CHAPTER 18

THE MID-ROMAN PITS IN CONTEXT

By Hella Eckardt

The late Roman occupation of Insula IX was characterised by large groups of pits and wells located in the backyards of properties, and in many cases attributable to specific houses. This offered an opportunity to examine the spatial distribution of 'special' deposits such as dogs and infants, but also to compare the proportions of artefact categories such as building materials, animal bones and pottery across the insula, and within selected pits and wells (Eckardt 2006). The results showed some striking differences between the northern and southern half of the insula in particular, with proportionally much more animal bone deposited in the pits to the south of the main fence-line. Analysis also highlighted the potential of exploring pit assemblages in detail, by not just identifying features that contained unusual deposits, but also studying individual layers within those pits. Such an approach makes use of the meticulously recorded stratigraphic and finds information, and adds a more detailed and temporal dimension to our understanding of pit use. It also, however, highlights the difficulty of defining 'ritual' deposits in wells and pits by examining associated material, which, for example, demonstrated that complete dog carcasses were deposited with other animal waste, or infants in fills that also contained what appears to be rubbish. The study of the late Roman pits thus illustrated both the potential and the difficulty of mapping and understanding structured deposition in the Roman period, a theme that will be developed below.

This chapter broadly follows the structure used for the comparative section in the late Roman report, but there are fewer pits, and it is much harder to attribute them to specific properties. Much of the discussion will focus on Period 4, as most of the cut features are attributed to that phase.

CHARACTER AND USE OF PITS

The discussion of excavated features has already covered cut features in some detail (above, Ch. 2), and only a brief summary is given here. In Period 3, we have identified three pits and two wells. Presumably associated with MRTB 1/ERTB 1 (former ERTB 4) is cess-pit 4835, located near the intersection of the streets in the north-east corner of the insula. Probably associated with MB 1 and/or MB 2, and located in the south-eastern area of the excavation, are pit 5039, the slumps into pit 6290, and well 5693. Finally, there is an earlier well used as a pit in Period 3 (2234); this feature is located to the north-west of the main buildings, and probably belongs to a separate property located outside of the excavated area.

In Period 4, all the major cut features are located to the south-east of MB 3, and are associated with that building, and/or with the more ephemeral MRTBs 4 and 5. There are two certain wells (5735 and 1750), with well 1750 already partially excavated by the Victorians. Pits 3102 and 3406 may have functioned initially as wells, while 2601 and 2434 are certainly pits, with the latter used as a cess-pit.

Table 26 records the depths, number of fills, and any special deposits found within these pits and wells. The table suggests use as a cess-pit where mineralised deposits were recorded, using a '?' to indicate field observations not supported by the plant remains. It is clearly difficult to define 'special deposits' within archaeological contexts, but, as for the late Roman material, it is possible

to map the distribution of infants, complete pottery vessels and dogs. The articulated remains of wild animals have been added as a new category for this period.

Complete, and almost complete, pottery vessels were found in five of the eleven cut features examined here (FIG. 135). Fulford and Timby (2001) have suggested ritual deposition for complete pierced vessels which may represent the symbolic 'killing' of a vessel while at the same time allowing for the gradual release of fluid offerings. In this assemblage, complete vessels such as the worn mortarium from the slumps into pit 6290 and the Nene Valley colour-coated box-lid from pit/well 3406 may represent offerings, or discarded household utensils. Fills within pits and wells may have been subject to considerable disturbance and compression, and that may explain 'almost complete' pottery vessels such as the dish from pit 4835, the three flagons from well 2234 and the BB1 jar from pit/well 3406. It is also possible that partial vessels (such as the base fragment from pit 4835 and the flagon necks from pit 5039) represent *pars pro toto* offerings. Alternatively, of course, damaged vessels may simply have been discarded as rubbish.

Jane Timby (above, Ch. 8) has explored other aspects of the pottery assemblage, such as the relative proportions of imports and functional categories. An interesting pattern to pick up here is the emphasis on drinking vessels amongst the pottery contained in well 5735; this may represent the disposal of pottery relating to fluid storage and consumption in a watery feature. Such an association of specific pottery forms is perhaps mirrored in the three almost complete flagons from well 2234, but the sample is too small for certain conclusions, and flagon necks were also recorded from a pit (5039). Complete and almost complete pottery vessels were recorded from four Period 3 and one Period 4 features, but the sample is too small to suggest a trend; there is no apparent spatial patterning.

