

HUMAN-ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORKS IN HEALING CULTS, RURAL SANCTUARIES AND SACRED GROVES BETWEEN INTERSECTIONALITY AND TRANSCULTURAL NEGOTIATION

Theme: 1. Widening horizons through human-environment interconnections

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Keywords: Sacred Landscapes, Resources, Knowledge, Cult practices, Contact zones, Political Economy

Cult places in geographically exceptional positions, such as in caves, on mountain tops, or near springs, played supra regionally significant roles in different geographic and chronological contexts. Serving as important meeting points of local communities, these sanctuaries became transcultural hubs for shared economic spaces and resource landscapes. These cult places can be understood as human-environmental networks, where human and non-human actors were deeply entangled. Ritual experiences and cult(ural) practices built a common platform, allowing to overcome social differences and to negotiate personal identities. Which was the role of the non-human agency in these cult places? Did landscapes have a proactive role in sharing cult practices and in connecting communities?

Food for thought:

-Agency of Landscapes

Communities shaped sacred landscapes on their own socio-economic and religious needs. However, the environment also influenced the choice and the characteristics of cults. What role did landscape features play in the selection of sites for healing cults? Are their implications similar or did they vary in different sociocultural contexts?

-Intersectionality

The focus of these cults on non-human agency allowed worshipers to overcome social conventions and to create new temporarily shared reference values. Were these cults stages for the negotiation of personal identities? Did cult practices construct new or extraordinary identities?

-Sacralization of Resources

Resources, such as salt in pastoralism, wine in the Mediterranean, or rice in agricultural regions of India, became important elements in the semantics of cult. Did the sacralization of resources create spaces of negotiation between communities? Were healing cults bottlenecks in specific resource networks?

-Political Economy

Cult places could serve as institutions for the storage, control and redistribution of goods. Did social groups manipulate parts of the political economy through access to ritual activities, norms, values and beliefs? Can collective feasts at cult places be interpreted as expressions of socio-political power?

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Abstracts for session #334

Abstract #: 01

MOUNTAINS OF MEMORY TRIANGULATING LANDSCAPE, CULT AND REGIONAL IDENTITY THROUGH ZEUS

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Mountains hold a special place in the human mind, possessing a deep ontology unlike any other natural feature. Social geographer Yi-Fi Tuan states: 'modern nations like to think that a high peak, if not the world's highest, lies within their border' (1977: 40). This was no less the case in the pre-modern world, although claims to such heights were typically framed in terms of divine power. Besides political power, mountains can also anchor a special sense of place, intersecting the spheres of the human and the divine. This paper aims to understand the triangular relation between mountains, religion, and regional identity in the ancient world by focusing on three different peak sanctuaries of Zeus: Zeus Lykaios on Mount Lykaion, Zeus Akraios on Mount Pelion, and Zeus Stratios on a mountain plateau by Amaseia. Each of these peak sanctuaries are assessed for their role in providing a regional focus within emerging political landscapes.

The analysis focuses on the physical mountain, the narratives associated with it, the visibility through viewshed analyses, and the role of ritual and festival as the cult becomes absorbed by a nearby city. Through our analysis, incorporating material evidence such as epigraphy and numismatics, we show that visual prominence was not always their main asset. Local myth and legend played a part in foregrounding these cults in the surrounding regions, helping the mountains to acquire a symbolic and political importance over time.

We conclude by suggesting that these mountain sanctuaries of Zeus provided a focus of social memory, were storied places that became important in the political landscape, and were places claimed by nearby cities to legitimise their own place in the landscape, thereby creating a sense of region.

