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
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Central-Southern Italy faced immense changes in the last three centuries BC. The area was conquered and subsequently incorporated by Rome, and local communities had to accommodate Roman rule. In this period of conflict and change, cult places played an important role. Italic sanctuaries are evoked by Roman historians as loci for resistance or ideological combat during the various wars resulting in the conquest of Italy. The Samnites swear secret oaths against Roman power and Rome summons the tutelary deities of enemy cities. Once Italy was conquered, Roman attention shifted to other areas and we hear little or nothing about what happened subsequently to Italic sanctuaries and religion. The literary information we do have, from the early imperial period onwards, relates to a by then ‘pacified’ peninsula. Especially in the Augustan period, Italian countryside religion is highlighted in poetry and art. A rustic, timeless image of honest, frugal cult is exalted. What happened in the period between the conquest and nostalgic romanticism?

The changing religious landscape of Central-Southern Italy in the crucial period of the last three centuries BC is poorly understood. What we do know is that monumental temples lay dotted over the scarcely urbanised Italic landscapes. They are the result of a frenetic building activity in the religious realm in the third and second centuries BC especially, which is unparalleled by contemporaneous developments in civic or domestic architecture. The question of how sanctuaries and cults relate to changes in society following the Roman conquest has been central to this study. Previous studies on sanctuaries and their relation to cultural and political developments have usually focused on the architecture and decoration of single sites. This is a useful approach in its own right, but does not take into account the full scale of specific social and political contexts within which the cult places functioned in antiquity. In addition, the interpretation of cultural models and elements (e.g. ‘Roman’, ‘Latial’, ‘Hellenistic’) depends on the specific ideological climate present in the ancient communities that built them. When addressing questions on larger socio-political developments, the ‘landscape’, in the broadest sense of the word, surrounding a sanctuary is arguably
more revealing than its physical appearance alone. A contextual approach has therefore been pursued in this study, in an attempt to understand the interaction between sanctuaries and patterns of settlement and institutional structures. The applied methods include historiographical and epigraphical research, and field survey and analysis of excavation finds in a case study. Different perspectives have been adopted, yet they share the aim of contextualisation. In this way, ideological (Pietrabbondante), spatial (San Giovanni in Galdo), and institutional (pagi and vici) contexts have tentatively been reconstructed, and I have tried to demonstrate how important these contexts are for our ideas about sanctuaries and the society they were part of. In these concluding remarks, I shall summarise the main results and try to draw together the threads of the preceding approaches and arguments.

Rome and Italy: Ideas on Cultural Change and Religious Romanisation

The issue of sanctuaries and society in the Republican period is connected to the general debate on the character of Roman control and supremacy over Italy (Chapter 1). Related ideas on cultural change are usually studied under the heading of ‘romanisation’. In the 19th century the idea took root that, from the third century BC onwards, Italy and Rome underwent a process of gradual cultural convergence under Roman guidance. Over time, Italic peoples would have assimilated themselves increasingly in language, customs and political institutions to Roman standards. This conception relies to an extent on idealist and teleological notions, the historiographical roots of which have been traced by Henrik Mouritsen. The mechanism of cultural change which is usually presupposed in this ‘idealist’ conception is that of ‘self-romanisation’, according to which Italic peoples would have voluntarily adopted Roman culture out of a wish to become Roman. This concept has been attacked from the 1990s onwards in Anglo-Saxon studies, pointing out the complexity of the interpretation of ‘Roman’ material culture and the underlying frame of thought, which takes the superiority of Roman culture for granted. Crucial points to learn from these critiques are that the adoption of Roman culture should not be seen as a self-evident, natural process, and that the meaning attributed to cultural elements by the ancient audience is not stable, but depends on the overall context. At the same time however, this current of studies inspired by postcolonial theory has often underestimated Roman impact and strategies, and has tended to overemphasise ‘native’ agency.