In contrast to the late Roman period, none of the infants recorded from mid-Roman features were found in pits or wells (FIG. 109). Parts of the skull, clavicle and ribs of an infant aged 38–42 weeks were found in context 4472, the fill of a small grave cut (4516). This burial is located

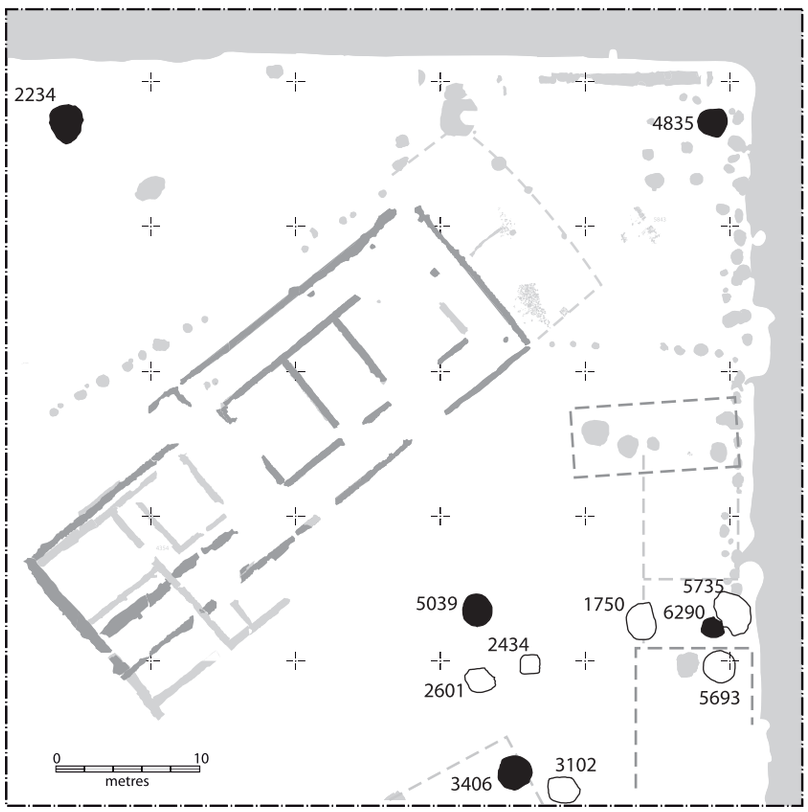

FIG. 135. Pits with complete or near complete pots (Periods 3 and 4).

