

'ANONYMOUS' MANTLE FIGURES, 'SACRED HOUSES' AND CITIZENSHIP. CIVIC GROUPS AND URBAN RITUAL ACTIVITIES IN THE WESTERN GREEK COLONIES

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Scholarship on the ancient Greek sense (notion) of community relies heavily on literary sources, socio-anthropological, epigraphic and historical information. But, what about material evidence?

This paper aims to integrate all the aforementioned data with some renewed archaeological and iconographic evidence. About the latter one, it is worth mentioning the so called "anonymous mantle figures", usually depicted on the secondary side of vases, both in Attic and South-Italian production. This standardized iconographic theme seems to be strictly related to ritual activities occurring within civic groups and, more in general, it could symbolize the idea of 'citizenship', as M. Langner (2012) and M.C. Franceschini (2016; 2018; 2021) recently suggested. Mantle figures on red-figured pottery could represent the participatory aspect of a collectivity (not of a specific individual; they look 'anonymous' because they allude to a generic citizen) to some important rites within civic sub-groups and associations. These civic associations may also explain why this "anonymous mantle figures" iconography spread on kraters and kylikes, shapes related to communal feasts.

Moreover, on some Sicilian red-figure vases it is possible to observe mantle 'female' figures. This presence - very underestimated in the previous iconographic studies - can allude to the important role of women's participation within some ritual activities, probably related to passages of status of individuals who become legitimate holders of 'civic rights', which likely occurred during specific meetings organized by sub-groups of local civic associations.



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Combining this evidence with the new paradigms deriving from 'lived ancient religion' and with the archaeological reappraisal of particular buildings - the so called 'sacred houses' - it is possible to trace not only the symbolical role, as we can see in the case of mantle figures, but also the real spatial dimension of ritual activities managed by local civic associations belonging to phratriai or other similar local civic sub-groups and family clans (gene, tribes, demoi, etc.). These peculiar buildings were firstly recognized in the case study of Himera by E. C. Portale, and a new overview suggests us they were probably used in the whole Western Greek world.

Eventually, a renewed idea of citizenship - recently suggested by J. Blok (2017) - can help us to pull all of this information together. Ancient Greek citizenship must be perceived not as a "political" status but as a "civic" position within every local community (e.g. legitimacy of civic rights, including the descendants), especially within complex societies as the ones of Magna Graecia and Sicily, characterized by a mix of several ethne that had to somehow coexist with each other. To meet their need of amalgamating different people with different origins into a coherent community they developed a new sense of belonging to a Greek community through specific ritual activities aimed to obtain civic rights and citizenship. For these reasons civic associations played a crucial role in the Western Greek poleis and today it is more and more crucial to explore this topic from a renewed archaeological perspective.



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