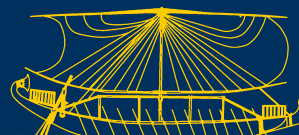


Muziris 2



Μουζιρίς



Modern Economics and the Ancient World

Were the Ancients Rational Actors?

Selected Papers from the Online Conference,
29–31 July 2021

Edited by Sven Günther

Zaphon

Muziris

Historische Papyrologie, Epigraphik und
verwandte Gebiete der antiken Kulturen

Historical papyrology, epigraphy and
neighbouring fields in ancient cultures

Band 2

Herausgegeben von
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= Muziris 2

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Old Ideals and Adaptations to a New Reality

Columella's *De Re Rustica*, a Survival Handbook for an Elite?

José Remesal Rodríguez

Abstract: I begin by assuming that each individual is driven by his or her interests and that each individual creates a mental schema to justify his or her actions. This “rationalization” is a function of his position in the social fabric of the world in which he lives. Augustus’ creation of his empire radically changed the political and economic structure of the society of republican Rome. Augustus concentrated in his person both the political power of the patriarchs and that of the *populus Romanus*. Rome was no longer the centre of Roman expansionism, but the centre which, as in all empires, was to attract to itself the resources of the vast territories conquered in the final phase of the Republic by both Caesar and Pompey. Columella was torn between the old ideals of the Roman elite and the effort to rationalise agricultural production within the new framework created by Augustan policy.

Keywords: Economy – Politics – Agriculture – Columella – Gades – Tarentum – Roman Empire

The life and work of L. Iunius Moderatus Columella has long been analysed from various perspectives. Here I would like to dwell on one aspect that, in my view, has not been sufficiently addressed yet. When we talk about the “rationality” of economic action, we have to take into account many other non-economic factors, such as, for example, the existence of food taboos that prevent certain economic developments, or certain economic actions that are not well regarded by the social framework in which the individual moves. Here I would like to focus on the study of the social and political environment in which Columella lived and show how his ideology was determined by the contrast between an ideal of status and the concrete position of the individual within this ideal status in which he was forced to act:¹

... magnaque deum benignitate et modestia hiemis rebus extremis subventum. at hercule olim Italia legionibus longinquas in provincias commeatus portabat, nec nunc infecunditate laboratur, sed Africam potius et Aegyptum exercemus, navi- busque et casibus vita populi Romani permissa est.

1 Valencia Hernández 1991.

... and the crisis was relieved only by the especial grace of the gods and the mildness of the winter. And yet, Heaven knows, in the past, Italy exported supplies for the legions into remote provinces; nor is sterility the trouble now, but we cultivate Africa and Egypt by preference, and the life of the Roman nation has been staked upon cargo-boats and accidents. (Tac. *Ann.* 12.43.2; trans. taken from Loeb edition, 1937)

Tacitus states that once Rome and Italy were sufficient to supply the legions fighting in distant lands. Now Rome depended on ships from Egypt and Africa. Columella had already pointed out this fact:

Itaque in "hoc Latio et Saturnia terra," ubi di fructus agrorum progeniem suam docuerant, ibi nunc ad hastam locamus, ut nobis ex transmarinis provinciis advehatur frumentum, ne fame laboremus, et vindemias condimus ex insulis Cycladibus ac regionibus Baeticis Gallicisque. Nec mirum, cum sit publice concepta et confirmata iam vulgaris existimatio rem rusticam sordidum opus et id esse negotium quod nullius egeat magisterio praeceptove.

So, then, in "this Latium and Saturnian land," where the gods had taught their offspring of the fruits of the fields, we let contracts at auction for the importation of grain from our provinces beyond the sea, that we may not suffer hunger; and we lay up our stores of wine from the Cyclades Islands and from the districts of Baetica and Gaul. Nor is it to be wondered at, seeing that the common notion is now generally entertained and established that farming is a mean employment and a business which has no need of direction or of precept. (Colum. praef. 20; trans. taken from Loeb edition, 1941)