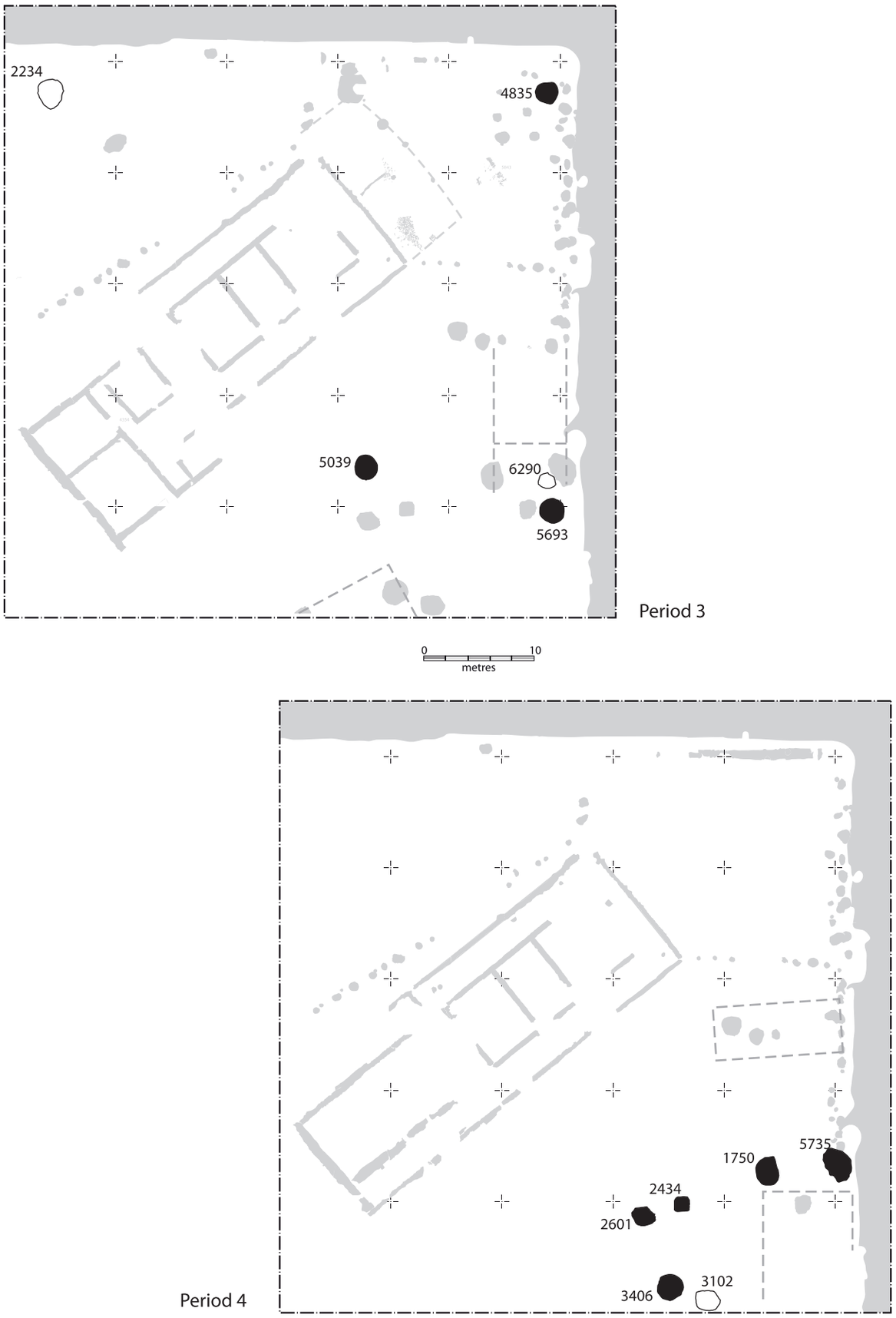

FIG. 136. Pits with dog remains (Periods 3 and 4).

adjacent to a beam slot, possibly indicating a timber building (MRTB 2), in the occupation deposits close to the southern edge of the excavation trench (Object 701). The left humerus of a premature infant was found in the nearby deposit 4475.

Dog remains were recovered from pits, wells and occupation layers (Clark, above, Ch. 14) (FIG. 136). These usually consist of fragmentary bones, and while two or more individuals are represented in five pits and wells, only the neighbouring pits 2434 and 2601 contained more than 50 fragments, representing at least three dogs. Articulated skeletons have been interpreted as ritual deposits (cf. Eckardt 2006, 227–8, with further references) and Black (2008, 1–8) has recently argued that the deposition of dogs and vessels in pits, wells or shafts may have been associated with the god Sucellos. He interprets the dog as representing the devouring and transforming nature of this god, rather than any healing properties. However, with the exception of the curled up carcass in pit 2601 and the skull in pit 4835, there are no other articulated skeletons, or complete skulls, from the mid-Roman features. This can be contrasted with the late Roman pits, where three pits contained the articulated remains of multiple dogs. These three pits were all located in the southern half of the site, and possibly associated with Building 1 (3235 and 3251) and Building 5 (1707). These pits also yielded infant remains and, in two cases, complete pots; closer analysis did, however, demonstrate that these deposits did not necessarily occur within the same layers.

The detailed stratigraphy of selected pits containing dogs will be examined below, but it should be noted here that there appears to be no temporal or spatial patterning, or association with specific buildings, in the deposition of dog remains in the mid-Roman phases. They also occur in both pits and wells, including cess-pits. While there are fewer mid-Roman pits, this discussion includes all substantial features, and the relative rarity of articulated remains may thus reflect a change in depositional practice rather than an accident of survival and recording. It may also relate to the changing management and exploitation of the canine population. Clark (2006, 189–95) noted that while some of the animals had been mistreated and killed, indications of butchery in the late Roman assemblage were few. By contrast, there is considerable evidence for the skinning of dogs in the mid-Roman assemblage (Clark, above, Ch. 14), perhaps suggesting that dog remains were much more intensively processed in the mid-Roman period, and perhaps not perceived to have the same ritual importance as in the late Roman period. It is striking that the only pit to yield an almost complete carcass (2601) also contained the unusual folding-knife depicting two mating dogs (see below for further discussion and Crummy, Ch. 6).

