

ATHENS AND ROME: LIFE AND CULTURE IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

Lecture 21 – Trade, Markets and Food Supply

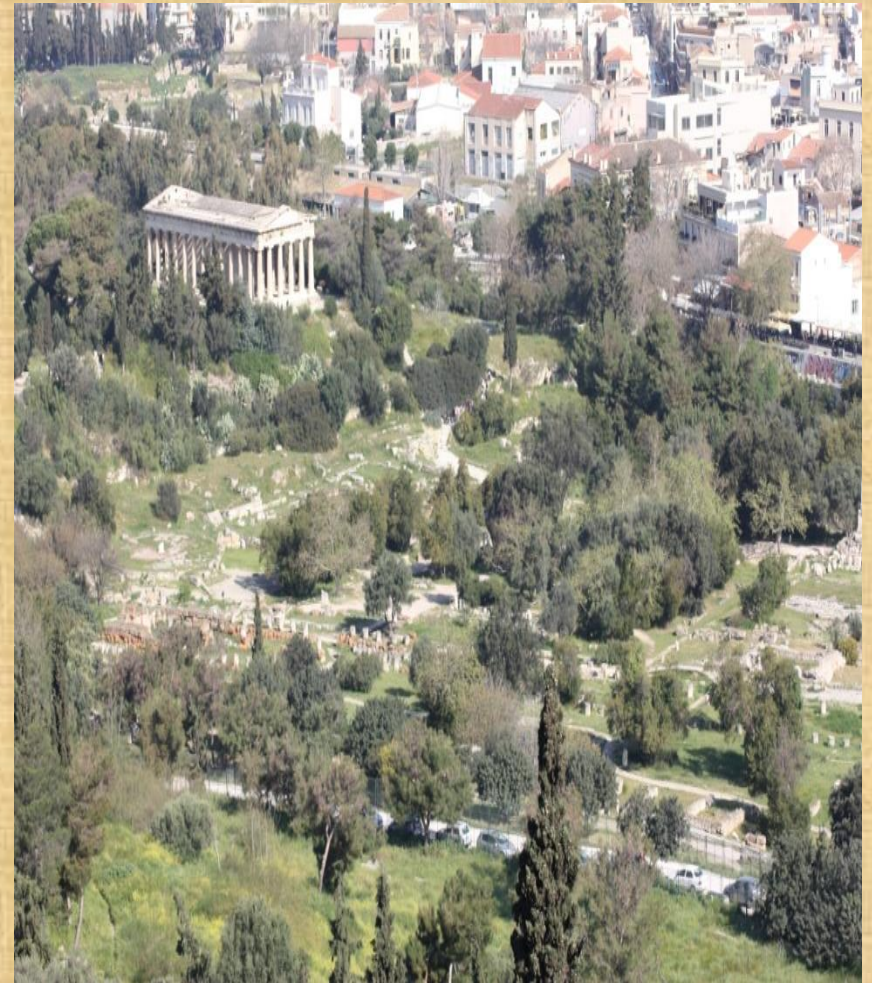
CLCS4007

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Athenian Agora

The Agora

- ❑ Open space located in the centre of Athens.
- ❑ Key centre of politics, commerce, law and religion.
- ❑ Stoa, long colonnaded buildings – used for public business. Possibly used for commerce?



Markets in Athens

- ▣ Likely to have temporary wooden stalls – areas essentially bazaars.
- ▣ Not necessarily any strict planning or layout.

“[Sausage-Seller] - Just tell me how a sausage-seller can become a great man.

[Demosthenes] - That is precisely why you will be great, because you are a sad rascal without shame, no better than a common market crook.” –

Aristophanes *Knights* lines 179-81.

“Midwinter here means gherkins and grapes and such things mind you, And violets and the like for sale though dust blows fit to blind you, While thrushes and olives, honey and pears, are sold at the self-same stall With beestings, haggises, pilewort, crickets and kidlets small,

And there figs and myrtles in basketfuls even in snowy weather, And pumpkin-seed and turnip-seed are both put in together.

Aye, none of ‘em knows in these days what time of year they’ve got to.”

