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GODS OF PLACES OR OF PEOPLE? A STUDY OF RURAL CULT SITES AT THE EDGE OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

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A recent conference, Naming and Mapping the gods in the Ancient Mediterranean. Spaces, Mobilities, Imaginaries (Toulouse, 10th-12th February 2021), investigated the intersection between the divine and space and between the spaces and designations of the gods. From this symposium it has emerged the importance of spaces and human agents in the formation of religion in Antiquity from ritual practices to naming deities. This paper aims to discuss to what extent the environment and the social network influenced:

- the erection of rural cult sites and their gods in a specific place, like hilltops;
- the function of these cult sites, from hubs of village community to sacred places because of their location near “healing” and “divine” natural resources.

An analytical approach of the study of rural cult sites in regional case studies at the edge of the Roman Empire (Lusitania, roughly Portugal, and the Hauran in the southern Syria) will be undertaken on two levels:

- Through the study of naming gods: from toponym to deities named after an individual;
- Through spatial analysis: location of cult sites in relation to topography, water sources, and administrative infrastructure network of villages and cities.

Keywords

cult sites, village, natural resources, social network, Roman Empire

Note/comment