

Introduction: Individuals and Communities

The human by nature is a social animal; the one who is asocial by nature (rather than by ill fortune) surely is either subhuman or superhuman [...] thus society by nature precedes the household and the individual.¹

The study of the past, whether through a historical, classical or archaeological lens, is always implicitly a study of individuals and communities alike. Aristotle's description of the 'social animal', above, focuses on our need for social interaction, but it is also true that society cannot exist without the individuals who make it. Thus, whether we are discussing the biography of a "great" person (defined by their actions to or for their community) or the monuments of a past culture (constructed by nameless individuals), the two sides of this dichotomy are inseparable from one another.

For the 13th edition of *PONS AELIUS*, we invited postgraduate researchers from universities across the UK to reflect on the relationships between individuals and communities in their own particular period of research. Each of our contributors has interpreted this theme in a different and distinctive way, showcasing the extensive connections between these two constructions.

Neither 'individual' nor 'community' are easily or singularly definable. Charles Taylor understood the modern sense of an individual self as constituted by "a certain sense (or perhaps a family of senses) of inwardness", but this can only occur in relation to an outside world and our place within it.² We can only be aware of ourselves in relation to similarities and differences to others, and to those who are both inside and outside of our self-constructed communities. This relationship can also be configured in the parallel processes of 'individualisation' – the idea of individual actions modifying and de-traditionalising norms from within a larger social context; and 'individuation' – the idea of individual actions *becoming* those social norms.³ These twin processes can be said to be always at work in equal but opposite directions. My actions shape who I am as an individual and thus shape my place in, and my understanding of, my community; at the

¹ Aristotle, *Politics* 1253a; my translation.

² Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.111.

³ For a discussion and contextualisation of these concepts, see Jörg Rüpke, 'Individualization and individuation as concepts for historical research' in *The Individual in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean* ed. by Jörg Rüpke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

same time, those actions (and the actions of others) are shaped by the community in which I am placed.

The papers that make up this edition of *PONS AELIUS* have been arranged broadly in a chronological order. This is not to suggest a development of ‘communities’ in any sense, especially given the wide geographical remit of the articles, but is a reader-oriented decision. We begin in Bronze Age Scandinavia, where Amber Roy shows how the presence of battle-axes in the archaeological record marks a shift from group identity to individual distinction within a group, and the potential functionality of the weapons. Guy Brindley follows with a discussion on the interpersonal connections at play on both a family and a community level in Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Aulis*, first staged in Athens in 406 BCE. In the next article, Thea Sommerschild takes us on a journey through the construction of pilgrimage and questions whether it is a good idea for scholars of the ancient world to use this construction for ancient Greek *theoria*, a sacred journey undertaken on behalf of the whole community. We next move into Medieval Britain, where Joe Chick takes us into the heart of the rebellions in Bury St. Edmund in 1381, and contrasts the importance of the role of the individual leaders in respect of the role of the local community. Jie Li then shows how the texts and theories of Vladimir Lenin were used to create a cohesive community in post-Maoist China. In the final piece of this issue of *PONS AELIUS*, John Bagnall discusses how Britain’s place within the European community was affected by its actions during the Falklands Crisis.

The overarching theme of these articles is a familiar point that warrants further debate: the relationship between individuals and communities is an ever-present negotiation across all societies. It may play out in different ways, yet it is an unfailingly important part of understanding who we are. The human is a social animal, but a community can only exist as a collectivisation of individuals. It is this two-way relationship that the following papers explore.

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Bibliography

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Taylor, Charles, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989)