

Proximity and Distance. Foreigners in Hellenistic Rhodes (supervised by Prof. Dr. A. Möller)

The PhD project investigates the social standing of foreigners in the polis of Rhodes beyond their mere legal status. This microhistorical perspective allows to distinguish between different groups of foreigners, to examine the interaction between citizens and non-citizens and to assess chances for social mobility.

During the instability of the Diadochian wars, Rhodes emerged both as an important naval power and a trading centre and attracted many foreigners for that very reason. Corresponding to Rhodian trade relations, the majority of the foreigners came from the Eastern Mediterranean area, from Syria, Egypt and from the poleis along the coast of Asia Minor. The synoecism of the formerly independent poleis Ialysos, Kameiros and Lindos combined with the foundation of the new city of Rhodes at the northern tip of the island formed the basis for the remarkable rise of Rhodes. However, the project is not restricted to the island of Rhodes itself, but comprises the entire polis territory, which included some of the surrounding islands and the mainland territory (the so-called Peraia) as well.

In Rhodes a particularly striking dichotomy between citizens and non-citizens existed. To be classified as a full-citizen, both parents had to possess Rhodian citizenship. Offspring of a mixed marriage was designated as »matrós xénas« – born of a foreign mother – in public decrees. Foreigners were awarded citizenship only in very particular cases. Thus, belonging and foreignness were distinguished meticulously.

However, since the studies of L. Robert and Ph. Gauthier the second century B.C. is generally seen as a turning point regarding the establishment of an »aristocracy«. The Rhodian evidence does not suggest such an interpretation. Actually, the sources indicate that there were much more chances for social mobility in late Hellenistic times, especially for foreigners. Nonetheless, the boundary between citizens and non-citizens still retained its significance. In this respect the project ties in with the vivid discussion of current scholarship on the exclusiveness of citizenship in Hellenistic times.

To appraise the social standing of the foreigners, attention has to be drawn on the Rhodian associations. The associations had an inclusive effect by connecting people of different juridical and social status. Therefore, one has to take into consideration whether these clubs developed their own social structures and hence to discuss to what extent they can be described as a rather autonomous sphere within the framework of the polis.

The methodical approach of the project is to examine different spaces of the polis in which foreigners were present, e.g. the sanctuaries, the necropoleis and the clubhouses. The spaces are to be regarded as functional areas of the polis, inasmuch the inhabitants of the polis perceived them accordingly. Following, one has to ask about the membership of non-citizens in different collectives. The project mainly deals with the following questions:

a. Inclusion and exclusion

To which physical spaces did foreigners have access at all, or more precisely which groups of foreigners had access to which spaces? Does there exist a continuity of persons within the spaces? To what extent was the access to different spaces of the polis regulated by granting privileges, based on the fact that the demos decided about the right of front seats at the theatre, privileged entry to the council and the assembly or simply the right to acquire property?

b. Social hierarchy

Which rules governed the hierarchy within the group of the foreigners? Did they – according to Bourdieu – possess economic and cultural capital to influence their social standing? Was it possible to transfer prestige that was gained in one functional area into another sphere? Did different spheres of inclusion and exclusion exist within the phylai, demes and ktoiinai?

c. Communication

What were the spaces in which contact between citizens and foreigners took place? How were differences in status defined? Which implications did arise when citizens and non-citizens shared common spaces?