The debate on Roman influence in the religious realm in Italy has different disciplinary backgrounds in mainland Europe linguistic and religion studies (Chapter 2). In these traditions, ‘Italic religion’ and Roman religion have been studied either in separation, or as basically one and the same system. Studies into aspects of what has been called ‘religious romanisation’ are therefore of relatively recent date. One trend in the debate with strong parallels in the general romanisation discussion has put emphasis on the spread of Roman religious models in Italy such as Capitolium-temples
and anatomical votive terracottas. This spread is conceived of in two ways: first as documenting ‘Romans or Latins abroad’ reproducing Roman religious models; especially in the case of colonial contexts. Second, these models would have been copied by the Italic allies, inspired by the ‘superiority’ of Roman religious culture: the spread in Italy of anatomical votives for instance has been described by Mario Torelli as “a striking sign of Roman superiority”\(^1\) while a similar case has been made for *Capitoliun*-style temples. However, evidence for this spread of Roman religious models as a consequence of their ‘superiority’ has been shown to be problematic, with exception of the religious symbols of the *Urbs par excellence*, the *Capitilia*. These are actually less well attested for the early phases of colonies than is often assumed, but at least from the second century BC onwards they will – in Roman contexts – indeed have expressed allegiance to the Roman model.

With regard to direct Roman intervention in religious affairs outside Roman territory, Rome is usually thought to have adopted a *laisser-faire* policy. The *senatusconsultum de bacchanalibus* of 186 BC could be an exception to this rule if it extended to areas outside *ager Romanus*, which remains unclear. Be that as it may, the primary Roman concern seems to have been the possible political dimension of the cult organisation, not the cult itself. Direct Roman intervention has been recognised in the destruction or closing down of other cult places too. However, this aspect has been overemphasised in modern research: no coherent policy of the kind can be discerned in the Republican period.

The real Roman impact would have consisted of an emphasis on urban development, rather than on countryside cult places. This shift of attention would have lead to the gradual abandonment of the latter. Sometimes, the ancient cult places continued, remaining largely unaffected by Roman influence. In an influential article, Cesare Letta expresses this view lucidly for the Apennine area: “nei santuari rurali … la romanizzazione praticamente non tocca le tradizioni religiose locali, formatesi nei secoli precedenti … I culti propriamente romani che vengono trapiantati … sono introdotti nelle città, non nell’ambiente rurale.”\(^2\) These considerations on romanisation and its religious pendant form the background to the subsequent chapters.

*The Ideological Context: Material Culture and Meaning in Samnite Sanctuaries*

The importance of the ideological context is shown in a case study on Samnite sanctuaries (Chapter 3). Here, the limits of an isolated architecture-oriented perspective are pointed out by demonstrating the problematic relation between cultural models or elements and ideology.

At the sanctuary of Pietrabbondante, in the heartland of ancient Pentrian Samnium, a monumental temple-theatre complex, Temple B, was erected at the end of the second

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\(^1\) Torelli 1999, 42.
\(^2\) Letta 1992, 122.
In the architectural model, Roman influence has been recognised by modern scholars. The combination of theatre and temple would recall the *comitium-curia* scheme, whereas the three *cellae* of the temple would mimic the Capitoline model. However, weaponry and Oscan epigraphy found here demonstrate that this sanctuary functioned as an important focus of Samnite military and political power – which was frequently directed against Rome. Especially the explicit mention of *safinim* in an inscription found in the sanctuary, designating it as belonging to the ethnic group of the Samnites, is suggestive. The rich contextual evidence for the case of Pietrabbondante makes clear that in this period a common symbolic language was available to both Roman and Samnite communities, which could be used actively and creatively for different purposes. This symbolic language can be discerned in coinage: an exceptional Samnite coin struck in the period of the Social War represents the Samnite bull goring the Roman she-wolf (Chapter 3, fig. 3.4). Arguably, architectural models were used in a similar way in antiquity; that is, through active appropriation. ‘Traditional’ elements have been recognised in the ground plan of the sanctuary, which might recall the Livian description (10.38) of the *locus consaeptus* where Samnite elite soldiers swore their oath before the battle at Aquilonia in 293 BC. Whether this ‘traditionalising’ interpretation holds true or not, in any case a particular and original complex was constructed, which was moreover echoed in the contemporaneous smaller sanctuary of S. Giovanni in Galdo.

In conclusion, although at Pietrabbondante elements that appear as ‘Latin’ or ‘Roman’ were adopted, this cannot simply be interpreted as the acceptance of Roman rule or the wish to ‘become Roman’. Rather, it can be seen as the choosing of ‘building materials’ for the construction of a Samnite Pentrian identity at the end of the second century BC. Despite my general reservations about the facile adoption of similar terms, I think that in this case it is legitimate to speak of ‘cultural resistance’. Yet it is important not to equate this with cultural continuity. Indeed, there *was* cultural change, but without loss of local distinctiveness.

