Trajan's Imperial Alimenta:

An analysis of the values attached to children in Roman society in the *alimenta* of Trajan.

Master of Classics and Ancient Civilisations with a specialization in Ancient History.

2019-2020

Gavin Carroll O' Brien

First Reader: Dr. L. E. Tacoma

Second Reader: Dr. M. Flohr

Contents

Introduction

In the twenty-first century children are an intensely protected and catered for group within society. Playgrounds, schools, and clubs are attestations to the precious value which modern society places in its youth. That one's child should have as carefree a childhood as possible is the standard aspiration of modern parents and the voices and feelings of children are continually being heard. In contrast with modern times there is a distinct lack of voice from children of the ancient world. Their personalities and attributes are presented in both literature and visual representations by those male authors who felt them worthy of record and artists who catered to the tastes of wealthy clients. This lack of voice has not hindered historiography where the attitude of Roman society towards children has been a central topic in furthering our understanding of ancient childhood.

The relationship between Roman parents and their children is a complicated one. Children were loved, yet disposed of, wanted but also needed, an economic necessity and a burden. These are just some of the ambiguous values placed in the Roman child stemming from a number of historical issues. For instance, the rate of infant mortality in the first year of life was up to 40% in the Roman Empire. A lack of commemorative culture for infants and young children reinforced theories of an emotionally indifferent parent-child relationship as parents hardened themselves against the loss.[1] Mark Golden argues however that a lack of open grief by parents does not equate with indifference since commemorations had various social manifestations. He stresses the care and resources dedicated to children within ancient communities to ensure their protection and nurture, be they communal wet-nurses or religious rituals, arguing for a prudently selective but not indifferent attitude towards children.[2]

W. V. Harris demonstrated the high level of exposure conducted by ancient society, an unquestioned willingness to abandon infants to their deaths or a life of slavery, whilst child rearing as a whole was associated with poverty.[3] The ease with which Romans committed exposure is contrasted by the funerary dedications to older children discussed by

[1] Golden, Mark, 'Did the Ancients Care When Their Children Died?', *Greece & Rome* 35 (1988) 154-155; Hope, Valerie M., *Roman Death* (London 2009) 137-141.
[2] Golden, 'Did the Ancient Care When Their Children Died?', 156-159.
[3] Harris, W. V., 'Child-Exposure in the Roman Empire', *The Journal of Roman Studies* 84 (1994) 2-4, 6-7.

Eve D'Ambra. These dedications consisted of statues, reliefs, inscriptions and even oratory which emphasised the cruelty of fate and untimely death.[4] Within these children are often presented in a subjunctive form of what would have been, thus honouring the deceased, but also the 'guaranteed' aspirations of the parents who had lost their child and their own security in old age.[5]

In discussing the Roman family, Keith Bradley highlights the fluidity of the Roman *familia* and the various relationships which children experienced with other members of the *domus,* household, and how this impacted upon their development and social obligations.[6] This discussion focuses on the aristocratic household however, with little information on the *plebeian familia,* thus his argument may not easily reflect the experiences of the latter. He also examines child labour in the Roman Empire, agreeing with the concept of a Roman childhood, though concluding it was brief in order to send the child to work for monetary support.[7] Suzanne Dixon notes Roman society's recognition of children as a distinct group by the many rituals and traditions surrounding their attaining age milestones.[8] But she also highlights the disinterest with which adult Romans, particularly the literary class, had in childhood, and the ease with which many Romans chose to adopt rather than rear their own children.[9] Beryl Rawson argues a high level of affection between parents and children existed, based on the grief parents displayed at the death of their child, whilst agreeing with Richard Saller that the power of the *paterfamilias* over their child was far more restrained than traditionally understood.[10] She also highlights the propagandic value of young children for imperial propaganda.[11] However, Rawson's discussion also focuses upon the upper class experience and avoids significant discussion of the realities and hardships faced by children of the plebeian class.

Interpreting this relationship is no less complex when we consider the imperial *alimenta,* a form of state support for the subsistence of citizen children formed by Emperor

---

[4] D'Ambra, Eve, 'Racing with Death: Circus Sarcophagi and the Commemoration of Children in Roman Italy', in; Cohen, Ada, & Rutter, Jeremy B. (eds.), *Construction of Childhood in Ancient Greece and Italy* (Princeton 2007) 339-40.
[5] Ibid., 340.
[6] Bradley, Keith R., *Discovering the Roman Family: Studies in Roman Social History* (New York 1991) 4-6.
[7]Ibid.,117-118.
[8] Dixon, Suzanne, *The Roman Family* (London 1992) 101-102, 108-110.
[9] Ibid., 98-100, 112-13.
[10] Rawson, Beryl, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy* (New York 2003) 220-21.
[11] Ibid, 40-41, 60, 223-24.

Trajan (r.98-117). The *alimenta* itself was not a new concept, some private *alimenta* having existed since the middle of the first century A.D., but these were limited to a handful of localities and could only be funded by the wealthiest in society.[12] Trajan's reign offers an interesting new departure in the creation of a state funded scheme stretching across Italy. It was one of the most expensive, organised and far reaching projects undertaken by the Roman administration, enduring for a century and a half later before disappearing in the later third century.[13]

The discovery of the Bronze Tables at Ligures Baebiani and Veleia, as well as Pliny the Younger's description of his *alimenta* at Comum, means that scholars have a relatively firm knowledge as to how the *alimenta* functioned.[14] In essence it consisted of imperial loans provided to landowners in various districts of Italy calculated at around 8% the value of their land. The total sum required depended upon the number of children to be supported locally. Landowners would then pay yearly interest payment of 5% which would be used to fund the local *alimenta*.[15] Parents within these urban centres could register their children; male, female, legitimate or illegitimate, who would then be selected to partake in the scheme receiving an allowance based upon their gender and social status.[16]

The motivation for Trajan's scheme continues to be debated as no ancient source states his intentions. The closest we come to this is Pliny the Younger's *Panegyricus* wherein he associates the *alimenta* with the intention of nurturing children to provide recruits for the army, hinting at a declining citizen population. [17] This theory has been supported by Richard Duncan-Jones and Alice Ashley.[18] Others have been more sceptical however with Hazel G. Ramsey arguing that the *alimenta* was the by-product of a primary response to an Italian agrarian crisis by investing loans in rural farms, while making use of the interest for the *alimenta*, a theory supported by Julian Bennet but refuted by Richard Duncan Jones.[19] Greg

[12] *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 5.5262, 11.1602 (1), 14.350 (1).
[13] Duncan-Jones, Richard, 'The Purpose and Organisation of the Alimenta', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 32 (1964) 143-44; Ashley, Alice M., 'The 'Alimenta' of Nerva and His Successors', *The English Historical Review* 36 (1921) 15-16.
[14] *CIL* 9.1455 (1), 11.1147 (1); Pl. *Ep.*7.18.
[15] Duncan-Jones, 'The Purpose and Organisation of the Alimenta', 123-24.
[16] Bennett, Julian, *Trajan Optimus Princeps* (London 1997) 87-88.
[17] Pliny, *Pan.* 28.4-6.
[18] Duncan-Jones, 'The Purpose and Organisation of the Alimenta', 127; Ashly, 'The 'Alimenta' of Nerva and His Successors', 5, 8.
[19] Ramsey, Hazel G. 'Government Relief during the Roman Empire', *The Classical Journal* 31 (1936) 479; Bennet, *Optimus Princeps,* 86-88, 90; Duncan-Jones, 'The Purpose and Organisation of the Alimenta' 129-30.

Woolf meanwhile argues that the *alimenta* was primarily a means to bind the emperor closer to the Italian population as an extension of his patronage and generosity.[20] As to the *alimenta's* benefit, Alice Ashley determines that the allowances given would have sufficiently provided sustenance for the receiving child, but Julian Bennet has questioned the degree to which the loan could have aided children and families, given the limited number of those registered, focusing more on the benefits which it held for small farmers.[21]

Trajan did however make firm use of the *alimenta* in his imperial propaganda, from Pliny's *Panegyricus,* to coin legends, sculptural reliefs and arches.[22] If we are to regard his policies as a new precedent then clearly new attitudes towards children by society were formulating. This leads us to the central question of this paper: What values are attributed to children by the existence of the imperial *alimenta* that enticed Trajan to invest in them? Within this there appear to be three categories; demographic, economic and symbolic values, which will form the basis for answering the central question.

Chapter one will focus on the demographic value of children, often overlooked in earlier studies. Children made up a significant proportion of the empires population but had never been a central focus of imperial patronage before. What encouraged this new departure in social policy and the formation of the *alimenta,* did it spring from a humanitarian outlook or was there truly a population crisis? Being limited to Italy, what was the scope of the *alimenta,* and which children were deemed appropriate recipients? Overall, what does it tell us about Roman societies view of gender and status, particularly of their children?

The second chapter will discuss the economic value of children. Was the *alimenta* designed purely for them or was it a by-product of a different plan altogether? The allowances might appear low to a viewer, but what was the purchasing power of the *alimenta*? Could it really hope to make a difference in the lives of Roman families? Finally, what were the wider economic implications for aiding in the survival of children? Could they alone be said to benefit from the *alimenta,* or did it fulfil a wider public role?

Finally, the third chapter will discuss the symbolic value of Roman children. What did it mean for Trajan to invest in them? Surely there were easier alternatives by which he could achieve the loyalty of his subjects or does his investment tell us more about Roman societies

[20] Woolf, Greg, 'Food Poverty and Patronage: The Significance of the Epigraphy of the Roman Alimentary Schemes in early Imperial Italy', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 58 (1990) 225-227.
[21] Ashley, 'The 'Alimenta' of Nerva and His Successors', 15; Bennet, *Optimus Princeps,* 83-84.
[22] Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy,* 60-62

attitudes than is apparent? Finally, what does his propaganda tell us about his exploits relating to the *alimenta* and how did its creation allow him to stabilize his reign and dynasty?

To answer the central question a variety of qualitative information from a variety of sources will be utilized. This work shall make substantial use of Pliny, analysing his work in detail, as the only eyewitness present and whose work will provide insight into the outlook of Roman society at that time. Epigraphic remains relating to the *alimenta*, reliefs and coinage as forms of formal imperial propaganda and quasi-political statements shall also be discussed. Finally, by close study of existing secondary literature relating to the *alimenta* this thesis will both build upon what has gone before but also hopefully add to the existing corpus surrounding the *alimenta*.

Chapter One: The Demographic Value of Children

Trajan's imperial *alimenta* was a vast undertaking, seeking impact upon the lives of Roman children across Italy. Yet Trajan's motives for establishing the scheme remain to be satisfactorily explained. From a modern perspective the idea of a child-support scheme seems natural. Indeed, children formed a major demographic in Roman society, with Tim G. Parkin and Richard Saller both demonstrating that the proportion of the population aged under 15 out-numbered those aged over 50 by 5:1.[23] Yet, it took until the reigns of Nerva and Trajan before an emperor began to look specifically towards their well-being and on such a scale. What encouraged this new departure in social policy that led to the imperial *alimenta*? The scope of the *alimenta* was limited to Italy and even then it could not hope to cater for every Roman child. Which children were deemed as appropriate for selection and how many could hope to be aided? Finally, what does the scheme tell us about the Roman societies attitudes towards gender and status values within the context of Roman citizenship?

As stated in the introduction, scholars have a good understanding of how the alimenta functioned but the motives for its creation are uncertain and must be interpreted from the few extant primary sources relating to it. A popular theory is that the *alimenta* was created in response to a declining Italian citizen population. Richard Duncan-Jones argues in favour of this, stating the *alimenta* was: "intended to encourage a rise in the birth-rate", in order to produce more recruits for the army, a theory earlier supported by Alice Ashley. He refers to Pliny's *Panegyricus* and specific coin types from Trajan's reign which advertise both the *alimenta* and the restoration of Italy, which together suggest a demographic motive.[24] This argument has proven controversial. Julian Bennet and J. K. Evens both argue that the limited scope of the *alimenta* meant it could not increase the population but was intended to maintain

[23] Parkin, Tim G., *Old Age in the Roman World* (Baltimore 2003) 51, 280-81; Saller, Richard, *Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman Family* (Cambridge 1994) 190.
[24] Duncan-Jones, Richard, *The Economy of the Roman Empire: Quantitative Studies* (Cambridge 1982) 295, 318-19; 'The Purpose and Organisation of the Alimenta' 127; Ashly, 'The 'Alimenta' of Nerva and His Successors', 5, 8.

existing levels. Richard Duncan-Jones concedes to this point but maintains that the Roman objective was a population increase. [25]

The discovery that the Italian population was actually increasing in the first century AD has further hampered this theory. Censuses were held regularly during the Roman Republic but became less common in early empire and the figures given are difficult to interpret due to rapid population increases, poor recording and lack of details regarding locations and the omission of non-citizens.[26] But providing a margin of error, it seems reasonable that their figures are somewhat accurate and that the Italian citizen population had risen from approximately 4.4 million in AD 14 to between 7-8 million by the second century, though higher estimates exist.[27] Trajan's reign therefore coincided with the peak expansion of the Italian population it.[28] Thus any connection between Trajan's *alimenta* and a response to population decline seems unlikely.