- Aristophanes *Seasons* fr. 569. 1-7.

Imports and Products

Antiphanes *fr.* 236 lists local specialities as:

- ▣ Elis – cooks.
- ▣ Argos – cooking-pots.
- ▣ Phlius – wine.
- ▣ Corinth – rugs.
- ▣ Sicyon – fish.
- ▣ Aigina – flute-players.
- ▣ Sicily – cheese.
- ▣ Athens – perfume.
- ▣ Boiotia – eels.



Erechtheum - Workers Pay

**TABLE 7
RATES OF PAY**

Architects	Salary, 36-37 dr./prytany	1 dr./day
Carpenters	General work: making struts, laying rafters, truing edges Making coffer lids Planing roof pieces Making frames	1 dr./day 2 dr./lid 1½ ob./piece 20 dr./frame
Joiners	Work by the day Gluing cymatia	5 ob./day 2 dr./opening
Laborers	General work: laying tiles, removing scaffolding, using block and tackle	1 dr./day
Masons	Laying Eleusinian block Laying Pentelic backers, 5½ cubic feet Laying Aeginetan backers, 12 cubic feet Finishing stones Shaping center gable block, 24 cubic feet Channelling columns, 20 feet high, 24 flutes	5 dr./tetrapody 2 dr. 4 ob./block 2 dr. 5 ob./block 3½ dr./tetrapody 40 dr./block
Modellers in wax	Models of acanthus & rosette	350 dr./column 8 dr./model
Painters	Painting wooden ceiling Encaustic painting	4 dr./coffer lid 5 ob./foot
Sawyers	Sawing timber Sawing timber (same account)	1 dr./day 1 ob./4 foot cut
Sculptors	Frieze figure (adult) , 26½ inches max. ht.	60 dr./figure
Under-secretary	Salary, 30 dr. — 30 dr. 5 ob./prytany	5 ob./day
Woodcarvers	Ceiling rosettes	14 dr./rosette

Prices in Athens

- ▣ C. mid-late fifth century BC one *medimnos* (c. 52 dry litres = c. 40 kg) of wheat cost three drachmas? – likely to be subject to fair degree of fluctuation.

“... for [grain retailers] they were bound, in selling, to add no more than an obol to the price... But in fact they were selling at a profit of a drachma several times in the same day, as though they were buying by the medimnus at a time.” – *Lysias Against the Corn Dealers* 22.8,12.

Trading Standards

Agora

- *Dokimastes* – scrutinizer - a public slave who checked coins for purity.
- Market overseers checked measures against official standards - Penalty: 10 x value for fraud/cheating.

Piraeus

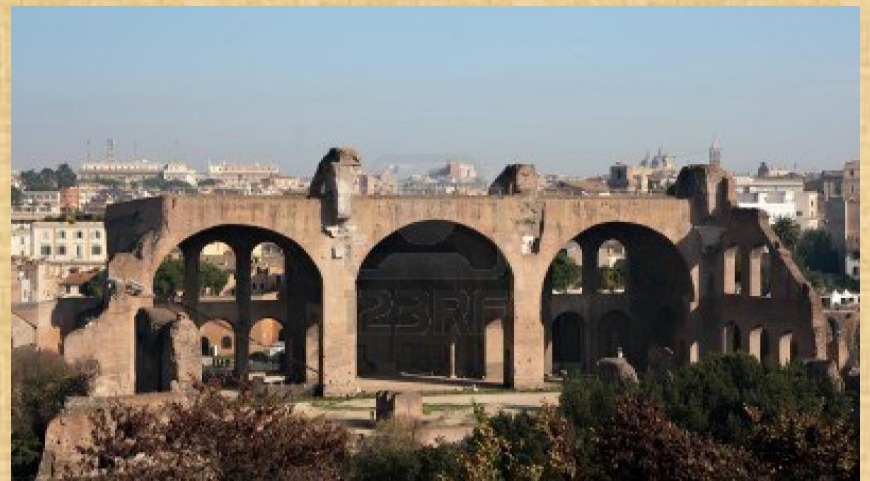
- 5 *agoranomoi* – ensured merchandise was pure and unadulterated.
- 5 *metronomoi* - ensured honest weights and measures were used.
- 5 (later 15) *sitophulakes* - ensured no fraud in sales of grain -
Millers sold flour at price proportional to grain price -
Bakers sold loaves of specified weight at prices proportional to grain price.