*The Spatial Context: Theories on the Audiences of Sanctuaries*

As noted, monumental sanctuaries appear throughout the Central-Southern Italian landscapes in especially the third and the second centuries BC. The interpretation of this phenomenon is equivocal: it has been linked to, amongst other things, economic prosperity, elite competition, and a growing ethnic or cultural consciousness (cf. *supra*). Epigraphical and archaeological evidence is scarce and inconclusive. Trying to provide a context for the interpretation of these sanctuaries, I have attempted to reconstruct the probable functions of the cult places within Italic society on a ‘practical’ level: their place within patterns of settlement and institutional structures. This approach is not aimed directly at solving the question of monumentalisation, but seeks to offer a basic background against which these processes might be understood.
At the same time, it complements the discussion by providing an important, yet usually neglected facet of monumentality: the intended audience of these sanctuaries. Regardless of the specific reasons for their construction (economic affluence, cultural resistance, competing gentes, a combination of all, or something else), a message was conveyed by constructing these monumental temples. But to whom was this message addressed? Who saw and visited the cult places on a regular basis? The reasons for embellishing and monumentalising sacred places must be sought in the first place in the role these sanctuaries fulfilled within society.

Explicit attempts to establish a relation between sanctuaries and patterns of settlement or institutional structures are not numerous, but three different conceptions can be distinguished in the existing literature (Chapter 4). Transhumance economy has been linked to Italic sanctuaries of the Apennine and Samnite areas. Cult places would have been located as staging posts along the tratturi intersecting the Apennines, providing shelter for herdsmen and offering a safe place for trade. Wealth accumulated by transhumance would have been employed for the monumentalisation of the sanctuaries. The popularity of Hercules, as patron deity of herdsmen and trade, in the Apennine areas has been interpreted as evidence supporting this theory. However, the relation between sanctuaries and tratturi is less clear than has been suggested, and an association of the cult of Hercules with trade is actually best documented for urban contexts, not for rural Italic sanctuaries.

Alternatively, Italic sanctuaries and their associated cults have been interpreted as boundary markers of ethnic groups. Since ethnic groups are by their very nature fluid and elusive, and supporting evidence is absent, this conception is impossible to test. The model of territorial shrines derives from Greek (and to a lesser extent Tyrrhenian) contexts, with presumably very different spatial and hierarchical structures. Without hard evidence, it is perhaps better not to apply this model to the inland Italic situation.

A model which does take into account a specific Italic context is the so-called pagus-vicus system. In this system, pagi (territorial districts) and villages (vici), would together make up the Italic tutto or nomen. A related hierarchy of sanctuaries belonging to respectively tutto, pagi and vici has been particularly popular in modern studies.

Before going into the problems related to this last conception (cf. Chapter 6), it is important to point out that all three models have virtually no evidential basis in archaeology or historical sources. Especially the first two models rely heavily on preconceptions about Italic economy and spatial organisation. Arguably, the formation of these models has been influenced by the visual impression of the archaeological landscapes of Central Italy, which until recently was basically one of ‘emptiness’. Only the most visible remains of hill-forts and sanctuaries have traditionally attracted attention, whereas minor and dispersed rural settlements are seriously underrepresented, or simply absent in this image. At least to some degree, the apparent ‘isolation’ of monumentally constructed sanctuaries might have suggested that larger economic or political structures (transhumance; frontiers of ethnic tribes) determined the presence of sanctuaries. For the pagus-vicus system – in fact emphasising rural settlement – the
discussion is different, because it roots in modern interpretations of ancient literary traditions rather than in economic and geopolitical models.

The Spatial Context: Problem-Oriented Field Survey around a Samnite Sanctuary

Since evidence for the spatial context of Italic sanctuaries is mostly absent, and at the same time its influence on interpretation is significant, a research approach for dealing with this issue has been developed and has been tested on the Samnite sanctuary of S. Giovanni in Galdo (Chapter 5). This small temple, monumentalised around the end of the second century BC and reflecting the ground plan of Temple B at Pietrabbondante, was until recently located in an ‘empty’ landscape as evoked above: the pattern of settlement in this area was almost completely unknown. The small temple has previously been interpreted in light of transhumance, or alternatively as part of a pagus-vicus system, but has above all been seen as a prime example of an isolated and rural Italic sanctuary.