We should not dismiss the argument entirely, however. Ancient censuses varied in frequency, quality and accuracy across regions, nor were they easily accessible for reference as today, there was therefore no way of knowing the true state of the population.[29] Analysing ancient authors highlights this confused picture. Pliny the Younger has proven to be the most influential for our understanding of the social realities of the period, albeit from an aristocratic perspective. His *Panegyricus* is central our interpretation of the *alimenta's* purpose. In it Pliny states that Trajan established his *alimenta* in Rome shortly after arriving in the city, though his motives go unmentioned.[30] As a result of the *alimenta* Pliny states: "There is indeed great encouragement to have children in the promise of allowances and donations..." it is in fact now a: "profit to rear children'.[31] The children supported by the scheme shall: "…pass from a child's allowance…to a soldiers pay", indeed: "…the army and

[25] Bennet, *Optimus Princeps,* 89-90; Evans, J.K., 'Wheat Production and its Social Consequences in the Roman World, *The Classical Quarterly* 31 (1981) 437-38; Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire*, 318-19.
[26] Brunt, P. A., *Italian Manpower 225B.C.-A.D. 14* (New York 1971) 104-6, 113-16; Scheidel Walter, 'Roman Population Size: The Logic of the Debate', in Luuk de Ligt and Simon Northwood (eds.), *People, Land and Politics: Demographic Developments and the Transformation of Roman Italy 300BC-AD14* (Leiden 2008) 19-21, 62-63.
[27] Brunt, *Italian Manpower 225B.C.-A.D. 14*, 116-120; Scheidel, 'Roman Population Size', 22-25.
[28] Scheidel, Walter, 'A Model for Real Income Growth in Roman Italy', *Historia Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 56 (2007) 328-29.
[29] Brunt, *Italian Manpower 225B.C.-A.D.14*, 114-15.
[30] Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 26.1-2 (trans. Radice 2015).
[31] Ibid., 27.1-2.

the citizen body will be completed by their numbers".[32] These children of the *alimenta* will then go on to have their own offspring, leading to further prosperity for the state.[33]

Scholarly interpretation of the *alimenta's* purpose clearly stems from Pliny's *Panegyricus* and its idealized outcomes, which implies a population decline.[34] Pliny suggests an unwillingness among the populace to rear children, especially among his own social class who must be: "encouraged to rear children by high rewards and comparable penalties".[35] This attitude also pervades his letters, with one example recording his speaking at length on the benefits of child rearing to an audience at Comum, so that they might be persuaded to attain those privileges granted to a few.[36]

The privileges and penalties are a reference to the Augustan marriage laws, the *Lex Julia* and *Lex Papia Poppaea*, which penalised unmarried and childless Romans, whilst granting benefits to married couples with multiple children.[37] Whilst officially designed to encourage marriage and procreation, and technically applying to all Roman citizens, closer inspection demonstrates their being relevant only to the propertied classes. Their privileges and penalties primarily related to inheritance and property rights which would have had little benefit for the plebeian class.[38]

A central issue Pliny associates with child rearing is its cost, which the *alimenta* will reduce. There are reasonable grounds to believe this. Pliny had attempted to alleviate the burden of child rearing among the citizens of Comum in the forms of a local *alimenta*, a library and contribution towards payment for a local teacher.[39] Tacitus informs us of Marcus Hortensius, a formerly wealthy senator who obeyed Augustus' request and begat children to ensure the survival of his family line. Falling on hard times however he had to beg Tiberius for monetary support for his children or risk his family's financial ruin.[40] The anxieties of Pliny's class relate to inheritance laws requiring them to divide up their estates among their

[32] Pliny, *Pan.* 26.3-4, 28.5-7.
[33] Ibid., 28.7.
[34] Ashly, 'The 'Alimenta' of Nerva and His Successors', 8; Ramsey, Hazel G., 'Government relief during the Roman Empire, *The Classical Journal* 31 (1936), 479.
[35] Pliny, *Pan.* 26.5-6.
[36] Pliny, *Epistulae*, 1.8.11-13.
[37] Dixon, *The Roman Family*, 120.
[38] Wallace-Hadrill, Andrew, 'Family and Inheritance in the Augustan Marriage Laws', in Jonathan Edmondson (ed.), *Augustus* (Edinburgh 2014) 251-57.
[39] Pliny, *Ep.* 7.18, 1.8, 4.13.
[40] Tacitus, *Annals*, 2.36-38.

children, potentially leading to their family's reduced social status by not meeting the financial requirements for their rank.[41]

For the plebeian classes risks to inheritance and rank were irrelevant compared with need to afford sustenance for their children.[42] The early age at which children began work to supplement their family's income highlights this burden.[43] The practice of infant exposure was common among all classes and could act as a selective regulation to family size.[44] It reflects a prudence among parents, who had to decide how many children they could afford to maintain in order to ensure the survival of those children in whom they had chosen to invest.[45]

But the need to regulate family size must be weighed against the chances of a child reaching adulthood. Infant mortality was up to 40% in the first year of life, and remained high for the first ten years.[46] Indeed, average life expectancy at birth was only 25 years, and women who survived to the end of their reproductive lives, approximately age 45, would be required to bear 4-6 children to make up for the shortfall as a result of the death of their peers or those who bore fewer children to ensure the population growth rate remained at 0%.[47] Yet the population was increasing, and it seems safe to argue that the average Roman family size possibly fell between 4-6 individuals. Furthermore, communal and kin networks likely played a role in reducing the burdens of rearing multiple children among lower classes, whilst childbearing was a deeply ingrained social expectation for women.[48]

The role of children in society further mitigated the avoidance of childrearing. Children were expected to continue and enhance their family line through public offices, works, and marriages, with many monuments to deceased children depicting them in a subjunctive form with regalia of offices and professions.[49] Pliny refers to the prestige which a son would bring to him and his wife given their ancestry and connections.[50] Children were

[41] Wallace-Hadrill, 'Family and Inheritance in the Augustan Marriage Laws', 254-55; Dixon, *The Roman Family,* 122.
[42] Evens, J. K., 'Wheat Production and its Social Consequences in the Roman World', 428-29, 435.
[43] Bradly, *Discovering the Roman Family*, 115-18.
[44] Harris, 'Child-Exposure in the Roman Empire', 1-2, 11, 13, 18.
[45] Golden, 'Did the Ancients Care When Their Children Died?', 159.
[46] Ibid.,154-155.
[47] Hin, Saskia, *The Demography of Roman Italy: Population Dynamics in an Ancient Conquest Society 201BCE-14CE* (New York 2013) 172-3.
[48] Hin, Saskia, *The Demography of Roman Italy*, 193-5, 204, 208.
[49] D'Ambra, 'Racing with Death', 340-41.
[50] Pliny, *Ep.* 8.10.

essential in supplementing lower class family income and caring for their parents in old age out of familial *pietas*. *Pietas* was a natural obligation for children of all social classes to act dutifully towards their parents', care for them in old age and perform their funeral rites upon death in return for their parent's nurturing and gift of life.[51]

Clearly Pliny's presentation of his fellow Romans is misleading. Children had important functions in Roman society and while family sizes varied there was no significant aversion to childrearing. Even his reference to '5000' future soldiers is misleading since Italy had long ceased to be a recruiting ground for the Roman army in favour of the provinces. [52] How then could he claim their to be a need to encourage procreation? The answer is found in the visible world which undoubtedly influenced both Pliny and his literary class into perceiving that there was a population decline.

Children were extremely vulnerable in their earliest years, with many succumbing to a variety of illnesses. While poor sanitation and disease might affect an urban population, malnutrition was widespread. An expensive road-based food trade and poor Italian agriculture meant that food imported from the coast was limited, whilst famines could be frequent.[53] Farmers were at the mercy of what their land could produce both for their families and market sale.[54] Crop failures could have devastating consequences for an urban community, Rome being the most famous example with special doles to help maintain its citizens.[55] Indeed, death by malnutrition was an everyday reality.

Exposure was also common with many new-borns deposited at known areas both outside and within urban settlements.[56] Given the connection between childbirth and public morality in the ancient world, it is no surprise that exposure was viewed as morally reprehensible by writers like Pliny, Plutarch and Polybius, who equated it with the moral and numerical decline of a population.[57] For thinkers like Pliny it went counter to Augustan moral codes which encouraged larger families of up to five children.[58] Thus in reading Pliny we

---

[51] Saller, *Patriarchy Property and Death in the Roman Family*, 105-6, 109-14: Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy*, 223-225: Bradley, *Discovering the Roman Family*, 117-118.
[52] Wallace-Hadrill, 'Family and Inheritance in the Augustan Marriage Laws', 252-53; Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire*, 316-17.
[53] Evens, J.K. 'Wheat Production and its Social Consequences in the Roman World', 428-29.
[54] Ibid, 434-436.
[55] Woolf, 'Food, Poverty and Patronage' 211-14.
[56] Harris, 'Child-Exposure in the Roman Empire', 9, 15, 21; Pliny, *Ep.*, 10.65, 66.
[57] Harris, 'Child Exposure in the Roman Empire', 6-8; Golden, 'Did the Ancients Care When Their Children Died?', 158-59; Woolf, 'Food Poverty and Patronage', 225.
[58] Dixon, *The Roman Family*, 120.

should not interpret that his fellow Romans were childless or avoiding child-rearing, but that they were not rearing a morally acceptable number. Undoubtedly many parents lost all of their children regardless and though Augustan morals encouraged procreation the psychological toll which these loses had on parents must have weighed heavy, whilst for females the dangers of childbirth might have convinced them to give up.[59]

One final visible influence may have the number of children compared to adult males in the Roman population. Average life expectancy at birth was approximately 25 years. Though this average would increase over time the probability of dying before attaining it were high.[60] As noted above, children under the age of 15 greatly outnumbered those Romans over the age of 59. Tim Parkin estimated that the likelihood of a child having a living grandfather at birth on their mothers' side was one in three, but for their fathers' side it was only one in every six or seven.[61] Further, Richard Saller calculated that 1/3 of Roman children were fatherless by early adolescence, whilst 2/3 were fatherless by age 25.[62] The reason for this is the late age of marriage for Roman males around their thirties, compared with females in late adolescence.[63]

As such we could argue that the visibility of child mortality, malnutrition, the common exposure of new-borns, coupled with the limited sizes of Roman families and a shortage of adult Roman males compared with children who were at risk of dying created a belief of a population crisis in the Roman mindset. Naturally, the Romans did not 'die out', but from their perspective it must have seemed there was a risk. Thus, Pliny suggestion of a crisis is understandable within this context, regardless of its reality. We can thus argue that by creating the *alimenta* Trajan was acting to mitigate the effects of a 'crisis' and preserve the Roman population.[64]

But which children were to receive the *alimenta*? Ancient sources are ambiguous, the only obvious criterion being that the child held Roman citizenship. Pliny states that only children registered in Rome could obtain a place on the scheme there, whilst his own scheme was for

[59] Pliny, *Ep.* 8.10, 8.11.
[60] Parkin, *Old Age in the Roman World*, 49.
[61] Ibid, 52.
[62] Saller, *Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman Family*, 189.
[63] Parkin, *Old Age in the Roman World*, 52
[64] Pliny, *Pan.* 26.*7*

the benefit of the children of Comum.[65] The *Epitome de Caesaribus* notes that the emperor Nerva ordered: "..girls and boys born to indigent parents [to be] fed at public expense throughout the towns of Italy".[66] Finally, in a letter to Marcus Aurelius from Fronto, the latter refers to an edict in which Marcus stated the desire that: "there should flourish on their holdings unimpaired youth" or as Fronto puts it: "..that [Marcus] desires to see the Italian towns stocked with a plentiful supply of young men".[67] This is likely a reference to the *alimenta* which had been replenished during Marcus' reign.[68] The focus on urban children is interesting considering the majority of the population were rural based and equally poverty stricken, with only approximately one-eighth involved in non-agricultural labour.[69]

This need not represent a higher value being placed in urban children over rural or a disqualification of the latter from the scheme. It simply reflects existing realities. Given the difficulty of land travel rural families would have been hindered in journeying to the towns partaking in the scheme. Their chances of survival, even during famines, were also higher compared to urban families dependent on local rural produce. Indeed, steps had been taken under Nerva to redistribute public land to the urban poor of Rome, while the use of urban gardens as a 'poor man's farm' was commonplace.[70] The visibility of the 'population crisis' would have been evidently greater in urban areas. But many urban children were farm labourers, working the land in the vicinity of their town and would have been eligible for the scheme.[71] Thus, while nothing stopped rural children from seeking a place on the *alimenta*, it was designed with urban children as its primary recipients.

But even within urban centres there is confusion. The *Epitome de Caesaribus* specified Nerva's desire to aid children of 'indigent parents', but this work dates to the later fourth century AD and could contain Christian anachronisms regarding charity.[72] Pliny assures the *alimenta* was not exclusive to the urban poor by praising the influence it will have on inducing members of his own class to rear children.[73] The example of Hortensius indicates

[65] Pliny, *Pan.* 26.3; *Ep.* 7.18
[66] Aurelius Victor, *Epitome de Caesaribus,* 12.4 (trans. Banchich 2018).
[67] Fronto, *Correspondence*, 2, 112 (tr. Haines 2015).
[68] *CIL*, 11. 05957, 6. 10222; *Historia Augusta, Marcus,* 26.6
[69] Scheidel, Walter, 'Demography', in W. Scheidel, I. Morris, and R. Saller (Eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World* (Cambridge 2007) 80-81.
[70] Bennet, *Optimus Princeps,* 37-38; Evens, *Wheat Production, and its Social Consequences* 428, 433.
[71] Bradley, *Discovering the Roman Family,* 113-14.
[72] Woolf, 'Food Poverty and Patronage', 204.
[73] Pliny, *Pan.* 26.4-6.

that class did not exempt a person from seeking financial aid.[74] A private scheme from Sicca Venaria in North Africa specifies that members of the towns *municipes* or citizen body as well as *incolae,* here meaning Roman citizens who were not citizens of the town, were eligible for the scheme provided they owned property in the town or its region.[75] Therefore one could argue that to be among those eligible for the imperial *alimenta* you were required to be both a Roman citizen and also a citizen of the town with an investment in its region.