Yes, Rome, Italy, had supplied its legions as Rome expanded along the shores of the Mediterranean, but everything had changed: Caesar in the west and Pompey in the east had expanded Rome's controlled territory far beyond the shores of the Mediterranean. The long civil war had a clear winner, Octavian/Augustus, who had to reorganise such a vast territory and secure power in Rome, where he became both *princeps senatus* and in 23 BC, holder of the power of the plebeian tribune (*tribunicia potestas*). He dismissed much of the army that had led him to victory by granting them land in Italy or in the provinces; an army that now swore by the emperor and not by the Republic; an army on which Augustus imposed his conditions of life, pay and promotion.²

2 A current synthesis in Le Bohec 2018.

He allowed senators to continue to administer the old provinces on the shores of the Mediterranean, which he demilitarised, maintaining the fiction of senatorial government, and reserved direct control of most of the newly conquered territories, where he stationed his soldiers.

Pliny the Younger recalls, one hundred and fifty years later, that Pompey's most glorious act was to assume the *cura annonae* (Plin. *Pan.* 29.1).³ Augustus understood that in order to maintain social peace in Rome and keep the plebs on his side, he had to provide Rome with food in general. A system Juvenal called *panem et circenses*. Hence, the first political action Augustus mentions in his *Res Gestae*, after listing his merits, was that in 22 BC he freed the whole city, *populum universum*, and at its own expense, *meis impensis*, from famine:

Non recusavi in summa frumenti penuria curationem annonae, quam ita administravi, ut intra paucos dies metu et periculo praesenti populum universum meis impensis liberarem.

I did not decline at a time of the greatest scarcity of grain the charge of the grain-supply, which I so administered that, within a few days, I freed the entire people, at my own expense, from the fear and danger in which they were. (RGDA 5.2; trans. taken from Loeb edition, 1924).

Contrary to general opinion, I have maintained that the function of the *praefectura annonae* was not only to ensure that sufficient grain reached Rome to meet the needs of the *frumentationes*.⁴ More generally, the function of the *praefectura annonae* was to ensure that the market price of foodstuffs in Rome was not too high, and also to stockpile resources to supply the army. To this end, the emperor had at his disposal: firstly, the tribute paid in kind by the provinces; secondly, the produce of the extensive imperial possessions; and thirdly, if necessary, the imposition of *indictiones*, i.e., compulsory sales to the state at a price fixed by the administration.⁵

3 Kröss 2020.

4 The reference work on this view, in which the concept of *frumentationes* and *annona* are synonymous, is Pavis d'Escuracm 1976. A prosopographical update of the *praefecti annonae* can be found in Caldelli 2020.

5 I have discussed the subject in numerous works: Remesal Rodríguez 1986; 1990a/b; 1997; 1999; 2002a–c; 2008a; 2012. My views have promoted a wide discussion on the evolution of Roman administration, e.g., Wierschowski 2001, to which I replied in Remesal Rodríguez 2002c; or Eck 2006 and my reply in the same volume: Remesal Rodríguez 2006, 41 and in Remesal Rodríguez 2008b. Most recently Eck goes on to criticise my proposal, but without pointing out my arguments or his own against it: Eck 2018, 28.

Augustus soon realised that this system was detrimental to Roman agriculture and even thought of abolishing it:

... impetum se cepisse scribit frumentationes publicas in perpetuum abolendi, quod earum fiducia cultura agrorum cessaret; neque tamen perseverasse, quia certum haberet posse per ambitionem quandoque restitui. Atque ita posthac rem temperavit, ut non minorem aratorum ac negotiantium quam populi rationem deduceret.

“I was strongly inclined to do away forever with distributions of grain, because through dependence on them agriculture was neglected; but I did not carry out my purpose, feeling sure that they would one day be renewed through desire for popular favour.” But from that time on he regulated the practice with no less regard for the interests of the farmers and grain-dealers than for those of the populace. (Suet. *Aug.* 42.3; trans. taken from Loeb edition, 1913)

In any case, Augustus tried to find a balance between the interests of the *populus Romanus*, the provincials and the merchants.⁶

