Sanctuary and society in central-southern Italy (3rd to 1st centuries BC) : a study into cult places and cultural change after the Roman conquest of Italy
Stek, T.D.

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Introduction

On the eve of the decisive battle at Aquilónia, in the dire wars that were fought between Rome and Samnium in the late fourth and early third centuries BC, the Samnites formed the so-called *legio linteata*. Livy (10.38) describes in some detail how the elite soldiers came together in a *locus consaeptus* in their military camp, and were sworn into the special legion. The Samnite priest, the venerable Ovius Paccius, performed the ceremony according to a time-old rite (*ex vetusta Samnitium religione*), reading the sacred text from an old linen book. The initiated soldiers were forced to pledge allegiance to the Samnite cause by a terrible oath; those who had refused lay dead next to the altars, their blood mingling with that of the sacrificed animals. This rite, so colourfully described by Livy, clearly reinforced Samnite military strength, by legitimating and codifying it with a sacred rite. Also, the Samnites Pentri ritually deposited enemy weapons – amongst them Roman armour – at the central sanctuary at Pietrabbondante.

In Rome at the same time, temples were popping up, celebrating the victories over the Samnites.¹ Besides commemorating the deeds of the victorious generals and their *gentes*, these temples boosted the morale of the Roman community in those fearful times. Some of the gods that were introduced illustrate this connection to the welfare of the state neatly: for example *Salus* (Safety) was vowed a temple by the consul C. Junius Bubulcus during the Samnite wars, and she received her home on the Quirinal in 302 BC.² After the battle at Aquilónia – the Samnite oath apparently did not prevent them from losing it – T. Papirius Cursor and Sp. Carvilius Maximus returned to Rome with so much Samnite booty, that the new temple of Quirinus and the *forum* were too small to exhibit all of it.³

Community and sanctuary were closely related in ancient Italy. The Italic peoples, Romans included, were well aware of this. This implies, amongst other things, that communities were vulnerable in their cult places, and this vulnerability is taken up by Roman writers in later imagination and historiography. On the mons Tifata near Capua was the sanctuary of Diana Tifatina. In myth and poetry, the sanctuary is closely connected to Capys, the heroic founder of Capua. Capys would have kept a white deer which was dedicated to Diana and lived for thousand years from the foundation of the city onwards. In 211 BC, Q. Fulvius Flaccus besieged Capua, which had defected from Rome in this critical period. Before the city was taken, the consul sacrificed the holy

¹ Until 273 BC, at least eight temples were erected in honour of victories *de Samnitibus*.
² Liv. 9.43.25; Liv. 10.1.7-9.
³ Liv. 10.46.
deer. By doing so, the Roman general symbolically destroyed the Capuan community even before its actual military submission. Equally, gods could be summoned away from their cities, by promising them a temple in the victorious city of Rome. According to Livy (5.21–22), this had happened with Juno Regina during the capture of Veii in 396 BC. These and other references on the role of religion and sanctuaries in the conflicts between the Roman conquerors and the rest of Italy are striking, but reflect later recollection and imagination rather than contemporary observation. At the same time, they attest to a certain frame of mind placing religion and sanctuaries at the centre of war ideology. On the other hand, under the early empire Italian countryside religion is exalted in poetry and art. Images of rustic and frugalItalic religion abound, and some ancient Italic cult places, such as the Clitumnian sources, even gain in popularity under the empire: this all forms part of ‘Roman religion’ now. The process in between, however, remains tantalisingly difficult to grasp.

Shifting our perspective from the literary sources to archaeology, the remains of innumerable sanctuaries lie dotted over the landscapes of modern Central-Southern Italy. They document a frenetic temple building activity during the last three centuries BC. Even in the non- or scarcely urbanised areas, splendid monumental complexes were erected. Most of these cult places have been studied as single objects, with an emphasis on the architecture and decoration. The phenomenon of their ubiquitous appearance has attracted less attention. Nevertheless, several theories have been proposed, linking them to economic or political structures. It should be noted however, that the floruit of Italic sanctuaries coincides strikingly with the gradual Roman incorporation of Italy. The point of departure of this study is the question of how sanctuaries and cults of Central-Southern Italy relate to changes in society, especially in light of the Roman conquest and subsequent control of Italy. This theme is, of course, closely related to the debate on the ‘romanisation’ of Italy in general. Due to several provocative contributions from different perspectives to this debate in the last ten years, I think there is room and indeed need for a (re-)analysis of some of the sacred aspects too.