Interestingly orphans were unlikely to be eligible for the scheme since the allowance was intended to be given to their parents to procure their food.[76] An inscription from Asisium commemorates the receiving of the *alimenta* by local children with parental consent.[77] The need for permission highlights the contractual nature of the *alimenta,* where children entered a network of social obligations connected to the emperor acting as a benefactor. This might require a return later on from the '*pueri et puellae alimentorum*', statues being a common example.[78] Boys and girls below ages 14 and 12 were minors in Roman law and could not enter into contractual obligations without guardian consent.[79] In granting permission parents too entered into an obligation with the emperor to ensure that their child reached their majority whilst possibly deterring them from committing future exposure or selling of their child into slavery.[80]

We can easily argue that the upper echelons would abstain from the *alimenta*. Hortensius had requested aid from Tiberius but he received HS200,000 per son and his dignity was greatly diminished.[81] While being among the '*pueri et puellae alimentorum*' might be distinguishing for plebeian children, for the upper-classes it might be associated with poverty. Funds provided for the *alimenta* also came from wealthy landowners and it is unlikely that they would then apply for it themselves. The allowance ranged from HS10-HS16 per month and it is doubtful that this would have aided an upper-class family in raising a single child which they could otherwise likely afford. For a lower-class family however, it was presumably of great benefit. Indeed, Pliny's critiques of his peers focus on the

[74] Tacitus, *Annals,* 2.36-37.
[75] Klokner, Tomas, 'The Roman *alimenta* in the West provinces', *International Journal of Scientific research and Innovative Technology* 3 (2016) 19-20; *CIL* 8. 1641.
[76] Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire,* 300-1.
[77] *CIL*, 11. 09395 (1).
[78] Woolf, *Food, Poverty and Patronage,* 215-16: *CIL* 9. 05700 (1), 11. 5956 (1), 11. 5757 (1).
[79] Saller, *Patriarchy, Property and Death,* 183-85.
[80] Evens, 'Wheat Production, and its Social Consequences in the Roman World', 438.
[81] Tacitus, *Annals,* 2.37-38.

educational or marriage costs of childrearing, not the cost of food. Thus, his reference to the profitability of child rearing for his peers in the *Panegyricus* should be considered a literary trope rather than an indication that the wealthy would actively use it.

The *alimenta* was clearly expected to be utilized by the urban poor. But how many might be supported? Richard Duncan-Jones notes the presence of the *alimenta* in approximately fifty Italian towns and estimates that only four hundred could have benefitted from the scheme and within this only 100,000–150,000 children.[82] While the Italian citizen population numbered between 7-8 million, the urban population numbered only 1.2 million, half of whom were in Rome which had an independent scheme.[83] Competition was thus narrowed but how likely was it that a place was guaranteed? Duncan-Jones suggests a limit to the number of children which a family could put forward for the scheme as being one or two. He argues that at most only 300 families could have benefited from the scheme at Veleia though there were likely more.[84]

Calculating the population of ancient settlements is extremely difficult, but an estimate might be gathered by looking at the settlements size and applying the pre-modern density of 120-180 people per urban hectare.[85] Veleia covered approximately 10 hectares, which provides an urban population of range of between 1200-1800 people.[86] If we take it that Roman family sizes were between 4-6 people then that provides us with a maximum possible range of 450 families for the town or a minimum of 200. Adjusting our calculations to say that Veleia was only 8 hectares gives us a population of between 960-1140, and a maximum of 360 families or a minimum of 160. Finally, suggesting Veleia totalled 12 hectares then this would produce a potential range of 1440-2160 inhabitants with a maximum of 540 families or a minimum of 360. Naturally, these figures are a rough guide and one must consider other elements in the body of an urban population. But the outcomes demonstrate

[82] Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire*, 290, 317.
[83] Scheidel, Walter, 'A Model of Real Income Growth in Roman Italy', 326-27; Rickman, Geoffrey, 'The Corn Supply of Rome' (Oxford 1980) 189.
[84] Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire*, 269-70, 301. He compares it with Petelia, a town of similar size which had a potential maximum of 2,400 if one included the town and its hinterland.
[85] De Ligt, Luuk, *Studies in the Demographic History of Roman Italy 225B.C.-A.D.100* (Cambridge 2012) 200-202.
[86] Ibid., Appendix 1.3.

that the *alimenta* of Veleia could meet the demands of most if not more of its population even at the highest range if it maintained a single child limit.[87]

Ligures Baebiani, located in south-central Italy is more difficult to calculate because its urban range does not survive but it is noted as having been a small town and its *alimenta* scheme was less than half the size of Veleia, catering for only 110-120 children.[88] The difficulties for calculations are further hampered by the differences in urban density in northern Italy compared with southern Italy, where seemingly large settlements covering a wide area had in fact much smaller populations. The walls of the town of Velia for instance encompassed an area of 100 hectares but only a quarter of this was inhabited.[89] Thus any calculations are highly speculatory but if we assume that the *alimenta* of Veleia could meet the requirements of most its populace then the same might be true of Ligures Baebiani.

Such an assumption would mean that Ligures Baebiani could have encompassed no more than 8 hectares as its small scheme would have struggled to aid even the minimum of 160 families. Indeed, the scheme would suggest a more likely size of 5 hectares, where the process applied above would leave us with a maximum possible range of 225 families or a minimum of 100 for the town, giving a total population of between 600-900. This is more in keeping with figures of coverage from the Veleian scheme. But equally the number of inhabitants per hectare was not necessarily restricted to the limits above and there could have been more families in an area than the archaeological record would suppose.[90]

If true, the findings give us an estimate of the range of the *alimenta* and a number of possibilities. Taking the higher numbers shows that the *alimenta* could cater for at least half of an urban population. If we assume the lower numbers then there was a possibility that some families could have put forward more than one child to receive the benefit. It seems more probable however that selection would include those rural families in the vicinity since they were not disqualified from applying and it would allow for the greatest possible reach.[91]

---

[87] De Ligt, *Studies in the Demographic History of Roman Italy 225B.C.-A.D.100*, 206-208. De Ligt notes that the small towns of Northern Italy were never larger than 15 hectares, the average being 10.4 hectares.
[88] Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire*, Appendix 6; De Ligt, Luuk, *Studies in the Demographic History of Roman Italy 225B.C.-A.D.100*, Appendix 2.7.
[89] De Ligt, Luuk, *Studies in the Demographic History of Roman Italy 225B.C.-A.D.100*, 228-32, Appendix 2.8.
[90] Ibid., 211-14, 222-224.
[91] Ibid., 232-33.

In all scenarios there is still an element of competition. Selection was likely via *subsortitio*, or lot, the original method for choosing citizens for the *fumentationes* in Rome, and though it fell out of use there it was still in place for other imperial distributions. Papyri from Oxyrhynchus attest its continued use in that city for grain distributions in the late third century.[92] This method makes sense when we consider the role of the *quaestor alimentorum* who had the duty of filling vacancies in the scheme.[93] Any shortfall might also be made up by any private or supplementary schemes by local patrons, further increasing its range.[94]

Distinct to the Trajanic scheme is the allowance values set for the children. Legitimate boys and girls received HS16 and HS12, while illegitimate boys and girls received HS12 and HS10.[95] This offers us insight into the gender values of Roman society. Private schemes usually rounded numbers, setting an equal quota for both genders or made it gender specific.[96] In this case however parents chose which of their children to place on the scheme. Of the 300 chosen at Veleia boys numbered 246 to only 35 girls.[97] The number of girls given probably represents families who lacked surviving sons, but the boys were unlikely to be entirely without sisters, thus it cannot be considered an accurate description of the towns child population. This supports the argument for the inclusion of rural children in proximity to the town who could make the journey to receive the *alimenta*. The values given for either gender also seem to reflect a societal expectation. Even in private schemes where girls are favoured monetarily, where circumstances required their share would be reduced in favour of boys.[98] The valuations also suggest an encouragement for the rearing of males over females by the Roman administration due to the perceived threat of the population decline.

Finally, the inclusion of the *spurii* on the Table of Veleia has been assumed as the result of favouritism.[99] *Spurius* children were the product of unions not recognised by the

[92] Rickman, Geoffrey, *The Corn Supply of Ancient Rome*, 177-79.
[93] Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire*, 301-302.
[94] *CIL* 2.1174, 8.22904, 980, 1641.
[95] Ashly, 'The 'Alimenta' of Nerva and His Successors' 13.
[96] Hemelrijk, Emily A., *Hidden Lives, Public Personae. Women and Civic Life in the Roman West* (New York 2015) 150-52.
[97] Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire*, 294. An early trial scheme at Veleia contained 18 boys and 1 girl giving a total of 300.
[98] Hemelrijk, *Hidden Lives, Public Personae*, 152-54. A supplementary scheme at Hispalis in Hispania seems to have provided HS40 for girls and HS30 for boys from foundation worth HS50,000. Any surplus funds were to be distributed to boys however and any shortfall was to be made up by reducing the allowance allotted to the girls.
[99] Ashley, 'The 'Alimenta' of Nerva and His Successors' 14: Klokner, 'The Roman *alimenta* in the West provinces', 23.

state, such as relations between different social ranks; a senator and a freewoman or a soldier and a citizen woman. *Spurii* took their status from their mother, if she was a slave then so were they, but if they were freeborn Roman citizens they faced few legal or social stigmas' but were excluded from certain social benefits.[100] For example, Augustus had prohibited *spurii* from being registered at birth in Rome, thus preventing them from accessing the corn dole there, a measure which remained in place until its removal by Marcus Aurelius.[101] But was their inclusion on public or private *alimentary* schemes typical?

Inscriptions of private schemes typically state the genders of the children but not birth status. This could mean that such a status was irrelevant in those communities or that *spurii* were indeed excluded. However, one inscription does refer to distinct payments to children based on their social status, mimicking the value system of the Trajanic scheme which it post-dates.[102] Tomas Klokner argues that their inclusion on that private *alimenta* was again favouritism on the part of the *quaestor* or *curator alimentorum* who had the ability to select new candidates.[103] However for an imperial scheme as complex as Trajan's it is unlikely that children would be admitted and at a lower value if their inclusion and values were not pre-determined by the Roman government. Further, Trajan had been frustrated by the poor administration and corruption of local Italian councils and the scheme had been designed to evade this.[104] Though less well preserved, Duncan-Jones believes that the inscription at Ligures Baebiani also included *Spurii*, arguing that the figures at Veleia represented a standard value for the imperial scheme.[105]

Favouritism then seems unlikely to account for the inclusion of the *spurii*, and though only two were supported this may represent a minimum requirement and a point of future reference for private schemes in an attempt to increase their inclusion. We can also argue that Trajan might be attempting to set a lower value to encourage the separation of the legitimate and illegitimate in private schemes by means of his example. This need not represent social animosity towards illegitimate children, rather it reflects the Augustan morals discussed earlier built into the scheme to encourage Roman marriage and the rearing of legitimate

[100] Dixon, *The Roman Family*, 124; Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy*, 254, 264, 266-67.
[101] Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman* Italy, 111-12; Dixon, *The Roman* Family, 125, 229 n.135.
[102] Klokner, 'The Roman *alimenta* in the West provinces', 23.
[103] Ibid, 19, 23.
[104] Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire*, 297, 298-99.
[105] Ibid, 341-2.

offspring, while still recognising the value of *spurii* as citizens and their value for the Roman population as a whole.

Overall, though we must be cautious with Pliny's *Panegyricus* there is reason to accept that the *alimenta* was the product of a perceived population decline by Roman elites. Their proof was in the visible world where high child mortality, and a shortage of adult male Romans gave a sense that something was wrong. Though favouring urban children, others were not excluded from obtaining a place on the scheme. Indeed, if our calculations are correct then the scheme was genuine in its attempts to remedy its cause, being able to reach at least of an urban population if not more should the one or two child per household limit be maintained. The values set for the receivers reflected societal expectations and it had the goal to prioritize the rearing of males whilst also encouraging marriage for the production of legitimate children. Nevertheless, the *alimenta* recognised the right of all citizen children to partake in it regardless of gender and status and a recognition by the state of their demographic importance.

Chapter Two: The Economic Value of Children

Trajan's *alimenta* was a complex and meticulously organised scheme stretching across Italy and involving hundreds of landed estates. For the scheme to function loans were distributed to property owners who mortgaged a section of their land worth 8% its total value with a yearly interest payment of 5% which would fund the local *alimenta*. The loans appear to have been perpetual to facilitate the schemes' long-term viability though the effectiveness of this method and the 'perpetuity' of the loans has been questioned. The heavy investment and planning of the *alimenta* have sparked debates that it was a by-product of a primary economic motive to relieve an Italian agrarian crisis. Unfortunately, ancient sources remain silent. Nevertheless, the economic motives of the *alimenta* continue to intrigue scholars. What then were the economic motives surrounding Trajan's establishment of his *alimenta*. Were they purely related to children? How should we view the loans, did they prove a benefit or a burden for the landowners involved? What was the real value of the allowances, could they make a difference or was it merely tokenism? How does it compare with other such perpetual foundations both public and private?