Roman Markets

The Roman Forum

- ▣ Located in the centre of Rome - in the valley between the Palatine, Quirinal, Oppian and Capitol hills.
- ▣ The forum acted as a political, Judicial, Religious and Commercial centre.

“The basilicas ought to be placed in the warmest part of forums so the businessmen can meet for business throughout the winter...” – **Vitruvius**
Architecture 5.1.4.



Basilica of Constantine (Maxentius)

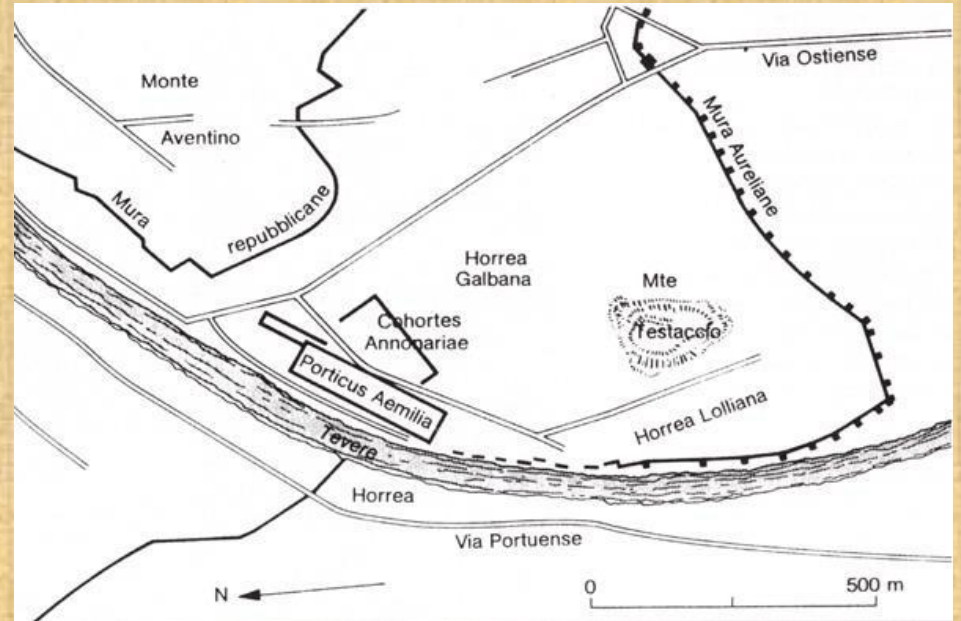
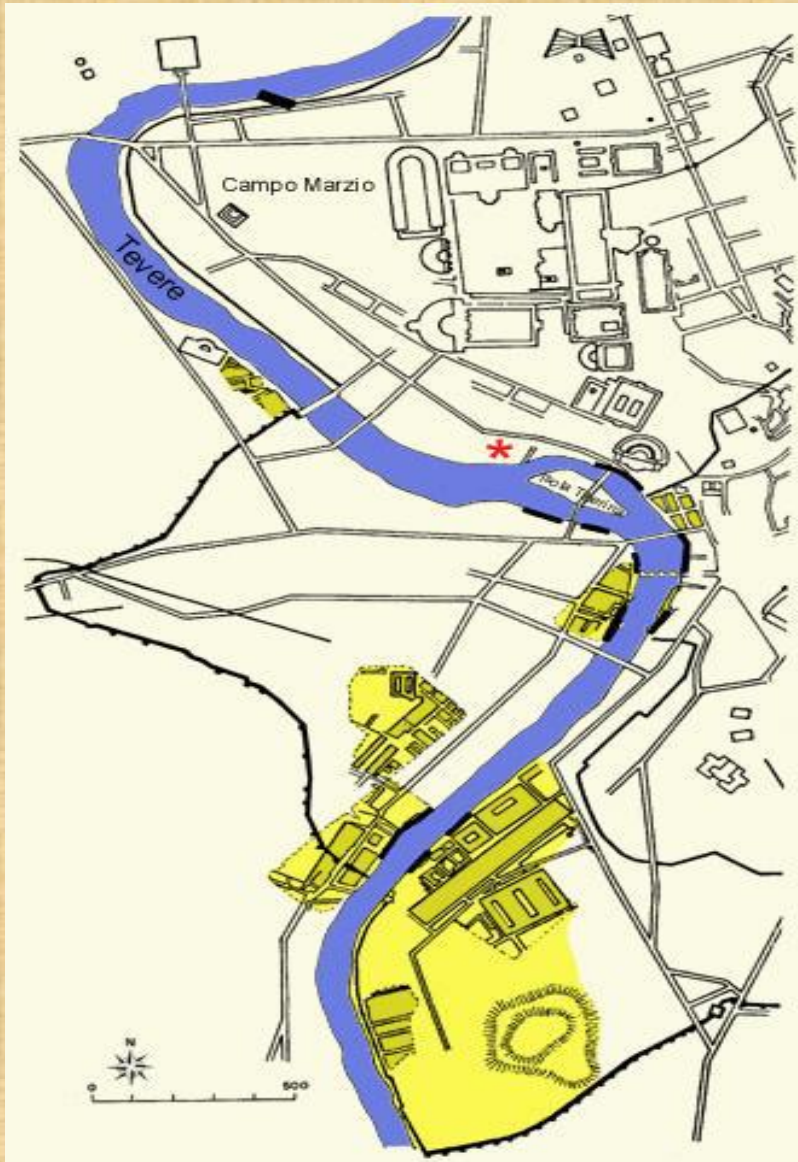
Horrea

