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Ad exemplum rei publicae Roman private colleges and the *civitas*

Abstract: The starting point for these studies is the opinion that Roman colleges were to be a copy of the *respublica*. I have attempted to prove that 1. with regard to organisation, copying municipal (civic) solutions was usually limited to adopting the nomenclature (names of corporate offices) and some institutions (corporate treasury, gatherings (meetings) of corporate members) known from public life. 2. In the sphere of symbols, referring to civic ideals/civic ethos was one of the bases of corporate identity. Both the system of values and the tools used to create the college's image, founded on this system, were identical for colleges and the community of citizens. In other words, an ideal college member was also an ideal citizen.

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The phrase quoted in the title comes from Gaius' writings (*Dig.*, 3, 4, 1). Through them, the famous Roman jurist aimed to express the fundamental principle on which private *collegia* functioned. They were to

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operate similarly to the community of citizens. It should therefore come as no surprise that the opinion, put forward by J. P. Waltzing over 100 years ago, that a Roman private college was nothing other than a *petite cité*, did not arouse much controversy among scholars studying the Roman *fenomeno associativo*.¹ Following this train of thought, we could risk the thesis that since the college was to be modelled on the *civitas (res publica)*, the ideal for its members to pursue was the citizen (*civis*). Forming such a hypothesis would open interesting research possibilities. First of all, by observing various aspects of corporate life we would be able to see how college members imagined a **citizen** who was supposed to be a **model** for them. Consequently, we would also learn what behaviours, attitudes, as well as the ideals and value systems behind them, were regarded as attributes of a citizen/citizenship. This very tempting research perspective becomes even more attractive if we realise that the vast majority of the *collegiati* were citizens (not only on the municipal level, but also in the sense of *cives Romani*).² We would, therefore, be dealing with a manifestation of the reception of the idea of citizenship and, most importantly, it would be related to the proverbial ‘Roman Joe Public’, rather than another member of the senatorial elite. This idea seems interesting enough, I believe, to be worth exploring.

Since the subject of our reflections will be colleges and their members, we should probably start by defining what Gaius, quoted in the opening paragraph, considered to be a *collegium*, as this term (along with its synonyms, such as *corpus* or *societas*) was applied both to ‘classic’ occupational colleges, all sorts of religious communities (including Jewish and Christian ones), trade companies, and even bands of highwaymen.³ So what were

¹ J. P. Waltzing, *Étude historique sur les corporations professionnelles chez les Romains depuis les origines jusqu’à la chute de l’Empire d’Occident*, vol. 1, Bruxelles–Louvain 1895–1900, p. 513.

² P. Wojciechowski, *The social structure of members of religious associations in Italy (1st–3rd century AD)*, “Eos” 2015, vol. 102, no. 2, pp. 305–320.

³ Attempts to show that the terms are not synonymous have not produced convincing results; the discussion, which goes back to the 19th c., is summarised by De Robertis (F. M. De Robertis, *Il fenomeno associativo nel mondo romano. Dai collegi della repubblica alle corporazioni del Basso Impero*, Roma 1981, pp. 12–17) and Ausbüttel (F. M. Ausbüttel, *Untersuchungen zu den Vereinen im Westen des Römischen Reiches*, Kallmünz Opf. 1982,

those *collegia ceteraque corpora*? Roman normative sources limit themselves to listing the features which had to characterise a group of persons for it to be treated as a *collegium*. Firstly, the number of members in such a group could not be fewer than three;⁴ the college also had to have *res communes*, *arca cummunis* and a governor (*actor* or *syndicus*).⁵ Modern definitions of Roman private associations are equally imprecise. Starting from the proposal of de Robertis, it is usually accepted that they were voluntary associations of people who had a common goal and who accepted the principles which regulated their participation in the community. Another important criterion was the permanence of these organisations; the goals they set for themselves had to be long-term, which allows us to distinguish colleges from business enterprises established to pursue short-term interests.⁶ The vast majority of the ‘voluntary associations’⁷ defined in this manner were, of course, occupational and religious associations well-known from primary sources, and they will be the subject of our analysis here. We can therefore go back to the earlier thesis and attempt to answer the question whether these organisations were indeed copies of urban communities and whether their members aimed to emulate civic models.

pp. 14–20). For examples of ancient authors using the term *collegium* in a variety of contexts and meanings see F. M. Ausbüttel, *Untersuchungen...*, p. 15, n. 10.

