

Roman Economy

1. Some statistics:

Census figures:

70 BC – 910,000 (Phlegon of Tralles, *FGrH* 257 F 12.6)

28 BC – 4,063,000 (*RGDA* 8.2)

8 BC – 4,233,000 (*RGDA* 8.3)

AD 14 – 4,937,000 (*RGDA* 8.4; interim result 4,100,900 probably represents Italian numbers: *EJ* 40)

AD 48 – 5,984,072 (Tacitus, *Ann.* 11.25). A census return from Egypt has survived: *Fontes iuris Romani anteiustiniani* III 8.

For partial census (properties over 200,000 HS) in AD 4, cf. Cass. Dio LV.13.4.

Corn dole recipients in Rome:

320,000 reduced by Caesar to 150,000: Suet., *Caes.* 41.3

320,000 recipients of Augustan *congiarium* in 5 BC: *RGDA* 15

Limited to 200,000: Cass. Dio LV.10.1, cf. Suet., *Aug.* 42

What do Augustan census figures represent?

P.A. Brunt, *Italian Manpower, 225 B.C. – A.D. 14* (Oxford 1971, rev. 1987), 113-20

E. Lo Cascio, 'The Size of the Roman Population', *JRS* 84 (1994), 23-40

Relative incomes / assets:

legionary salary under Augustus: 225 denarii (= 900 HS) p.a., in 3 instalments of 75 denarii on 1 Jan, 1 May and 1 Oct (M. Speidel, *JRS* 82 [1992], 88, for further details). Presumably established by Caesar, who doubled the salary: Suet., *Caes.* 26.3

praetorian salary: 3,000 HS p.a.

centurion's salary p.a.: 13,500 HS (*primuspilus*: 45,000 HS?)

discharge payment to a legionary: 12,000 HS (Cass. Dio LV.23.1)

discharge payment to a *primuspilus*: 600,000 HS (Suet., *Cal.* 44 – but based on an emendation)

salaries of senior procurators: from 60,000 – 300,000 HS p.a. Title of *procurator ducenarius* first attested: Suet., *Claud.* 24.1

equestrian census requirement: 400,000 HS

senatorial census requirement: 1,000,000 HS from 18 BC (Cassius Dio LIV.17.3); 1,200,000 (Suet., *Aug.* 41.3). Gifts from Augustus bringing some 80 young men to 1,200,000: Cassius Dio LV.13.6 (AD 4).

notable fortunes: C. Caecilius Isidorus, a freedman: 4000 slaves, 3600 pairs of oxen, ca. 250,000 sheep and other livestock; 60 mln. HS in cash (Pliny, *NH* XXXIII.135); Cn. Cornelius Lentulus: worth 400 mln. HS (Suet., *Tib.* 49; Seneca, *Benef.* II.27). Cf. C. Wells, *The Roman Empire*, 2nd ed. (London 1992), 88.

not more than 60,000 HS to be kept at home (law of 49 BC): Cassius Dio XLI.38

three mullet for 30,000 HS: Suet., *Tib.* 34.1

food in Roman Egypt at subsistence level: ca. 170 HS p.a., cf. W.V. Harris, *Rome's Imperial Economy* (Oxford 2011), 43.

2. Government and the economy:

Taxes:

*Cf. A.H.M. Jones, 'Taxation in Antiquity', in Id., *Roman Economy* (Oxford 1974), 150-81, at pp. 164-8

Falling disproportionately on the poor and on the provinces (with the exception of the *vicesima hereditarium*)

Enhanced the monetization of the economy (when collected in coin, which was not universal)
Fell more on agriculture than on manufacture or trade (taxed only through indirect taxes and customs dues, low within the Empire).

poll tax (*tributum capitis*, at a set rate) and land tax (*tributum soli*, up to 20% of the produce) in provinces

taxes in kind: ox hide tax of Frisians: Tac., *Ann.* IV.72; grain tax in Baetica: Cassius Dio LX.24.5

customs dues: 25% on the eastern border; 2-5% on provincial borders

5% *vicesima libertatis*

5% *vicesima hereditarium* – paid only by citizens, the poor probably exempt

1% *centesima rerum venalium* (reduced to *ducentesima*: Tacitus, *Ann.* II.42)

4% tax on buying slaves: Tacitus, *Ann.* XIII.31

Confiscations:

A provincial executed for his wealth: Tac., *Ann.* VI.19 (cf. IV.36)

Bona caduca / *vacantia*: Pliny the Younger, *Paneg.* 42

Legacies left to the emperor:

Suet., *Aug.* 101: *viginti proximis annis quaterdecies milies ex testamentis amicorum percepisset* (1,400,000,000 HS).

