

Lora Holland

Grove Topography and the Sacro-Idyllic Landscape in Augustan Italy

The rural Italian sanctuary is generally regarded as having held an esteemed, if nostalgic, place in the collective imagination of the Augustan age, as the poetry of Tibullus especially seems to demonstrate. This paper examines the relationship between Augustan literature, Roman religion, and the depiction of rural sanctuaries in the sacro-idyllic corpus, and offers a new interpretation for the prominence of the rural shrine in the religious landscape during this era.

Diana's sanctuary at Lake Nemi was arguably the most famous one in Italy, and its location in a volcanic crater presented a unique topographical tableau. Ovid (*Fasti* 3.263-274) purports to give an eyewitness description of the grove, and the details of his account will form the starting point for a brief analysis of several paintings (on slides) from the sacro-idyllic corpus. Ovid's influence on Roman wall painting has already been seen in one instance: Leach (*RM* 1981 88: 307-327) has argued that the iconography of the myth of Diana and Actaeon in Campanian wall painting reflected Ovidian literary influence. My analysis, however, will not be myth-specific, but will focus on the topography of the grove, bringing to bear evidence from Vitruvius and from Pliny the Elder (passages and bibliography will be included on the handout). Diana's frequent appearance in the sacro-idyllic corpus emphasized her role as goddess of fertility and supported the iconography of the renewed fertility of the earth that was a central element in Augustan imagery.

Establishing a firm connection between the rustic shrines depicted in the sacro-idyllic corpus and the worship of Diana as described by the Augustan poets illuminates the larger role of the rustic shrine in Roman religion during the Augustan age. My study concludes that the "nostalgia" for the rural landscape was not a longing for the past, but was part of a dynamic and fundamental change in Roman religion that sought to present Augustus as a god on earth in whose worship the rural sanctuary came to play a key role during his lifetime.