Augustus entrusted the transport of all goods necessary for the state to private individuals, so that trade in other products could develop alongside the transport of *annona* resources, allowing merchants to transport and trade in other products freely. Only in this way can it be understood that a product exogenous to the diet of the Central European peoples, olive oil, could spread not only among the military, in whose diet it was included by the central administration, but also among the population of the Central European provinces.⁷ In my opinion, the “*annona policy*” was one of the determining factors for the general development of Roman politics.⁸

Tiberius, in a year of scarcity, AD 19, subsidised those who brought wheat to Rome with two sesterces per modius, an interventionist measure, but a timely one (Tac. *Ann.* 2.87). Tacitus points to the year AD 23 as another time of shortage in Rome when the emperor tried to remedy the situation (Tac. *Ann.* 4.6.4). In AD 32 Tiberius complained about the treatment of the people at a time of famine, despite the fact that, in his time, he states in the words of Tacitus, more wheat came to Rome and from more places than in the time of Augustus (Tac. *Ann.* 6.13.1). Suetonius points

6 I translate “*aratores*” as “provincials”, meaning all food producers anywhere in the empire, not exclusively in Italy.

7 As the Latin papyrus *P.Gen.Lat.* I recto, part I; Fink 1971, no. 68. The state retained two thirds of the soldier’s salary as maintenance: Remesal Rodríguez 1990.

8 Remesal Rodríguez 1990b.

out (Suet. *Tib.* 32.2) that Tiberius did not want to increase the tribute to the provinces.⁹

However, in another time of scarcity, Claudius applied a much more profound interventionist policy. He granted social privileges to those who, depending on their social status, would put their ships at the service of the supply of Rome. The measure was in force at least until the middle of the second century AD:

... civi vacationem legis Papiae Poppaeae, Latino ius Quiritium, feminis ius IIII liberorum; quae constituta hodieque servantur.

... to a citizen exemption from the *lex Papia Poppaea*; to a Latin the rights of Roman citizenship; to women the privileges allowed the mothers of four children. And all these provisions are in force to day. (Suet. *Claud.* 19; trans. taken from Loeb edition, 1914)¹⁰

Claudius had recognised the problem: Rome needed the support of the provinces to sustain itself, and it was natural that the city that created an empire should benefit from its conquests, and to facilitate this he built a port at Ostia.¹¹

The social privileges granted by Claudius to individuals of various social strata, including women, created a new system, the survival of the empire depended on social stability in Rome, and social stability in Rome depended on the availability of food at a price acceptable to the *populus*, the plebs, in the broadest sense of these terms, for this mass of the inhabitants of Rome. The emperor, having the *potestas* of a *tribunus plebis*, was obliged to look after the plebs. Let us recall Vespasian's reaction when he was presented with a machine that could save labour:

... mechanico quoque quoque grandis columnas exigua impensa perducturum in Capitolium pollicenti praemium pro commento non mediocre optulit, operam remisit praefatus sineret se plebiculam pascere.

To a mechanical engineer, who promised to transport some heavy columns to the Capitol at small expense, he gave no mean reward for his invention, but refused to make use of it, saying: "You must let me feed my poor commons." (Suet. *Vesp.* 18; trans. taken from Loeb edition, 1914)

The emperor did not need new techniques to facilitate the great constructions in Rome, he only needed *plebiculam pascere*, to maintain the plebs.

9 On the years of calamity in Rome, see Virlouvét 1985; 2009.

10 Cf. Gai. *Inst.* 1.32c; Höbenreich 1997, 76–78; Kröss 2016.

11 Morelli / Marinucci / Arnoldus-Huyzendveld 2011.

We know little about the life of L. Iunius Moderatus Columella, from the personal data contained in his work it is assumed that he lived between AD 4 and 70, that he was from Gades in the Baetica, that he wrote his work between AD 61 and 65, that he must have lived not only his youth but also part of his maturity in the Baetica, given the knowledge he shows of Baetic agriculture, in which his uncle Marcus Columella, to whom he frequently refers, was his teacher.¹² In his work we also find references to notable figures of his time: the philosopher Seneca, his brother Iunius Gallio, Marcus Trebilius (Colum. 5.1.2). If we accept as authentic the inscription found in Tarentum: *L. Iunius L. F. Gal / Moderatus / Columellae / Trib. Mil. leg. VI Ferratae*,¹³ we must assume that he aspired to a career in the service of the emperor, which he does not seem to have pursued. It is suggested that he held this office in AD 36 under his friend M. Trebellius, governor of Syria. This inscription is used to explain his knowledge of the eastern Mediterranean since Columella gives direct references to the cultivation of sesame which he claims to have seen in Syria and Cilicia (Colum. 2.10.18).