- ▣ A new commercial area (Emporium) was developed southwest of the Aventine.
- ▣ From the 2nd C BC this area was being developed with *Horrea* (*Horreum* - storehouse).

“Before the death of Commodus there were the following portents... a fire that began at night in some dwelling leaped to the Temple of Peace and spread to the *horrea Piperataria*...” – **Dio Cassius 24.1.**

“Merchandise of the same product can provide the distinguishing name of part of the city... For instance, the area along the Tiber near the Temple of Portunus is called the Forum Piscarium, for its fish.” – **Varro *The Latin Language* 5.146.**

- Rome 22km inland as crow flies – river navigable for boats with shallow draft.



Monte Testaccio – 35km high, covers 20,000 m² c. 53 million vessels – c. AD 140-250.

- ▣ *Naves codicariae* – specialist vessels used to transport goods from Ostia and Portus up to Rome – boats averaged about 70 tons capacity.
- ▣ The 32 km trip up Tiber took three days – towed by teams of men (*helciarii*).

“On that side the traveller shows on the Flaminian or Salarian way, though his carriage makes no sound, that wheels should not disturb the soothing sleep which neither boatswain's call nor bargemen's shout is loud enough to break, though the Milvian Bridge is so near, and the keels that swiftly glide along the sacred Tiber.” – **Martial *Epigrams* 4.64.**



