

Financing Imperialism

This lecture covers 3 topics: (1) the relationship between the emperor's wealth and imperial finances; (2) the imperial estates; and (3) imperial expenditure. It is intended to form a link between the discussion of private economic activity and the political economy and also to provide background for the discussion of the methods and impact of Romans taxation in seminar 7.

1. Private Wealth and Public Finances

- individuals and states the main players in the ancient economy
- emperors individuals, and culturally assimilated to the senatorial élite
- empire a patrimonial system

the emperors' wealth and the empire's finances indissolubly linked and intermingled, practically, institutionally and morally yet the distinction maintained because of the traditions of res publica Romana

(1) **inheritances and legacies**

- Roman inheritance customs
- The development of a monarchical tradition and an accompanying discourse about emperors and inheritance
- Augustus' concern to be mentioned in wills, Tiberius only accepts legacies from friends, Claudius forbade those with children from making him heir, Nero confiscates the property of "the ungrateful dead", Domitian co-heir of Agricola etc.....
- emperors inherited the patrimonia of their predecessors even if they were not their designated heirs. These included freedmen and slaves as well as land, cash and other property.

(2) **generosity (and its opposite)**

'The deeds done by the deified Augustus through which he subjugated the entire known world to the power of the Roman people, and the sums of money he spent on the state and on the people of Rome....' cf. chs.15-24 beneficia to plebs, veterans, state, grain, civic buildings, temples, games and especially ch. 17 "on four occasions I subsidized the public treasury (aerarium) from my own resources." Res Gestae Divi Augusti 1.

(3) **moral assessment of emperors' financial actions**

e.g. in Suetonius' *Lives*, Pliny's *Panegyric* (both early C2nd)

- The Good Emperor...increases or conserves the revenues of the empire, is personally frugal, subsidises the noble poor, bestows beneficia on the deserving, leaves the treasury richer than he found it and foregoes revenue to which he is entitled
- The Bad Emperor...depletes the empire's resources in the pursuit of luxury, enriches his friends, mistresses and favorites too excess, appropriates legacies and inheritances not offered freely, condemns unjustly to enable confiscation, and imposes unfair taxes (on the rich).

- Real Emperors often presented as having both good and bad qualities in this respect, sometimes resolved into "good" and "bad" periods of a reign in histories or treated separately in biographies.

e.g.1 Tiberius accumulates revenue, grants Asian cities earthquake relief, refuses legacies, gives loans to solve liquidity crisis but confiscations from provincial rich, and does not subsidise senators.

e.g.2 . Nero's generosity to state, reforms of indirect taxation, responsible management but depletes treasury, personally extravagant, diminishes revenues of empire in favour of Greeks, gifts to mistresses and favorites (Acte, Doryphilus, Seneca), builds Golden House.

So:

1. a tendency to explain financial success or failure in terms of generalizing moral categories
2. a consequent neglect of outside constraints (such as changes in revenue or expenditure)
3. inconsistency and ambiguity: when is liberality profligacy? when do beneficia to amici become gifts to favorites?
4. contradictions from the perspective of the propertied classes. emperor should take less.....but be generous and leave the coffers full

How far did emperors feel constrained to act in accordance with this view despite their greater knowledge of the imperial finances?

2. Fiscus and Aerarium

F. G. B. Millar (1977) *The Emperor in the Roman World* chs. 1 & 4

P. A. Brunt (1990) *Roman Imperial Themes* chs. 7 & 16 (on the Fiscus)

Aerarium = Republican state treasury

Fiscus has various meanings including emperors' own wealth

Both controlled by emperor from Augustus' reign

1. slaves and freedmen of the emperor in domus divina (Suet. Aug 101)
2. equestrian procurators oversee estates and taxation
3. other member of the familia Caesaris

- a conceptual, ideological and accounting distinction
- tribute, indirect tax and vectigalia (rents) of public lands to aerarium; revenues of imperial estates to fiscus; bona damnatorum, probably to aerarium usually.
- no clear division of spending

Everything concentrated in the emperor's hands but it was convenient for him and for others to maintain the distinction.