It is difficult to explain Columella's stay in Tarentum since in his work he only makes references to his possessions in Latium, Ardea, Carseoli and Alba (Colum. 3.9.2) and in Caere (Colum. 3.3.3), but not in southern Italy, although his stay in Tarentum could be later than the publication of his work, and therefore we lack references on it. Even if the Tarentum inscription were authentic, and I still have my doubts about its authenticity, it would have to be connected, in my opinion, with Nero's foundation of a colony in Tarentum in AD 60 (Tac. *Ann.* 14.27.2), Tacitus also states that the attempt failed precisely because it was composed of veterans of various legions, who were not accustomed to agricultural life, who eventually sold their land and returned to their home provinces or where they had served in the militia.

12 On Columella's biography and news about his work I refer, in general terms, to Olivares 2010. Cf. the introduction by Holgado Redondo 1988 and that of García Armendáriz 2004. These works contain the fundamental bibliography on the character and his work.

13 *CIL IX 235 = ILS 2923*. The inscription was already considered a forgery by Mommsen, although Grotefend considered it authentic. Recently Gallo 2019, 141–142 shows that the manuscript that transmits it, that of Merodio, a character always attentive to identifying the individuals he finds in the inscriptions, does not identify, in this case, the character of the inscription with the agronomist; proof, for her, of the authenticity of the inscription; for me it is rather proof of the opposite since, as A. Gallo points out, Merodio refers to the agronomist at another time. On *ibid.*, 143 the author admits that Merodio also reproduces some forgeries. Cf. D'Angela 2000, who already points out that the inscription seemed false to Muratori. Certainly, the inscription is a "talking document" that is easily convincing because it is the only element, external to Columella's own work, to have any information about his life: Gasperini 1968, 389–390.

That this colonisation was a failure is shown by an inscription of AD 78/79 found near Taranto (Crispiano): *Imp(erator) Caesar / Vespasianus / Aug(ustus) co(n)s(ul) VIII / fines agror(um) / p(ublicorum) m(unicipii) T(arentini) ex forma / Gracchiana / restituit*.¹⁴ Vespasian had to reorganise the territory in the old way.

Did Columella participate in the organisation of this colony as a “master farmer” to teach these soldiers how to turn iron swords into ploughshares? If so, he was unsuccessful in his endeavour. One would have to suppose that Columella received an official commission, of which we know nothing either, nor is it recorded in the inscription. A commission from the emperor? A commission promoted by his good friend Seneca, who was in leading position at the time? This is a suggestive idea that may help to raise other questions. But I must admit that it is only an idea, in my opinion, suggestive, but nothing more. Another idea, equally suggestive, provided we accept that the inscription is authentic, and perhaps more realistic, would be to suppose simply that Columella bought land from the holdings sold by the legionaries. He probably thought it prudent to move away from Rome after the fall of Seneca in AD 62.

Some considerations on the Tarentum inscription.¹⁵ The earliest known information is that of Merodio, whose manuscript was licensed for printing in 1681,¹⁶ but Merodio’s manuscript was not published until recent times.¹⁷ The earliest printed notice is that of Pacichelli,¹⁸ who distributes the last two lines differently from Merodio and in his text gives the impression of having seen the inscription, but his commentary is palpably similar to Merodio’s, and although at that time he does not quote Merodio, in the index of his work (*s.v.* Tarentum) he does quote Merodio’s manuscript, indicating that it will be published in Lecce.