⁴ *Dig.*, 50, 16, 85: ‘Neratius Priscus tres facere existimat “collegium”, et hoc magis sequendum est’.

⁵ *Dig.*, 3, 4, 1, 1: ‘Quibus autem permissum est corpus habere collegii societatis sive cuiusque alterius eorum nomine, proprium est ad exemplum rei publicae habere res communes, arcam communem et actorem sive syndicum, per quem tamquam in re publica, quod communiter agi fierique oporteat, agatur fiat’.

⁶ This or a similar definition of the Roman *collegium* was proposed by both De Robertis (*Il fenomeno...*, pp. 2–3) and Ausbüttel (*Untersuchungen...*, p. 17), as well as by the authors of the most recent publications on *il fenomeno associativo* – see N. Tran, *Les membres des associations romaines: le rang social des collegiati en Italie et en Gaules, sous le haut-empire*, Rome 2006, pp. 4–9; F. Diosono, *Collegia. Le associazioni professionali nel mondo romano*, Roma 2007, p. 5; D. Rohde, *Zwischen Individuum und Stadtgemeinde. Die Integration von collegia in Haffenstaeden*, Mainz 2012, pp. 12–14.

⁷ The term ‘voluntary association’ became popularised especially by the publication of a volume of studies by Kloppenborg and Wilson (*Voluntary associations in the Graeco-Roman world*, eds. J. S. Kloppenborg, G. Wilson, London–New York 1996).

Epigraphic testimonies of the use (in the corporate context) of terms borrowed directly from municipal/civic nomenclature are so numerous that it is neither possible nor, I think, necessary to present a full list of them here. We will have no trouble finding corporate equivalents of municipal officials, from *scribae* and *viatores* to *quaestores* to *quinquennales*. However, even a slightly more thorough analysis is sufficient to conclude that although the emulation of municipal models, postulated by Roman jurists, is visible, we can hardly speak of simple copying here. To illustrate this point, let us use the term *quinquennalis*, given to the highest corporate officials. The inspiration for corporate *quinquennales* were undoubtedly municipal *duoviri quinquennales* – officials elected every five years to carry out a census. It turns out that the college – unlike the municipium – could be headed by one or more officials; the name of the office could also differ.⁸ Sometimes the association was headed by a *magister*,⁹ sometimes by a *magister quinquennalis* or simply *quinquennalis*.¹⁰ Since the duties of the collegial *quinquennales* were not limited to performing a *lustrum*, they were elected for five years rather than every five years (as was the case in cities). Moreover, the five-year term could not have been a commonly observed rule, as sometimes one *album* contains the names of up to ten *quinquennales*.¹¹ It seems that gradually in most (if not all) colleges the link between the word *quinquennalis* and the five-year term of office became blurred. The term *quinquennalis* became a synonym of the highest corporate office, losing its original meaning.¹²

It is even more difficult to find confirmation of the thesis that colleges were ‘copies’ of the community of citizens (*res publica*) if we look at the internal structure of these organisations. Although their members were referred to as the *populus* (or sometimes *plebs*), this is where similarities ended. This is because the *populus* in question was divided – depending on the college – into *centuria*, *cohors* or *decuria*. The use of these terms, strongly

⁸ H. L. Royden, *The magistrates of the Roman professional ‘collegia’ in Italy from the first to the third century A.D.*, Pisa 1988, p. 14.

⁹ CIL 6, 717.

¹⁰ See CIL 14, 2112; CIL 6, 4872; 8796; CIL 14, 430 = CIL 10, 543.

¹¹ F. Diosono, *Collegia...*, p. 69. See e.g. CIL 6, 4872.