Keywords

Zeus Cults, Peak Sanctuaries, Mountains, Social Memory, Viewshed Analysis

Note/comment

MARITIME NETWORK MODELLING FOR THE ANALYSIS OF CULT TRANSMISSION IN THE SARONIKOS KOLPOS (6C-1C BCE)

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This paper examines the phenomenon of cult transmission in the Saronic Gulf during classical antiquity in specific relation to its maritime context and the utility of alternative methods of network analyses to illuminate the linkages between cult, economic relations and political instrumentality. Observations from the provisional application of proximal point analysis (PPA), social network analysis (SNA), and network optimization to a limited (but real-world) data set are discussed. The transportation of the healing cult of Asklepios (through its embodiment in the sacred snake) by Telemachos Acharneas in 419 BCE from the Asklepion in Epidauros to the southern slopes of the Acropolis is the example par excellence during this period of the importation of an alien cult in order to secure both religious (as a palliative measure in the wake of plague) and geopolitical (to secure port access on the southern Peloponnese) objectives. Indeed, the locations at both Epidauros and Athens, their orientation, and visual affordance reflect an intertwined relationship between these sanctuaries and the broader environmental setting of the Saronic that in the early years of the Peloponnesian War would become a region of increasingly critical importance. The location of other sanctuaries throughout the Gulf islandscape, such as the Sanctuary of Dionysos on Salamis (which based on archaeological evidence appears to be linked to rites of fertility) or the Asklepion at Troezen reveal a similar territorial consciousness encompassing both a sense of belonging and interconnectedness with the maritime communities around them. Likewise, the proximity of points-of-embarkation and loci of economic activity/production to these and other cult sites in the region indicate a close relationship between specific cult practices and the wider system of socio-economic relations. As a promising set of tools, the application of network modelling, including PPA, SNA, and flow/path optimization, can provide quantifiable affirmation of these relationships.

Keywords

Saronic Gulf, Ancient Greek Religion, Maritime Networks, Network Modelling, Landscape Archaeology, Sacred Landscapes

Note/comment

HONEY BEES AND HONEY: MYTHOLOGY, PROPHECY, AND HEALING

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Beekeeping occurred on Crete by the 1500s BCE. Coins of Militaea from this time depict Zeus on one side and bees on the reverse with an inscription reading "MELI" (honey). For the ancient Greeks, Crete was seen as the origin place of bees, since it was here that Rhea is said to have given birth to Zeus. On Crete, the future king of the gods was raised on honey and milk, thanks to Melissa, the daughter of the king of Crete, Melisseus. In myth, Melisseus was the first to sacrifice to the gods and Melissa becomes the first priestess to the Magna Mater (and in some versions of the story is turned into a bee herself). Priestesses and attendants to various deities continued to be called melissae after their mythological namesake. Associations with Zeus, Apollo, and Dionysus allowed a prophetic aspect to be attributed to bees, which extended to the sacred landscapes of Mount Dicte, the oracle sanctuary at Delphi, the home of the Thriae prophetic nymphs at Mount Parnassos, and cemeteries.

The ancients believed that if one were to consume honey, they would interact with the divine, and adopt the characteristics attributed to bees. Poets and prophetic figures were often said to have been fed by bees during infancy. By ingesting honey, a person could be pure, chaste, holy, prophetic, or come into contact with the divine. Nectar was not only food for the gods, but also food of bees.

Because of bee's proximity to the divine, honey also had a high sacrificial value and was used in funeral rites as offerings to the dead. Some believe that the bee embodies the soul of the dead and swarms of buzzing bees were the dead flying around on earth. Bees were chthonian creatures, connected to ideas of preservation and resurrection.

Keywords

honey bees, honey, mythology, Crete, prophecy, sacred landscapes

Note/comment

Abstract #: 04

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

HOLY WATERS AS PLACE OF ENCOUNTER AND NEGOTIATION IN PADANIAN ETRURIA: RECORDS FROM CASTELFRANCO EMILIA AND LAKE BRACCIANO OF MONTESE

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Two important archaeological findings concerning the cult of waters occurred in the Panaro river valley, in the province of Modena. These waters have healthy attributes, such as those coming from salsobromiodic springs, or those from resurgences, providing homeothermy and natural self-purification.