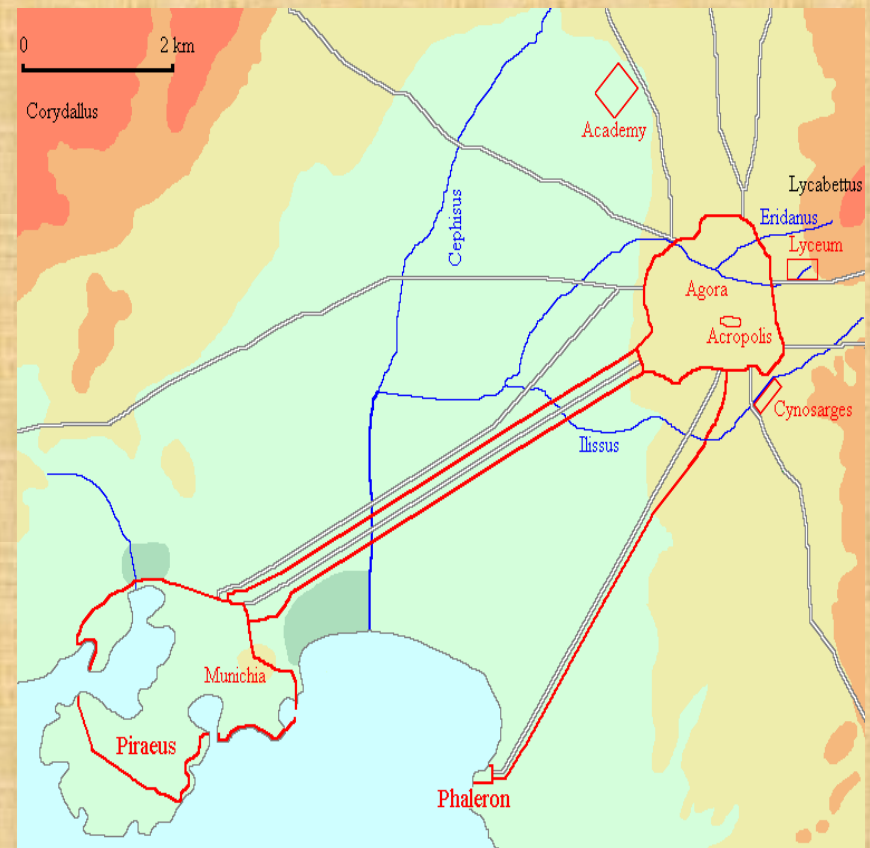
The Isis Geminiana fresco, Ostia.

Ports and Sailing

The Piraeus

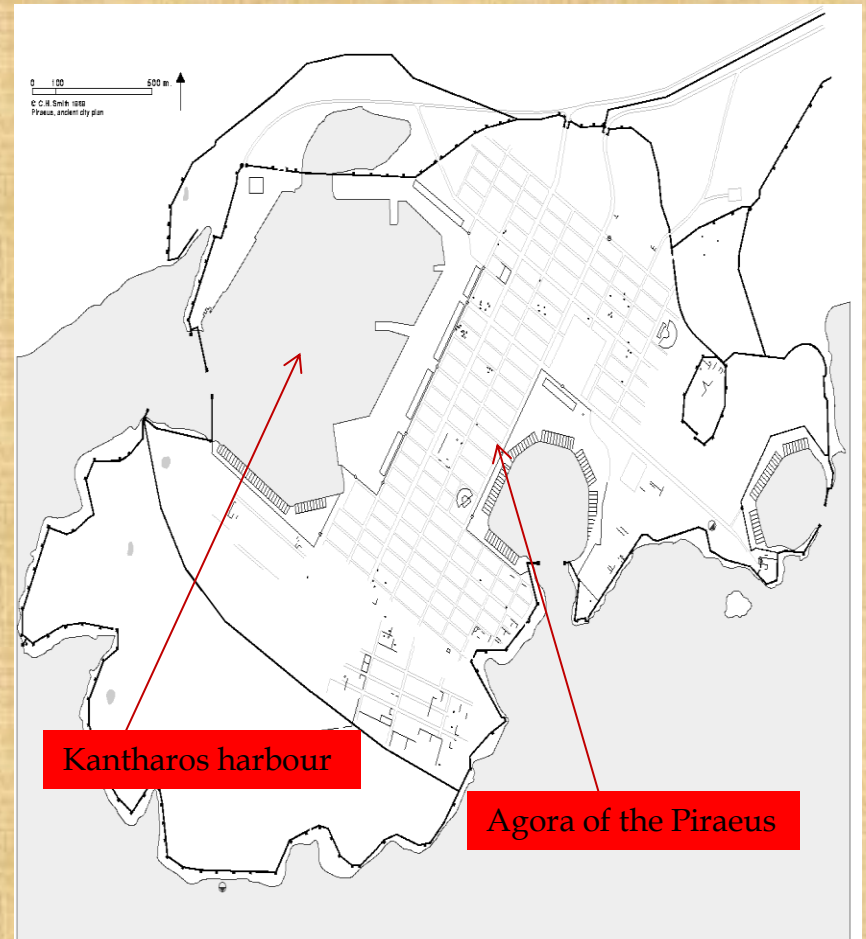
- ▣ The Piraeus is the harbour area of Athens.
- ▣ c. 7 km from the harbour to the acropolis.
- ▣ There were three distinct harbours
 - Zea - triremes
 - Mounichia - triremes
 - Kantharos – commercial.