Hazel G. Ramsey argued that the *alimenta* was conceived from a response to Italian agrarian crisis by investing loans in small farms, saving them from impoverishment. She argued that the Veleian table records the names of small farmers who received the loans, their interest repayments funding their municipalities' *alimenta* whilst saving their farms and halting rural population decline.[106] Julian Bennett supports this theory arguing that small-medium sized farmers were the primary recipients and stood to benefit from these loans. He interprets the *alimenta* among the wider agrarian reforms of the late first century AD. These were begun by Emperor Nerva (r. 96-98) in response to a food shortage among the plebeian classes in Rome and Italy. This was due to a series of poor harvests, which continued into the reign of Trajan, and the decline and absorption of small-medium sized farms into larger *latifundia*, or 'villa estates' which favoured slave labour over freeborn Italians, resulting in rural poverty and

[106] Ramsay, Hazel G., 'Government Relief During the Roman Empire', *The Classical Journal* 31 (1936) 479, 483-5.

population decline.[107] Indeed Nerva's reintroduction of the *ager publicus*, with a fund of HS60 million, for the distribution of public land to the plebeian class of Rome, would seem to indicate an urban food supply crisis in Italy, as well as an urban population overload as a result of declining farms.[108] Trajan himself would attempt an expansion of the baking industry in Rome by offering full citizenship to those holders of Latin rights if they agreed to bake 100 *modii* of wheat into bread for each of ten years.[109]

Several issues arise with this interpretation. As discussed in the previous chapter, the *alimenta* was established to solve a perceived population decline, focusing on urban centres and intending to maintain and increase the citizen bodies there. Were a rural exodus occurring then surely there would have been no need to create the *alimenta*, rather the wider redistribution of land would have been more practical. Indeed, the revival of the *ager publicus* and distribution of farmland by Nerva is an issue specific to Rome. Rome was a magnet for immigration, its population numbering around 1 million inhabitants at this time, of whom around 200,000 received the monthly *frumentationes*. This required an import of up to 200,000 tonnes of grain per year.[110] That Rome was suffering from food pressures seems somewhat unlikely given that its foodstuffs came primarily from North Africa and Egypt. The external dependence for its cereals was central to Rome's survival and the vast state granaries and careful organisation assured the capital imported a surplus of foodstuffs for emergencies.[111]

Of course, shortages could occur. A famine scare led Domitian (r.81-96) to introduce the 'Vine Edict' in AD 91 to reduce viticulture in favour of cereal crops throughout the empire to avoid food shortages, to which Italy was no exception, but it was repealed the following year.[112] It has been argued that Nerva was attempting to secure the food supply for Rome via the *ager publicus*.[113] Even accepting this does not necessarily reflect a wider food crisis or rural population decline. More likely Nerva was simply attempting to relieve

[107] Bennett, *Optimus Princeps*, 40-41, 86-87, 90; Willem Jongman, 'Beneficial symbols: alimenta and the infantilization of Roman citizen' in Willem Jongman and Marc Kleijwegt (eds.), *Essays in Ancient History in Honour of H.W. Pleket* (Leiden, 2002), 55-56.
[108] Bennett, *Optimus Princeps*, 40, 85.
[109] Garnsey, Peter, 'Supplying the Roman Empire', in Peter Garnsey, Richard Saller and Martin Goodman, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture*, (California 2015) 113.
[110] Garnsey, 'Supplying the Roman Empire', 109-10, 120; Evans, 'Wheat Production and its Social Consequences in the Roman World' 428-429.
[111] Garnsey, 'Supplying the Roman Empire', 111-112.
[112] Jones, Brian W., *The Emperor Domitian* (London, 1992) 77-79; Bennet, *Optimus Princeps*, 85-86.
[113] Bennett, *Optimus Princeps*, 85.

overcrowding among the plebeian classes in Rome, something which Caesar and Augustus had attempted in the past.[114] Thus he was not attempting to relieve a food crisis or rural exodus, but rather an overcrowding crisis in Rome itself.

In rural Italy it was believed that small-to medium sized farms were losing out economically to and being bought out by the larger *latifundia*. Though difficult to pinpoint exactly there is information which demonstrates that small farms were actually keeping pace with the *latifundia,* which were themselves at times shown to be declining whilst small holdings increased. This varied across regions but clearly the independent Italian farmer was not as vulnerable as once supposed.[115] It is also now recognised that the relationship between *latifundia* and small farms was actually more complicated than previously understood. There is evidence of mixed workforces of slaves and wage labourers on some estates though the degree to which this was the norm is elusive.[116] An abundance of cheap citizen labour is also evident, as Walter Scheidel notes a slowdown in rural migration to urban centres in this period, whilst the population continued to increase.[117] Most rural dwellers were certainly poverty stricken but we should not assume that they were struggling to survive. As Peter Garnsey points out, famines could occur, pushing rural families to the edge of survival, but this was not the norm and rural society was adapted to its situation. It could fall back on traditional means of survival such as a plant-based diet, and displayed a strong sense of group survival, whilst urban centres dependent on their produce were conscious not to push them too far.[118]

The major point of contention is the sizes of the estates to which the loans were distributed. Hazel G. Ramsey makes reference only to C. Volumnius Memior at Veleia as an example of a receiver, but maintains these were small farmers struggling to survive and with no other means of obtaining a loan.[119] Julian Bennett references the small sizes of the estates as the basis for his argument that the loans were to aid small-medium sized farmers, maintaining that they stood to benefit more by receiving the loan than did the receivers of the *alimenta*.[120] Indeed, the method of calculation demonstrates its value to a receiver. At Veleia

[114] Brunt, P. A., *Italian Manpower 225BC-AD14*, (Oxford, 1971) 104.
[115] Jongman, 'Beneficial symbols', 56-57; Scheidel, 'A Model of Real Income Growth in Roman Italy', 335-36, 338-39.
[116] Hin, Saskia, *The Demography of Roman Italy*, 333.
[117] Scheidel, 'A Model of Real Income Growth in Roman Italy', 327-29, 342. 345-46.
[118] Garnsey, 'Supplying the Roman Empire', 121-22, 126.
[119] Ramsey, 'Government Relief During the Roman Empire', 483-4.
[120] Bennett, *Optimus Princeps*, 88-89.

8% of the total amount of land mortgaged was valued at HS1,044,000, the 5% interest would provide the HS52,200 required to support 300 children. The sum of the 8% would then be multiplied by twenty times the amount needed.[121] Thus we can calculate that the total loan for the Veleian *alimenta* was HS20,880,000. Julian Bennett refers to Volumnus who registered his property under the scheme. Its total value was HS108,000, making its 8% loan value HS8,692. Multiplying this by twenty, Volumnus stood to gain HS173,840 as a loan for his property. What the receivers would do with the loan is anyone's guess.

Richard Duncan-Jones has dismissed any agrarian economic motives for the scheme, highlighting that the landowners listed were among the wealthiest in each region and that the loans were likely involuntary.[122] Julian Bennett agrees the landowners were of wealthier stock, but emphasises that their properties values were far below the threshold required to be among the upper-classes. The largest holding at Veleia, valued at HS1,600,000, equalled only 1/10th the size of Pliny's estate, who was himself regarded as middling senator. Consider also the forty-six estates at Veleia, the largest stated above, with the smallest being worth HS50,000, all for the support of 300 children. Compare this with the sixty-six estates at Ligures Baebiani, the largest and smallest of which valued at HS501,000 and HS14,000, for the support of only 110 children.[123] These low values do suggest the landowners were farmers of moderate means.

An exchange of letters between Trajan and Pliny, during the latter's governorship of Bithynia, adds to the confusion. Pliny requested advice as how best to invest a large return of public funds and suggested loaning it out to local town councillors upon their supplying security and at a reduced rate of interest than the usual 12.5% as it would lessen the burden and be more appealing.[124] Trajan agreed with Pliny, though noted that 'to force a loan on unwilling persons who may…have no means of making use of it…is not in accordance with the justice of [their] times'.[125] This could be taken as evidence to indicate the *alimenta* as indeed having an agrarian economic motive centred on aiding the economic viability of small-medium size farmers.

[121] Bennett, *Optimus Princeps*, 88; Duncan-Jones, Richard, *The Economy of the Raman Empire: A Quantitative Studies*, (Cambridge 1982) 295-297.
[122] Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire*, 303, 307-08.
[123] Bennett, *Optimus Princeps*, 90-91; Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire*, Appendix 4
[124] Pliny, *Ep.* 10.54.
[125] Ibid, 10.55.

Yet closer inspection of the properties reveals further issues. Firstly, Richard Duncan-Jones noted that none of the landowners in either scheme was part of the local *ordo*, many lacking the social status or wealth to be among their town's *decurion* class.[126] Peter Garnsey, however, reports that there is evidence connecting contributors at Ligures Baebiani to the town itself or other towns nearby.[127] Secondly, the land declared did not necessarily represent the landowners' total holdings, but just one estate among many, with other holdings potentially in different regions. For Veleia some properties declared did come from the territory of a different town, such as Luca, Placentia, and Parma. In such an instance the declarer is unlikely to have a connection with the *ordo* of the *alimenta* town.[128] Thirdly, it was possible for a member of the *familia* or *domus* to declare property with the permission of the owner, thus explaining the presence of women and freedmen on the tables, who were excluded from partaking in the *ordo.* Some of these declarants even had influential connections, though the land they declared was small. A small property declared by Corellius of the *gens* Netatii is an example. He was represented by Neratius Marcellus, possibly the same Naratius that was consul in AD95 and 129, and the *gens* itself was powerful throughout the imperial period.[129] Finally, though boys and girls of the *alimenta* would erect inscriptions giving thanks to the various emperors for their support, none were ever dedicated by receivers of the loans, raising further questions as to their identity.[130]

The nature of the loans further excludes the possibility that they were designed for struggling farmers since at both Veleia and Ligures Baebiani the largest estates were targeted. When these were exhausted at Veleia the search moved into the surrounding regions. Only76% of mortgaged estates belonged directly to Veleia.[131] There were surely farms worth far less than the lowest of HS50,000 in Veleian territory that could have benefitted from the loan. The low value of properties at Ligures Baebiani reflects the poorer agricultural land in the region, accounting for the smaller estates but which were likely connected to properties in other regions.[132] Evidence from both towns show that the schemes were established in two stages and were gradually implemented between A.D.100-113. The first stages used smaller

[126] Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire*, 308.
[127] Garnsey, Peter, 'Trajan's Alimenta: Some Problems', *Zeitschrift fur Alte Geschichte* 17 (1968) 367-68.
[128] Garnsey, 'Trajan's Alimenta' 368-69; Duncan-Jones, 'The Purpose and Organisation of the Roman Imperial Alimenta', 141.
[129] Garnsey, 'Trajan's Alimenta', 372-74.
[130] Woolf, 'Food, Poverty and Patronage' 199, 202, 225.
[131] Duncan-Jones, 'The Purpose and Organisation of the Roman Imperial Alimenta', 141.
[132] Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire*, 297-98.

numbers of children and land for their support, which were later incorporated into the larger schemes.[133] Given the financial investment of the project Trajan evidently wanted to be sure that it would succeed. Though struggling farmers might benefit from the loans they would not provide a stable base upon which to build the *alimenta* which required larger, profitable estates for its success. Thus, when creating the *alimenta* Trajan was not attempting to resolve an agrarian economic crisis or rural exodus among smallholders, rather he was attempting to guarantee the annual 5% return on the loan.

Though the economic motives of the *alimenta* were not connected with solving an agrarian crisis, it does not exclude other possible economic motives. We could argue that these motives were directly related to the economic stability of the children of the *alimenta* and the redistribution of wealth among their families, which explains the perpetuity of the loans. For most of the first century B.C. the Roman Republic was engaged in numerous civil wars. This had a direct impact on the Italian population in terms of military recruitment, migration for work to urban centres and also in the redistribution of wealth by Roman warlords to their soldiers which passed to their families. Compared with the elite, the Italian lower classes made considerable economic gains from the turmoil, but this subsided when stability returned by the century's end and Italian recruitment for the army dwindled in the following century.[134]

Admittedly cash distributions, or *sportulae*, were typically paid out by members of the upper classes to their poorer counterparts as an expected civic duty. These distributions could be irregular however, often annually, and amounted to only a few sesterces. Women were frequently excluded from these distributions or were presented with a lower amount.[135] Writing to Trajan, Pliny complained that the distributions of *sportulae* in his province were getting out of hand, with every coming-of-age, marriage, building dedication and official postings being used as an excuse for their distribution. Trajan agreed, especially regarding distributions to large groups who are not considered close friends and gave Pliny permission to act accordingly.[136] In the case Bithynia the curbing of *sportulae* arguably reflects a Roman

[133] Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire*, 294-95, 289-90, Appendix 3.
[134] Scheidel, 'A Model of Real Income Growth in Roman Italy', 330-36.
[135] Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire*, 262-273; Woolf, 'Food, Poverty and Patronage', 214.
[136] Pliny, *Ep.* 10. 116, 117.

suspicion of the intentions of provincial elites in courting popularity. It also shows a civic expectation balanced by a reserved attitude regarding the timing and frequency of such distributions among Roman elites. Ergo *sportulae* were neither reliable nor effective for the economic security and redistribution of wealth among the lower classes.