In Emilia-Romagna such natural phenomena are frequently connected with the cult of a goddess, protector of the feminine sphere. During the Roman Age her identity is Minerva, while in most cases she incorporates divinities related to the Etruscan, Celtic and Ligurian melting pot inhabiting the area at the time of Romanization. These places of worship are often located near communication routes, at least from the early Iron Age. The worship area of Prato dei Monti is located near the soon to come via Emilia in Castelfranco Emilia, formerly Forum Gallorum. The area features many springs and is probably located near the Minerva worship area, quoted by Cassio Dione relating to the prodigia of the war of Mutina (43 b.C.).

A border sanctuary exists near the Lake Bracciano of Montese, located in the mountain area.

In spite of its marginal location, it bears a strong strategical position, along routes through the valleys.

The area is a meeting point for different ethnic groups residing there at the eve of Romanization.

These people were shepherds practicing transhumance along the valley thus contributing to important market places such as the Campi Macri.

Both places offer various votive objects, dating from the 6th century to at least the 3rd century B.C., when the Celts occupy Emilia-Romagna.

During the Roman age the Prato dei Monti area features solely cults of Italic matrix.

Keywords

cult of waters, Contact zones, springs

Note/comment

THE AGENCY OF LANDSCAPES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTS IN REPUBLICAN CENTRAL APENNINE ITALY

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Religious space of the local communities of central Apennine Italy during the Republican period is often determined by the topographical framework and environment of sacred sites, underlining the importance of the topographical contextualisation of such sacred areas. They can be characterised by areas for open-air meetings that are marked by evidence of ritual practices, depositions and sometimes altars, or are linked to a specific natural setting, such as a cave. Between the 4th and 1st century BC there is a widespread distribution of healing (sanatio) cults, often associated with water, and cults connected to pastoralism. During the 2nd century BC some of those sanctuaries underwent a monumentalization process, while others slowly lost importance. This paper focuses on the agency of landscape in the establishment and development of cults and sanctuaries in the Central Apennine area from the Roman colonization to the Roman Imperial period, with the latter covering an obvious cultural break. By focusing on an area that is specifically defined in time and character, both local characteristics and those shared with the rest of Republican Central Italy can be highlighted from synchronic and diachronic perspectives. Our interpretation of the tempo-spatial patterns acknowledges not only cultural implications but also the significance of topographical distributions and territorial functions of these cults.

Keywords

Agency of Landscapes, Healing Cults, Roman Colonization, Central Apennine Italy

Note/comment

LANDSCAPE AND CHTHONIC CULTS IN REPUBLICAN CENTRAL ITALY

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The correlation between natural environment and chthonic cults is often especially striking. Cult places for chthonic deities in ancient Italy could be situated in places with exceptional landscape features, such as volcanic crater lakes (the Avernus being the most prominent example) or caves from which suffocating vapours arose, as in the sanctuary of Mephitis at Ampsanctus. A closer examination of our evidence shows that other landscape elements were associated with underworld gods: dei inferi could be worshipped in sanctuaries located by lakes or rivers, on islands, in thick forests (*silvae*) or smaller groves, or by the sea. This paper aims to analyze the circumstances that could lead to the formation of a chthonic cult in a specific environment; this can help to assess how, conversely, the environment could be shaped to create cult places for underworld gods in suburban and rural locations. The analysis presented in this paper, which especially focuses on Etruria, Latium and Campania, can also contribute to outline and to understand other relevant issues. Firstly, many cult places for chthonic deities, because of their particular features, seem to have been characterized as liminal zones and contact zones, which could serve as transcultural meeting places and connect people from different communities with each other. The examination of these peculiar aspects could shed some light on some Etruscan sanctuaries located in border areas by lakes or rivers, which have been mostly considered by researchers as water-related 'healing sanctuaries'. Secondly, the paper will also discuss the evidence suggesting that some cult places for chthonic deities were of special significance for marginal social groups, such as freedmen or slaves.