The apparent use of dog furs may also provide an explanation for the presence of badger remains in mid-Roman pits and features, in particular the deposition of two carcasses in pit 2434. While it is possible that badgers were killed as pests, it seems more likely that they were trapped for fur. That badger fur was valued in the Iron Age is demonstrated by its use to cover the elaborate bronze couch of the Hochdorf burial (Green 1992, 53; Biel 1985, 117–18). Badger remains occur at Danebury, where the deposition of a young fox and badger in the same fill within a pit was interpreted as a special deposit (Grant 1984, 526; Grant 1991, 478; cf. Cunliffe 1986, 126–35). Other wild animals are relatively rare in the Silchester pits (FIG. 137), but Ingrem (Ch. 13) also highlights the deposition of raven remains in mid-Roman features.

Ravens are striking birds, and their presence at Silchester, especially in pit 2601 and well 1750, may not simply signify the disposal of food waste or vermin, but again relate to ritual practices. Ravens may have been eaten, or hunted because they threatened crops (Green 1992, 52), or even attacked young lambs (Luff 1982, 63). Ravens are omnivorous birds, well suited to scavenging amongst urban debris, and their 'slow, low take-off flight means ravens are especially vulnerable to target practice' (Parker 1988, 218). Ravens can be kept well in captivity if taken young, and may have been valued for their ability to mimic human speech. Toynbee (1973, 273–5) discusses a number of literary sources recording Roman fascination with their ability to talk, most famously the story about a raven trained to greet the emperor Augustus after his victory at Actium (Macrobius, *Satires* 2.4.29, 30).

However, ritual significance has been suggested for both the Iron Age and the Roman period, with subtly changing symbolic meaning attached to these birds. Beliefs about the supernatural association of ravens may reach as far back as the Bronze Age (Needham and Bowman 2005,

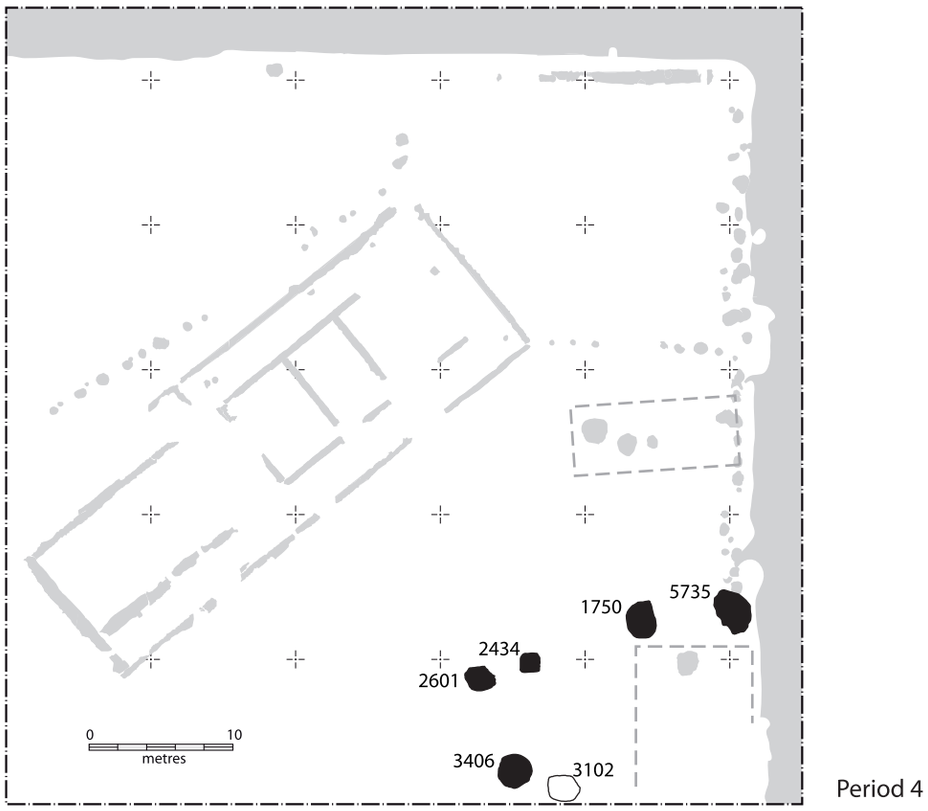

FIG. 137. Pits with the remains of wild animals (Period 4).