City walls in red



Merchant Harbour

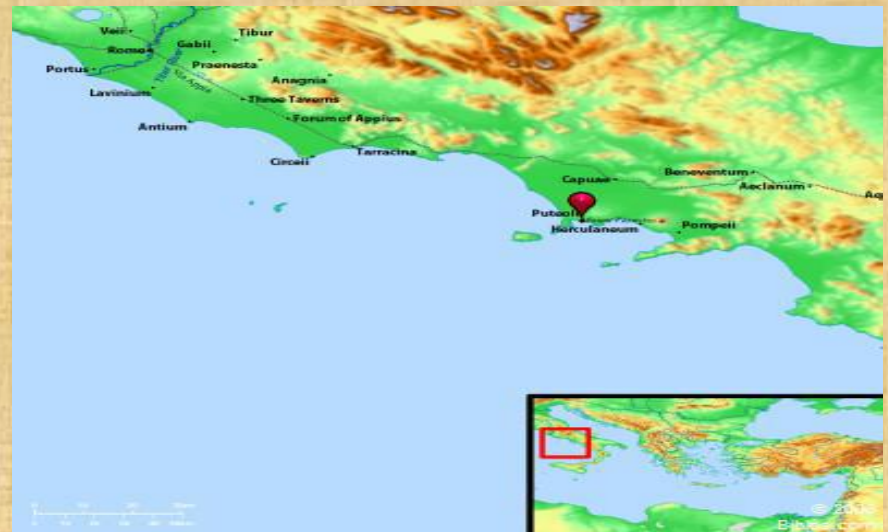
- ❑ Piraeus was laid out on a grid plan, designed by Hippodamos of Miletos.
- ❑ Many metics lived here – foreign cult objects found.
- ❑ Banks and warehouses.
- ❑ Merchant ships moored at quays and wharfs; they were not pulled out of the water like warships.



Puteoli

- ❑ Campania a fertile agricultural region, notable for wine. Also other industries, e.g. bronze-working.
- ❑ Puteoli offered a natural deep-water harbour.
- ❑ Just under 200 km by road from Rome.
- ❑ Archive of the Sulpicii (found at Pompeii).

“...and here the exports from Alexandria also are larger than the imports; and anyone might judge, if he were at either Alexandria or Dicaearchia [**Puteoli**] and saw the merchant vessels both at their arrival and at their departure, how much heavier or lighter they sailed to or from there...” – **Strabo Geography 17.1.7.**

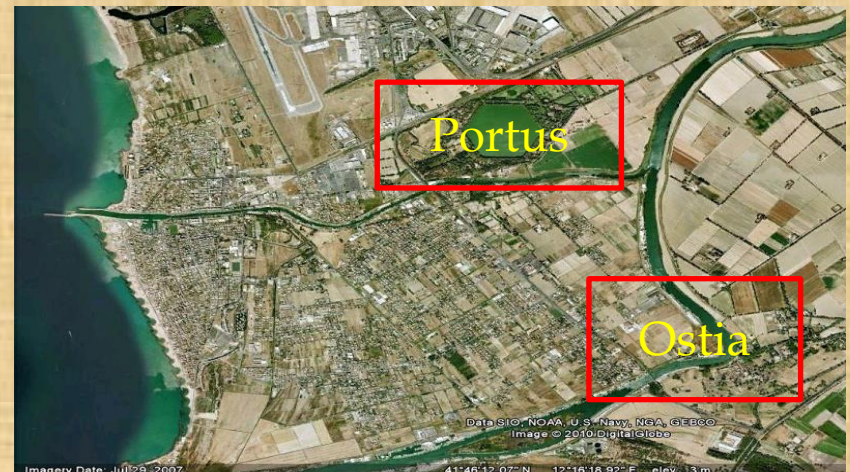
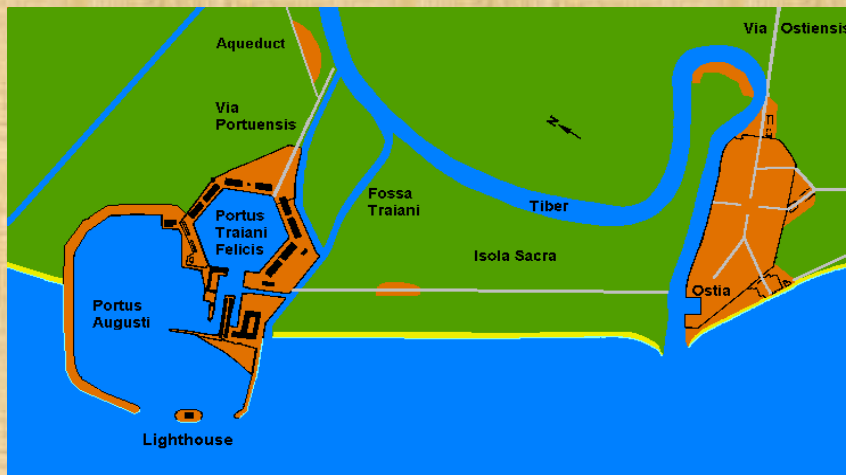