3. Imperial Estates

D. J. Crawford (1976) 'Imperial Estates,' in M. I. Finley *Studies in Roman Property* pp. 35-70

attested in: Africa Proconsularis, Numidia, Mauretania Sitifensis, lower Egypt, Judaea, Syria, Lydia, Lycia, Phrygia, Pisidia, Lycaonia, Cilicia, Cappadocia, Galatia, Bithynia, Thrace, Macedonia, Thessaly, Attica, Pannonia, Noricum, Raetia, Italy, Sicily, Corsica, Sardinia, Spain, Gallia Belgica, Germany
ie: most provinces (and Italy) where we might expect evidence

acquisition:

- conquest. Egypt post Actium, ? crown lands of kings
- confiscation e.g. by Tiberius, Nero, Severus
- inheritance and gift e.g. Mauretanian estates owned by Hadrian's sister-in-law Matidia, Agrippa's lands

disposal

- gifts to imperial family and favorites e.g. Egyptian *ousia* owned by Livia, Germanicus, Pallas, Messalina, Narcissus or gifts of Nero to Doryphylus
- *some* reverted to emperor on their deaths
- sale. Trajan selling lands in Italy

a cumulative trend to accumulation?

AFRICA

Frontinus *de controv. agro* p.53 some private estates bigger than civic territories with villages on them around the villae. 'in Africa non exiguum possidet' (the emperor). cf. Pliny *NH* 18.35 on Nero executing six men who together owned half of Africa. An un-urbanized landscape?

The Bagradas Valley

D. Kehoe (1988) *The Economics of Agriculture on Roman Imperial Estates in North Africa = Hypomnemata* 89

- SW of Carthage, fertile climate, inland area in region from which large exports of grain were sent to Rome.
- six inscriptions set up by imperial tenants recording successful petitions
- estates included Saltus Burunitanus, Blandianus, Lamianus, each possibly named after an Augustan proconsul, possibly after previous owners
- managed by procurators at Carthage, via conductores and coloni, sharecroppers paying 1/3 produce as rent, with penalties for neglecting land and inducements to cultivate subseciva
- villages of peasants on estates. Local magistri, evidence of imperial cult. Emperors reserved the munera of the coloni for estates. SC of 138 allowed Lucilius Africanus to hold a market on the Saltus Beguensis.

ANATOLIA

S. Mitchell (1993) *Anatolia. Land, men and gods in Asia Minor. Volume I* ch.14

- Epigraphically attested series of large estates in inland valleys remote from cities e.g. that near Vegissus of the Sergii Pauli, a family of Italian descent and senatorial status.
- Some estates had Italian owners from mid C1st AD, others had Graeco-Anatolian landowners established in mid C1st B.C. Inhabitants settled in villages.
- From mid C2nd imperial holdings appear with inscriptions of imp. freedmen and slaves, suggesting imperial acquisition of previously private land.

EGYPT

- acquisition at conquest. early imperial ousiai especially in Fayum but also elsewhere in lower Egypt including Delta, Hermopolite, Oxyrhynchite and Memphite nomes.
- typically smaller units, managed as private property through short leases on land differentiated as orchard, grain land etc.
- some attempts to improve land (in the Ptolemaic tradition)

4. Imperial Expenditure

all figures per annum and approximate to a large degree

MILITARY EXPENDITURE

salaries	31 BC - AD 84	450 million HS
	84 - 202	600
	202-212	800
	212 -	1080

plus in excess of 40 million HS p.a. for *praemia* (discharge bonuses)

CIVIL EXPENDITURE

salaries equestrian and senatorial officials etc. 75 million HS

IRREGULAR EXPENDITURE

- congiaria and donativa (irregular gifts of cash on accessions, triumphs etc to civilians and military) ?average p.a.=10-50 million HS
- campaigns
- building projects, especially in Rome
- subsidies to barbarians
- gifts to amici

ESTIMATED BREAKDOWN OF FIGURES

army 75 % of costs
total *average* costs 600-800 million HS mid C1st
800-1000 million HS mid C2nd
1400-1600 million HS c. 215 A.D.
and major fluctuations in non-military budget.