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Samnite Sanctuaries Surveyed: Preliminary Report of the Sacred Landscape Project 2004

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with a contribution by M. Roccia

Abstract

In March 2004, an intensive, small-scale, problem-oriented survey was conducted in the area surrounding two Samnite sanctuaries in the Alta Valle del Tappino (CB), which lies in the modern region of Molise in central-southern Italy. The sanctuary at S. Giovanni in Galdo, località Colle Rimontato, and the sanctuary at Gildone, località Cupa, were of equally modest dimensions and were frequented during the Hellenistic and the Roman periods. In this short preliminary report, the objectives of the survey will be discussed in the context of the theoretical framework of the project. The first provisional results will also be presented.

Sanctuaries and other sacred places constitute an invaluable source of information on Italic communities. At least as important as the sacred places themselves, however, is their relationship to other elements in the cultural landscape, such as settlements, necropoleis and roads. This 'landscape of the sacred' is essential for our understanding of the changing functions and cultural meanings of sanctuaries.

A major problem affecting the study of the sanctuaries of southern and central Italy is the frequent absence of information about their spatial context. It is this lacuna in the archaeological record that the 'Sacred Landscape Project' aims to reduce and various intensive field surveys around selected Italic sanctuaries are now scheduled.¹ In March 2004 the first survey was conducted around two sanctuaries in the modern region of Molise: the sanctuaries of Gildone (località Cupa) and the sanctuary of S. Giovanni in Galdo (località Colle Rimontato), both situated in the 'Alta Valle del Tappino' (fig. 1). In antiquity this hilly part in the south-eastern Molise is thought to have been inhabited by one of the five Samnite tribes, the so-called Samnites Pentri.²

SAMNIUM

Ancient authors attribute an important role to the Samnites Pentri in Italic resistance to Roman expansion, from the Samnite Wars in the second half of the 4th century BC right up to the Social War in the early first century BC.³ One long debated aspect of Samnite society is its political and social organization, which seems to have functioned within

a rather de-centralized territorial arrangement. In this context, sanctuaries are often assigned a pivotal role as central places with political and commercial as well as religious functions.⁴ In our view, it is this aggregative quality that makes the analysis of sanctuaries so valuable for the study of socio-political changes in Samnite communities.

The lavish attention devoted to sanctuaries by Samnite society, as reflected in the building and



Fig. 1. Topographic map of the Molise, with indication of the sanctuaries of S. Giovanni in Galdo, località Colle Rimontato (A) and Gildone, località Cupa (B), in the Alta Valle del Tappino area (adapted from Di Niro 1993 fig. 1).



Fig. 2. The sanctuary at S. Giovanni in Galdo, località Colle Rimontato, with a view on the Tappino Valley, CB. (photo J. Waagen)

embellishment activities in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC, is striking, especially when they are compared to other public buildings or domestic architecture of the period. The architectural forms chosen and the dedications made suggest that in these places specific group identities were being articulated. These common identities may have assumed ethnic connotations under specific historical circumstances.⁵ This aspect can be grasped most firmly at the sanctuary complex at Pietrabbondante, in all probability the focal point of the Samnite 'sacred landscape'.⁶

Much less is known, however, about the Samnite sacred landscape on a local level: i.e. around the smaller sanctuaries and shrines. Although the general assumption is that these must be 'rural sanctuaries', their 'rurality' cannot simply be assumed *ex silentio*. The existence of a major bias, resulting from a scholarly tradition that paid disproportionate attention on the monumental elements of the landscape at the expense of more modest forms of settlement, should be taken into serious consideration when thinking about the function of sanctuaries. At present, the debate on forms of settlement and the role of sanctuaries within them has reached an impasse, with the function of sanctuaries apparently being interpreted in the light of ideas and preconceptions regarding socio-political configurations. Although our knowledge of Samnite settlements has increased considerably in recent decades,⁷ the issue has never been specifically addressed from a desire to understand the functioning of the 'sacred landscape'. Who visited the smaller sanctuaries dispersed over Samnite territory on a regular basis? It is this basic question that must first be addressed if we are to approach the more difficult issues, such as the intentions of the visitors and how (if

at all) the experience of these communities of worshippers relates to the construction of a larger 'Samnite' entity.

