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### Reinterpreting the Roman '*Alimenta*': expanding modern perspective on state responsibility in child welfare

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**Background:** The Roman '*alimenta*' introduced by the Emperor Trajan around 98-117 CE was a state sponsored welfare program which provided public funds to poor children and orphans living in Italian cities. This program which provided such children with financial aid and the basic necessities such as food and clothing, was funded through the granting of agricultural loans to Italian landowners. This not only granted a steady income to support the *alimenta*, but also boosted Rome's agricultural economy by supporting small farmers. While majority of the existing scholarly interpretation of the program is that on the *alimenta* being an economic mechanism to drive the agricultural development of Rome, this study aims to add a novel perspective by situating it within the broader discourse on state responsibility in child welfare.

**Method:** Accordingly, this study employs a qualitative research methodology by taking into analyses primary sources and archaeological evidence including the works of Pliny the Younger's letters and inscriptions from Roman municipalities, alongside secondary literature on welfare economics and public policy. Under this approach, this study will also follow an eclectic method by examining modern welfare models from various states to contextualize the relevance of *alimenta* in contemporary policy discussions.

**Results:** The *alimenta* did undoubtedly have an impact on the social welfare as epigraphic evidence suggests that thousands of children benefited from the program. Accordingly, 16 to 20 sestertii; Roman coins were provided monthly per child. The *alimenta* is thus a timeless reminder that state-sponsored child welfare is a fundamental social responsibility, not just a temporary solution to poverty.

**Conclusions:** It stands as a true testament of a sustainable funding model, prompting a rethink on alternative funding mechanisms for child welfare that reduce financial strain on government budgets today.

**Keywords:** *Alimenta*, Rome, state, child, welfare.