Muratori doubted the existence of this inscription (see above), as did Mommsen, but after Grotefend’s defence of the authenticity of the inscription, no one else doubted the validity of the inscription, although it has never been clearly defined whether it is a funerary or honorary inscription. For some, therefore, Columella

14 Gallo 2020; in ead. 2021, the author relates this text to the more general Vespasian action of reorganisation of certain territories in southern Italy. In my opinion, this inscription should be placed in relation to the failure of the Neronian colonisation of the region of Taranto.

15 I thank Y. Le Bohec, A. Buenopane, M. Silvestrini, M. Mayer, and A. Gallo for patiently listening and answering my questions.

16 I am grateful to Annarosa Gallo for the information obtained on Merodio.

17 Merodio 2000.

18 Pacichelli 1685, 363. On Pacichelli, see Carrino 2014. Pacichelli arrived in Naples in 1679, and his work was published in 1685.

died in Taranto.¹⁹ Cichorius in his biography of Columella devotes his efforts to linking the title of *tribunus militum* with the time when M. Trebellius Maximus as *legatus legionis* led a campaign against the Cieti, a Cilician people, in AD 36. Thus, he again explains Columella's knowledge of those regions (Colum. 2.10.8) and establishes the chronology of this knowledge and, furthermore, shows that Columella's friend Marcus Trebellius (Colum. 5.1.2) is none other than the aforementioned Trebellius Maximus.²⁰ In his article, Cichorius fixes another historical moment in Columella's life at AD 41, using a wide range of sources and showing that Columella was in Rome in that year. However, this additional fact has not been pointed out by those who have later dealt with Columella's life.²¹

It is certainly surprising that someone in the 17th century attributed to our character the title of *tribunus militum* of the legio VI Ferrata, but it is also surprising to see the eagerness with which later research has used this document: it is not necessary to think that Columella could only have been in Syria and Cilicia because he was holding a military post, he could have travelled for any other reason. Nor is it necessary that his friend, Marcus Trebellius, is the Trebellius Maximus mentioned by Tacitus. It is strange that, whether it is a funerary or honorary inscription, an equestrian office held many years before is indicated, knowing that Columella, as he points out in the preface to his work, showed no interest in holding public office (Colum. praef. 10).

There would be an explanation for the appearance of this title, if it is accepted that Columella had some role in the Neronian colonisation of Tarentum and that the office of *tribunus militum* is a function of his intervention in this colonization.²² However, it is surprising that there is no reference in the inscription to this activity, the commissioning of which, if he had held it, would have been very significant for a personage who had not, as far as we know, had any other public activity.

In the light of these considerations, I would like to raise another question. At the request of Marcus Trebellius, Columella writes the fifth book on the measurement of fields:

19 Grotefend 1835, for whom the title of *tribunus militum* of the legio VI Ferrata already confirmed Columella's stay in Syria and Cilicia, based on Colum. 2.10.8.2; 10.8. Opinion followed by Dessau in *ILS* 2923.

20 On the character, see lately Camodeca 1983.

21 Cichorius 1922.

22 In imperial times we have evidence that those responsible for the reorganisation of territories held military posts: Hinrichs 1974, 92.

... ut proxime, cum de commetiendis agris rationem M. Trebellius noster requireret a me, vicinum adeo atque coniunctum esse censebat demonstranti, quemadmodum agrum pastinemus, praecipere etiam pastinatum quemadmodum metiri debeamus. ... for example, only recently, when my friend Marcus Trebellius required from me a method of measuring land he expressed the opinion that it was a kindred and indeed closely connected task for one who was showing how we ought to trench land to give instructions also how we ought to measure the land thus trenched. (Colum. 5.1.2; trans. taken from Loeb edition, 1954)

If the friendly Trebellius is Marcus Trebellius Maximus, we know that in AD 61 he was commissioned to take the census in Gallia, together with Quintus Volusius Saturninus and Titus Sextius Africanus (Tac. *Ann.* 14.46). Since Columella states that he had “recently” been asked to do so by his friend, we can understand that Trebellius might have found this knowledge useful for his work in Gallia. In this case we would have to date the fifth book to this year, AD 61, or shortly thereafter. Columella ends up writing on the subject because Silvinus to whom Columella dedicates his work had also asked him to do so, but he begs to be excused if he makes mistakes because he is not a geometrician:

Verum quoniam familiariter a nobis tu quoque, Silvine, praecepta mensurarum desideras, obsequar voluntati tuae, cum eo, ne dubites id opus geometrarum magis esse quam rusticorum, desque veniam, si quid in eo fuerit erratum, cuius scientiam mihi non vindico.