119–22). For Celtic Europe, Green (1992, 87–9, 177–81, fig. 4.17) discusses the association of ravens, who scavenge on dead flesh, with death and war, citing examples such as the third/second-century B.C. helmet from Ciumeşti in Romania crowned by a raven with flapping wings. The association with death is also reflected in later Irish vernacular tales, where ravens are often perceived to predict the future, acting as birds of omen and harbingers of doom (cf. Ross 1967, 242–70).

Archaeologically, ravens are strongly represented in Iron Age pits within, for example, the Hampshire hillforts of Danebury and Winklebury. At Danebury, it has been suggested that ravens may have nested on the site, 'frequenting the rubbish dumps and picking at carcasses' (Coy 1984, 530), and their deposition in pits may relate to other ritual deposits of animals in pits on that site (Grant 1984, 533–43; Serjeantson 1991, 479–81; cf. Cunliffe 1986, 158–9; Hill 1995, 29, 63–4). Even more strikingly, a raven was found with spread wings at the bottom of a pit at Winklebury, which also contained the complete carcass of a pig (Wait 1985, 138; Hill 1995, fig. 2.1).

Ravens continued to be deposited in striking ways in the Romano-British period (cf. Parker 1988, 206–9). A dry well associated with the Romano-Celtic temple at Jordan Hill in Dorset contained, amongst other structured deposits, pairs of tiles, between each of which were a coin and a bird skeleton, with raven, crow, buzzard and starling represented (Ross 1968, 266–7). On several sites, unusual deposits of raven are also associated with dog remains, as in our mid-Roman pits. At Portchester the fourth-century pit 236 contained a complete Great Northern Diver as well as two ravens, numerous other birds and domesticated animals, with a noticeable concentration of complete or almost complete skulls of cattle, sheep, pig and dog (Cunliffe 1975, 172–6). Eastham (1975, 412–14) suggests that the Great Northern Diver may represent an accidental catch while the ravens may have been kept as pets, but does not comment on the fact that they are all associated in the same pit. At Sheepen pit 120, dated to A.D. 49–61, produced

a 'curious assortment of bones', including two nearly complete raven skeletons, the remains of two white tailed eagles, a complete dog skeleton and a puppy (Luff 1982, 63). At Dunstable two human skeletons had been buried amongst the subsiding top fills of a 9m-deep shaft, interpreted in the report as a well re-used as a cess-pit, and dated to the first half of the second century A.D. (Mathews *et al.* 1981, 63–73). Amongst the fills was the skeleton of a sea eagle, found in a layer with parts of a raven, several small rodents, a frog and a water vole. The excavators interpret this assemblage as 'the remains of food given to a captured eagle, or they may have been in the bird's stomach' (Mathews *et al.* 1981, 67). The ritual associations of this feature are, however, strengthened by the presence of an infant burial and several complete dog and puppy skeletons in other layers within this shaft.

Raven remains were recorded from the forum-basilica excavation at Silchester (Serjeantson 2000, 485–6), with a raven skeleton from an Iron Age feature interpreted as possibly ritual in nature. Ravens were also deposited in late Roman pits in Insula IX, but occur only in the pit group associated with Building 1 (Late Roman Object 116); in particular raven and jackdaw remains are concentrated in pit 3251 (cf. Ingrem 2006, 174, tables 32a–c). This is a pit that also contained infant, cat and articulated dog remains, and a complete pottery vessel (Eckardt 2006, 242–4).