The aim of the 2004 survey has therefore been to shed light on the relationship of the sanctuaries of Colle Rimontato and Cupa to their direct environment, which was formerly unknown, apart from some isolated finds.⁸ We have done this by trying to establish the pattern of settlement into which the respective sanctuaries were inserted. Moreover, through the comparative study of the settlement data and the material from the sanctuaries themselves, from the present survey as well as from the excavations, we hope to gain more insight into the communities that installed, monumentalized, visited and finally abandoned these sacred places.⁹

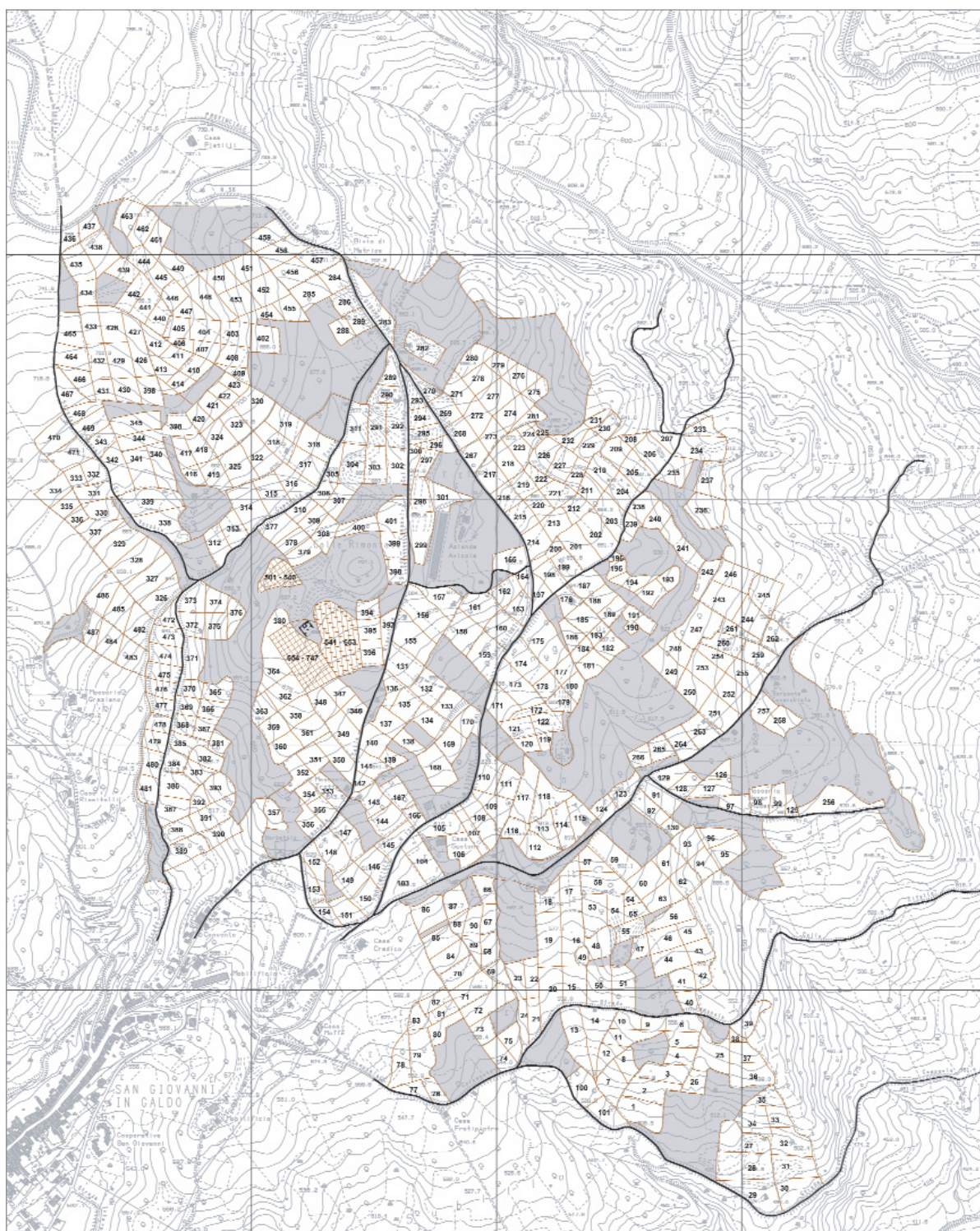
THE SANCTUARIES OF S. GIOVANNI IN GALDO, COLLE RIMONTATO AND GILDONE, CUPA

The remains at S. Giovanni in Galdo, località Colle Rimontato, provide a good visual impression of the ancient sanctuary (fig. 2). The temple building represents the monumentalized phase (from the late 2nd to the 1st century BC) and has been considered a 'typical' Samnite sanctuary of this period.¹⁰ The context of the sanctuary is unknown, except for some graves in the vicinity that Angela Di Niro has attributed to the early phase of the sanctuary.¹¹ The sanctuary at Gildone, località Cupa, on the other hand, does not present much architecture *in situ*, due to interventions made in 1935-1938 during the construction of a road. A resemblance to the sanctuary of Colle Rimontato has seemed plausible to most authors.¹² Some of the terracotta roof decoration has been preserved, as well as relatively opulent votive gifts from a nearby deposit.¹³ In the wider area on the slopes of the Montagna di Gildone several archaeological traces have been documented, but the direct context of the sanctuary is unknown.¹⁴

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

In order to understand the landscapes of the sanctuaries of S. Giovanni in Galdo and Gildone, an area of c. 1.5 square km around each sanctuary was investigated, cutting through different geomorphological features such as hilltops, slopes, river valleys and terraces (see fig. 1, indicating the Sacred Landscape Project survey areas).

Both sample areas were surveyed in units of approximately 50 by 100m (0.5 ha) at 10m intervals between participants (~20% coverage) (fig. 3).¹⁵



All the archaeological material encountered was collected, washed and studied. In places where there were too many tiles to collect, their numbers

Fig. 3. Topographic map of the San Giovanni in Galdo region, with indication of the survey units (map grid is 500 x 500m.). (J. Waagen)

were counted in small sample areas of 1m². This made a rough estimate of the overall quantity possible. For each unit the land-use, noted erosion processes, tillage and various visibility factors were recorded.