Unlike *sportulae* the *alimenta* would be distributed monthly and guaranteed a consistent amount for the beneficiaries, but it is the perpetual nature of the loan repayments which make its economic purpose distinct. As discussed, the initial cost of the *alimenta* for a single town was astronomical. Trajan could have saved millions by distributing the *alimenta* funds directly every month, but instead chose to invest in the land. The belief that a large annual distribution would be quickly spent must have been apparent, while cumbersome and risky land transport likely influenced the decision to forgo with direct monthly distributions. By investing in the land Trajan guaranteed the 5% return given the small percentage of the land involved. This created self-contained and replenishing schemes which would require no further input from the imperial treasury nor be affected by downturns in the imperial economy.[137] Naturally agricultural income fluctuates yearly but the small amount of land mortgaged and even smaller interest rate meant that the burden of repayment was light. Indeed, if most declared estates were one among many belonging to a wealthy individual the burden of repayment, even following poor harvests, is unlikely to have been of any consequence.[138]

This returns us briefly to the question of loan assignments and their presumed perpetuity which would have had impacted negatively on the property's value, possibly inhibiting volunteers for the scheme, whilst assigning them would be counter to Trajan's policies. These misgivings are based on Pliny's reflection that a building he dedicated worth HS500,000 for his *alimenta* at Comum was now reduced in market value due to the perpetual rent charge of HS30,000 to fund the scheme.[139] Any land registered to the *alimenta* which was later sold would therefore carry the obligation of the loan with it. But Pliny's dedication was worth more than any property declared at either Veleia or Ligures Baebiani, and he admits the fixed rent was designed so that the building would always attract a tenant who could easily profit from it.[140] Indeed the interest and security for the loans sit far below the

[137] Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire*, 297.
[138] Ashly, 'The 'Alimenta' of Nerva and His Successors', 7; Bennett, *Optimus Princeps*, 84; Garnsey, 'Trajan's Alimenta', 378-9.
[139] Pliny, *Ep.* 7.18.
[140] Garnsey, 'Trajan's Alimenta', 378; Pliny, *Ep.* 7.18.

usual 12.5%, as recommended by Pliny in the case of loans for Bithynia, reflecting the advice Trajan offered to Pliny. Again, the wealthiest landowners of each district were targeted, and the intention was clearly to make any financial burden as light as possible. Julian Bennett argues that a perpetual loan seems unlikely, proposing the possibility of a termination point in the agreement which is lost to us.[141] Indeed, by the reign of Pertinax in AD193 the system had collapsed, since he was required to pay several years of arrears to the *alimenta* which had been neglected by his predecessor.[142] The extant information is too thin for us to make a final judgement but undoubtedly the setting up of a regular, reliable payment system was at the heart of the loans.

As for participants, we should not assume that the mortgages were viewed as off-putting or detrimental. The low repayments and substantial initial loan may have enticed some landowners to come forward immediately. Others may have used it as an opportunity for recognition and fulfilment of public service. Nerva had encouraged civic patronage among the people and the *alimenta* could have been once such outlet, some individuals even provided supplementary funds to existing schemes.[143] At times, contributing to the *alimenta* was cheaper than other civic benefactions, such as feasts or games.[144] The bronze tables at Veleia and Ligures Baebiani would have stood as a permanent reminder of the individual's contribution to the scheme and *alimentary* towns possessed the imperial office of *quaestor* or *procurator alimentorum*. Even in towns where private schemes were established the unofficial *curator alimentorum* was created to mimic the official office These offices are displayed on many funerary inscriptions demonstrating the prestige which it gave its holder.[145]

Contributing might also afford social privileges to the loan holder. Pliny, though childless, was granted the rights of parents of three children by Trajan around the beginning of his reign, by which time Pliny's own *alimenta* was running in Comum.[146] Though there is no relation made between the two events, it seems fair to suppose that Pliny's euergetism at Comum would have at least contributed to his being awarded these specific privileges, which

[141] Bennett, *Optimus Princeps*, 89.
[142] Historia Augusta, *Pertinax*, 9.3.
[143] Pliny, *Ep.* 10. 8; Klokner, 'The Roman a*limenta* in the West provinces', 21-22; Hemelrijk, *Hidden Lives*, 151-53.
[144] Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire*, 309-10.
[145] *CIL* 6. 1633, 9. 02354, 11. 4389, 5395, 14. 4468/70; Klokner, 'The Roman a*limenta* in the West provinces', 18-19.
[146] Pliny, *Ep*. 10. 2.

might well entice others to contribute in the prospect of receiving them too. If after these concessions there remained a need to force loans upon unwilling landowners Trajan probably felt justified given the seriousness of the project which he was undertaking. That landowners were 'burdened' and suffered from taking up the loans seems entirely unjustified. In the sphere of upper-class aspirations, they clearly stood to gain.

We now turn our attention back to the receivers of the *alimenta*, the children. As suggested, Trajan's economic motive for the *alimenta* was a redistribution of wealth, providing a stable, regular, and long-term income for the children, contributing to their survival. Richard Duncan-Jones agrees that if managed properly the *alimenta* could affect some moderate wealth redistribution.[147] But what was the purchasing power of the allowance? As noted previously, the valuations stood at HS16 and HS12 for a legitimate boy and girl, whilst an illegitimate boy and girl received HS12 and HS10. The average adult Roman required roughly 3000 calories daily. At Rome, the monthly distribution of the *frumentationes,* consisting of 5 *modii* or approximately 33.75kg of wheat, is seen to roughly equate to this, allowing for the nourishment of a single Roman over the period of a month, though it likely benefitted other family members as well.[148] Indeed, a single Roman required an average of between 230kg-275kg of wheat per year to survive at a subsistence level.[149] Thus the total of 60 *modii* at Rome would have easily sufficed to help sustain a number of family members.

As for the *alimenta* Willem Jongman argues that the purchasing power of the scheme was actually quite high by the standards. Though it is difficult to calculate, he suggests that HS3 were sufficient to purchase a single *modius* of wheat. Thus, the total allowance for a legitimate male for one year would be sufficient to purchase up to 64 *modii,* or just over 400kg.[150] Given that children would, theoretically, require less calories the amount of provision purchased could easily sustain them while contributing to the nourishment of other family members. Even the lowest amount of HS10 for an illegitimate girl could still provide 260kg of wheat subsistence per year.[151] Again, considering that children required less

[147] Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire*, 318.
[148] Rickman, Geoffrey *The Corn Supply of Ancient Rome,* (Oxford, 1980) 173; Garnsey, 'Supplying the Roman Empire', 110, 114-15; Jongman, Willem, 'Beneficial symbols', 70.
[149] Evens, 'Wheat Production and its Social Consequences', 432-33; Jongman, 'Beneficial symbols', 63.
[150] Jongman, 'Beneficial symbols', 63
[151] Ibid, 63

calories, the above amount could theoretically support the child, easing the economic strain on a family to provide for them.

The allowance payments have sparked arguments that the *alimenta* was merely an extension of the *frumentationes* and *congiaria* of Rome.[152] However this overlooks a number of issues. Firstly, the differentiation in the values of the distributions, and the inclusion of different genders and social status' are not found at Rome. Secondly, there is the limited nature of the benefaction. If Trajan were mimicking the distributions in Rome, then why bother focusing his attention on children when he could easily target the adult male citizen body. Furthermore, there was an age limit to Trajan's generosity, twelve girls and fourteen for boys, which was extended under Hadrian by two and four years respectively.[153] Trajan was being generous if a legitimate boy could hope to receive so much money for such a long period. Looking at a private scheme from Sicca Venaria in North Africa, citizen children of the town could hope to get around HS10 for boys and HS8 for girls, illegitimate children are not mentioned.[154] Even *sportulae* tended to give only a few sesterces to adult receivers.[155] Rather what we see is distinct economic investment in children intended to aid their growth and stabilize their families budget as much as possible.

The *alimenta's* importance to an urban family cannot be underestimated, nor can the role that children performed to maintain their families economic well-being. Boys began working officially around ages 12 or 13, though evidence suggests this could begin much earlier, to help supplement family income. This could be achieved via an apprenticeship or nearby agricultural labour. Girls were primarily confined to the domestic sphere, though they may have worked in unofficial assistant capacities, such as shopkeepers.[156] Evidence from Egypt shows that boys began working in apprenticeships usually pre-arranged by their mothers, or required their consent as guardian should the boy enter upon it underage.[157]

This significant fact highlights the economic importance of the *alimenta*. While the example came from Egypt, early paternal death was not uncommon in the Roman Empire. Indeed, it has been estimated that up to 1/3 of Roman children were fatherless by age 15,

[152] Woolf, 'Food, Poverty and Patronage', 211; Jongman, 'Beneficial Symbols', 49, 70-72.
[153] Ashley, 'The 'Alimenta' of Nera and His Successors', 8.
[154] Klokner, 'The Roman alimenta in the West provinces', 19.
[155] Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire*, 264-68.
[156] Bradly, *Discovering the Roman Family*, 106-9, 113-16; Hin, *The Demography of Roman Italy*, 202-3.
[157] Bradly, *Discovering the Roman Family*, 108.

whilst another 1/3 were fatherless by age 25.[158] This could have severe economic implications for a family's income, requiring children to begin work earlier.[159] In light of this, the values attributed in the *alimenta* to males reflects their important position within the Roman *familia*. Though they might be under the guardianship of their mother, they were theoretically the head of their family, and their survival as primary breadwinners was essential. By contrast, girls would be intended to marry from age 15 onwards, and as such their care would transfer to their husbands.

One final point is the importance of children to care of their parents in old age from the filial devotion associated with *pietas*. To the Romans this was a natural, reciprocal relationship between children and parents, the latter guaranteeing a good upbringing with the former promising support in old age.[160] Mothers especially had the most to lose, their husbands likely predeceasing them, without surviving children they faced an uncertain old age.[161] It would appear that mortality remained high among children until age 10 and then levelled off.[162] Though none should be regarded as lacking sorrow, epitaphs to children who died during this stage of life are particularly bitter. The emphasis on the malice of untimely fate possibly reflects a belief in parents that their children, having survived the worst, would live to adulthood, but were instead stuck down.[163] Surely evident at the time it might explain Hadrian's extension to the age limits in order to ease economic burdens and increase the chances that children would survive into adulthood, securing the economic lively hood of their families, the security of their parents in old age and the longevity of the Roman population.

Overall, we can safely argue that Trajan's imperial *alimenta* was not created with the intention of resolving an agrarian crisis. Italian farms were stable during this period, and the receivers of the loans were in fact the wealthiest landowners in the districts. Their uptake of

[158] Saller, *Patriarch, Property and Death in the Roman Family*,181, 189; Hubner, Sabine R. and David M. Ratzen, 'Fatherless antiquity? Perspectives on ''fatherlessness" in the Ancient Mediterranean', in Sabine R. Hubner and David M. Ratzan (eds.), *Growing Up Fatherless in Antiquity,* (Cambridge 2009) 9.
[159] Sabine, 'Fatherless antiquity?',10/
[160] Saller, *Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman Family*, 105, 108-14; Bradly, *Discovering the Roman Family,* 116-18; Stevenson, T. R., 'The Ideal Benefactor and the Father Analogy in Greek and Roman Thought', *The Classical Quarterly* 2 (1992) 426-29.
[161] Hin, *The Demography of Roman Italy*, 181, 201-2.
[162] Saller, *Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman Family*, 21-22.
[163] Bradly, *Discovering the Roman Family*, 117-18; Hope, *Roman Death,* 139-140.

the loan might have financially unnecessary, but it was certainly not burden and could actually aid them in their class aspirations. The economic incentive of the *alimenta* remained firmly grounded towards the financial support of the children of Italian families. The goal was to redistribute wealth gradually in a manageable way via stable and consistent distributions which were themselves generous, being able to provide, in the right circumstances, for more family members than a single child. It also made up for the shortfall in a family's income resulting from the death of a primary earner. The higher amounts given to boys reflects the social expectation of their gender as breadwinners for the preservation of their family. Finally, the *alimenta* improved the chances of survival for children receiving the loans, adding additional security for their parents, particularly mothers, as they approached old age.

Chapter Three: The Symbolic Value of Children

In implementing the imperial *alimenta* Trajan risked a great deal of time and resources in a project that probably seemed over ambitious and doomed to failure. He could easily have invested in public theatres, libraries, or sponsored local games and feasts, the traditional methods used to win public favour. Yet he did undertake it, and the *alimenta* was tremendously successful by Roman standards, being commemorated on the architecture and coinage of Trajan's reign. Coins declared the "Restoration of Italy", while his Arch at Benevento gave a central role to children as the ultimate beneficiaries.[164] For his actions Trajan was hailed as *Pater Patriae,* 'Father of the Fatherland', but only when he felt worthy of receiving the title.[165] Indeed, Trajan's 'humanity' has remained as distinct a hallmark of his character as philosophy has with Marcus Aurelius. But how accurate is this presentation? What did Trajan gain from gambling in the *alimenta* and citizen children? Were his intentions humanitarian or were there ulterior motives? What had allowed Trajan to declare his restoration of Italy and how do we interpret his refusal of the title *Pater Patriae*? Finally, how did focusing on children aid in stabilizing Trajan's rule and what does this say about the power of children as political symbols in Roman society?

A curious point about the *alimenta* is that during Trajan's reign it became an institutionalized form of imperial patronage and an expected responsibility of the Roman emperor. As discussed earlier the *alimenta* was officially responding to a perceived population crisis. Yet, it was not a new concept, private schemes having existed for almost half a century, though with the primary intention of posthumous remembrance of the patron.[166] Why then did Trajan act so radically? Indeed, the use of the *alimenta* in Trajanic propaganda demonstrates its importance to Trajan's position as emperor and the presentation of his rule in Italy from his ascension. Greg Woolf views the *alimenta* as fitting perfectly among other imperial benefactions which bound the Italian population to Trajan, allowing him to advertise his reigns prosperity and the moral well-being of society.[167] But his discussion overlooks tenser political realities upon Trajan's ascension and his use of the

[164] Rawson, Beryl, 'Children as Cultural Symbols: Imperial Ideology in the Second Century', in Suzanne Dixon (ed.), *Childhood Class and Kin in the Roman World* (London 2001) 23.
[165] Pliny, *Pan.* 21.
[166] Hope, *Roman Death*, 35-36; Pliny, *Ep.* 7.18.
[167] Woolf, 'Food, Poverty and Patronage', 219-220, 223-227.

scheme to stabilize his new rule and dynasty whilst differentiating himself from his predecessors.

