FUNDUS AS ECONOMIC UNIT*

by

P.W. DE NEEVE (Amsterdam)

1. - The prevailing opinion among scholars is that the term *fundus* refers to an economic unit. What exactly this unit comprises, however, is usually not further specified, as is evidenced by the following survey, which lays no claim to completeness.

In his article on *Die italische Bodentheilung und die Alimentartafeln* 1, in many respects of fundamental significance, Mommsen speaks of a 'wirtschaftliche Einheit' without further definition. In the RE, A. Schulten goes into rather more detail2. He begins by defining *fundus* as a 'wirtschaftlicher Organismus', a 'topographische und wirtschaftliche Einheit'. A few lines further on he speaks of a 'selbständiger wirtschaftlicher Organismus'. Again, rather vague. Somewhat more clarity is to be found in A. Steinwenter's definition: 'Maßgebend für die Einheit des Fundus-Komplexes erscheint immer die einheitliche Bewirtschaftung'3. Admittedly the word 'Bewirtschaftung' itself can be interpreted in various ways, but the context would seem to indicate that Steinwenter means that *fundus* refers to a unit of production4, a farm5. F.G. de Pachtere seems to entertain an analogous opinion when, discussing the *fundi* in the *Tabula Veleias* (CIL 11.1147) with composite names, he states that they nevertheless '... ne constituent en général qu'une seule exploitation'6. In principle the same may be said of...

* This article was published originally, in Dutch, as Appendix IV (p. 151-167) of my thesis Colonus, Privégrondpacht in Romeins Italië tijdens de Republiek en het vroege Principaat, Utrecht 1981 (of this work minus some parts, an English version has now appeared: Colonus, Private Farm-tenancy in Roman Italy during the Republic and the Early Empire, Amsterdam 1984). For the purpose of separate publication, it has been slightly adapted but not essentially modified.
5. For this term see, for example, Jones, 52-54; 94. 'Farm' is distinct from 'estate' (see also below, § 5).
'exploitation' as of Steinwenter's 'Bewirtschaftung', but it would seem plausible that De Pachtere uses the word in the sense of 'unit of production'. Finally, L. Capogrossi Colognesi recently pointed out that the concept fundus 'n'est pas une donnée étroitement matérielle, ni étroitement juridique, mais ... se rattache à l'organisation économique de la propriété', without further specification of what he means exactly by this.

A completely divergent opinion is held, however, by P. Veyne, the only one to do so as far as I can ascertain: fundus means — at least in the Tabulae of Veleia and Ligures Baebiani (CIL 11.1147 and 9.1455 respectively) — nothing more than a 'parcelle cadastrale' and has no economic connotation.

Further consideration of this problem would therefore seem to be of some purpose.

2. — To begin with, even a cursory perusal of the sources makes it clear that, in any case, fundus cannot always be taken to mean 'unit of production'.

This is evidenced by the structure of Horace's Sabinum, for instance. That is a fundus (Hor. Ep. 1.16.1; cf. also Porph. Hor. Epod. 1.31-32). Part of it is cultivated by slaves, the rest is divided among five tenants (Hor. Ep. 1.14.1-3; Sat. 2.7.118) each of whom most probably had his own operation. So in fact the fundus consisted of six 'units of production'.

Another fact is that, in Leg. agr. 3.14, the picture painted by Cicero is that Rullus' father in law fundos ... optimos fructuosissimosque continuavit and thus ex multis praedisi unam fundi regionem formamque perfecerit. That the en...

7. For 'exploitation' as 'concern' see, for example, P. George, Précis de Géographie Rurale, Paris 1963, 121-122. Confirmation that De Pachtere took 'exploitation' to mean exploitation as one concern is to be found on p. 107: '... ces éléments de mêmes fonds sont plus naturellement réunis pour l'exploitation que des biens situés en des pagi différents'.


9. P. Veyne, La Table des Ligures Baebiani et l'Institution Alimentaire de Trajan, MEFR 69 (1957) 114-125; the quotation on p. 123.

10. Cf. also W.E. Heitland, Agricola, Cambridge 1921 (repr. Westport, Connecticut 1970), 216. However that would not be so in the case of share-cropping (Heitland takes account of that possibility), where there is some question of 'semi-direct exploitation' (see my Colonus, ch. I, § 5). But there is no indication for this; it may even be considered improbable. In the first place there was most likely hardly any share-cropping at this time (ibid., ch. I, note 60) and in the second, the Sabinum was not concerned with what can be called plantation farming (ibid., ch. III, § 6 and § 8 with note 136) in which share-cropping could have had a function (ibid., ch. III, § 7b), 'Fermage', in which the tenant managed his own concern (ibid., ch. I, § 5), is therefore the most obvious form. For that matter the fact that the Sabinum was a fundus on which there was no plantation farming refutes the conception of Frier (cited n. 4), 214-215 (Sabinum mentioned in note 56) that fundus always signified a concern that could be called a plantation (see my Colonus, ch. III, § 6; Frier does not use the term 'plantation', but it is evident from the context that this is what he means). That fundus was strictly neutral in this respect can be inferred from the very broad definition of Florent. D. 50, 16, 211 (for this see below, § 5).

11. The reading of the Oxford-edition (A.C. Clark, 1909), unlike the codd., is normamque on the grounds of Hor. Sat. 2.6.8. I see no reason for this emendation (see also below, § 3).