All find concentrations of more than five artefacts per square metre were subjected to closer examination. After a first standard sampling (see above) all the high artefact-density areas (also called 'sites') were re-sampled in order to quantify the density of material at various locations within a concentration, as well as to collect additional diagnostic material for dating and functional analysis. A GPS was used to establish the coordinates and contours of the encountered find concentrations. Both survey unit boundaries and site contours were mapped on 1:10000 maps of the region.

The sanctuary of San Giovanni in Galdo and its immediate surroundings were sampled in a more detailed manner. Here an intensive site-survey method was used. The site area (c. 2.5 ha) was surveyed in units of 10 by 10m (0.1 ha) at 2m intervals (~100% coverage).¹⁶ The main objective of this very time-consuming site survey strategy is to make an artefact density contour map of this complex archaeological reality. On the base of this map we will try to draw up a hypothesis about the possible existence of other structures surrounding the *sacellum*.

FIRST RESULTS

Although study of the survey data is still in progress, some brief preliminary remarks will be made here. Since the main objective of the 2004 survey campaign is to contextualise two sanctuaries with a chronology between the 4th century BC and 2nd century AD, the focus in this report will be on data concerning this particular period.¹⁷

In the area of the San Giovanni in Galdo sanctuary at Colle Rimontato a fairly clustered settlement pattern is individuated. Almost all encountered 'sites' of the Samnite and Roman periods are situated to the east of the sanctuary (fig 4). This so-called Inguno area, rich in natural springs and terraces, is delimited to the east and south by very steep slopes, descending in the east to the Vallone Visciglieto and in the south to the Torrente Fiumarello. In the centre of this panoramic area, at little more than 500m from the Colle Rimontato sanctuary a relatively large concentration of archaeological material is individuated, consisting of large quantities of different coarse wares, tiles and some fine wares, among which fragments of black

gloss and red slip pottery. Woodland makes the precise dimension of this site difficult to establish, but it covers an area of at least 4 ha. The chronology of this settlement appears to correspond with that of the sanctuary (4th century BC-2nd century AD). Concentrated around this nucleus various very small sites are individuated. These comprise limited concentrations of mostly tiles, coarse and plain wares. Remarkably, few other sites from this period have been discovered in the rest of the area investigated around the sanctuary. To the north of the Colle Rimontato, a large villa of the imperial and late Roman period is individuated. This interesting site post-dates the sanctuary, however.