¹² H. L. Royden, *The magistrates...*, pp. 15, 43–45.

associated with the military, was interpreted as a clue (or even proof) of the paramilitary character of the colleges organised in this way. The division into *centuria* is attested epigraphically mainly in the milieu of colleges gathering the *fabri* and the *centonarii*, which historians linked to the function of the municipal fire brigade, attributed to both of these corporations.¹³ In this case as well we are faced, in my opinion, with overinterpretation at the very least. The statement that terms such as *centuria*, *cohors* and *decuria* were used in the military nomenclature is, of course, true. However, their appearance does not always have military connotations. For instance, the association of the personnel of the Roman *Horrea Galbana* had an entirely civilian character. The wealth of epigraphic material related to the functioning of the imperial warehouses leaves no doubt that their employees created a *sodalitium* divided into three *cohors*.¹⁴ The activity of the *horrearii*, however, gives us no reasons to believe that their organisational structure was paramilitary, which in turn could have been reflected in the nomenclature used. The division into cohorts was in this case determined by practical considerations, mainly the number of members,¹⁵ and perhaps also by the architectural solutions used in the *Horrea Galbana*.¹⁶ The baselessness of the theories linking colleges' use of military nomenclature to their activity can be seen even more clearly with regard to the terms *decuria* and *decurio*. While the division into *centuria* was a very rare thing, *decuria* as organisational units within colleges were quite a common occurrence. The informa-

¹³ J. P. Waltzing, *Étude...*, vol. 1, pp. 359–360; F. M. Ausbüttel, *Untersuchungen...*, pp. 71–78; G. Mennella, G. Apicella, *Le corporazioni professionali nell'Italia romana: un aggiornamento al Waltzing*, Napoli 2000, pp. 22–24; J. S. Perry, *The Roman collegia. The modern evolution of an ancient concept*, Leiden–Boston 2006, pp. 7–16; F. Diosono, *Collegia...*, pp. 56–67; J. Liu, 'Collegia centonariorum': the guilds of textile dealers in the Roman West, Leiden–Boston 2009, pp. 126–129; D. Rohde, *Zwischen...*, p. 216.

¹⁴ CIL 6, 30901: *ex collatione horreariorum c(o)hortis II*; CIL 6, 710: *Galbenses de cohorte III*; CIL 6, 588: *horrearius cohortis III*; CIL 6, 30855: *vilicus horreorum Galbianorum coh(ortium) trium*.

¹⁵ It is estimated that approximately two thousand people must have worked in the imperial warehouses; see J. Carlsen, *Vilici and Roman estate managers until ad 284*, Rome 1995, p. 36.

¹⁶ P. Wojciechowski, *Czciociele Herkulesa w Rzymie. Studium epigraficzno-antropomastyczne (I–IV w. n.e.)*, Toruń, pp. 117–118.

tion about *decuria* usually appears in the context of presenting the list of college members (*album*).¹⁷ This gives us an opportunity not only to detect the presence of *decuria* in the corporate organisational structure, but also to find out the number of *decuria* themselves and – more or less precisely – all members of the association. It turns out that the term *decuria* was used very arbitrarily, and along with ten-person units (CIL 6, 631) there were also some which numbered almost thirty members (CIL 6, 647). Epigraphic sources also leave no doubt that the division into *decuria* aimed not so much to aid the execution of some specific tasks – which required a special organisation (modelled on the military) – given to the association, as to ease the ‘everyday’ operations of the corporation. The system of *decuria* was, for instance, the basis of organising the burial of deceased members of the *familia Silvani* from Trebula Mutuesca. The *decumanes* who headed the *decuria* were responsible both for spreading the information about the organised burial ceremony and for collecting the appropriate fee.¹⁸ Perhaps, following in the footsteps of F. Diosono, we should consider whether the *decuria*-based model of operation of many religious and occupational colleges was not the same as the model of organising the personnel in many large Roman estates.¹⁹ It seems that at least colleges such as the *sodalitium dii Silvani Pollentis*,²⁰ which associated mainly slaves, could have adapted the organisational solutions and nomenclature well-known from the ‘domestic’ context. We can therefore conclude that at least in terms of organisation, the principle of *ad exemplum rei publicae* was very superficial. In my opinion, the models inspired by civic ideals were definitively more visible in the sphere of corporate symbols.

I would like to prove the thesis that both college members and authorities completely accepted and regarded the ideals and value systems of the community of citizens as their own by presenting an analysis of the phenomenon of corporate banquets. It is certainly a mistake to view these gatherings only through the prism of the pleasure that college members

¹⁷ CIL 6, 631 and 647; CIL 11, 1449.

¹⁸ AE 1929, 161.

¹⁹ F. Diosono, *Collegia...*, pp. 56, 68–69.

