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THE ORGANIZATION OF FRUMENTARII

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As their name implies, the *frumentarii* were, in origin, concerned with *frumentum* - with the supply of corn to the Roman armies.¹ But, as is well known, this was merely a cover for their operations in intelligence gathering and secret police work. What is not so clear is how they were organized, and how they functioned, in the provinces.

Some elements are well established: -

Their base of operations was the *castra peregrina*, on the *Mons Caelius* in Rome.² Their commander was the *princeps peregrinorum*, a man with the rank and status of a senior centurion. Under him was the *subprinceps*, also of centurion rank, while other offices we hear of in Rome include *optio peregrinorum*, *canaliclarius* and *aedilis castrorum*. The *frumentarii* themselves were ordered out to the provinces, and there, in some way not clear to us, they operated under their own centurions, the *centuriones frumentarii*.

Although we hear of *stationes* appropriated to the *frumentarii* near Rome itself,³ we have no such evidence for the provinces. They may well have often had their headquarters in the provincial capital: a *frumentarius* had charge of a prison at Ephesus, capital of Asia (CIL III 433 = ILS 2368). A *frumentarius* was apparently in charge of the building of a *scola* for the *speculatores* of I *Adiutrix* and II *Adiutrix*, serving on the staff of the governor of Pannonia Inferior at Aquincum (CIL III 3524 = ILS 2375). Similarly, a *centurio frumentarius* had charge of the building, by legionary detachments, of a stretch of the city walls of *Salonae*, the capital of Dalmatia (CIL III 1980 = ILS 2287).

Although it has been claimed that *frumentarii* served as such in the *officia* of provincial governors,⁴ there is no evidence for this - even though they are sometimes associated with members of provincial *officia* on inscriptions. On the contrary, it is now clear that when transferred into a governor's *officium*, they no longer ranked as *frumentarii*. The evidence is contained in a partial list of the members of the *officium* of the legate of Numidia, dating to the early third century (AE 1917-18,57). After four *speculatores* and 30 *beneficarii consularis* are listed six men described simply as *candidati*, and then five who appear as *ex frum(entariis)*. Other inscriptions record men promoted from *frumentarius* to *beneficiarius consularis*.⁵ Such promotion clearly involved transfer into the governor's *officium*, where

¹ There is no reason to think that they were at all concerned with the supply of corn to Rome, the sphere of the *praefectus annonae*.

² Ammianus Marcellinus XVI, 12,66: in castris peregrinis, quae in monte sunt Caelio.

³ For the *castra peregrina* and the various officers stationed there see P.K. Bailie Reynolds, JRS XIII, 1923, 152-189.

⁴ A. Domaszewski, Rangordnung, 34, accepted by W.G. Sinnigen, MMAR 27, 1962, 213-224 and N.B. Rankov, Britannia XVIII, 1987, 244.

⁵ CIL II 4154 = ILS 2369; CIL III 3020; CIL VIII 17627; Srpska Kraljevska Akademija Spomenik 71, 193 1, 90 no. 209.

the man might have to wait for a while, along with other *candidati*, until a vacancy as *beneficiarius consularis* appeared.

The emperor thus had his own men on the staffs of provincial governors. Unlike men promoted by the latter, they owed loyalty, and gratitude for advancement, not to the governor but directly to the emperor. They could and no doubt did report directly to him, bypassing the governor. They could be promoted via the rank of *speculator* to the *centurionate* (CIL VI 36775 = ILS 484), and were eligible for advancement in the *castra peregrina* along with others who had not been inserted as '*moles*' into provincial *officia*.

The *frumentarius* seems often to have served in a province far removed from that in which his legion was stationed.⁶ His enrolment in a legion was clearly a mere formality, and there is no evidence that he served at his legion's headquarters or had any formal duties with his legion. He was clearly totally distinct from the ordinary legionary enlisted man.

Operating no doubt under the immediate orders of a *centurio frumentarius* he served the emperor, not the governor, and could not only be ordered to arrest⁷ but also to assassinate.⁸ When promoted to *centurio frumentarius*, he could aspire to further advancement to the highest offices open to equestrians, equally with equestrians with more orthodox backgrounds. But throughout he will never have ceased to be the emperor's man, reporting directly on all matters of security. He is thus to be clearly distinguished from all other men in the public service of Rome during the principate.

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⁶ A *frumentarius* from IV Flavia at Aquincum, CIL III 3578; one from V Macedonica in Africa, CIL VIII 2867; one from VII Gemina in Noricum, CIL III 5579. If a *frumentarius* was promoted to *bf. cos.* in the province in which he was serving, we can see how often *beneficarii consularis* may have been 'foreigners' to the civilians among whom they served. It is to be noted that one of the *ex-frumentariis* listed in Numidia in AE 1917-18,57 was Aurelius Nilammon - an Egyptian name.

⁷ *Acta Martyrorum* (p.52 Ruinart); Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* VI, 40; St. Cyprian, *Ep.* 81.

⁸ SHA *Did. Iul.* 5, 8 with CIL X 6657 = ILS 1387 and AE 1945,80.