Keywords

Cult practices, Sacred landscapes, Etrusco-Italic religion, Chthonic cults

Note/comment

**CULTS, PLACES, ANATOMICALS. SO-CALLED HEALING SANCTUARIES REVISITED.
NEW INSIGHT ON TRADITIONS, INTERRELATIONS AND ALIGNMENTS**

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After tackling the question which cult sites we do consider as healing cults – i.e. which kind of topography, architecture, written sources, venerated deities and specific finds provide the basis to assume a sanctuary was specialised in healing – the presentation will focus on the phenomenon of anatomical votives in sanctuaries of Latium (Italy) dedicated in the 4th to 1st cent. BC. These votives were hitherto understood as indicators for so-called healing cults. The archaeological and historical contexts though, e.g. the associated finds as well as the topographic position of the sites and their traditions, have hardly been focused yet. Featuring a holistic and contextualising approach the lecture will present the analysis of more than 100 sites in Latium with a total of over 15.000 anatomical votives regarding their connection to environmental parameters as springs, lakes, mountain tops, caves and connections to roads and settlements. Quantitative and gender-specific analyses are also taken into account. Based on this data the so-called healing cults of Latium can be divided into two main groups which differ from their location, the composition of the dedicated votives, the venerated deities and probably the dedicants.

These two groups presumably root in local cult traditions and were spread by entangled communities with shared or similar religious conceptions. Given that, anatomical votives can be understood as part of an indigenous identity within a broader network of cultural exchange. Very likely the anatomical votives should not be seen as objects with a prescribed meaning in a static cultic frame but as multivalent offerings in a dynamic frame of reference.

Contributing this new insight on tradition, interrelation and alignment may broaden the session's perspective on healing cults and add a significant benefit to the discussion.

Keywords

Healing Cults, Sacred Landscapes, Cult practices, Votive offerings

Note/comment

CULTS AND THE COLONIES - EXTRA-URBAN SANCTUARIES IN COLONIAL TERRITORY IN REPUBLICAN CENTRAL ITALY

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A significant number of extra-urban sanctuaries in Republican Italy were located in the hinterland of Latin or Roman colonies. Many of those cult sites, however, were not founded by the colonists but originated in pre-Roman times and thus went back to indigenous cults. While the Romans often changed certain aspects of these indigenous cults, the cult sites themselves were often continued and could, like the sanctuary of Marica a few kilometres west of Minturnae at the mouth of the Liris River, obtain a quite prominent position within the colonial pantheon. In other cases, however, such extra-urban cult places were abandoned and subsequently forgotten. Only rarely did the colonists destroy a pre-Roman sanctuary intentionally.

Various factors could have affected the continuation or abandonment of an extra-urban sanctuary: its importance for the indigenous population, where it could hold the danger of becoming a rallying place for those resisting Roman occupation; the nature of the cult and its compatibility with Roman religious ideas; the perceived sanctity of the place. The latter aspect leads to the question which role the natural landscape played in which a cult place was situated and whether the location in a geographically exceptional position made a difference. Did certain natural features – such as springs, rivers or grottoes – favour the continuation of a cult site in a colonial setting, even though it was created by an indigenous population? And how was identity negotiated in such a place?

The paper seeks to address these issues by giving an overview of the known extra-urban sanctuaries on colonial territory in Central Italy and their environmental setting, discussing the diverse landscape features as well as aspects of cult and – where possible – the deity (or deities) worshipped there.