These finds from Romano-British contexts suggest that ravens continued to have ritual significance, with the deposition in pits and wells indicating a chthonic motif, perhaps harking back to the association with death and the underworld apparent in Celtic beliefs (Green 1992, 211). In the Roman world ravens are also credited with prophetic powers, acting as oracles and associated with a variety of deities (Toynbee 1973, 273–5). The raven was sacred to Apollo and Helios, and also appears on Mithras reliefs (ibid., 275).

Black (2008, 5–8) also discusses the finds of ravens from Roman Britain, and notes that ravens are the bird of the Gaulish Romano-Celtic Nantosuelta, the consort of Sucellos (cf. Ross 1967, 244–6, figs 151–2). Ravens are also found with the god Lugos (ibid., 249–56, fig. 154), and other healing and underworld deities (Green 1989, 61–9, fig. 25). Given the association of ravens with dogs in structured pit deposits, a relief from Moux, Burgundy, is of particular interest. This depicts a bearded god standing with a dog at his feet and a raven on each shoulder (Green 1992, 212, fig. 7.10; Deyts 1976, no. 160).

While ravens are clearly significant in Roman Britain and beyond, we again come up against the difficulty of conclusively proving ritual deposition, as opposed to the structured deposition of unusual material (see below). Possible links between ravens and dogs will be explored below through the detailed examination of selected pits.

CHRONOLOGY OF PITS

For the late Roman pit assemblages, it was possible to map the distribution of not only coins, but also dated pottery (Eckardt 2006, 228–33, figs 98–103). For the mid-Roman phases, there are far fewer coins, and almost none contemporary with the occupation come from pits. The only exception is an unworn coin of Carausius (A.D. 287–93) that came from the uppermost fill (2602) of pit 2434, which also contained quantities of building material dumped prior to the construction of Late Roman Building 1, whose foundations overlay the pit. This coin not only provides a *terminus post quem* for the construction of that late Roman building (cf. Fulford *et al.* 2006, 18–19), but also a *terminus ante quem* for the abandonment of well 1750, which lies underneath the building. Radiocarbon dating suggests that the construction of well 1750 should be in the period of 202–240 cal AD (Galimberti *et al.* 2004, 920–1, see above, pp. 44–6). A combination of pottery dating and stratigraphic relationships in Period 4 then allows us to suggest a chronological sequence, with well 5735 the earliest, followed by 1750 (of which only the earliest contexts were undisturbed by Victorian excavations), then 2601, 3102, 3406 and finally 2434 (see pp. 41–51 above).

A recurring feature of both the layers and pits is the amount of residual material, noted both for pottery and small finds (see Chs 6 & 8 above), a characteristic that prevents further spatial analysis.

PIT ASSEMBLAGE COMPOSITION

For the late Roman report, the quantities of tile, pottery, bone, slag and nails were compared for each group of pits (Eckardt 2006, figs 105–109). As pit size and depth clearly have an impact on the amounts of material contained within a feature, pit volumes were calculated (Eckardt 2006, 236). For this purpose, pits are described as truncated cones, and volumes calculated using three basic parameters: the top diameter, the bottom diameter, and the depth (see Table 26). Finds can then be shown as estimated densities, and for the late Roman pit groups there were some interesting trends. As expected, tile was by far the most common material by weight, and was spread relatively evenly across the site; it was often dumped in upper fills, presumably to seal pits and wells prior to further building activity. By contrast, nails and slag occurred in much smaller quantities, with some spatial patterning. Perhaps the most striking result for the late Roman features was the differential deposition of domestic waste, namely pottery and animal bone. Analysis demonstrated that proportionally much more animal bone was deposited in the features associated with the buildings in the southern half of the excavated area (Eckardt 2006, figs 107 and 109).

For the mid-Roman assemblage, the dataset is much smaller, and there are no clear-cut spatial groupings of pits and wells. It is, however, possible to compare Period 3 features with those from Period 4, and to contrast the use of wells with that of pits. In the graphs that follow, pits (P) and wells (W) are distinguished, and features are shown in the same order as in Table 26 below. Pits/wells 4835, 5039, 6290, 5693 and 2234 belong to Period 3, the remainder to Period 4.

