

ABSTRACT

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Beyond “exceptionalism”?: the Etruscan city of Populonia as a case study in ancient economies

Unlike the southern Etruscan cities of Tarquinia or Caere, Populonia only recently begun to receive increased attention. Scholarly publications (mostly in Italian and therefore with a limited audience) have emphasized its coastal position, its extensive metallurgical activities (and their ecological impact) but Populonia tends to be dismissed as “exceptional” and excluded from comparative theoretical approaches.

While aware of the inherent limitations of any comparison across both time and space, this paper will however demonstrate how the Etruscan port could be used as a valuable case study in the ongoing debate regarding the primitivism or modernism of the “ancient economy”. The determinism of the city’s location near Elba’s iron mines, the embeddedness of economic and political institutions, the economic factors that could qualify Populonia as a *polis* will be successively considered. A multidisciplinary approach breaching the traditional divide between Etruscologists, classicists and economists will be advocated and, following Purcell and Horden, research avenues identified to study Populonia (and Etruria as a whole) as a part of the integrated economy and micro-regions of the ancient Mediterranean world.

Beyond theoretical manichaeisms, this paper will argue that Populonia, a “consumer”, “producer” and trading city, as well as its elites able to transform economic into social or cultural capital were far from “exceptional” and ultimately reflected the diversity of ancient economies.