²⁰ CIL 6, 647.

supposedly took in them. Participation in collegial banquets were certainly more multi-faceted. One aspect was their symbolic dimension. It is assumed that Roman banquets, public and private alike, were modelled on the banquets which accompanied making sacrifices.²¹ One of the most characteristic features of both types of feasts was taking care to maintain the hierarchy related to the social status of the participants. This manifested itself in various ways: from the order in which the participants received their meals, to the size and quality of the food they received, to the place which the participant occupied at the table. Banqueting, like participation in the distribution of presents, was one of the basic rituals celebrating social order, in which the ideal of the citizen occupied the central place. As I have mentioned, the ritual could be observed both in the sphere of public life and on a private level. It is worth noting that both participants in the public banquets organised by the municipal authorities and representatives of the municipal elites included members of the most prestigious occupational and religious corporations (the *fabri*, the *centonarii*, the *dendrophori*), and sometimes also associations of veterans. For members of these corporations, an invitation to a banquet was, on the one hand, a confirmation of their relatively high social status, and on the other hand an opportunity to demonstrate the college's close ties to the city as a community of citizens. By participating in festivities organised by the community (apart from municipal banquets and distributions of presents they could also include religious festivals, processions and theatrical shows), colleges not only manifested their loyalty towards the political elite ruling the city, but also showed that they were an integral part of the urban fabric and fully identified with the system of values on which the *res publica* was based. However, for the majority of the *collegiati*, the main opportunity to celebrate the social hierarchy were the banquets organised by the college itself. The allocation of seats during the banquet, the size and quality of the meals, and the amount of the cash gifted *per gradus* were traditional signs of status which everyone could read. For corporate officials, many of whom had a servile background, this was, therefore, a unique opportunity to demonstrate their social advancement. Similarly, the ordinary *corporati*,

²¹ Van Nijf 1997, pp. 152–153.

by participating in the collegial meal, not only satisfied the natural need to demonstrate their belonging to a group, but by using the prestige which their association enjoyed, created or strengthened their social image. Each banquet and distribution of presents in which they could take part as college members was another piece of evidence showing the status they had achieved and their place in the social hierarchy of the city.

On the other hand, the exclusive character of corporate gatherings meant that the line separating the *corporati* from their social background became clearer. This, in turn, provided the basis for far-reaching (and erroneous) conclusions about the social aspects of how Roman colleges functioned. Firstly, colleges were perceived as organisations operating in opposition to the civic/municipal community.²² Secondly, a vision emerged of colleges as communities in which the limitations related to belonging to groups of different legal statuses, typical of Roman society, no longer applied.

Establishing strong social ties among members of communities such as the colleges in question was, of course, a natural phenomenon, considering the size of these groups and the intensity of corporate life. However, building a strong sense of collegial/group identity did not have to happen at the expense of the sense of belonging to the *civitas*, which colleges demonstrated at every opportunity; nor did it necessarily lead to colleges transforming into the kind of social space where the lines between persons of different social status became blurred. The romantic vision of colleges as places where slaves and their owners, men and women, Roman citizens and *peregrini*, sat side by side is detached from historical reality and completely at odds with the civic system of values. The latter – as I aim to show – was an important element of corporate identity. Although college members included representatives of social groups with different social and legal statuses, just as it was in the public space, the places reserved for slaves, women and non-citizens were usually on the margins of these communities.²³ Not only will we not find members of these groups in the

²² Discussion on this topic in Rohde, *Zwischen...*, p. 48.

²³ For slaves and women in corporate structures see P. Wojciechowski, *The social...*, pp. 305–320.

collegial authorities, but even their presence among the ‘ordinary’ *corporati* is a rare and rather unclear phenomenon.²⁴ Contrary to popular opinion, on the corporate level a servile background was also a brand which was difficult to remove. Although freedmen frequently appeared in the collegial authorities and among corporate benefactors, they were difficult to accept in the role of patron.²⁵ The servile past of a patron not only lowered the college’s prestige, but also compromised the possibility to effectively defend its interests. Such an attitude manifested by colleges could, in any case, have been a result of more than pragmatic considerations. It could also be treated as a sign of attachment to the civic ethos, a major element of which was appropriate (and most importantly free) birth. A collegial patron’s servile background was difficult to reconcile with civic ideals.