The archaeological situation around the Gildone sanctuary at località Cupa is quite different. Most of the encountered sites of the Samnite and Roman periods are situated in the close vicinity of the modern 'strada statale', very probably an important ancient route.¹⁸ Alongside this road four fairly large (> 1 ha) but dispersed sites have been individuated, at approximately 200m distance from one another (fig. 5). One of these sites is the Cupa sanctuary itself, as was confirmed by the discovery of a column base and large quantities of fine ware. This location matches well with the rather vague and brief description given by Vincenzo D'Amico, a local doctor and historian who documented the 'excavation' of the sanctuary during the road works.¹⁹

Further on, to the north of the road, two smaller sites have been individuated. What is very different from the San Giovanni in Galdo area is the relatively large number of sites predating the Samnite/Roman period. The pre-historic and classical-archaic landscape in this part of the Alta Valle del Tappino seems much richer, or at least much more visible.

CONCLUSION

These first results suggest that the 'rurality' of at least the San Giovanni in Galdo, località Colle Rimontato sanctuary has to be redefined, as it does not imply complete isolation from human settlement. The presence of a contemporary site of considerable size at a distance of circa 500m may, in relation with the graves attested near the sanctuary,²⁰ indicate the outline of the spatial and social organisation of a small Samnite community. Further research will therefore focus on this relationship, by studying the survey material and sanctuary material in more detail and possibly by a more thorough exploration of the site. On the other side of the Tappino valley the situation seems to grav-

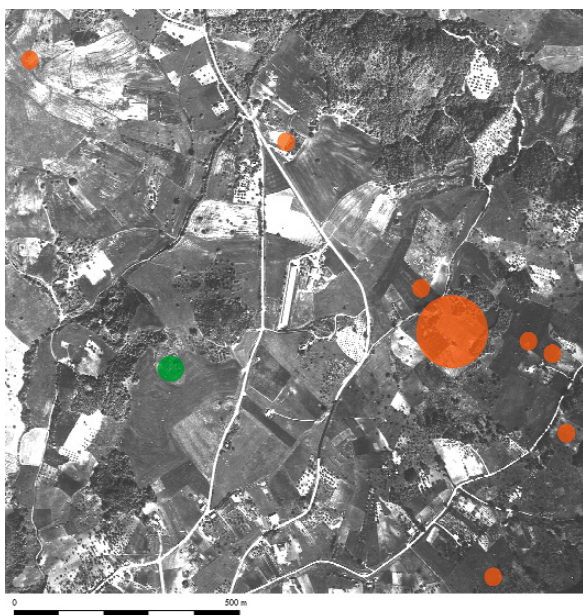


Fig. 4. Aerial photo of the area around the sanctuary at S. Giovanni in Galdo, località Colle Rimontato, with indication of the >5 artefacts per m² areas with a chronology between the IV century BC and the II century AD, corresponding with that of the sanctuary. The sanctuary site is indicated with a green dot. In red: individuated sites. The large red dot indicates the large concentration of archaeological material found in the Inguna area.



Fig. 5. Aerial photo of the area around the sanctuary at Gildone, località Cupa with indication of the >5 artefacts per m² areas with a chronology between the IV century BC and the II century AD. The sanctuary site is indicated with a green dot. In red: individuated sites.

itate around the ancient route, and maybe the location of the sanctuary has to be seen in this light as well.²¹ The relation to the hill-fort on the Montagna di Gildone will be given priority in future research, by extending the survey area in this direction as well as more detailed topographic research on the hill-fort itself. The contextualisation of sanctuaries by intensive field survey has learned us so far that the situations in which sanctuaries were installed and frequented may vary greatly from place to place, even within short distances, and that their specific functions may not be deduced from preconceptions on Italic society.

OSSERVAZIONI SUI MATERIALI (M. Roccia)

La maggior parte delle evidenze registrate nel corso del survey consiste di frammenti fittili; l'attribuzione di ciascuna evidenza ad una determinata cronologia si basa essenzialmente sull'analisi dei materiali rinvenuti, e dunque, pressoché esclusivamente, sull'analisi delle ceramiche.²²

Per quanto concerne la possibilità di confrontare

quanto rinvenuto con esemplari già editi, va detto che, relativamente ai contesti archeologici della regione, la tradizione di studi è ancora in costruzione; infatti, per molte classi ceramiche mancano ancora studi sistematici e, dunque, entrare nel dettaglio cronologico, tentando un'analisi delle singole forme, si rivela un'operazione piuttosto complessa.

