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## **OF SACRED LAKES, SPRINGS AND CAVES: CULT PLACES AND RESOURCECULTURES IN THE NORTHERN APENNINES DURING THE IRON AGE**

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Sacred groves and lakes, as well as holy caves where healing cults performed their activities, were central hubs in the sacred landscape of the northern Apennines. At the crossroads of transhumance and commercial routes, and at the meeting points of different geo-cultural areas, these cult places in the mountains were difficult to reach, hidden and secluded without any outlook over the plains. Indeed, the secret paths to these places required a guide, whose knowledge of their location was probably individually transmitted. These difficulties of access can be seen as adding value to these places. Worshippers had to experience a difficult journey and learn the path, in order to finally reach a place where they were surrounded by natural elements and thus would become background figures in the divine 'show'. These evocative natural locations were both stage and active agent in the encounters between humans and gods. At the same time, these places attracted worshippers from different neighbouring geo-cultural regions, who left material signs of their presence, including objects that they took away as physical remembrances of these encounters. These objects have been found on the plains on both sides of the Apennine mountains in different cult contexts, and indicate shared cult practices, as well as a geographic spread of religious knowledge and meaning attached to objects. The present contribution aims to discuss the evocative power of these natural places and their value in shaping the evaluation processes of cult objects and rituals across the Etruscan Apennines during the Iron Age.

### **Keywords**

Mobile pastoralism, Knowledge transfer, Cult practices, Etruscans, Colonial encounters, Mountains

### **Note/comment**