Research has consisted of intensive field survey in an area with a radius of ca. 1.5 km around the sanctuary. It has been combined with a study of the finds from the excavation of the sanctuary executed by the Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici del Molise in the 1970s. The survey revealed for the Iron Age a nucleated pattern of settlement to the east of the sanctuary. For the Hellenistic period, a particularly high density of sites in the area around the sanctuary has been documented, amongst which several farms and a burial area. Most importantly, at about 500m from the temple, a major site, which can be interpreted as a village, was found. Inhabited from the Iron Age onwards, it was apparently enlarged in the Hellenistic period, when it reached an extension of at least 10ha, and it continued well into the Roman period.

As for the sanctuary, the excavation finds as well as the survey data indicate that the beginnings of the cult place can be dated to the end of the fourth or early third century BC. Many finds dating to the imperial period document its use in this period as well. The complex of village, farms, burial area and sanctuary might reflect a rather ‘complete’ Samnite community, established already in the early Hellenistic period.

This community apparently formed the audience for a traditionalising, yet fashionable monumental sanctuary that echoed the central political sanctuary at Pietrabbondante, constructed just before the Social War (91-88 BC) broke out. In the absence of epigraphical evidence, guessing is all we can do as to the identity of the initiators of the monumentalisation project. If it was ‘state intervention’, aimed at winning the hearts of the local population for the Samnite cause, or rather a local initiative, aimed at joining in with this development, remains a tantalising question. Even if the monumentalisation of the sanctuary may relate to larger societal structures or developments, the functioning of the cult place can be understood within the local community of farmers and villagers that the survey has revealed.
Moreover, the site density recorded in the field survey for the Hellenistic and Roman
periods is considerable, and attests to anything but an ‘empty’ landscape. This high
density of sites in the research area must not reflect an overall high site density in this
part of Samnium. Perhaps it can indeed be related to the presence of the cult place, as a
comparison with a sanctuary recorded in the Biferno Valley survey, equally located
within a dense pattern of settlement, could indicate. This suggests that at least these
‘rural’ sanctuaries for which the spatial context has been object of research were not
located at the periphery, but rather at the centre of society.

The Institutional Context: Sanctuaries and the So-Called Pagus-Vicus System
A pattern of settlement characterised by dispersed farms and villages is commonly
indicated as the already mentioned pagus-vicus system. This would have been a
specifically Italic system of ancient times. However, this conception has proved to be
fundamentally problematic. Recent studies in the legal and institutional realm by Luigi
Capogrossi Colognesi and Michel Tarpin have attacked the basis of the system
(Chapter 6). Rather than representing “die uritalische Siedlungsform”, the pagus was
in all probability a Roman administrative division of the land. The opinions on the
vicus are more diverse. Whereas Capogrossi Colognesi maintains that the vicus
represents an ancient Italic reality, Tarpin has – in my opinion convincingly – argued
to the contrary. According to him, also the vicus was a Roman legal or administrative
category. In sum, pagi might be ‘Roman’ territorial divisions, and vici small ‘Roman’
villages – ‘Roman’ here meaning ‘the result of Roman intervention’. Moreover, the
presumed hierarchical relation between pagus and vicus can be dismissed.
The implications are twofold: first, the ubiquitous adoption of the term pagus-vicus
system for pre-Roman and non-urban settlement organisation should be abandoned. In
numerous cases, the term has been applied while actual epigraphical documentation of
pagi or vici is absent. In these instances, this misinformed (and misleading)
terminology can easily be replaced with less determinative terms such as ‘dispersed
settlement organisation’ or ‘village-farm pattern of settlement’.
Second, for the areas which do yield epigraphical evidence for a vicus or a pagus, the
consequences exceed sheer terminology and are more fundamental. Here, the revision
of pagus and vicus from an institutional perspective has significant implications for
ideas on the cultural ‘romanisation’ of Italy. Until now, these implications have barely
been touched upon. In Chapters 7 to 9, an attempt is made to explore aspects of these
cultural implications in relation to sanctuaries and cults. One of the crucial questions
concerns the identity of the inhabitants of pagi and vici: the fact that the institutions
they happened to be part of were the result of Roman intervention, does not
automatically imply that they were ‘Roman’ too. Despite the complexity of the issue, I
have argued that the discussion on pagi and vici may be the key to the recognition of

