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Once upon a time a professor of economic history told me that, in books on economic history, the text is quite superfluous. The crux of the argument should be found and the majority of the effort of the author should be directed to the tables and graphs. The main difference between quantitative and qualitative research is that the first exposes the truth through a scientific method, while the latter is just a collection of opinions from people, be they ancient or modern observers. Because people are frequently unreliable and their observations subjective, the text that is based on them suffers from the same defects. Quantifiable information, analyzed with scientific statistical analysis, would offer an unbiased view that transcends the limitations of human observers. Good economic history would thus reveal not what the contemporaries thought but what actually took place.

Paul Erdkamp, a noted scholar of Roman military history, has written a book on Roman economic history which does not have a single table, graph or other tool of statistical analysis. As is evident to every student of Roman history, the topic is of utmost importance. The Roman Empire was in essence consisted, in addition to the countryside, of a number of large cities, and the organization of food supply to those cities was the prerequisite of the very existence of the empire. The size of the cities, with Rome in a class by itself, was far too large to be supported by their immediate hinterland which is why an elaborate grain market existed to supply them with grain from areas with large surplus production such as North Africa, Egypt and the Black Sea. The aim of the book is to examine the functioning of the grain market, the mechanisms with which, to take a famous example grain from Egypt, was acquired, transported and delivered to the Roman plebs. Because of its general importance, the grain market was heav-