Finally, I would like to devote a little bit more attention to the self-presentation of colleges. The way colleges wanted to be perceived is the best answer to the question about the values and models which members of these organisations held. The sources offer many testimonies to the fact that colleges tried to build their image by referring to the system of values important to the community of citizens. Moreover, to this end they used the same tools of social communication as the municipal elite. This is visible already in terms of the language used in inscriptions put up by colleges. Their authors tried, more or less successfully, to emulate the style of the imperial administration. Let me quote just two extreme examples. The first one is the famous inscription from Lanuvium, put up by the *collegium cultorum Dianae et Antinoi*. The main part of this long document is the *lex collegii* (a set of by-laws of the association); we will also find there elements typical of official documents, such as the consular date, references to the relevant decisions approved by the assembly of college members, and even a fragment of the Roman Senate’s resolution which allowed this association

²⁴ The exceptions were specific communities whose corporate status frequently raises doubts: the servile *familiae* and the rather mysterious *collegia mulierum*; e.g. CIL 5, 4087; 6, 298; 10423; 14, 266, see also J. P. Waltzing, *Étude...*, vol. IV, pp. 251–257.

²⁵ See P. Wojciechowski, *Patronage in Roman religious associations in Italy under the principate*, “Res Historica” 2017, no. 43, pp. 27–40.

to be established.²⁶ The form and content of the inscription from Lanuvium should come as no surprise, since the *cultores Dianae et Antinoi* were a prestigious organisation gathering mainly members of the local middle class, strongly connected to the elite of nearby Rome. The situation is totally different in the case of an inscription found in Ostia, from which it follows that in 205 a group of slaves working on an imperial estate (*praedia Rusticeliani*) were given by Calistus (an imperial freedman who held the function of *procurator*) permission to organise rites related to the imperial cult on a territory designated by him.²⁷ They created a college (*cultores Larum et imaginum dominorum nostrorum invictissimorum Augustorum*) headed by an imperial slave by the name of Maximianus. It was probably on his initiative that the inscription was lengthened to include a copy of the letter in which Callistus informs Maximianus that he agrees to the request of the *cultores larum Augustorum*, and gives care of the college to Maximianus. It is worth noting that Callistus, an imperial *procurator praediorum Rusticelianorum*, aimed to make his response as official as possible, emulating – rather clumsily – the style of imperial documents. The fact that Callistus' letter was the highest-ranking document the *cultores Larum* could quote means that their activity did not leave the boundaries of the *praedia Rusticeliani*. As we can see, there are almost no similarities between the *cultores Larum* and the college of the worshippers of Diana and Antinous: they had a different social background, prestige and scope of activity. What they had in common was that they paid careful attention to their image. Both corporations wanted to present themselves in a way which would emphasise to the full their official character and respect for the rules governing the life of the community of which they wanted to be a part (on very different levels, of course). To what extent these measures were successful is a completely different matter.

The tools of self-presentation used by colleges did not differ from the ones used by the elite of the *civitas*. Honorific inscriptions, lists of members, fragments of corporate by-laws and *tabulae patronatus* displayed in

²⁶ CIL 14, 2112. See A. Bendlin, *Associations, funerals, sociality, and Roman law. The collegium of Diana and Antinous in Lanuvium (CIL 14.2112) reconsidered*, in: *Aposteldekret und Vereinswesen*, hrsg. M. Öhler, Tübingen 2011, pp. 207–296.

²⁷ CIL 14, 4570.

the corporations' meeting places were direct parallels to elements of social communication known from any Roman city. Statues put up for college patrons do not essentially differ from those which communities of citizens erected for patrons of the *rei publicae*. In both cases the founders praised the lawfulness and generosity of the patrons. The scale of the generosity was, of course, different. This, however, is inconsequential from our perspective. For us, it is important to conclude that both communities (the *res publica* and the *collegium*) held the same system of values and that they did so in a way which was understandable to all participants in public life.

Therefore – going back to the question about the presence of civic models in the life of Roman private corporations – we can conclude that:

1. with regard to organisation, copying municipal (civic) solutions was usually limited to adopting the nomenclature (names of corporate offices) and some institutions (corporate treasury, gatherings (meetings) of corporate members) known from public life,
2. in the sphere of symbols, referring to civic ideals/civic ethos was one of the bases of corporate identity. Both the system of values and the tools used to create the college's image, founded on this system, were identical for colleges and the community of citizens. In other words, an ideal college member was also an ideal citizen.