But since, Silvinus, you also ask us in a friendly spirit for instructions about measurements, I will comply with your wish, on condition that you harbour no doubt that this is really the business of geometricians rather than of countrymen and make allowances for any errors that may be committed in a sphere where I do not claim to possess scientific knowledge. (Colum. 5.1.4; trans. taken from Loeb edition, 1954)

Columella never speaks of his father, but only of his paternal uncle, Marcus. It is thus assumed that he must have been orphaned in his childhood and raised by his uncle, who lived in the Baetica. In my opinion, there are a number of questions, certainly decisive ones, about which we have no information. Why did Columella go to Rome and when? Who was his protector there? Did he intend to make a career in the emperor's service? Was he an agent of his uncle to take charge of the sale of his products in Rome? If he intended to make a career in the emperor's service, he soon abandoned it, as is clear from the preface to his work, in which he renounces all the services he had to render in order to obtain any office (Colum. praef. 10; 1.19). As

there was a long scholarly tradition in Gades, did he go to Rome just to learn?²³ Let us remember that the philosopher Moderatus of Gades has the same *nomen* and one of the *cognomina* of our character.²⁴

Claudius, in the speech Tacitus gives in defence of the incorporation of provincials into the Senate, first cites Balbus of Cadiz as an example after the incorporation of the Gauls into the Senate (Tac. *Ann.* 11.24.3). Cornelius Balbus the Elder was the first consul of provincial origin. His nephew, Balbus the Younger, was the last to obtain the right to celebrate a triumph in Rome in the time of Augustus.²⁵ It is well known that in the Roman world, political power and economic power were closely linked, as the case of the Balbi, as well as that of the Annaei of Cordoba, demonstrates. Turranius Gracilis, a native of Gades (Cádiz), probably from the city of Mel-laria, was the first *praefectus annonae*, who held office until the time of Claudius (AD 8–48), although Caligula tried unsuccessfully to remove him (Sen. *Brev. Vit.* 20.4). Turranius, along with the consuls, was among the first to show his submission to Tiberius after the death of Augustus (Tac. *Ann.* 1.7.2).²⁶ Turranius was undoubtedly the most economically influential man in Rome. Seneca, the philosopher, a friend of Columella, a certainly wealthy character, who on his return from exile in AD 49, married Pompeia Paulina, a woman who had been a member of the Roman family for many years. Seneca in his *De brevitate vitae* (18.5) says to his father-in-law: *cum ventre tibi humano negotium est* (“you have to deal with the belly of men”). This is a declaration of Seneca’s interest as a great agricultural landowner.²⁷ Did Columella count on the help of Turranius? Unfortunately, we do not know since he does not quote him. It has been proposed that Lucius Iunius Gallio was of Baetican origin, given his friendship with Seneca senior, who allowed his eldest son, Lucius Annaeus Novatus, to be adopted by Gallio and given the name L. Iunius Annaeus Novatus.²⁸ Columella had the same *nomen* as Gallio, was there a kinship between the two? The other great personality of Baetican origin at the time when Columella arrived in Rome was Sextus Marius, of whom we shall speak shortly.

I have referred to the personal conditions that may have surrounded Columella’s arrival in Rome. It will be necessary to insist on the politico-economic situation: I have already referred to the creation of the *praefectura annonae* and its effective control during the Julio-Claudian dynasty by the Hispanics. I would like to point

23 Rodríguez Neila 1997; Almagro-Gorbea 2012.

24 Ramos Jurado 2003.

25 Rodríguez Neila 1996; 2011.

26 Pavis d’Escurac 1976, 317–319.

27 Remesal Rodríguez 2002b.

28 Castillo 1965, 105, n. 195.

out two other facts. When Sextus Marius, the great mine owner in Baetica, was condemned for incest, Tacitus states that his goods were not auctioned, but went directly into the hands of the emperor, and clarifies that his wealth was the real cause of his death (Tac. *Ann.* 6.19.1).