By contrast, William Jongman argued the *alimenta* represents a compromise which Trajan offered the Italian citizen body in return for the erosion of their political power, as the "infantilized" citizen-soldiers no longer constituted the backbone of Roman armies nor had the power to choose their leadership.[168] But he provides no reason why Trajan's reign should mark the point of their outburst in a process ongoing over the course of a century. Indeed, Italians were less often found in Roman armies by this time, but their continued dominance in the Praetorian Guard would easily have negated this.[169] Though small in comparison to the army, the guard's proximity to the emperor and constant presence at Rome ensured they were highly influential, and more than once played a role in choosing an imperial candidate, as we shall see.

It appears sounder to interpret Trajan's *alimenta* as originating from his own insecurities upon attaining the throne. This was not something exclusive to Trajan. Most emperors had to find ways of justifying and securing their rule against a variety of threats. But Trajan's position was slightly more precarious. Firstly, he hailed from Roman Hispania, making him the first non-Italian Roman Emperor. [170] Though of Italian descent, there was no guarantee that someone of Italian aristocratic birth would not attempt to replace him. Secondly, he was the adopted son of his predecessor Nerva, who reigned briefly from AD 96-98. Nerva was the senatorial choice for emperor following a conspiracy which overthrew Domitian (r. AD 81-96). A subsequent mutiny by the praetorians, hardly 'infantilized', forced Nerva to select Trajan as his heir, being deemed a suitable compromise by all parties.[171] Thus Trajan's position as the second emperor of this new dynasty would have been far from secure and memories of the civil war of AD 69 likely resonated.

Furthermore, Domitian was hated by his peers but was popular with the praetorians. No ancient source records the plebeian reaction to his assassination, but Gaius and Nero were at the height of their public popularity upon their downfalls and Domitian had been engaged

[168] Jongman, 'Beneficial Symbols', 50, 54, 61.
[169] Wallace-Hadrill, 'Family and Inheritance in the Augustan Marriage-Laws 252; Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire*, 316-17.
[170] Bennett, *Optimus Princeps*, 1-3; Woolf, 'Food, Poverty and Patronage', 226-227.
[171] Bennett, *Optimus Princeps*, 35-37, 43-46.

in lower class public works.[172] Nerva was notably generous in his distributions to the lower classes. This represented the expected *congiaria* at the beginning of a new reign, but he undoubtedly remembered the downfall of Emperor Galba who succeeded Nero in AD 68 but failed to gain popularity by his frugality, being himself overthrown in AD 69.[173] The similarity of his position could have influenced Nerva to be more generous. In fact, Nerva has been proposed as the founder of the Italian *alimenta*.[174] The debate persists but its details need not detain us, as Trajan, not Nerva, would benefit from the propagandic value of the scheme.[175] If it did originate with Nerva it merely highlights his own insecurities and his need to ingratiate himself with Roman and Italian citizens who may have mourned Domitian.

Trajan thus had to compensate for his provincial birth while contesting with the spectre of almost three decades of Flavian rule. The crowds recorded by Pliny that welcomed Trajan upon his *adventus* to Rome were not guaranteed to be there had he arrived immediately in AD 98.[176] But why the *alimenta*? A *congiaria* was guaranteed and he could have paid for other typical civic gratuities. As we discussed in chapter two however, by investing in the economic wellbeing of children Trajan connected himself with multiple tiers of Roman society in a way which no prior emperor had done. With their parents' permission children accepted his allowance, becoming the *pueri et puellae Ulpianorum.*[177] This connection between Trajan and the very baseline of Roman-Italian society ensured the families in receipt would owe him a an obligation of loyalty, reinforced by the regularity of the payments.[178]

The speed of the *alimenta's* use suggests Trajan had had it in mind from the onset of his reign, or so is inferred from the *Panegyricus.* Pliny notes Trajan's refusal of the title *Pater Patriae* until he had felt worthy of it. When he did accept, Pliny praised him for "…[he] alone [had] been Father of the country in fact before [he was] in name". [179] What Pliny meant is open to interpretation. The title itself was a standard imperial epithet and was commonly refused for some time following an imperial ascension. Trajan waited about eight months

[172] Flower, Harriet I., *The Art of Forgetting: Disgrace and Oblivion in Roman Political Culture* (University of North Carolina Press 2006) 239-40; Bennett, *Optimus Princeps*, 34, 37.
[173] Flower, *The Art of Forgetting*, 240; Bennett, *Optimus Princeps*, 39-41.
[174] Aurelius Victor, *Epitome de Caesaribus*, 12.
[175] Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire*, 291-92.
[176] Pliny, *Pan.* 22.
[177] *CIL* 11. 05395 (1), 04351.
[178] Woolf, 'Patronage, Property and Death', 216-17.
[179] Pliny, *Pan.* 21. (trans. Radice 2015).

before accepting it in late AD 98.[180] Tom Stevenson proposed that Trajan accepted the title in exchange for declining a third consulship for the year AD 99, given that the earliest coins bearing the title belong to AD 98.[181] We could argue however that Trajan accepted the title having announced his intention to create the *alimenta* for Rome and Italy.

Trajan's *adventus* occurred in mid-AD 99, greeted by streets lined with Roman families, and roofs sagging with spectators.[182] Pliny notes how during the *congiaria* parents would: "..show [their] little ones mounted on [their] shoulders..." teaching them words of flattery, whilst older children swarmed the emperor in the hope of enticing his sympathy.[183] He states that Trajan ordered that: "...every child must be admitted and enrolled..." before being allowed to approach him so that they would not leave disappointed. These children were the five thousand: "…sought out and found to be entered onto the lists…" for the Roman *alimenta*.[184] Given the planning required for the *alimenta* it is unlikely that Trajan announced his intentions after reaching Rome, since this would have created a logistical nightmare. The intensions for an Italian scheme were also likely made public early on given that the earliest trial schemes were in place by AD101 with full schemes being established over the following decade.[185] Therefore, we can argue that Trajan's accepting the title *Pater Patriae* was connected with his announcement for the creation of the *alimenta* in AD 98, providing sufficient time to plan and prepare for its distribution in Rome in AD 99. The population, likely aware of this, thus guaranteed their support and fanfare for Trajan's *adventus*.

The use of children to solicit sympathy highlights the emotional symbolism attached to children in Roman society. Children began to feature prominently in Roman art in the Augustan Era, gradually becoming connected with motifs of peace and prosperity.[186] This resulted from Augustus' desire to promote Roman familial virtues. Events, such as the *Ludi Saculares* of 17 BC, celebrated the adoption of his grandsons into the *gens Iulia*, whilst emphasising the themes of childrearing, motherhood and fertility.[187] His own family played a

[180] Stevenson, Tom, 'Roman Coins and the Refusals of the Title "Pater Patriae"', *The Numismatic Chronicle* 167 (2007) 119-120, 128-29.
[181] Ibid., 129.
[182] Pliny, *Pan*. 22.
[183] Ibid, 26.1-3.
[184] Ibid, 26.2-3, 28.4-5.
[185] Duncan Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire*, 289-290, 294.
[186] Rawson, Beryl, 'The Iconography of the Roman Child', in Beryl Rawson and Paul Weaver (eds.), *The Roman Family in Italy: Status, Sentiment, Space* (Oxford 1997) 206.
[187] Rawson, 'The Iconography of the Roman Child', 212-13.

central role in his propaganda, particularly on the *Ara Pacis* where they are depicted in procession.(fig.1).

The altar itself was dedicated to Augustus in gratitude for the peace which he had brought Rome. Indeed, the depiction of numerous family members was a means of juxtaposing Rome's security and prosperity with Augustus' family, wherein his numerous relations would provide for the security of Rome whilst his role as father was emphasised.[188] The children featured are presented in a realistic pose, passing gestures with the adults and some tug at the folds of their parents clothes, a new innovation in Roman art. At one end of the alter a female personification of *Italia* or *Pax* (fig.2) nurses two infants, again juxtaposing continual prosperity of Rome with the imperial family.[189]

This use of children in imperial art did stop with Augustus and was adopted by his successors.[190] Trajan was no exception, his Arch at Benevento being a prime example of such propaganda. Though dedicated late in his reign in AD114, it bears several similarities with the *Panegyricus* and its depictions of the *alimenta* certainly reflect the official policy of how the scheme was to be interpreted.[191] These are primarily seen on the interior passage way, the largest panels. On one side Trajan is depicted presiding over a sacrifice (fig. 3) inaugurating the *alimenta*, or more rightly the law which brought into being, highlighting the seriousness of the scheme but also the sacred obligations pertaining to it.[192] On the opposite Trajan is depicted distributing his *alimenta* (fig. 4) as small children approach. Close by stands a father clasping the hand of one of his children whilst another sits on shoulders, a striking parallel with the *Panegyricus*. In the background four goddesses stand as representations of the towns partaking in the scheme.[193]

Being constructed after the Dacian Wars, the arch incorporates Trajan's triumph over Rome's external enemy and the security and prosperity which this affords Italy. The success of Trajan's wars and *alimenta* can be seen on a panel (fig. 5) where Trajan presents a small

---

[188] Severy, Beth, *Augustus and the Family at the Birth of the Roman Empire* (New York 2003) 107-8, 111-12.
[189] Rawson, 'The Iconography of the Roman Child', 214-15, 217; Severy, *Augustus and the Roman Family at the Birth of the Roman Empire*, 104-106.
[190] Rawson, 'The Iconography of the Roman Child', 217, 219, 223.
[191] Torelli, Mario, '"Ex his castra, ex his tribus replebuntur": The Marble Panegyric on the Arch of Trajan at Beneventum', *Studies in Ancient History of Art* 49 (1997) 168-70; Bennet, *Optimus Princeps*, 246-7.
[192] Torelli, 'Ex his castra', 147-48.
[193] Ibid., 145,146-47.

boy and girl to the deities Providentia, Fortuna, Mars and the personification of a colony.[194] Julian Bennett has argued that this scene represents the birth of new provinces following the Dacian War and is not connected with the children of the *alimenta*.[195] But when we consider the *alimenta* as being an official response to a perceived population crisis the former argument seems preferable, as here is another parallel with the *Panegyricus* where it is noted that the children of the *alimenta* would go on to: '…safeguard the state in war and adorn it in peace'.[196]

But architecture was not the only medium dominated by these themes, coins too played a central role in Trajan's presentation of his rule and the *alimenta* and his coinage is notable for giving more representations of the Roman than previously, especially in scenes such as the *alimenta*.[197] One of the most common types found on base metal coins such as the bronze *sestertius* (fig. 6) features Trajan seated as a magistrate in a curule chair distributing the *alimenta* to a personification of *Italia* and two children on the reverse, while the words ALIM(ENTA) ITAL(IA) can be seen in the exergue.[198] These are the earliest types found no earlier than AD 103 which seems correct if Trajan wished to be sure of the schemes success before commemorating it.[199]

A second common (fig. 7) type dating between AD 104-111 and 112-114, features a small child with a female personification with the same legends as before.[200] Rawson argues this figure as being *Annona* the personification of the harvest. Her basis for this is the connection between the *alimenta* and the improvement of Italian agriculture via the loans whose success was now bearing fruit.[201] We already discussed that the *alimenta* loans were not intended to improve Italian agriculture, nor could they guarantee an improved harvest. I would argue that the figure represents *Abundantia* who also features prominently in Trajanic art.[202] This would make sense when we consider the value of the allowances and the ability for parents to procure food for their children in urban markets.

---

[194] Torelli, 'Ex his castra', 150-52.
[195] Bennett, *Optimus Princeps,* 249.
[196] Pliny, *Pan.,* 28.5.
[197] Thill, Elizabeth Wolfram, 'The Emperor in Action: Group Scenes in Trajanic Coins and Monumental Reliefs' *American Journal of Numismatics* 26 (2014) 124-25.
[198]Thill, 'The Emperor in Action', 103; The Roman Imperial Coinage 2 *Trajan,* Rome 461.
[199] Rawson, 'Children as Cultural Symbols', 27-8.
[200] Rawson, 'Children as Cultural Symbols', 28-29; *RIC* 2 *Trajan,* Rome 460.
[201] Rawson, 'Children as Cultural Symbols', 29.
[202] Torelli, 'Ex his castra', 150.

Figure 1. *Ara Pacis*, procession of with adults and children.

Source: Kohl, Allan T., *Ara Pacis Augustae*, www.flickr.com, Accessed: 30/6/2020

URL: https://www.flickr.com/photos/69184488@N06/11970686625

Figure 2. *Ara Pacis*, east side upper panel, Tellus nursing infants.

Source: Shurygin, Ilya, *Panel of Tellus* (2012), www.ancientrome.ru. Accessed: 30/06/2020.

URL: http://ancientrome.ru/art/artworken/img.htm?id=4674

Figure 3. Passageway of Trajan's Arch, distribution scene by Trajan to parents and children. Source: Houston, George W. *Beneventum, Arch of Trajan (V),* (1969). www.flickr.com. Accessed: 30/06/2020. URL: https://www.flickr.com/photos/isawnyu/4749426268/in/photostream/

Figure 4. Passageway of Trajan's Arch, Beneventum, sacrifice inaugurating the *alimenta*. Source: Strong, Eugene Seller, *Roman Sculpture from Augustus to Constantine,* (1907) 377. www.fickr.com. Accessed: 30/06/2020.
URL: https://www.flickr.com/photos/internetarchivebookimages/14594430480/

Figure 5. South Pier middle panel, Trajan presenting *alimenta* children to deities. Source: Raddato, Carole, *Institutio Aimenta Relief*, (2019) www.flickr.com. Accessed: 30/06/2020. URL: https://www.flickr.com/photos/carolemage/49866556976/in/album-72157714204747363/

Figure 6. Reverse of bronze coin (*sestertius*) of Trajan with *Italia* and two children.