Ostia / Portus

“He constructed the harbour at Ostia by building curving breakwaters on the right and left, while before the entrance he placed a mole in deep water. To give this mole a firmer foundation, he first sank the ship in which the great obelisk had been brought from Egypt, and then securing it by piles, built upon it a very lofty tower after the model of the Pharos at Alexandria, to be lighted at night and guide the course of ships.” – **Suetonius *Divus Claudius* 20.3.**



Nero AE Sestertius. 63/64 AD. RIC 181v



Vegetius *Epitoma rei militaris* 4. 39

- ❑ The 'safe season' is 6 days before the Kalends of June (27 May) till 18 days before the Kalends of October (14 September).
- ❑ The 'risky seasons' are from after 14 September until 3 days before the Ides of November (11 November), and from 10 March until the Ides of May (15 May).
- ❑ The 'closed season' is from 11 November until the Ides of March (10 March)

Lucian *Navigium*

“...hearing that such a huge boat, exceptionally large, had put into Piraeus, one of the Egyptian grain ships on its way to Italy... what a huge ship! A hundred and twenty cubits long... and well over a quarter as wide, where it is deepest, twenty-nine... she was said to carry corn enough to feed Attica for a year... Then having lost their course, they sailed across the Aegean beating up with the trade winds against them, and yesterday, seventy days after leaving Egypt, they anchored in Piraeus, after being driven so far downwind, they should have kept Crete to the starboard, and sailed beyond Malea so as to be in Italy by now.” (1, 5-9).

▣ See also *Acts of the Apostles* 27-28.

Sailing Times - Italy and Alexandria

Puteoli/Ostia to Alexandria

- ▣ Valerius Marianus – Puteoli to Alexandria – 8 days; Galerius and Balbillus (prefects of Egypt) – 6 and 5 days (from straits of Sicily).
- ▣ Average time for death of emperor to reach Alexandria 52 days – Duncan-Jones (1990).

Alexandria to Puteoli/Ostia

- ▣ 30 days – Sulpicius Severus *Dialogues* 1.1.30.
- ▣ 70 days – Lucian *Navigium* 7–10.
- ▣ Venetian records of the 16th and 17th centuries – Jaffa to Venice – 89 days journey on average (pilgrimage records) – Duncan-Jones (1990).

Cost of Transport

	Sea	River	Land
18 th C. England (Duncan-Jones 1974)	1	4.7	22.6
Roman Empire (Duncan-Jones 1974)	1	4.9	28
Roman Rhine Frontier (Kuenow 1980)	1	5.9	62.5

Grain Supply

Grain Shortages

- ▣ Variable Mediterranean climate means poor harvest not infrequent.
- ▣ Attica's agricultural capacity sufficient to feed perhaps c. 150,000 – 200,000? - Population estimates c.150,000 – 250,000?
- ▣ Population of Rome c.1st century AD about 1,000,000 - Mattingly and Aldrete estimate – a minimum requirement of 948 ships (average capacity 250 tons) for wheat, 104 ships for oil, 640 ships for wine = 1,692 ships (more due to shipwreck).
- ▣ 285,714 olive oil amphorae – 4,000,000 wine amphorae, 4,740,000 sacks of wheat = 9,300,000 “porter-loads” per year – 100 day peak trade period – 93,000 “porter-loads” per day – requirement for 3,000 labourers for ship-unloading at Ostia / Portus?