In ogni modo, dal confronto preliminare con i contesti di scavo disponibili,²³ possono essere delineate, per alcune sequenze cronologiche cruciali, quali quella sannitica, alcune tendenze generali, configurabili nella ripetitività nel repertorio ceramico e nella scarsità di importazioni.

Nel corso del survey si è notato che, relativamente a talune sequenze cronologiche, alcune classi e forme di materiali si presentano costantemente associate; ad esempio, per l'età sannitica, troviamo in associazione la ceramica a vernice nera (*skyphoi*, coppe e patere), contenitori di liquidi in ceramica d'uso o in ceramica fine acroma, tegole con listello profilato a quarto di cerchio, embrici, *opus doliare*; così per il tardo antico, le forme aperte

della sigillata africana, e le loro imitazioni localmente prodotte, si presentano costantemente associate con le forme, prevalentemente chiuse, delle ceramiche *burnished* e *painted*, con i testi, etc.

La ricorrenza costante di tali associazioni ha permesso, già nelle fasi preliminari della ricerca sul campo, di assegnare a determinate evidenze una valenza cronologica relativa.

Particolari problemi presenta l'analisi delle ceramiche in impasto. Non essendo pubblicati contesti regionali,²⁴ la frammentarietà dei pezzi raccolti e l'usura delle loro superfici, non consente, il più delle volte, che di riferirli genericamente ad ampie o amplissime cronologie.

Per quanto concerne i materiali d'età sannitica, si può dire, in generale, che la maggior parte delle ceramiche sembrano prodotte localmente; nell'ambito della ceramica fine e della ceramica d'uso, stringenti appaiono i confronti morfologici con gli esemplari provenienti dai più vicini contesti d'età ellenistica.²⁵

Dal confronto di quanto rinvenuto con i contesti noti, e, in particolare, da quello, ancora in corso, con i materiali provenienti dallo scavo dei due santuari, in buona parte inediti, si vorrebbe ottenere un dettaglio cronologico, relativamente al periodo grosso modo compreso tra il IV secolo a.C. e il II secolo d.C., il più possibile dettagliato. Inoltre, si vorrebbe contribuire, attraverso la comparazione del dato materiale proveniente dai siti dei due santuari con quello riferibile ai nuclei di insediamento sparso identificati sul territorio ad essi circostante, alla comprensione più approfondita della natura delle peculiari relazioni che dovettero stabilirsi, di volta in volta, tra i santuari e le diverse realtà insediative su di essi topograficamente gravitanti.

NOTES

¹ *The Sacred Landscape Project* (SLP) is a cooperation of researchers of the University of Amsterdam (UvA) and the Free University of Amsterdam (VU) and is organised by the authors. The role of 'sacred landscapes' in the construction and expression of identities of Central Italic communities in relation to the Roman expansion is subject to a PhD research by Tessa D. Stek. Jeremia Pelgrom investigates the role of the sacred places of Lucania within socio-political transformation processes after the Roman conquest in the context of his PhD thesis. The small survey campaigns around different sanctuaries are organised in order to solve specific problems encountered in these studies. The 2004 survey was co-organised by Dott. Michele Rocca, who is also responsible for the study of the survey-material. His knowledge of the local topography and ceramics has proved invaluable for this campaign.

² The authors would like to express their gratitude to the

Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici del Molise, who actively supported the 2004 project with advice and generously gave access to relevant archaeological information, especially Stefania Capini, Valeria Ceglie, Angela Di Niro and Mario Pagano. The advisory board consists of Herman A.G. Brijder, G.-J.L.M. Burgers, Marijke Gnade, Eric M. Moormann and Douwe G. Yntema (UvA and VU), who are thanked for their help and comments on the text. We also thank the Regione Molise for cartographic and photo materials. Furthermore, we would like to thank Domenica Luciani, Benno Ridderhof, the family Rocca and of course the very motivated team: Vanessa D' Orazio, Sandra Fatica, Michele Frattino, Marie-Catherine Houkes, Debora Lagatta, Bruno Sardella, Ellen Thiermann, whose comments on the text were also highly appreciated, Barbara Valiante, Martijn Kalkwarf, Jitte Waagen and Jeroen Weterings. Our special thanks to J. Waagen who was also responsible for the ACAD drawings. The 2004 survey was supported by a fund from the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and the Institute of Culture and History of the UvA.