Imperial mines:

Strabo IV.6.7 (reasons for the conquest of the Salassi, cf. Plin., *NH* 18.182)

New mines in Spain: Florus II.33

*EJ*² 160: *familia Tiberii Caesaris*

Continued use of the publicani companies:

Tacitus, *Ann.* IV.6

Cf. P.A. Brunt, 'Publicans in the Principate', in Id., *Roman Imperial Themes* (Oxford 1990), 354-432

Reserves:

list given by Augustus: Suet., *Aug.* 101.4

2,700,000,000 HS left by Tiberius to Caligula: Suet., *Cal.* 37.3

On different treasuries see P.A. Brunt, 'The *Fiscus* and Its Development', in Id., *Roman Imperial Themes* (Oxford 1990), 134-62

Expenditure:

ca. 50 mln. HS on salaries of senior equestrian officials (D.W. Rathbone, *CAH*², vol.10 [1994], 310)

min. 180 mln. HS on army salaries

RGDA App. 1: *Summa pecuniae quam dedit vel in aerarium vel plebei Romanae vel dimissis militibus: denarium sexiens miliens* (= 2,400,000,000 HS)

Strabo IV.5.3: occupying Britain too expensive

Coinage:

Range: 1 aureus = 1600 quadrantes

local bronzes of provincial towns

imperial mint at Lugdunum

- *M.H. Crawford, *Coinage and Money under the Roman Republic* (London 1985), ch.17:
Augustan monetary reforms
- *E. Lo Cascio, 'State and Coinage in the Late Republic and Early Empire', *JRS* 71 (1981), 76-86
- M.H. Crawford, 'Money and Exchange in the Roman World', *JRS* 60 (1970), 40-48
- *W.V. Harris, 'A Revisionist View of Roman Money', *JRS* 96 (2006), 1-24
- C.J. Howgego, 'The supply and use of money in the Roman world, 200 B.C. – A.D. 300', *JRS* 82 (1992), 1-31

Building programmes:

Res Gestae divi Augusti 11; 12.2; 19-21.1; 23; 24.2; 34.2; 35.1; Suet., *Aug.* 28.3-30; 31.5; 56.2; 57.2: Augustus

Suet., *Tib.* 47; Tac., *Ann.* II.49; III.72; VI.45; Vell. Pat. II.130.1-2; Cass. Dio LVII.10: Tiberius

Suet., *Vesp.* 18: 'let me feed my people (*plebiculam pascere*)'

- *P.A. Brunt, 'Free Labour and Public Works at Rome', *JRS* 70 (1980), 81-100
- M.K. Thornton, 'Julio-Claudian Building Programmes: Eat, Drink and be Merry', *Historia* 35 (1986), 28-44

'Credit crunch' of AD 33:

Tac., *Ann.* VI.16-17; Suet., *Tib.* 41; Cassius Dio LVIII.21.4-5

Compare fall of interest rates to 4% in 30 BC: Cassius Dio LI.21

*T. Frank, 'The Financial Crisis of AD 33', *AJP* 56 (1935), 336-41

Trade:

Alexandrian sailors and Augustus: Suet., *Aug.* 98 (*per illum se vivere, per illum navigare, libertate atque fortunis per illum frui*).

Roman troops securing trade route through the Alps: Caesar, *BG* III.1

Encouragement of grain supply and house-building: Gaius, *Inst.* 1.32-34

Arretine pottery and army supply contracts: A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Rome's Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge 2008), 415-6

Maecenas, *iaspis figulorum*: Macrobius, *Sat.* II.4.12

*K. Hopkins, 'Taxes and Trade in the Roman Empire (200 B.C. – A.D. 400)', *JRS* 70 (1980), 101-25

R. Duncan-Jones, 'Trade, taxes and money', in Id., *Structure and Scale in the Roman Economy* (Cambridge 1990), 30-47

W.V. Harris, 'Roman Governments and Commerce', in Id., *Rome's Imperial Economy* (Oxford 2011), ch. 9

Luxury and economic prosperity:

Tacitus, *Ann.* II.33; III.52-5