3 KORNEMANN 1905, 83.
Roman religious influence in the countryside, which is usually believed to be minimal or absent. To this end, the epigraphical evidence for the involvement of *pagi* and *vici* in sanctuaries in Italy has been surveyed, and four cases with the best contextual evidence have been examined in more detail (Chapter 7). In the traditional conception, sanctuaries in which *pagi* and *vici* were involved would have functioned within an Italic system. This assumption has to an extent determined the interpretation of the related cults and sanctuaries, often stressing their ‘pre-Roman’ or ‘Italic’ character. I have asserted that the factual arguments for several cases are weak. Even if there would of course be no point in overstating the possible ‘Roman’ elements in turn, I believe there are striking aspects that suggest allegiance to Roman religious ideas and models.

For instance, the recently excavated sanctuary at Castel di Ieri in the Central Apennines, dating to the end of the second century BC, was (re-)constructed *ex pagi decreto*. It has been interpreted by the excavator as an ‘Italic temple’ dedicated to Minerva. As I have shown, there is evidence to suggest that it was actually a *Capitolium*-temple, a situation which could attest to a ‘romanising’ attitude of this *pagus*.

A second case explores the connection of *pagi* and *vici* to Latin colonies. The possibility of extra-urban *vici* depending on the colonial urban centre is examined. It is argued that the prevalent image of mid-Republican Latin colonisation is strongly influenced by hindsight. There is no conclusive evidence for the location of colonial *vici* outside the urban centre from the foundation of the colony on (but neither for the opposite argument, that they were exclusively urban). At least in later periods such extra-urban *vici* existed.

In the Latin colony of Ariminum (Rimini), black gloss vases with inscriptions mentioning *pagi* and *vici* have been found. The value of this evidence exceeds that of mere epigraphical documentation; the objects themselves provide important information. Tentatively, I have reconstructed a ritual designed to enhance cohesion between the different communities belonging to the colony, both within and outside the city walls. Arguably, *pagi* and *vici* communities expressed allegiance to Rome too by dedicating to the divine virtue of Fides, in a cult place which also seems associated with other Roman gods.

The third case examines the *vici* and sanctuaries found in the *ager Praetutianus*, at the Adriatic coast. *Vici* and related sanctuaries appear to be a relatively late phenomenon, from the second century BC onwards and thus postdating the Roman conquest. The differentiation between *vici stricto sensu* and other villages changes the general picture of decline in the settlement evolution in this area.

The fourth case regards the *vici* which are documented along the Fucine lake, in Marsic territory. These *vici* are amongst the most complex and interesting manifestations, because of their early date (third to second centuries BC) and rich epigraphical evidence for cults. The *vici* and their cults have usually been interpreted as ‘indigenous’ Marsic elements. This argument cannot be supported, but it would be
equally incautious to regard them instead as entirely ‘Roman’ enclaves. Closer examination points to a more complex reality, in which possibly both native people and foreigners functioned within a new Roman institution. It is argued that these ‘new communities’ were oriented on ‘Roman’ ideological models, and constructed their own ‘Romanness’ by writing in Latin and, especially, venerating gods like Victoria and Valetudo, popular ideological concepts in this period in Rome. In sum, in these institutionally Roman contexts of *pagus* and *vicus*, religion was central to the construction of community as well.

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**Roman Rituals in the Italian Countryside? The *Paganalia* and the *Compitalia***

These considerations have prompted research into other religious aspects related to *pagi* and *vici*, and more specifically into the festivals of the *Paganalia* and the *Compitalia* (Chapters 8 and 9). The *pagus* features in early imperial poetry as the rustic locale for religion *par excellence*. This rusticity evokes an ancient or ‘immemorial’ image, and modern authors have accepted and perhaps even amplified this image. On closer analysis, however, the evidence for the most prominent religious aspect of the *pagus*, the festival of the *Paganalia*, reveals a quite different reality. An agricultural association is actually poorly attested, and, for what it is worth, Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Ant. Rom.* 4.14-15) connects the festival plainly to the taxation of the inhabitants of the *pagus*. On firmer ground, both epigraphy and literary sources document the *lustratio pagi*: a circumambulation by the inhabitants of the *pagus* around their territory. The possible impact of the installation of the Roman *pagi* in the Italian countryside comes into focus: the ritual act will have erased pre-existing divisions and boundaries from the landscape or have ‘overwritten’ them. At the same time, the ‘new community’ constituting the *pagus* confirmed and legitimised its position and territory ritually.

