. These depots or stations had steps (gradus) leading to them, and by reason of that fact the bread was called panis gradilis.

When Constantine established Constantinople as one of the capitals of the empire, free distribution of bread was also made in that city, and in order to encourage the building of houses, all householders were entitled to a ticket. The grant made by Constantine was subsequently increased. C. 11.25.2. Others aside from owners of houses, also received such bread. C. 11.25.1. And by reason of the sale and transfer of the tickets, the right seems to have fallen into numerous hands, but just how extensive it was, is not quite clear.²

See in general, Smith's Dict. G. & R. Antiq. under 'frumentariae leges'; Marquardt, Rom. Stverw. 106-132. Free distribution of bread was also made in Alexandria, as shown by C. 11. 28. 2, and Edict 13. That had also been true in Carthage. In addition to bread, oil also was probably ordinarily distributed as well. C. Th. 14.17.15. But that seems not to have been true in Justinian's time. Some of the emperors also distributed meat and wine without charge. Marquardt, supra 133; Lampridius, Alex. Sev. 22, 26; Vopisc., Aurel. 47. The free distribution of bread (and of course, of other articles) ceased in Constantinople in 618 A.D. under the reign of Heraclius. Stockle, Spatrom. Zunfte 50. We know that it continued to be made in Rome as late as 554 A.D. as shown by c. 22 of Appendix VII (pragmatic sanction), and C. 1. 27.

Appendix VII. (554 A.D.)

c. 25. That public workshops shall be preserved.

We direct that the customary allowances and favors for the repair of the city of Rome or of public workshops, the channel of the river Tiber, the forum, the port of Rome or water pipes shall be continued, provided that they shall be paid only from the sources assigned for that purpose.

11.25.1. Emperors Theodosius, Arcadius and Honorius to Proculus, City Prefect.

That by the liberality of Constantine public food supplies were not granted so much to positions of rank as to individuals on account of their deserts, appears sufficiently clear. None, therefore, shall be claimed in the name of the palace legions³ as such, but the grants are reserved for each individual according to his desert, so that if any persons have transferred the right to the supplies to be received by them, to the heirs of

² [Blume] Constantine distributed 80,000 loaves. Socrates, 2 Hist. Ecc. 13; Bury, 1 Hist. Later Roman Empire 74. And the Register of Dignitaries (Seek, p. 243), issued in the beginning of the fourth century, states that Constantinople had 20 public bakeries and 117 stations from which the bread was distributed to the public, and that in addition thereto there were 120 private bakeries which supplied, doubtless, the needs of the people who received no free bread and which, perhaps supplied as much bread as the 117 steps or stations.

³ [Blume] The palace or palatine legions were called scholae - school, by reason of the fact that porticoes in the place were assigned to them. They were part of the imperial body-guard, consisted originally of five departments of 500 men each and were under the master of offices, but were increased by Justinian to 5500 men. Lydus mentions 10,000.

1 Kuhn 141.

their body, or to strangers, by sale, such transfer, either by reason of inheritance or voluntary alienation, shall remain valid.

Given at Constantinople June 25 (392).

C. Th. 14.17.10.

11.25.2. Emperors Theodosius, Arcadius and Honorius to Tatianus, Praetorian Prefect.

Through the natural liberality of Our Piety, we give 125 pecks of grain daily for daily distribution of bread, aside from the amount customarily distributed, to commence with the first of January of the present, sixth, indiction, and we have sent an imperial order to the Sublime prefect of the Orient, by which he may know the measure of our donation and without delay furnish what we have directed. This law, we ordain, shall be in force for all time and the amount mentioned shall be given to our citizens in perpetuity. (about 392 A.D.)