Source: *RIC* 2 *Trajan*, Rome 461. www. Numismatics.org. Accessed: 30/6/2020

URL:http://numismatics.org/ocre/id/ric.2.tr.461_sestertius

Figure 7. Reverse of a bronze coin (*dupondius*) with *Annona* or *Abundantia* with a small child.
Source: *RIC* 2 *Trajan*, Rome 460. www. Numismatics.org. Accessed: 30/6/2020

URL: http://numismatics.org/ocre/id/ric.2.tr.460

Figure 8. Reverse of gold coin (*aureus*) depicting Trajan with two children.

Sounce: *RIC* 2 *Trajan* Rome 93. www. Numismatics.org. Accessed: 30/6/2020

URL:http://numismatics.org/ocre/id/ric.2.tr.93

Figure 9. Reverse of gold coin (*aureus*) Trajan gesturing *Italia* and two children., Rome 105. Source: *RIC* 2 *Trajan* Rome 105.www.Numismatics.org. Accessed: 30/6/2020
URL:http://numismatics.org/ocre/id/ric.2.tr.105

A rare type (fig. 8) dating to AD111 is an *aureus* featuring Trajan distributing his *alimenta* to two children on the reverse and bearing the same standard exergue as before.[203] This has been considered odd given that emperors were never typically depicted alone with children unless they were captives or the sons of fallen enemies, but that given the precedents which Trajan had established in his coinage types it likely represents his desire to show himself interacting personally and directly with his subjects.[204] The use of gold might also represent his desire to advertise the success of his *alimenta* to a wealthier group given the scheme's near full implementation by this point. In all these coins advertised the symbolic importance of children as the future of Italy, their own futures now guaranteed thanks to Trajan's bounty.

The value of coinage in transmitting imperial ideals cannot be underestimated. Though their children would receive them, the coins would pass to their parents who would be left in no doubt as to whom they owed their thanks and upon whom they depended for the continued allowance.[205] Unlike Augustus, Trajan used his propaganda to focus not on his own family, but on the families and children of Italians. There future prosperity was guaranteed by Trajan's rule, but no less than Rome's prosperity was guaranteed by theirs and their children's.

One question remains however, regarding Trajan's of the 'Restoration of Italy'. Trajan might be able to claim such a symbolic restoration after his Dacian Wars, but coins (fig.9) were issued as early AD103 bearing the legend *REST(ITUA) ITAL(IA)* in the exergue and continued until AD111. The most common types in base and precious metal depict a standing Trajan holding a sceptre or roll in his left hand as he gestures a kneeling Italia to rise with his right hand. Between them stand a small boy and girl with arms outstretched to Trajan.[206] The connection with the *alimenta* series of coins cannot be missed and its combination on the arch confirm that the 'Restoration of Italy' was also an early propaganda feature of Trajan's reign. But what was he restoring?

As discussed in chapter one, the *alimenta* was officially undertaken to halt a perceived population decline.[207] Real or not, the concept of population decline was associated with a

[203] *RIC* 2 *Trajan* Rome 93.
[204] Thill, 'The Emperor in Action', 104, 124-25.
[205] Jongman, 'Beneficial Symbols', 74.
[206] Rawson, 'Children as Cultural Symbols', 30-32.
[207] Pliny, *Pan.* 26.4-27.4.

morally decaying society in need of remedy to return its prosperity.[208] Willem Jongman has questioned this approach stating that population decline was associated with bad emperors, yet Trajan was not a bad emperor since Pliny praises the prosperity and population expansion which his reign is bringing. Ergo, the *alimenta* cannot be connected with restoring a morally degraded society.[209] This reasoning seems short sighted when considering the wider historical context.

Trajan was, by Roman standards, not a bad emperor, nor was Nerva. But they had succeeded a 'bad emperor' in Domitian whose legacy undoubtedly loomed large. His early reign appears to have been modest and he too was devoted to the moral restoration of Roman society. Indeed, Trajan and Pliny would exchange letters referencing Domitian's actions as possible precedent for the resolution of their own issues.[210] But his policies alienated the upper classes. He held almost yearly consulship, rarely sharing it with anyone outside of his *gens*, gave preference to 'new men' in imperial appointments, raised military wages resulting in higher taxes and fought several inconclusive wars. Most significantly he purged the senatorial class, executing a number of its members on charges of *maiestas* following several against him resulting in his harsh treatment in the historical tradition.[211]

The *Panegyricus* contains numerous comparative examples between Trajan and Domitian. Trajan's journey to Rome was "quiet and undemanding", but not long before: "another emperor had passed…in a very different fashion...his progress was better called a plundering foray..", indeed, the provinces required convincing that only Domitian had travelled in this way .[212] Trajan's ability to control his army is contrasted with Domitian's favouritism of them, reinforced during the *congiaria* where the largess was: "…distributed to the civilians in its entirety, whereas the military received only half their bonus", and though they would receive the second half later: "..the army was placed on the same footing as the civilians".[213]

In accepting the title *Pater Patriae* Trajan was praised for having waited until he had earned it, compared with others who: "…accepted the title from the start along with that of

[208] Woolf, 'Patronage, Property and Death', 225.
[209] Jongman, 'Beneficial Symbols', 59.
[210] Flower, *The Art of Forgetting,* 226; Bennett, *Optimus Princeps,* 29-30; Pliny, *Ep.* 10.58, 66, 72.
[211] Flower, *The Art of Forgetting,* 234-38, 265-66; Bennett, *Optimus Princeps,* 19-36.
[212] Pliny, Pan. 20.
[213] Ibid, 25.2.

Emperor..".[214] This clearly references Domitian who, while not immediately taking the title, did accept it within two months of his ascension.[215] Finally Domitian's unsuccessful wars are referenced in connection with the children of the *alimenta*. Under Trajan the mothers delight at having sons who would serve at his command, while fathers need not worry for their sons beyond human frailty. In caring for the children of the citizens, Trajan guaranteed the prosperity and peace of Rome.[216]

Naturally, we must be aware of Pliny's own agenda in flattering Trajan by presenting his own vision of what a good emperor was in comparison to a tyrant, an ideal which Trajan was unlikely to object to. Indeed, Trajan needed to distance himself from Domitian's regime, his family had gained prominence under the Flavians and he had one of Domitian's closest generals.[217] Many of his contemporaries, Nerva and Pliny included, also had to confront the same reality that their success resulted from their connection with Domitian.[218] Their solution was to condemn Domitian's memory in the harshest terms to justify his downfall and the new order to the army and the people, whilst the *alimenta* acted as demonstration of society's moral restoration. As its benefits were felt over time, reinforced by Trajan's victorious wars in AD 102 and 106, people were likely to be convinced that Domitian truly was a tyrant and that Trajan's rule and claims of restoring Italy were justified.

Finally, by investing in Italian children Trajan compensated for his own lack of offspring by emphasising his role as *Pater Patriae*. The focus on children and prosperity in Trajan's propaganda contrasts with the barren nature of the imperial household. The reason was likely a simple fact of nature. The result was a sequence of adopted emperors beginning with Trajan and lasting until Commodus succeeded his father Marcus Aurelius in A.D. 180. This adoptive system has frequently been regarded as an enlightened policy, but evidence demonstrates its resulting from circumstance not intention.[219]

[214] Ibid, 21.1-2.
[215] Stevenson, 'Roman Coins and the Refusals of the Title "Pater Patriae"', 127.
[216] Pliny, *Pan.* 22.3-4, 27.1-2, 28.4-7.
[217] Bennett, *Optimus Princeps*, 18-20, 25-28.
[218] Flower, *The Art of Forgetting,* 239, 263-70.
[219] Levick, Barbara M., *Faustina I and II: Imperial Women of the Golden Age* (New York 2014) 56, 60-61.

Augustan law specified that married men and women were expected to continue procreation until the ages of 60 and 50, respectively.[220] Their degree of application varied across the population based on personal circumstance and property, but as emperor Trajan would surely have taken them with some seriousness. Admittedly Augustus had only one daughter, but she had provided numerous grandchildren who were adopted directly into the *gens Iulia*. Only when all available blood-kin died did he choose Tiberius as a successor.[221] Tiberius celebrated the birth of his own grandchildren by his son Drusus, and Gaius, Claudius and Nero all produced offspring. Vespasian had two sons, Titus and Domitian, and while Titus died childless, Domitian had had a son who died prior to ascension but was commemorated with dynastic overtones.[222]

The birth of the daughter of Marcus Aurelius and Faustina in AD 147 highlights the importance of natural offspring for the imperial family as Faustina was awarded the title of *Augusta,* the first time a wife of a future emperor held the title before her husband.[223] Both Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus would advertise their progeny as a demonstration of their dynasty's good fortune. Had more sons survived, imperials heirs would likely have been designated among them.[224]

Trajan thus had to remedy his lack of offspring. This again can be connected with his refusal of the title *Pater Patriae*. Though a standard part of Roman titular, it was somewhat more respected, usually refused longer than other titles. Augustus would not accept it until 2BC, and Tiberius never did. From Gaius until Trajan, most emperors refused it for several months, but Hadrian, himself childless, waited over a decade before accepting it and both Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus did likewise until six years into their reign in AD167.[225] Had Trajan restored an element of reverence in the title?

The 'father figure' played a powerful role in Greco-Roman socio-political thought as the ideal benefactor, providing for his wards without the selfish expectation of a return, though the natural order would ensure this return from the recipients via reciprocal

[220] Parkin, *Old Age in the Roman World*, 196.
[221] Severy, *Augustus and the Family at the Birth of the Roman Empire*, 70-71; Tacitus, *Annals*, 1. 2-3.
[222] Tacitus, *Annals*, 2.84, 15.23; Levick, *Faustina I and II*, 21-22; Rawson, 'The Iconography of the Roman Child', 217-218, 223;.
[223] Levick, *Faustina I and II*, 63; See also: Historia Augusta, *Marcus Aurelius*, 6.6. Details awards to Marcus.
[224] Historia Augusta, *Marcus Aurelius*, 12.8-11, 16.1.
[225] Stevenson, 'Roman Coins and the Refusals of the Title "Pater Patriae"', 120-22, 129-130, 131; Historia Augusta, *Hadrian*, 6.4; *Marcus Aurelius*, 12.7.

obligations.[226] This philosophical thought had clear parallels with the concept of *pietas* within Roman society and was easily applicable to the role of both the state and ruler as the providers of security and nourishment, the role of food giving itself being a highly symbolic act between the provider and receiver which reinforced the social hierarchy.[227] By investing in children, Trajan successfully contrasted himself with the 'tyrannical' Domitian. As a father figure he provided for his youngest citizens, and given the high rate of fatherless families, his provisions undoubtedly meant more than symbolism for many. In return all he expected was their natural loyalty, as a father would from his child. Trajan's success was such that investment in the *alimenta* became a hallmark of good emperors, whilst any neglect of the system would ensure association among the bad.[228] Thus, Trajan elevated himself as a true father to his people. This ideal was not lost on Pliny who commented: 'And now that bear the name [Father of the Fatherland], how kind and considerate you show yourself, living with your subjects as a father with his children'.[229]

Overall, Trajan's *alimenta* was no simple gesture of humanity. It was a calculated effort to demonstrate his devotion to the people of Italy, regardless of his provincial origin. His architecture and coinage appealed to parental sentiment by his promise to provide for their children, winning their and their children's loyalty in the process. The *alimenta* also provided Trajan a platform to justify his rule in a smear campaign wherein he claimed to have restored Italy following the rule of a tyrant whose memory remains tainted to present. Finally, his refusal of the title *Pater Patriae* was not a formality, but a restoration of its dignity. Receiving it for creating the *alimenta*, Trajan elevated himself higher than any of his predecessors since Augustus. In providing freely for citizen children and expecting only their loyalty in return Trajan cultivated himself as an ideal leader and true father of his people. The *alimenta* was risky, but it worked and provided the stability which Trajan required. Its success attests to his successful playing with the emotions of Italian parents by offering them security for their most cherished possessions.

[226] Stevenson, T. R., 'The Ideal benefactor and the Father Analogy in Greek and Roman Thought', 425-28.
[227] Stevenson, T. R., 'The Ideal benefactor and the Father Analogy in Greek and Roman Thought', 429-30, 433; Woolf, 'Food, Poverty and Patronage', 212, 215.
[228] Woolf, *Food, Poverty and Patronage*, 221-22.
[229] Pliny, *Pan.* 21.3-4.

Conclusion

This paper set out to investigate: what values are attributed to children by the existence of the imperial *alimenta* that enticed Trajan to invest in them? In the opening it was suggested that these revolved around a demographic, an economic and a symbolic value each of which we have confirmed. In chapter one it was argued that the *alimenta* was created in response to a population decline. Modern studies demonstrated that the Italian population was actually increasing in the first century AD and peaking during the reign of Trajan which often led to its dismissal from the argument. However, a close review of Pliny's *Panegyricus* and letters and the Augustan marriage laws demonstrated that anxieties were present, particularly with the notion that people were not producing enough children.