The festival of the *Compitalia* or ‘crossroads festival’ is best known from its association with the urban plebs and social unrest in late Republican Rome, leading to the suppression of the organising *collegia*, and the restructuring of the festival under Augustus. The festival is usually thought to have originated as a rural cult of immemorial antiquity (“seit unvordenklicher Zeit”)\(^4\) which was later incorporated in or transferred to the city, where it became the principal festival of the *vici* or urban quarters of Rome. There is clear evidence for the celebration of the *Compitalia* in the countryside, but I have argued that the development was the other way around: spreading from Rome to the countryside. Evidence from Delos and Picenum suggests that this spread predated the Social War, and was underway in the second century BC already. The *Compitalia* had, just as the *Paganalia*, a strong integrative potential, defining the community of the *vicus* by celebrating together and, again, circumambulation of its territorial borders. Less clear are the actual cult places of the

\(^4\) WISSOWA 1897, 1872.
Lares Compitales in the countryside: *compitum* shrines have been found in, but never outside, urban contexts. Dismissing an erudite, yet quite implausible tradition in modern research on the special appearance of rural *compitum* shrines (based on Dolabella L 302.1 and a scholion on Persius 4.28), it has been suggested that possibly ancient Italic sanctuaries were reused for the purpose. In that case, the ritual may have again contributed to the creation of a new reality and community of cult – under the guise of continuity.

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Conclusion

The arguments presented in this study have above all pointed out the importance of religion and cult places for the affirmation of different groups in Central-Southern Italy in the last centuries BC. This process does not appear to have been limited to Italic groups, but also applies to colonies and other new ‘Roman’ communities installed in the Italian landscape. In this last section, I would like to try confronting this main conclusion with usual conceptions of cultural change in Italy (‘romanisation’) and its more specific religious aspect (‘religious romanisation’).

As has become clear in Chapter 1, in the ‘traditional’ conception of romanisation a linear and gradual development of cultural convergence is envisaged. Clearly, the evidence presented in this study tends to undermine any notion of a general and gradual development towards unity. Rather, it seems to indicate a competitive atmosphere, which is geographically differentiated. To recognise differentiation in romanisation processes is of course not new, but it is often thought of in regional terms. The recognition of the Roman institutions of *pagi* and *vici* could to some extent complicate this regional approach, and suggests an even more pronounced and fragmented differentiation for especially Central Italy. As the *vici* at the Fucine lake seem to indicate, differentiation could be very local in nature. This means that generating a history of Italy in regional terms can lead to a biased picture in some cases. This effect of differentiation has been demonstrated for the *ager Praetutianus* for conceptions of settlement developments. This could also apply to the area of the Marsi, who are usually thought to be ‘precociously’ romanised. However, once the *vici* on the shores of the Fucine lake are left out, ‘the Marsi’ might appear much less romanised. Increasing the resolution, much sharper variation within regions, and perhaps the distinction of different communities, can come to light.

An overly rigid distinction between ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ has also proved to be complicated. This is indicated by the tight relations between the two, also on a religious level, as has been argued for Ariminum, where rural communities are symbolically bound to the urban centre. Arguably, one of the most interesting outcomes is that Roman religious influence was not limited to towns, as is usually

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5 E.g. LETTA 2001, 145.
thought, but applied to specific rural communities in the countryside as well, i.e. pagi and vici.

The ‘traditional’ conception of a linear and gradual convergence is thus complicated by differentiation. But the arguments put forward in this study do not comply with some important notions of the postcolonial critique of the traditional conception either. Especially the tendency to minimise Roman impact, often present in studies of the postcolonial current, is countered by the arguments presented in this study. On the contrary, in the processes under discussion, Roman influence was considerable. As noted, Roman religious influence has tentatively been discerned in the countryside. Moreover, processes witnessed in ‘Italic’ contexts cannot be seen in isolation from Roman impact.

Temple B at Pietrabbondante is a clear example: as argued, no ‘Roman’ meaning can be attached to the cultural models adopted in this temple complex. But this ‘Samnite’ phenomenon should not be disconnected from Roman impact altogether: the necessity to affirm Samnite sentiments was prompted by changes that were to a large extent brought about by Roman dominion.