Another important event was the well-known economic crisis of AD 33. The numerous complaints following the fall of Sejanus had led to the auctioning of many agricultural goods. The *patricians*, in order to buy the auctioned land, had accepted loans at a higher interest rate than the legal rate, which in turn exposed them to the risk of being denounced. Tiberius' reaction was moderate: he granted a year and a half to rectify the situation: ... *secundum iussa legis rationes familiaris quisque componerent* (Tac. *Ann.* 6.16.3), i.e., to repay the loans contracted at excessive interest. But the money was in the hands of the emperor, the beneficiary of the proceeds of the auctions, or of the moneylenders. To protect its members, the Senate decided that it should be invested in the purchase of land in Italy for an amount equal to two-thirds of the capital owed. Finally, the debtors had to take out another loan, this time at a legal interest rate, to pay off their previous debts, or put their newly acquired land up for sale again to pay off the loans.

The lenders had to either lend money, this time at the interest rates allowed by the *lex Iulia de modo credenda possidendique intra Italiam* (Tac. *Ann.* 6.16.1), or buy the land from the debtors. However, the lenders preferred to withhold the money and hope that the oversupply would allow them to buy the land at a lower price, as the text clearly shows. Finally, Tiberius offered interest-free money for three years, provided that the debtor offered collateral in the form of property worth twice the money lent on these terms. This meant that many did not have to put their new property up for sale and, at the same time, received an interest-free loan for a period twice as long as that originally granted by the emperor himself (Tac. *Ann.* 6.16–17).

In my opinion, the crisis of AD 33 is not a systemic crisis. The fear of being denounced for breaking the *lex Iulia* could also put those members of the senatorial elite who had benefited from the confiscations in danger. A large part of the money supply was in the hands of the emperor or of speculators who wanted to benefit from the provisions established by the Senate itself. It was enough for the emperor to put part of the money he had hoarded into circulation for the crisis to be alleviated.²⁹

The confiscations had filled the coffers of the empire, but they had changed the system of land ownership in Italy. According to Suetonius, when the Senate suggested to Tiberius that taxes be raised on the provinces to preserve the state,

29 Noè 2002, 73. Remesal Rodríguez 2012, 222–223; Schartmann 2012; Harris 2019, 175–177. Cf. also Leese in this volume, pp. 204–205.

Tiberius replied that a good shepherd shears the sheep, but does not skin them (Suet. *Tib.* 32.2). Tiberius found a way to fill his coffers: he skinned his rich political enemies and even his friends, such as Sextus Marius or Cornelius Lentulus, whom Tiberius, in order to inherit his property, incited to suicide (Suet. *Tib.* 49.1). The process of the concentration of property in Italy had already been going on for a long time,³⁰ but there is no doubt that the crisis of AD 33, with the disappearance of many notables, led to a significant increase in this concentration, especially in the hands of the emperor, not only in Italy but also in the provinces (Suet. *Tib.* 49.2). In this sense, it is necessary to re-read Pliny's text:

verumque confitentibus latifundia perdidere Italiam, iam vero et provincias - sex domini semissem Africae possidebant, cum interfecit eos Nero princeps.

And if the truth be confessed, large estates have been the ruin of Italy, and are now proving the ruin of the provinces too - half of Africa was owned by six landlords, when the Emperor Nero put them to death (Plin. *NH* 18.7.35; trans. taken from Loeb edition, 1950)

The six owners who possessed half of Africa became one: the emperor.