Keywords

Extra-urban sanctuaries, Central Italy, Roman Republic, Colonial territory, Landscape

Note/comment

Abstract #: 10

HEALING CULTS IN SOUTHERN ETRURIA DURING THE ROMAN PERIOD

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Sacred contexts related to healing (sanatio) are particularly widespread in the whole of Etruria during the Late Republican and Early Imperial period. This paper will analyse the sacred landscape of Etruria between the 4th century BC and the 1st century AD, with special focus on healing cults in relation to agrarian and chthonic cults. The aim is to understand the topographical features as well as the political, commercial and social motivations that were the driving force for the establishment of these cults. A thorough analysis of the votive material by comparing stylistic and stratigraphic data led to a more precise dating of the sites, indicating that the sacred areas that were thought to have been abandoned in the 2nd century BC were in use until at least the Early Imperial Period. In this light, prominent sacred contexts in urban and non-urban areas, especially Veio, Tarquinia, Volsinii Novi and Vulci, will be redefined.

Keywords

Healing Cults, Roman Etruria, Roman Cults, Veio, Volsinii Novi

Note/comment

REPRESENTATION AND IDENTITY NEGOTIATION IN THE EASTERN IBERIAN PENINSULA. SACRED LANDSCAPES AS SOCIO-POLITICAL RESOURCES IN HISPANIA DURING THE ROMAN-REPUBLICAN PERIOD

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In the 3rd-1st centuries BCE, Iberian societies in eastern Hispania faced the presence of Carthage and Greeks and eventually Roman conquest. In particular, the Roman expansion in the Iberian Peninsula led to dramatic changes in social structure, resource management, language and writing, and settlement structure, which often resulted in the transformation from oppida to urban structures.

In this contribution, I examine how these changes were manifested in the religious field and how different actors, especially Iberians and Romans, represented themselves and expressed or negotiated identities in this context. These socio-religious practices can be traced in sacred architecture and modifications of buildings, votive material (e. g. pottery, bronze figurines and statues) and the imagery in ritual contexts. The study of these materials helps to understand the various strategies of representation and the extent to which sacred landscapes could serve as political resources and spaces of social negotiation during the Roman-Republican period.

Keywords

Iberian Peninsula, Hispania, Sacred Landscapes, Identity Negotiation, Social Representation

Note/comment

TRACES OF THE ROMAN SANCTUARIES ALONG THE KRKA RIVER

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In the Roman times, the Krka River was a very important geostrategic point which, with its steep deep canyon, was a natural barrier that was impossible to cross. That was one of the main reasons for founding the Roman legionary camp Burnum in its immediate vicinity. Only a few convenient natural positions due to the combination of travertine barriers and valleys allowed crossing over it and contact between the two shores, which were then used by the Romans, as main roads. One of them is the crossing at the Čavlinov buk position, in the upper part of the Krka river. Numerous archeological finds were found here, including inscriptions of the gods Neptune and Mercury ?, fragments of architecture such as a stone architrave decorated with relief depictions of aquatic animals, pillars and capitals indicate that they probably belonged to a significant sanctuary associated with the river and crossing. On the middle course of the Krka river, at the crossing near Roški slap, a dedicatory inscription to the Liburnian goddess Latri was found, erected by the Praetorian evocate. All this shows how these crossings played an important role in the spiritual life of the travelers and the merchants who passed through it, but also of the soldiers who lived in its immediate vicinity.

Keywords

Burnum, river Krka, Neptun, Latri

Note/comment

Abstract #: 13

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

THE CULT OF NEPTUNE IN BURNUM

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In the upper course of the Krka River (Titius flumen) at the crossing Cavlinov buk, where in Roman times was a bridge that passed through it and the main road, a dedication to the god Neptune was found. During the past, construction works were carried out in this area, during which the remains of Roman architecture were found (parts of architraves with reliefs of amphibians, a fragment of a spiral pillar and a Corinthian capital) and it is possible that these are the remains of Neptune's sanctuary. Furthermore, a monumental head of Neptune? originates from Burnum. The Krka River played an important role in the life of the surrounding population, both indigenous and later Roman, and it was precisely because of it that the Roman legionary camp Burnum was built there. Therefore, the worship of the deity of the sea and running waters was an important part of their spiritual life.

Keywords

Burnum, Neptun, Krka River, sanctuary

Note/comment