From a historical perspective, there is often a pendular movement in the development of scholarly ideas. This certainly is true for the study of the Roman incorporation of Italy and its institutional and cultural consequences. Ideas on the romanisation of Italy changed under the influence of modern conceptual frameworks including nationalism, colonialism and postcolonialism. The latter half of the previous century witnessed a turn from a Romanocentric perspective, often based on the uncritical consultation of the Roman sources, to another extreme position, which puts the ‘indigenous’ perspective at the centre. Some studies have implemented this new orthodoxy in extremis, and have combined postcolonial (or, perhaps, anti-colonial) theoretical assumptions with radical ‘deconstruction’ of the literary accounts.

In the traditional conception, sovereign Italic tribes would have populated the peninsula up to the fifth or fourth centuries, until in the fourth and third centuries BC

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these early ethnic groups were uprooted as a consequence of Roman expansion and colonisation. During the third and second centuries BC the Italic population would have been enticed to assimilate themselves to Roman standards, or did so spontaneously. Rome, however, jealously guarded the citizenship and the allies had to fight the Social War (91–88 BC) before Rome would grant it to them. ‘Roman Italy’, already long under way, was thus made official.

More recent studies in the postcolonial tradition have tried to deconstruct the idea of an already deeply romanised Italy in the third and second centuries BC. With some success. Indeed, scholars of the generation of Theodor Mommsen had been suspiciously eager to conceptualise a cultural and political convergence of Rome and Italy already from the third century BC onwards. Especially Henrik Mouritsen has shown that these ideas persist in modern scholarship. In this line, revisionist studies emphasise the cultural and political sovereignty of Italic communities prior to the definitive incorporation after the Social War. Only then, Italic communities would have lost their political and cultural independence, indeed resulting in a ‘Roman Italy’. There are several possible objections to parts of the revisionist view, especially the undervaluation of Roman impact and strategies. Indeed, the pendulum might have swung to the other extreme, but a great deal of the critique on the modern conception of a culturally ‘romanised Italy’ in the third and especially second centuries BC holds true. It is therefore precisely in this period that an interesting field of research presents itself; the changing attitudes and self-definitions of Italic communities, importantly including Rome itself, in these turbulent times.

Although the discussion about the role of cult places and religion has its own momentum and is, for various historical reasons, not directly consonant with the development of general romanisation studies, parallels can be drawn. Contrary to digressions about the heat of the battlefield as cited above, the sources are relatively silent about the post-conquest period. This dearth has suggested that Rome as a rule did not interfere in the religious affairs of the conquered territories. Certainly, Roman and Latin colonies boasted their allegiance to Rome by venerating the gods of the Urbs in their own Capitolia, but the countryside and allied territories would have remained largely unaffected. However, in the meantime undeniable and momentous changes did occur in these areas, not least of all in the sacred realm, of which the temple architecture already referred to is the most visible result. Although, as noted, no direct Roman intervention is usually presumed, Roman architectural models (or Hellenistic models, spread through mediation by Rome) are conjectured to have been adopted by the Italic communities. Also, the participation of Italic people in the Mediterranean markets, which were open to them thanks to the Roman hegemony, would have stimulated and financed these building activities. Furthermore, the organisation ofItalic cults and sanctuaries sometimes betray Roman influences, but this is interpreted as the assimilation to or copying of Roman models. After the Social War, on the other

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5 Mouritsen 1998.
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hand, Roman influence on Italic sanctuaries would primarily take the form of a negative secondary effect: the Italic cult places of old would have waned and dwindled as a consequence of the new, Roman emphasis on urban centres. New, urban-based cult places and a desolate sacred countryside would represent the major outcome of the ‘religious romanisation’ of Italy, although some pre-Roman cults in the countryside persisted.

