

Description PhD-Project for CGS

Stürme, Seuchen, Spekulanten

Antike Beurteilungen der Ursachen von Versorgungsengpässen in Rom

(Storms, Plagues, Speculators. Ancient Assessments of the Causes of Food Shortages in Rome)

My dissertation's focus lies on the causes of food shortages in Rome – and, in particular, on the ancient writers' views on the matter. Startling discrepancies between ancient narratives on one hand and insights gained in more recent research on the other, allow to draw conclusions about Roman concepts and patterns of thought which might differ widely from modern ideas.

Subject of my research is the city of Rome (with its up to about a million inhabitants) within a timeframe ranging from the mythical foundation (753 B.C.) to the end of the Severan dynasty (A.D. 235).

My central hypothesis is the following: ancient historiographers did not discuss food shortages in their own right, but only out of political or moral motives. In order to substantiate this hypothesis, I have on one hand been studying the preconditions for supplying the metropolis in Roman times, and on the other I have been working on a catalogue of source passages concerning difficulties with the Roman food supply. Currently, I am working on the core of the project, where I use discourse analysis as well as a praxeological lecture of the selected source passages in order to substantiate my claims.

The expected results will be a better understanding of how the ancients saw relations between human actions and natural processes – especially concerning crises and their causes, logistic challenges or the role of emperors in preventing crises. Besides, new insights into selection criteria applied by historiographers as well as into the significance of expertise in Rome can be expected.