Ancient Sanctuaries in the Area of Etruria and Lazio: Religious and Cultural Interference

As a direct continuation of a three-year project on “Virgilian sanctuaries” carried out for three years by Mario Torelli and Fausto Zevi at the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, the second half of Torelli’s Balzan Prize will start when the former project ends in March 2015. “Virgilian sanctuaries” has focused on two sanctuaries: Castrum Inui on the coast of Ardea, dedicated to the obscure local divinity Inuus (under the direction of Torelli); and Juno Sospita in Lanuvio (under the direction of Fausto Zevi). The two sanctuaries were among the topics addressed in a conference held in October 2013 (publications in progress), while at present work is underway on an edition of two volumes for the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei’s prestigious series Monumenti Antichi, planned for 2016. These two research projects, which have departed from recent extensive excavations, have benefited from the latest, most innovative formulas of archaeology of religion and ritual. Likewise, the present project is anchored to the area of Etruria and Latina, like the “Virgilian sanctuaries” project, and will continue in the same spirit of experimentation, expanding its perspectives in various directions – archaeological, monumental, historical and historical-religious – to then move on to different lines of research constructed around the theme of the archaeology of religion and rituals.

At the centre of this six-fold project is the interference between religions coming from the different cultures which came into contact between the proto-historic age and the Archaic and Classical periods. One line of research will be dedicated to a remarkable, undoubtedly multi-faceted case of religious interference between Greece and the Latin, Etruscan and Italic world: the cult of the Dioskuri, the archaeological and historical-religious aspects of which will be investigated, as will the area of origin, Laco-nia and Taranto. Italy’s entrance into this non-Greek cult is undoubtedly the fruit of the intense relationship between the Etruscan and Latin world and world of the Greek motherland and its colonies, which started between the VIIIth and the VIIth century BCE and progressively expanded to all of the societies on the peninsula between the Archaic and Hellenistic ages. Nevertheless, the underlying reasons essentially are still unknown.

From the wide-ranging case history of this interference between the Greek area and non-Greek cultures, other significant examples will be studied with precise lines of research, starting with the justly renowned sanctuary-emporium of Gravisca at the port of Tarquinia, where between 590 and 480 BCE Greek merchants (mainly Greek-Orientalizing) traded with their Etruscan counterparts under the protection of divinities venerated in both their Greek and Etruscan aspects in dedications and inscriptions: two types of materials are planned for publication, to be included as the last two volumes in the final edition of the excavations, one on archaic painted ceramics of clear Ionic inspiration and the other on Greek and Etruscan transport amphorae. The study of these two types of ceramic materials may furnish useful diagnostic data on the precise provenance of both the Greek and the Etruscan merchants.
In addition, two more cases of interference between the Etruscan-Latin world and the Greek world will be taken into consideration. The first concerns the cult of Apollo; the second, the case of Circe, which is very isolated, but of exceptional interest. From the boundless evidence of the presence of the god of Delphi in Italy, one case was chosen, in which a recent controversial hypothesis attributes the temple of the Round Altar to Apollo in Ostia: the as of yet unpublished study of the materials discovered years ago in the excavations of the cela and the overall re-examination of the archaeological, epigraphic, topographical and monumental documentation are expected to lead to new data for a certain identification with the divinity.

The second case concerns the cult of Circe, the goddess at the centre of one of the most important myths of the Odyssey. The sanctuary dedicated to her rose in the Latin colony of Circeo (393 BCE), which took its name from the sorceress of myth and from the promontory where the cult was located. The editing of a recently defended doctoral thesis on the centre and its many antiquities has shown that the traditional identification of a colossal base supported by vaulted structures in opera incerta with a villa (the so-called Villa dei Quattro Venti) is unfounded. Both the data collected by the diligent analysis of the structures and the discovery of a votive dedication from the Republican period on the inside of the complex suggest instead that this great monument can be identified as the sanctuary of Circe, and that the imposing architectural complex can be recognized as one of the “Sullan sanctuaries” of Lazio, like Fortuna Primigenia in Palestrina and Hercules Victor in Tivoli. Once the general framework of the archaeological district of Circeo has been analysed, this sanctuary will mainly be discussed in relation to what different sources say about the relationship with the place of the cult of Circe.

On the larger theme of the so-called Sullan sanctuaries, a link will be re-established with research on the sanctuary of Juno Sospita in Lanuvio, already begun three years ago under the direction of Fausto Zevi, who will continue to supervise the research, addressing the study of ceramic materials found in the excavation and expanding investigations to the area of the lower sanctuary of the late Republican and Imperial era. Both studies will make it possible to obtain not only more articulate information on the Proto-historic and Archaic phases, to which the birth of the cult is dated, but also more precise data on the plan in terms of the late Republican, monumentalizing phase of the sanctuary, which in fact connects the transformation of the sanctuary complex to the grandiose, scenographic architecture of the Late Hellenistic period.
No less significant are a few known cases of interference that took place in the religious sphere between the various *ethne* on the peninsula, for which the characteristics of inter-ethical sanctuaries have been recognized. Pertinent to the Etruria-Lazio area that is the subject of this research, one example of such a place of ethnical and cultural contact has been chosen from among these different places: the *Lucus Feroniae*, or “sacred woods” dedicated to the Sabine-Faliscan goddess Feronia. The sanctuary, which witnessed contact among three cultures (Latin, Faliscan-Capenate and Etruscan), has on several occasions revealed an enormous quantity of votive materials amassed after it was sacked by Hannibal. However, only those retrieved in the most recent excavation campaigns carried out by former Superintendent of the Villa Giulia, Anna Maria Moretti, and her collaborator, Gilda Benedettini, will be studied. The extraordinary archaeological situation of the deposition of the votive objects, all of very high quality, will be presented by the excavators, while the research carried out by young Balzan research fellows will in fact concern the classification and analytic study of the ex-votos, whose provenance will constitute a fundamental indicator of the currents that used the sanctuary.

Before starting work, in the course of a day-long conference that is planned for the month of January at the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, an extraordinary, very recently excavated example of cultural and ideological interference between worlds and cultures in contact with each other will be discussed: the great complex of Monte Prama (OR), where, on several occasions between 1975 and the present day, a high number of colossal stone statues clearly pertinent to Nuraghic culture have been discovered. The excavations just finished by the University of Sassari have brought to light part of a necropolis with tombs that the statues were connected with. They were probably produced following foreign, perhaps Orientalising, influence, and have definitively confirmed the funerary destination of the impressive sculptures, whose more remote inspiration has been widely debated in the past. Even if they lie outside the Etruscan-Italic area that this research focuses on, the case of Monte Prama is an indispensable example of possible contact between two cultures, the Nuraghic and the Phoenician, and will provide an important contribution to the discussion related to the forms of, reasons for and sources of inspiration at the root of ideological interference in the Mediterranean area and a possible model of eventual analogous cases in the Etruscan-Italic area. All of the costs of the conference will be covered by the University of Sassari, and publication of the conference proceedings is planned in the series of the *Atti dei Convegni Lincei*, with an explicit reference to the research project funded by the Balzan Prize.

For these six projects, Mario Torelli has worked out a research plan that will involve graduate and doctoral fellowships, purchase of materials and research tools, mission expenses and various kinds of scholarly production, including monographs and articles in academic journals.