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Citizenship and religion in the first-millennium BCE Mediterranean: from Etruria to Iberia

Corinna Riva

Abstract

This short contribution summarises an impending research project that will be carried as part of the 2021–22 Distinguished Fellowship programme at the Max-Weber-Kolleg (University of Erfurt) within the research cluster Religion and Urbanity. The aim of the project is to contribute to a comparative understanding of first-millennium BCE Mediterranean urbanism by focusing on citizenship, through the investigation of the archaeological record of ritual contexts in two selected regions: southern Tyrrhenian Etruria and southeastern Iberia. The project builds on recent research on comparative urbanism and the role of religion in urban life, from Greek history to interdisciplinary studies on religion. The particular focus will be to understand whether, and the extent to which, religion provided the conceptual and material space for expressing membership to the urban community or, in one word, citizenship.

Keywords: first-millennium BCE Mediterranean, religion, urbanism, citizenship, Etruria, Iberia

Introduction

A recent volume on first-millennium BCE urbanism between the Mediterranean and temperate Europe has not only put to rest centre–periphery perspectives on this wider region, notably the view of a Mediterranean primacy over temperate Europe in the emergence of urbanism, but has also highlighted that debunking this view involves redirecting our predominant interest in the origins of this phenomenon (Zamboni et al. 2020). This interest has dominated scholarship in and out of the Mediterranean, which arguably stems from a reaction to decades of ethnocentric Graeco-Roman exceptionalism in the understanding of this phenomenon (see Riva 2020). Less coverage has been given to first-millennium BCE urbanism of the non-Graeco-Roman Mediterranean *per se*, understood comparatively with the Graeco-Roman region, partly because of the difficulties of studying text-rich regions along with those that are not. Instead, most recent studies on the subject have concentrated upon urban networks and the drivers generating those networks, whether commercial or otherwise (for example, Gleba and Marin-Aguilera 2021); less recently, the focus has often been on the urban state, its ruling elites and their political authority.

Yet new research on the Trypillia sites of Ukraine has revived the debate on the archaeology of cities (Gaydarska et al. 2020; Wengrow 2018, 2019), even on a global scale (Woolf 2020), as well as related aspects, including citizenship (Stuurman 2019). This development has gone hand in hand with the recognition of the tremendous variability of ancient urbanism, and therefore the importance of comparativism (Gaydarska 2016) on the one hand and the flourishing of contemporary urban studies in the twenty-first century on the other (Rüpke 2020, 1). Meanwhile, at the heart of the Classical Mediterranean city, Greek historians have taken the pivotal step of moving beyond narrow Aristotelian definitions that have dominated even global perspectives on cities and opened up new vistas on what it means to be a citizen or member of a city-state. This raises similar questions for other regions that have a solid archaeological documentary base such as Central Tyrrhenian Italy and southeastern Iberia, which can thus provide an entry into our comparative understanding of first-millennium BCE Mediterranean urbanism. Such questions are at the heart of an impending project which will be

carried out as part of the 2021–22 Distinguished Fellowship programme at the Max-Weber-Kolleg (University of Erfurt), within the research cluster Religion and Urbanity. What follows is an outline of the project. Before that, however, I address citizenship along with recent studies of the Graeco-Roman world, on which the project builds.

Citizenship: from Greco-Roman history to political philosophy

Recent readings of Archaic and Classical Greek texts have challenged strictly political Aristotelian understandings on citizenship and highlighted shared cult, descent and law as constitutive of Greek citizenship. Scholars now deem the latter to be a fluid and dynamic concept; importantly, participation in religion is seen as key to citizenship, involving a ‘covenant’ between the members of the *polis* and the gods, and therefore requiring rules and prescriptions dictating such participation (Blok 2013, 2017; Duplouy and Brock 2018). These new interpretations have gone hand in hand with a significant move to rethink the Greek city-state in relation to civic behaviour, itself driven by strategies for social distinction whereby status was constantly contested and performed (Duplouy 2006, 2019).

Parallel processes have been recently acknowledged for early Republican Rome, on which the debate has been less lively – largely due to a scholarly focus on the late Republican and Imperial periods (for example, Dench 2005). Even for those later periods, however, Rome’s political culture is now deemed to be much more dynamic than previously thought (Flower 2010). In fact, the real barrier to understanding citizenship in the ‘wild frontier land’ (Flower 2010, 55, cf. 48 n.33) that is early Rome comes from the fragmentation of the available textual sources, posing the challenge of peeling back from later sources what can be assessed as reliable evidence (Flower 2010, 35–44). Attempts to confront this challenge have been made successfully with the help of political theory on the one hand and archaeology on the other. Hereditary aristocracy, the existence of several assemblies and the sequence of magistracies characterise the increasingly complex early

Roman Republic in which an open and flexible concept of citizenship went hand in hand with the duties and privileges of citizens outlined in the city-state's developing constitutional and legal framework (Smith 2011; 2020). In these attempts, particular emphasis has been duly placed upon human agency, and hence the state's citizens, to shape – and indeed be – the state in consort with one another (Smith 2011, 228). Importantly, this aspect cannot be adequately addressed without archaeological evidence.