Indeed, the *alimenta* was forged in a society obsessed with reproduction and a fear that the Roman population risked dying out. The fact that the population continued to increase hints that Roman families were not typically small. For an urban Roman like Pliny however this would not have been apparent, as unreliable censuses and the sight of abandoned, deceased and commemorated children would have been omnipresent. The large presence of children in comparison to older Romans and the late age of marriage for Roman men coupled with their deaths and the high child mortality rates likely gave the impression that something was wrong and needed to be rectified. The *alimenta* was thus a reaction to a perceived crisis, and work or they must have believed it could at least help the situation.

Though open to all citizen children the *alimenta* was primarily targeted at urban children whose plight was most visible. It was often argued that limited spaces compared to a large urban population meant that only one or two children per family could hope to find a place on the scheme. This makes sense if we consider that Trajan should wish to aid as many families as possible. Indeed, by calculating, with caution, the estimated population of a settlement based upon its size produced a number of variables. But in all cases the *alimenta* was theoretically able to reach at least half if not all of an urban population, allowing for multiple children from some families or the entrance for children in the rural vicinity which may have led to a random selection, again supporting the one or two child limit.

The values attributed to the children on the scheme reflect the importance of their gender and status. Legitimate males were given the highest value, reflective of their

important position in Roman society as the primary carriers of citizenship and possibly an encouragement by the Roman government to the rearing of males to make up for the deaths of adult Roman fathers. But the inclusion of girls and illegitimate Roman children demonstrates fundamentally their right to receive the *alimenta*. A somewhat distinct admittance by the Roman administration of children's importance to Roman society and the value of their Roman citizenship.

The second chapter argued for the economic value of children. The *alimenta* was a frequently viewed as a by-product of a larger attempt to reimburse small Italian farms with manageable mortgage loans. But this was demonstrated to be false. Trajan desired to create a stable, perpetual scheme which would be able to function unhindered over long periods of time. To do this he invested loans into hundreds of regional farms, but these belonged to the wealthiest landowners in each district who likely owned multiple estates. When these ran out the search would continue to the neighbouring region. By investing in just a small section of each farm the loans were both manageable and guaranteed to be repaid. Any feelings of resentment held by landowners towards the loans was likely softened by this and the large initial payments. What is important to consider is that the *alimenta* was created with the intention of benefitting purely the children and it would be made to work for them.

Analysing the value of the grant showed that the *alimenta* was not simple tokenism. From HS10-HS16 the buying power of the *alimenta* was considerable and could easily see to the sustenance of each child who received it whilst complementing, to various degrees, the sustenance of other children or other family members. The regularity of the payment would further provide stability to a Roman household in comparison with many private schemes or *sportulae* which had either lower allowances or a more sporadic distribution.

The need for the generosity and regularity of the payments also highlights the need to ensure that the child supported would have the best chance of reaching adulthood. This is especially so when we consider that many children were fatherless before adolescence. Children were a supplement to family income, but lacking a primary breadwinner placed them at risk. The *alimenta* mitigated this and again explains the emphasis on males in its distributions as they would now be head of their households whose members were dependent upon them. This was important for parents, especially mothers, who would be dependant upon their children to care for them in old age. By investing in the *alimenta* Trajan was

attempting to ensure the stability of the Roman urban family, both for the child and for their parents. The focus and care placed in the *alimenta* demonstrates the central importance of the child to the economic stability of Roman society.

Finally, in chapter three we discussed the symbolic value of children. Like his predecessors, Trajan's position as emperor was not guaranteed upon his accession and his provincial background was a first for an imperial candidate. Investing in the *alimenta* was one way for him to stabilise his position and it is likely he had decided upon it early in his reign considering that it was functioning in Rome upon his arrival in AD 99 and Italy two years later. His use of it in his propaganda demonstrates to us he intended to exploit it.

Pliny's description of parents using their children to win the sympathy of the emperor must ring true when we consider how children would form a central aspect of Trajan's personal propaganda. From his arch at Benevento to his coinage, children featured as visual reminders to parents of the role which he had played in aiding their children's up-bringing. It was he who had restored Italy, assuring the states prosperity which also allowed their children to grow and which would pass on to them. Behind this focus on children, Italy and the future, the *alimenta* aided in smear campaign against Trajan's predecessor by convincing the public that the new order was justified.

The *alimenta* also allowed him to compensate for his own lack of offspring by making true his title *Pater Patriae*. In so doing he placed himself and the imperial office intimately into the lives who, in some cases, truly depended upon him for their sustenance and owed him their loyalty. Indeed, Trajan's use of the *alimenta* and the success which it won him is a real indication of the symbolic and emotional power which children held in Roman society to the point that to refrain from it investment became the mark of a despot.

The *alimenta* had often be described as a precursor to modern child-benefit programmes. Of course, this is not entirely true. The scheme was limited to a selection of children based primarily in urban areas. It discriminated against gender and birth and forced parents to prioritize the rearing of males over females. Nor did it evolve from feelings of humanity but was designed to resolve anxieties of a declining population, redistribute urban wealth and win for Trajan the loyalty of the Italian population. Looking back to introduction,

the *alimenta* fits in perfectly with the ambiguous relationship which Roman society held for its children in an institutionalised form.

Yet for all that, the *alimenta* tells us a great deal about the values which Roman society held for its children and why Trajan should want to invest in them. It confesses an acknowledgement by the administration that children were not an unimportant demographic but valued Roman citizens who were entitled to benefit from the state regardless of their age. Indeed, it was an institution entirely their own which, though limited, attempted to reach as many children as possible. It acknowledged the value of the working child to the imperial and household economy. The allowance they received was no mere token, it had real value, which reflected the states value in its children and of their vulnerability, easily ensuring they were provided for, whilst they in turn provided for their families and parents in old age. Finally, the *alimenta* confesses to us the power which children had as a symbol in Roman society. Pliny pandered to Trajan, but the scenes of his *Panegyricus* describing parents using their children to win sympathy is unlikely just a literary motif. Afterall, he would use these images in the propaganda of his reign to win the loyalty of parents while presenting himself as the ultimate father.

That the *alimenta* would outlive Trajan and become the expected right of Roman citizen children says much about their value to Roman society. In a way Trajan's reign was the culmination in a long process of realizing this value and while their voices do not come down to us, the *alimenta* demonstrates that society did hear their cries. In many ways it even helps to clear away some of the ambiguity.

Abbreviations

CIL *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (Berlin 1876-).

RIC *The Roman Imperial Coinage* ed. H. Mattingly *et al.* 10 vols. (London 1924-1994).

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Aurelius Victor, *Epitome de Caesaribus*: Thomas M. Banchich (trans.), (Buffalo, 2018).

Fronto, *Correspondence*: Charles Reginald Haines (trans.), (Loeb Classical Library vol. 1) (Cambridge 2015).

Historia Augusta: David Magie (trans.) *Historia Augusta: Hadrian. Aelius. Antoninus Pius. Marcus Aurelius. L. Verus. Avidius Cassius. Commodus. Pertinax. Didius Julianus. Septimius Severus. Pescennius Niger. Clodius Albinus.*, (Loeb Classical Library vol. 1) (Cambridge 1921).

Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae & Panegyricus:* Betty Radice (trans.), *Pliny the Younger Letters Books 1-10 & Panegyricus* (Loeb Classical Library 2 vols.) (Cambridge 2015).

Tacitus, Annals: John Jackson (trans.), *Tacitus, Annals Books 1-6, 11-12* (Loeb Classical Library vols. 3-5) (Cambridge 1989).

Secondary Sources

Ashley, Alice M., ‘The 'Alimenta' of Nerva and His Successors’, *The English Historical Review* 36 (1921) 5-16.

Bennett, Julian., *Trajan Optimus Princeps* (London 1997).

Bradley, Keith R., *Discovering the Roman Family: Studies in Roman Social History* (New York 1991).

Brunt, P. A., *Italian Manpower 225B.C.-A.D.14* (New York 1971).

D'Ambra, Eve., 'Racing with Death: Circus Sarcophagi and the Commemoration of Children in Roman Italy' in; Ada Cohen, and Jeremy B. Rutter (eds.), *Construction of Childhood in Ancient Greece and Italy* (Princeton 2007) 339-351.

De Ligt, Luuk, *Studies in the Demographic History of Roman Italy 225B.C.-A.D.100* (Cambridge 2012).

Dixon, Susanne, *The Roman Family* (Baltimore 1992).

Duncan Jones, R., *The Economy of the Roman Empire: Quantitative Studies* (Cambridge 1982).

Duncan-Jones, Richard, 'The Purpose and Organisation of the Alimenta', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 32 (1964) 123-146.

Evans, J. K., 'Wheat Production and its Social Consequences in the Roman World', *The Classical Quarterly* 3 (1981) 428-442.

Flower, Harriet I., *The Art of Forgetting: Disgrace and Oblivion in Roman Political Culture* (Chapel Hill 2006).

Garnsey, Peter, 'Trajan's Alimenta: Some Problems', *Historische Zeitschrift fur Alte Geschichte* 17 (1968) 367-381.

Garnsey, Peter, 'Supplying the Roman Empire', in Peter Garnsey, Richard Saller and Martin Goodman, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture* (California 2015) 109-126.

Golden, Mark, ‘Did the Ancients Care When Their Children Died?’, *Greece & Rome* 32 (1988) 152-163.

Harris, W.V., ‘Child-Exposure in the Roman Empire’, *The Journal of Roman Studies* 84 (1994) 1-22.

Hemelrijk, Emily A., *Hidden Lives, Public Personae. Women and Civic Life in the Roman West* (New York 2015).

Hin, Saskia, *The Demography of Roman Italy: Population Dynamics in an Ancient Conquest Society 201BCE-14CE* (Cambridge, 2013).

Hope, Valerie M., *Roman Death* (London 2009).

Hübner, Sabine R., and David M. Ratzan, ‘Fatherless antiquity? Perspectives on “fatherlessness” in the ancient Mediterranean’, in Sabine R. Hübner and David M. Ratzan (eds.), *Growing Up Fatherless in Antiquity* (Cambridge 2009) 3–28.

Jones, Brian W., *The Emperor Domitian* (London, 1992).

Jongman, Willem M., ‘Beneficial symbols: alimenta and the infantilization of the Roman citizen’, in Willem Jongman, and Marc Kleijwegt (eds.), *After the Past: Essays in Ancient History in Honour of H. W.* (Leiden 2002) 47-80.

Klokner, Tomáš, ‘The Roman *alimenta* in the West provinces’ *International Journal of Scientific Research and Innovative Technology* 3 (2016) 18-25.

Levick, Barbara M., *Faustina I and II: Imperial Women of the Golden Age* (New York 2014).

Norena, Carlos, F., 'The Communication of the Emperor's Virtues', *The Journal of Roman Studies* 91 (2001) 146-168.

Parkin, Tim G., *Old Age in the Roman World: A Cultural and Social History* (Baltimore 2003).

Ramsey, Hazel G., 'Government Relief during the Roman Empire', *The Classical Journal* 31 (1936) 479-488.

Rawson, Beryl, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy* (New York 2003).

Rawson, Beryl; 'Children as Cultural Symbols: Imperial Ideology in the Second Century', in Suzanne Dixon (ed.*), Childhood, class and kin in the Roman World,* (London 2001) 21-42.

Rawson, Beryl, 'The Iconography of the Roman Child', in Beryl Rawson and Paul Weaver (eds.), *The Roman Family in Italy: Status, Sentiment, Space* (Oxford 1997) 205-32.

Rickman, Geoffrey *The Corn Supply of Ancient Rome* (Oxford, 1980).

Saller, Richard P., *Patriarchy, property, and death in the Roman Family* (New York 1997).

Scheidel, Walter, 'A Model for Real Income Growth in Roman Italy', *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 56 (2007) 322-346.

Scheidel, Walter, ‘Demography’, in W. Scheidel, I. Morris, & R. Saller (Eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World* (Cambridge 2007) 38-86.

Scheidel, Walter, ‘Roman Population Size: The Logic of the Debate’, in Luuk de Ligt and Simon Northwood (eds.), *People, Land and Politics: Demographic Developments and the Transformation of Roman Italy 300 BC- AD14* (Leiden 2008).

Severy, Beth, *Augustus and the Family at the Birth of the Roman Empire* (New York 2003).

Spiegl, Steven, *Communal Responses to Socio-Economic Problems in Italy & Gaul: 31 BC – AD 284* (Manchester 2013).

Stevenson, Tom, ‘Roman Coins and the Refusals of the Title “Pater Patriae”’, *The Numismatic Chronicle* 167 (2007) 119-141.

Stevenson, T. R., ‘The Ideal Benefactor and the Father Analogy in Greek and Roman Thought’, *The Classical Quarterly* 2 (1992) 421-436.

Thill, Elizabeth Wolfram, ‘The Emperor in Action: Groups Scenes in Trajanic Coins and Monumental Reliefs’, *American Journal of Numismatics* 26 (2014) 89-142.

Tomlin, R. S. O., ‘An Early Third-Century Alimentary Foundation’, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 129 (2000) 287-292.

Torelli, Mario, ‘”Ex his castra, ex his tribus replebuntur”: The Marble Panegyric on the Arch of Trajan at Beneventum’, *Studies in Ancient History of Art* 49 (1997) 144-177.

Wallace-Hadrill, Andrew, ‘Family and Inheritance in the Augustan Marriage Laws’, in Jonathan Edmondson (ed.), *Augustus* (Edinburgh 2014) 250-274.

Woolf, G., ‘Food, Poverty and Patronage: The Significance of the Epigraphy of the Roman Alimentary Schemes in Early Imperial Italy’, *Papers of the British School at Rome* 58 (1990) 197-228.

.