³ The classic work on Samnium is Salmon 1967; see now Tagliamonte 1997.

⁴ Cf. La Regina 1989 and Barker 1995 on Samnite society. On the role of sanctuaries in the Central Apennines see Letta 1992; specifically on Samnium: Capini 1996.

⁵ La Regina 1976 *passim*; Dench 1995, esp. 139 and 175-217; Tagliamonte 1997, esp. 128-136 and 235-261.

⁶ Apart from the sumptuous architecture, the supralocal function of the sanctuary at Pietrabbondante becomes clear from the second-century *safranum*-dedication, which is thought to refer to the Pentri as an ethnic group and may reflect a self-conscious appeal to their Samnite tradition (Vetter 1953, 149). Cf. above n. 6; Coarelli/La Regina 1984, 230-256 esp. 236 for the architecture. For a short overview see Stek *forthcoming*.

⁷ e.g. Barker 1995; De Benedittis 1988 and 1990a; Di Niro 1993; Rainini 1996.

⁸ Cf. Di Niro 1980b, 271. For the larger topographical context of both sanctuaries see *ead.* 1993.

⁹ Apart from taking into account the published data from the sanctuaries, Angela Di Niro generously offered the possibility to see the unpublished material of the San Giovanni in Galdo, località Colle Rimontato sanctuary. Cf. following note.

¹⁰ The sanctuary of Colle Rimontato, although subject to private excavations in the 1930's by the landowner at that time, was excavated properly by the Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici del Molise in 1974-1976: La Regina 1976, 237-241; Di Niro 1980b.

¹¹ Di Niro 1980b, 271.

¹² e.g. Di Niro 1993, 13; Tagliamonte 1997, 193. For the documentation see D'Amico 1997 [1953], 26-30; D'Amico 1954 with map, with Di Niro 1980a, esp. 263 and Di Niro 1993: according to D'Amico the Cupa sanctuary measured ca. 7,85 x 7,83 m.; that of the Colle Rimontato measured ca. 7,80 x 8,40 m.

¹³ For the finds see Di Niro 1980a (also in Di Niro 1993, figs. 3 and 4).

¹⁴ See Di Niro 1993.

¹⁵ We are very grateful to dr. G.-J. L. M. Burgers for his advice on the technical and practical aspects of field survey. We used a survey methodology developed within the framework of the *Regional Pathways to Complexity Project*: Burgers 2002; Attema/Burgers/van

- Leusen 2002 (*in press*); Van Leusen 2002.
- ¹⁶ After Burgers 1998.
- ¹⁷ The data from the previous and later periods will be published in the final survey report.
- ¹⁸ Di Niro 1980a, 262.
- ¹⁹ D'Amico 1954.
- ²⁰ Cf. above note 12.
- ²¹ Cf. Di Niro 1980a, 262.
- ²² Per quanto concerne la suddivisione in classi, si è cercato di fare riferimento alle principali classi bibliograficamente riconosciute. Per quanto attiene all'analisi di tipo funzionale, si è preferito suddividere i materiali raccolti in pochi grandi raggruppamenti, che permettessero una lettura immediata delle funzioni svolte dalle ceramiche e dagli utensili, ad esempio: impasto, ceramica fine, ceramica d'uso, anfore, bacini, *opus doliare*, utensili, materiali struttivi, etc.
- ²³ Cfr. in particolare, per l'età sannitica, Capini 1984, De Benedittis 1988, Di Niro 1989, Barker 1995, Rainini 1996.
- ²⁴ L'eccezione è costituita dal complesso di materiali dell'età del Bronzo medio di Fonte Maggio, cfr. Barker 1976.
- ²⁵ Ad esempio, Gildone (Morgia della Chiusa), Campochiaro (santuario), Montevairano (fornace di Porta Vittoria); cfr., rispettivamente, Di Niro 1989, Capini 1984, De Benedittis 1990b.
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