Shortage and Instability

“Once indeed in a time of great scarcity when it was difficult to find a remedy, he expelled from the city the slaves that were for sale, as well as the schools of gladiators, all foreigners with the exception of physicians and teachers, and a part of the household slaves; and when grain at last became more plentiful, he writes: ‘I was strongly inclined to do away forever with distributions of grain, because through dependence on them agriculture was neglected; but I did not carry out my purpose, feeling sure that they would one day be renewed through desire for popular favour.’ But from that time on he regulated the practice with no less regard for the interests of the farmers and grain-dealers than for those of the populace.”

– Suetonius *Divus Augustus* 42.3.

Athenian Grain-Tax Law

“In the archonship of Sokratides [374/3 BC]... Agyrrhios moved: In order that there may be grain for the people (*demos*) in the public domain, sell the 8 % tax (*dodekate*) (which originates) in Lemnos, Imbros, and Skyros, and the 2% tax (*pentekoste*) in terms of grain... Let the Assembly (*demos*) elect ten men from all the Athenians in the meeting (*ekklesia*) at which they elect the generals (*strategoi*), who are to take care of the grain. After these men have seen to the weighing out of the grain in accordance with the written instructions, let them sell it in the marketplace (*agora*) at whatever time seems best to the Assembly (*demos*), but it is not permitted to put the sale of the grain to a vote before the month of Anthesterion (January/February). Let the Assembly (*demos*) set the price at which the elected men must sell the wheat and barley. Let the buyers (*priamenoι*) of the 8 % tax (*dodekate*) transport the grain (to the *Aiakeion*) before the month of Maimakterion (October/November.” – *SEG XXXVI 146*.

Incentives for Merchants

“To the merchants he held out the certainty of profit by assuming the expense of any loss that they might suffer from storms, and offered to those who would build merchant ships large bounties, adapted to the condition of each: to a citizen exemption from the *lex Papia Poppaea* (law promoting marriage); to a Latin the rights of Roman citizenship; to women the privileges allowed the mothers of four children. And all these provisions are in force to-day.” – **Suetonius**
Divus Claudius 18-19.

Athens – Grain Distribution

“Moreover, in accordance with Aristides’ proposal, the Athenians furnished an abundant food supply for the masses: from the income accruing from tribute, taxes and the allies more than 20,000 were kept provisioned. For there were 6,000 jurors, 1,600 archers, 1,200 cavalrymen, 500 Council members, 500 guards of the docks, and 50 guards in the city. In terms of magistrates, there were about 700 at home, and about 700 abroad. Added to these, when the Athenians went to war later on, were 2,500 hoplites, 20 patrol vessels, and other ships conveying the tribute, with 2,000 crewmembers elected by lot. Over and above this there were the Prytaneum [town hall], the orphans, and prison guards, for all these were supported by state funds.” – *Aristotle Athenian Constitution* 24.3.

Rome – Grain Dole

- ▣ Institution by Gaius Gracchus in 122 BC of a law (*Lex Frumentaria*) providing subsidised grain for a certain portion of adult male Roman citizen population.
- ▣ Clodius, during his tribunate (58 BC) made the grain dole one of free distribution (rather than subsidy) - *Lex Clodia Frumentaria*.

“[Julius Caesar]... reduced the number of those who received grain at public expense from three hundred and twenty thousand to one hundred and fifty thousand.” – **Suetonius** *Divus Julius* 41.3.

“He revised the lists of the people district by district... he determined to give out tickets for four months' supply three times a year; but at their urgent request he allowed a return to the old custom of receiving a share every month.” – **Suetonius** *Divus Augustus* 40.2.

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