According to Suetonius (*Aug.* 42.1), when the plebs of Rome complained about the high price of wine and asked Augustus to intervene in the price of the product, he refused, saying that his son-in-law, Agrippa, had built aqueducts so that the people would not die of thirst. Some have seen this as a moralising stance on Augustus' part.³¹ In my opinion, it is a desperate reaction. Augustus had emptied the Senate of political power, although he preserved the forms, but he knew that he should not touch the senators' pockets, so that wine, which was the business of the Roman elite in the final stages of the Republic, did not enter the *annona* cycle until the time of Aurelian (HA. *Aurel.* 48). Proof of this is that Columella recommends its cultivation as the most profitable, and that Seneca invested a large sum in the purchase of a famous vineyard, as implied by Pliny the Elder (*NH* 14.5.47-52) and also mentioned by Columella (Colum. 3.3.3). The price of wine depended on supply and demand and not on the intervention of the *praefectura annonae*, as was the case with grain and oil, products that came from the provinces, largely as a tax in kind, on the price of which the state could intervene. Columella carefully analyses the minimum profit from wine production, concluding that the profit was higher than six percent, the maximum profit that, according to the law, could be obtained by lending the money, which also indicates that if credit is obtained at that rate of interest it would be

30 Kuziscin 1984.

31 Tchernia 1986, 28.

beneficial to invest the money in the purchase of a vineyard.³² It is interesting to note that the calculation developed by Columella also includes the cost of the time necessary for the development of production (Colum. 3.3.2–15). According to Columella's calculations two hundred *iugera* of vineyard would yield as much profit annually as a procurator of sexagenarian rank. Among the numerous properties, it must be assumed that an individual of senatorial rank would have more than two hundred *iugera* of vineyards, in addition to other profitable productions.³³

I understand that the economic rationality of any actor is a function of the life context in which he or she lives. We need only recall the influence of food taboos on economic life. Columella lived between an ancient ideal, the *mos maiorum* just recreated by Augustus, remember that Virgil is frequently quoted by Columella; an economic reality, Italy was no longer the economic centre of the world, its great market, Rome, was supplied by the provinces, which Columella regrets; and a political reality, *Caesar omnia habet* (Sen. Ben. 7.6.3).³⁴

Columella was a provincial who arrived in Rome, linked to a prestigious and influential social group integrated into the Roman elite, some acceded to the senatorial rank, and others, voluntarily, like Annaeus Mela (Tac. Ann. 16.17.3) remained in the equestrian rank, because by serving the emperor, they could enrich themselves and promote themselves socially. What were Columella's pretensions? Certainly, as I have pointed out, he does not seem to be interested in promoting himself in the political sphere, or perhaps he writes out of spite for not having achieved the promotion he had hoped for. Although his view of political life suggests that he was more interested in showing himself as an individual of senatorial pedigree than as a provincial newcomer.

He seems to be only interested in making a comfortable living from the activity he considers the noblest, agriculture, for which he certainly proposes a model of dedication and exploitation;³⁵ a model that proposes a rationalisation of production, but in which it seems that the farmer is only the producer of a series of products dedicated to a nearby market. The production of wine, in regions close to Rome, where his properties were located, allowed for a large market capable of absorbing

32 Carandini 1983; Tchernia 1986.

33 An overview of Columella's economic calculations of investments and overhead costs also for the production of other products in Martin 1971, 289–310 and in Noè 2002, 81–118.

34 Remesal Rodríguez 2001.

35 On Columella's agrarian ideas, reference works continue to be those of Martin 1971, 289–373; 1985. I refer here to the work of Noè 2002, which is a well-documented synthesis of all that is known about Columella's thought.

quality and cheaper wines. Basically, Columella proposes a rationalisation of agriculture, but, in my opinion, with a certain social perspective in mind: that of those well-to-do people in Rome who, living in the city, could personally take care of the exploitation of nearby estates. Columella subtly refers to the tension in which the elite of Rome lived (Colum. 1.1.19), on the one hand interested in obtaining office, on the other hand in need of an ethical justification, respect for the *mos maiorum*, an ideal of *Romanitas* which the provincials soon wanted to put on, and a need to survive economically by making use of an area, wine production, in which the emperor did not want to intervene. Certainly his ideal of rationalising agriculture could also be applied to the provinces, provided that the main condition laid down by Columella was met, namely, that the landowner could have effective control over production.

Moreover, dedication to agriculture, to the ideal of the *bonus agricola*, was also a way of demonstrating the *dignitas* necessary to dedicate oneself to political life, as can be understood from a reading of Pliny the Younger's letters.

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