Dynamic processes of religious self-affirmation are actually documented for various ‘Roman’ and ‘Italic’ communities; and a connection or interplay on some level may be suspected. Especially in the second century BC evidence for religious expressions of communal pride abounds: Samnium has been mentioned, and from the second century BC onwards Capitolia become prominent in Roman contexts – they are hard to trace for earlier periods. The first evidence for cults related to pagi and vici date to the late third and second centuries BC. I do not suggest a direct relation or ‘confrontational’ interaction between these phenomena, although I would not exclude it either. Nonetheless, it appears that the expression of communal identities through religious aspects is important especially in this period, and it is tempting to relate this to a general climate of change, competition, and search for new self-definitions.

The fundamental contribution by the revisionist critique inspired by postcolonial thought, is the ‘deconstruction’ of metanarratives in historiography (Chapter 1). Revisionists have warned against writing history from hindsight. But the deconstruction of traditional frameworks does not automatically imply that we should abandon also the ‘traditional’ recognition of Roman impact and influence. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that this undeniable influence was not self-evident, and we should ask how and why cultural change occurred: arguably, the ‘deconstruction’ of modern frameworks has cleared the way for the recognition of the role of ‘construction’ in antiquity. Indeed, the key to understanding the processes under consideration seems to be the constructive character of communities. It is here that religion takes first place: in the establishment or redefining of new groups that were formed as a consequence of the Roman conquest. Throughout this study, the constructive aspect of the processes under way has been demonstrated. Most clearly, this is seen in Samnium. If the Samnite temples were perhaps traditionalising in some senses, they were in no way immutable fossils of ancient times: fashionable models
were adopted and remoulded in creative ways to fit the specific situation of the day. This phenomenon should therefore certainly not be seen as attesting ‘continuity’ or lingering traditions, but as a basically new construct designed for a specific moment in time. Cult places became the focus for the affirmation of a new community. Interestingly, a similar process might be recognised in ‘Roman’ contexts. The ‘Romanness’ in the ‘new communities’ of pagi and vici was not inherent to the institutions themselves: it was consciously forged. The clearest example is the vicus Supinum, possibly made up, at least in part, by Marsic locals, who put their public dedication to Victoria in Latin. The relation between pagi, vici and urban centre that was symbolically affirmed by dedicating cups in the colony of Ariminum is another case. The rituals of the Compitalia and the Paganalia, with their explicit preoccupation with the defining of both territory and included community, also stress this point.

These conclusions on the constructive aspect of these cultural processes tap into ideas on continuity. The importance of the ‘moment’ and the relative unimportance of ‘real’ tradition has been stressed for the Samnite case. Another, more tangible argument in this direction regards the Roman phases of Italic sanctuaries. A chronological continuity in the archaeological material is often implicitly equated with continuity of practice. Perhaps this is also connected to modern ideas on the ‘persistence’ of (especially countryside) religion and cult places, which may betray romantic notions. Although such a scenario of immutable practices is possible, radical changes, both in ritual and the community involved, should not be excluded a priori either. As shown for the rituals and festivals connected to pagi and vici, notions of ‘timelessness’ and great antiquity are to a large extent based upon Augustan and later sources, and should be critically regarded.

The constructive aspect of religion and religious rituals emphasised above should not be mistaken for liberty of action and choice. The character of the Roman religious influence which I have tentatively discerned in the Italian countryside, especially with the festivals of the Compitalia and the Paganalia, seems defined primarily as a consequence of administrative organisation. Arguably, it is precisely in this realm – institutional organisation – that we might be able to recognise ‘Roman religion’ at work. The ‘embeddedness’ of religion in ancient society is well-known, yet we should face the full scale of its consequences. It not only means that notions of proselytism are anachronistic (cf. Chapter 2), but also that ‘religious toleration’ probably had its limits within this same ‘embeddedness’. Being part of a community, or administrative institution, plainly meant joining in its rituals and was probably not a matter of choice. Conceptions of sanctuaries and cults as facultative and separate domains, primarily pertinent to personal religious experience, are likely to reflect modern attitudes more than ancient reality. Ultimately, these observations might again underscore the importance of the ideological, spatial, and institutional contexts within which sanctuaries functioned.