Religious Networks and Landscapes: Southern Italy from the Republican to the Imperial Age

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Introduction

- This project will form part of RENEL South, a first-of-its-kind quantitative and digital study of sacred and cult sites in the regions of Apulia, Basilicata, and Calabria, the heart of the area once called *Magna Graecia*, from the Roman Republican period to the Imperial era.
- The RENEL South project is led by Dr. Francesca Mazzilli and funded by MUR-PNRR -Missione 4 “Istruzione e Ricerca” - Componente 2 “Dalla Ricerca all’Impresa” - Investimento 1.2 Finanziamento di progetti presentati da giovani ricercatori.
- This project will specifically focus on the archaeological, epigraphic, and landscape data associated with these cult sites as well as its analysis and incorporation into graphical models.

Background

- While this is the first project with this unique spatial and temporal focus, geospatial and social network analysis have been used before across different regions of Italy, targeting various time periods. Such as Fulminante and Alessandri’s *Salt production in central Italy and social network analysis centrality measures: An exploratory approach.*
- Social network analysis (SNA) has been increasing in popularity among archaeologists for several decades. According to Barbara Mills in her *Social Network Analysis in Archaeology*, all of the main factors of SNA were already present by the middle of the last century.
- Much of the recent rise in the popularity of SNA can be attributed to a proliferation of large bodies of archaeological data in online databases and new means of graphical and quantitative analysis such as ArcGIS.
- There has not yet been a holistic, quantitative, approach to religious sites in Apulia, Calabria, and Basilicata nor to the relationships between sites and within their environmental and historical context.

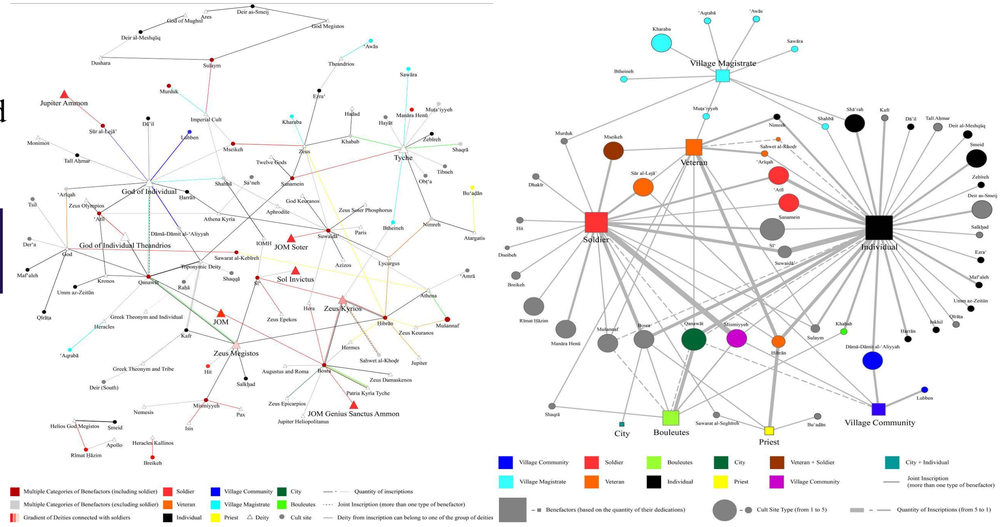

Figure: Two previous examples of SNA (Social Network Analysis) charts (Mazzilli 2022)

Objectives

- This initial project will seek to provide a systematic and analytical understanding of the interrelationships between religious sites, patronage networks, diachronic changes, and the effects of the environment in Apulia, Calabria, and Basilicata during the Roman Republican and Imperial periods.
- Through the study of archaeological, epigraphic, and landscape data, it will elucidate the processes by which the region’s cultural and religious diversity and the landscape itself influenced its historical development.

Methodology

- Religious sites will be identified and categorized according to their size, period of activity, archaeological remains, and other qualities.
- This data will recorded in a database which will comprise inscriptions, votive and ritual objects, statues, architectural remains and their associated social actors such as patrons or dedicatees.
- Regional landscape data will be used to develop the base layers of a GIS model of the study area, including terrain, river, roads, routeways, cities, villages, temporary settlements, and the target cult sites.
- Finally, the archaeological and epigraphical data will be collated into graphical representations, SNA charts and GIS models, enabling the visualization of site relationships, patterns, and changes that might otherwise be inscrutable.

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