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In this study on the role of sanctuaries in society in Central-Southern Italy during the last three centuries BC, I have tried to test, and to an extent question, some of the developments that have just been sketched. To that end, I have attempted to explore some aspects at both ends of the spectrum – within the oscillation of the ‘pendulum’ so to speak – by considering, on the one hand, internal developments in a local Italic context, and, on the other, evidence for the impact of Roman religion in the Italian countryside. Previous studies have mainly been occupied with the material culture and especially the architectural aspects of sanctuaries, also in contributions relating to the romanisation discussion. As will be demonstrated with the case of Pentrian Samnium in Chapter 3 however, an approach based solely on architectural forms presents difficulties for answering these kinds of questions of cultural change and its meaning. Indeed, certain Samnite sanctuaries, even if perhaps adopting Roman / Latial / Hellenistic elements, were actually foci of Samnite resistance against Rome. Interpretation depends on context, and in order to provide a context, the point of departure in the following chapters is the role sanctuaries had within society, and more specifically within patterns of settlement.\(^7\) Different ideas on the functioning of sanctuaries in Italic society have been put forward, and these are discussed from a historiographical perspective in Chapter 4. An important problem in the evaluation of these ideas is that they are mostly based on an incomplete picture of the ancient Italic landscapes. Hill-forts and sanctuaries now dominate the Apennine archaeological landscapes, whereas minor settlements are almost invisible. It will be argued that this ‘emptiness’ of the landscape has influenced the functional interpretation of the apparently isolated sanctuaries. In recent years, field survey research has altered the picture considerably, but in the pursuit of different research agendas, this research often took a large scale and long term perspective, which is not particularly appropriate for the functional analysis of cult places.\(^8\) Therefore, in Chapter 5 a specific research approach for investigating the direct spatial context of sanctuaries is presented. It consists of intensive field surveys (2004, 2005) around the Samnite sanctuary of S. Giovanni in Galdo (CB) and a comparison with the finds from the excavations executed by the *Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici del Molise* in the 1970s. The aim is to reconstruct the ancient landscape surrounding this Samnite sanctuary, and to provide it with a chronological depth. In this way, the ancient

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\(^7\) For similar approaches based on field survey research, for Greece see *RENFREW* 1985 and esp. *ALCOCK* 1993; for Italy see *ATTEMA* and *BOUMA* 1995; cf. *ATTEMA* 2006.

\(^8\) Esp. *BARKER* 1995, concerned explicitly with the *longue durée*. 
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‘audience’ of the monumental temple is tentatively reconstructed, which is relevant for its interpretation. The case of Samnium highlights the importance sanctuaries could assume for Italic communities when faced with change. On the other hand, in Chapters 6–9 possible evidence for a direct Roman impact in the sacred realm in the Italian countryside is explored. The re-interpretation of the so-called pagus-vicus pattern of settlement (‘sistema pagano-vicanico’ vel sim.) takes first place here. Traditionally, this pattern made up of districts and villages is thought to have been a typical, pre-Roman Italic feature and rural sanctuaries take a prominent place in this system. Recent studies in the institutional and juridical realm by Luigi Capogrossi Colognesi and Michel Tarpin however have questioned – in different ways – both the validity of the relation laid between pagus and vicus and their pre-Roman origin. After an analysis of the discussion on the ‘pagus-vicus system’ in Chapter 6, the possible consequences for the interpretation of Italic sanctuaries and cults are evaluated. Several cases, for which epigraphical and archaeological evidence is most readily available, are discussed in more detail. Finally, in Chapters 8 and 9, two festivals, the Paganalia and the Compitalia, are discussed in relation to a possible Roman religious influence in the Italian countryside.

In general, this study seeks to underscore the importance of the contextualisation of sanctuaries by analysing their role within settlement patterns and institutional structures. It is argued that only by including these patterns and structures, a meaningful interpretation of sanctuaries and cults, and, consequently, their significance for different communities, may be obtained. With this approach, it is hoped that the crucial role of sanctuaries and cults in the variegated developments which followed the Roman conquest of Italy will be demonstrated.