This highlights two aspects. First, in contrast to the Greek world, early Republican Rome is not unlike non-Graeco-Roman regions where the documentary base is almost entirely archaeological. Second, political philosophy and social theory are demonstrably helpful in the definition of socio-political categories, including citizenship itself, and for understanding patterns of social behaviour identified in the archaeological record that can be related to citizenship. In fact, building both on those aforementioned Greek studies and theoretically, I propose a working definition of citizenship that encompasses all aspects of what it means to belong to an urban community: from how membership to this community is expressed, primarily in ritual settings as widely attested across several regions of the basin and beyond (see Rüpke 2020, 2021), to the social cohesion, participation and agency of those belonging to it.

The twofold advantage of this wide definition is first to embrace a multifarious, rather than monolithic, analytical category (Tilly 1995) and second to combine a number of theoretical lenses through which to investigate these aspects through the archaeological evidence of social life in urban ritual settings. In particular, I draw from the following lenses:

1. Esposito's (2006) ontological approach to community that reconceptualises the exclusionary from a community and the concept of the proper and places emphasis upon 'being in common' because of individuals' lack of self-sufficiency and therefore the ethical and absolute obligation to carry out common duties (see also Bird and Short 2013; Langford 2015)
2. Tilly's (1995, 8) ideal-type citizenship conceived as a tie – however weak or strong – to the state, which pivots around transactions, rights and obligations between members of a community and 'agents of the state'

3. Rüpke's (2015) non-evolutionary model of lived religion that conceives of religion as both an intersubjective, communicative phenomenon through which the individual self is formed and a spatial practice in urban settings (see also Rüpke 2020, 2021)
4. Agamben (2006)'s definition of sacrifice as apparatus of the sacred in processes of subjectification (see also Riva 2021)
5. Rancière's (2013) emphasis on the intrinsic relationship between aesthetics and politics, intended as a 'collective theatrical stage' (Citton 2009) on which existing categories are contested and the partition of the sensible (*sensu* Rancière) reconfigured, giving space to the agency of political actors (see Rockhill and Watts 2009).

Methodologically, the combination of these theoretical approaches suits the material used for the comparative analysis proposed.

Southeastern Iberia and southern Tyrrhenian Etruria

For the study regions chosen for this project, first-millennium BCE urbanism has so far largely been investigated in relation to urban growth, state formation, power relations and structures with a focus upon the ruling elites (for example, Cruz Berrocal et al. 2013; Stoddart 2016, 2020; Terrenato 2019). The establishment and intensification of religious cult, often materialised in the monumentalisation of sanctuaries (Potts 2016; Mira 2019), has been tied to collective participation in urban settings and, in the case of Iberia, explicitly to social cohesion (Mira 2019, 350–1). However, this and the question of how sacred space vis-à-vis funerary space acted as the legitimate space for those aspects that I have used earlier to define citizenship are still waiting to be problematised in non-Graeco-Roman Mediterranean regions where urban and non-urban states emerged and developed with a variety of outcomes. The time to fill this lacuna is ripe, especially now that we have new methodological suggestions for investigating comparatively 'urbanizing and urbanized religion' (Rüpke 2020, 2021).

The selection of southern Tyrrhenian Etruria and southeastern Iberia is based on the quality and nature of the analytical data from both regions. The former, home to large city-states that were Rome's

closest neighbours, is suitable for investigating highly centralised urban states that bear resemblances and differences to the Roman state (Terrenato 2019). The latter region, by contrast, consists of a group of towns (*oppida*) that controlled a territory, in a form akin to the city-state but where political power was highly decentralised, heterarchical and driven by corporate groups within a ‘house society’ (Mira 2014, 2019; Mira and Sanchez 2018). The two regions, both extremely well researched and the object of several syntheses, provide an excellent combination for comparative analysis. Within each, I aim to analyse two types of ritual contexts, sanctuary and *necropolis*, from up to two settlements, in order to address different forms of collective participation and related social practices, from votive habits to burial traditions, diachronically. The larger objective is to evaluate whether, and the extent to which, parallel trajectories to those explored in the Graeco-Roman world occurred in those Mediterranean regions, and hence uncover the diversity of solutions to urban socio-political cohesion across the first-millennium BCE Mediterranean. The ultimate aim of this project is to contribute to debates in global studies on urbanism and citizenship.

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Conflict of interests

The author declares no conflicts of interest with this work.

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