**The Ritual Ecology of Archaic Italy: a view from the south**

Our understanding of the religious identities and practices of the indigenous populations of much of pre-Roman Italy is poor. This is especially true of the south, where prior to Hellenic influence indigenous populations did not (with a few notable exceptions) worship in purpose-built environments, nor use idols, votives and other such cultic paraphernalia readily recognizable in the archaeological remains. Ritual activity took place in and around springs, caves, groves and hilltops, and probably in the homes of clan and kinship group leaders; it was likely embodied as much in everyday activities as through orchestrated ceremonies.

In recent years, with the rise of new approaches derived from post-colonial perspectives placing a stronger focus on the active role of indigenous communities, and the ‘material’ turn acknowledging the agency of things, serious thought has been given to how best to study ‘not normal’ spaces, practices and behaviours in pre- and proto-literate societies. Current discourse between archaeologists, historians, anthropologists and—most fruitfully—sociologists is witnessing the development of new methodologies and a more nuanced language for the archaeology of ritual and religion. It is within this framework that I anchor my study.

While investigating parallels for the figurative imagery on Daunian statue-stelae, I became aware of patterns of shared iconographies amongst various cultures of Archaic southern and central Italy. When taken individually, the vignettes depicted on any one of these objects ostensibly come from either the sacred sphere (processions, sacrifices, purification rites) or the secular (weaving, the grinding of grain), or from somewhere in between (funerary/martial games, ‘komast’ dancing). We might consider the pictures to be borrowings from Greek painted pottery, but their repeated confluence on a range of objects from indigenous contexts is striking. The selection of images is clearly deliberate and points to a specific phenomenon in non-Greek 7th to 5th century peninsular Italy, which may well have earlier roots. When the images on a single object are read together it becomes clear that they likely represent individual moments in time from the same ritual system.

Using the concepts of ‘lived religion’ and ‘ritual ecology’, today’s viewer is able to get closer to an understanding of this imagery. Lived religion is the study of belief systems via observation and analysis of the everyday experiences, practices, expressions and interactions of its followers, while ritual ecology allows that religion and ritual are not static; that causal relationships exists among people, places, plants, animals, and things. This approach is beneficial also in that it admits a blurring of the line between the sacred and profane and accepts that seemingly unremarkable actions, items and places may be imbued with significance to certain people at certain times.

Through an investigation of this ritual landscape, I hope to enhance understanding of the religious behaviours of indigenous communities in southern proto-historic Italy and explore the paths which lead them from worshipping in natural settings to built sanctuaries such as Rossano di Vaglio (pictured) and Pietrabbondante.