

The Economics of Death in Hellenistic Rhodes – the Case of the *Koina*

Vasiliki Brouma

Material evidence and display for afterlife suggest a conscious psychological preparation for death. However, display in the funerary sphere can also be indicative of various socioeconomic agendas in connection to the burial ritual. This paper presents a contextual approach to funerary economics in Hellenistic Rhodes. The focus is a case study related to the *koina* (associations) of foreigners and their burial provisions.

From the 2nd century BC onwards, the islands of the Aegean and Asia Minor experienced an influx of foreign populations, both Greeks and non-Greeks, that can be divided in two broad categories: on the one hand short-term visitors who travelled around the Mediterranean world for economic, military and religious purposes and on the other hand permanent populations that chose the mainland and the islands as their stable residency. Epigraphic evidence suggests that foreigners had limited rights of participation in the civic and political life of the islands, yet they formed and maintained a great number of private associations: the so-called *koina*.

In Rhodes, we know of more than 150 *koina*. The members of these associations came from major trade cities of the Mediterranean such as Alexandria and while they were not politically important, they held considerable economic power. Members of the associations were organised along tribe lines and other activities that imitated sectors of civic life such as athletic competitions with officials of the *poleis* proper and funerary activities.

The Rhodian epigraphic corpus detailing these funerary activities is particularly rich: most date to the 2nd and 1st century BC and consist of honorary decrees and epitaphs. These texts describe that the members of the associations were honoured as *evergetai* post-mortem and were commemorated annually through a number of activities (i.e. banqueting) that were organised by the living members. Also, it appears that their status in the group was consolidated in regard to their financial contribution. And although the amount of written sources is remarkable, little do we know about the actual material evidence associated with these burial provisions.

In this paper, I will argue that a material-centred approach can throw light on the funerary ritual of the associations and provide a more accurate picture on the economics of these rites. A closer examination of the tombs and the funerary monuments associated with the *koina*, will enable us to reflect on various economic aspects of the funerary ritual such as individual and collective choice in the socioeconomic setting of Hellenistic Rhodes.

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