Ceramic building material is so dominant by weight, that it should be examined separately from domestic waste. While dominating assemblages in most features, tile is especially strongly represented in two features, pits 4835 and 2434 (FIG. 138a). Pit 4835 is located at the street intersection in the north-eastern corner, making it potentially an easily accessible site for the dumping of tile from anywhere in Silchester. On the other hand, and especially if the street frontage was fenced, the tile may be derived from earlier tiled structures within the insula. The tile is largely derived from two middle fills (5873 and 5867), with smaller quantities in the top fills (5821 and 4862); this may represent opportunistic disposal of unwanted building material rather than a sealing deposit.

Pit 2434 is located to the south-east of MB 3, and to the west of the potential building MRTB 4 in the south-eastern corner of the excavated area. There is no indication from where the ceramic building material is derived. The ceramic building material is largely from the uppermost fill (2602), where it appears to have been dumped prior to the construction of Late Roman Building 1 whose foundations overlay the pit. This context also included an unworn coin of Carausius (see above).

FIG. 138a also illustrates the deposition of stone; this is presumably derived from nearby demolished buildings and thus similar to the ceramic building material discussed so far. Stone occurs more commonly in Period 4 features, in particular in the neighbouring pits 2601 and 2434 to the south-east of MB 3. The especially strong showing of stone and tile in pit 2434 reflects the deliberate dumping of building material.

It is interesting that not that much tile was recovered from the mid-Roman wells, in contrast to the late Roman pattern (cf. Eckardt 2006, 234).

Other than tile, the bulk of the fills is made up of domestic waste, in particular broken pottery vessels and animal bone. FIG. 138b illustrates that pottery is generally more strongly represented than animal bone, with only pit/well 3102 and well 1750 containing noticeably more animal bone than pottery. Both are located in the south-eastern part of the insula, but not immediately next to each other. It is interesting to note that the two pits with very large amounts of tile (4835 and 2434, see above) are not dominated by pottery, but contain relatively similar quantities of pottery and animal bone. Does this indicate that bulky and 'harder' material was specifically selected to fill and seal these features? There are no clear-cut differences between Period 3 and Period 4, apart from a slight increase in the quantities of animal bone deposited.

The deposition of nails (FIG. 138c) may relate to casual loss, or the dismantling and disposal of timber structures, with wood deposited in wells and pits without the prior removal of structural

TABLE 26. 'SPECIAL' DEPOSITS IN PITS AND WELLS IN PERIODS 3 AND 4

Pit/Well	No. of fills	Depth	Cess	Special deposits: Objects	Special deposits: Dogs	Special deposits incl. wild animals
Pit 4835	14	1.75m	Yes	1 almost complete dish, 1 jar base	Remains of, including skull fragment. 7 fragments altogether including neonate humerus	
Pit 5039	15	1.65m	Yes?	Part of jar, flagon necks	Remains of ?1 dog; 3 fragments, 2 with skinning marks	
Pit 6290 (excavation not complete)	8	2.5m		Complete mortarium		Oyster dump
Well 5693	13	2.2m		Mirror fragment	Remains of 2 dogs concentrated in context 6300; 16 fragments, one with skinning marks	
Well 2234	32	3m		3 almost complete flagons		
Well 5735	9	2.2m		Writing-tablet, bucket handle, foot jug handle	Remains of 1 dog, 6 fragments, skinning marks	red deer, hare, rodent and goose bones, but no complete carcasses
Well 1750 (partial Victorian excavation)	4 un-disturbed lower fills	1.5m			Remains of 2 dogs, including articulated vertebrae and well-healed tibia fracture. 8 fragments	Faunal assemblage dominated by birds, including raven; some red deer bone
Pit/well 3102	14	2.75m	Yes?		1 fragment	
Pit/well 3406	10	2.8m		Complete Nene Valley lid, most of BB1 jar, substantial parts of other jars. Bead and gold wire, shale vessels, bone hairpins, shoes?	Remains from at least 2 dogs, plus neonate radius. 28 fragments, mainly from context 4290. Skinning marks on 2 bones	Partial cattle skull; substantial representation of galliform bone
Pit 2601	7	1.45m	Yes?	Dog folding-knife	Complete carcass of young, curled up dog; remains of 2 further dogs. 56 fragments	Partial raven skeletons
Pit 2434	6	1.8m	Yes	CBM dump; bead, bone hairpin, shale armlet	Remains of 3 dogs, and 2 neonate dog bones. 86 fragments	2 partial badger skeletons; red deer antler pieces

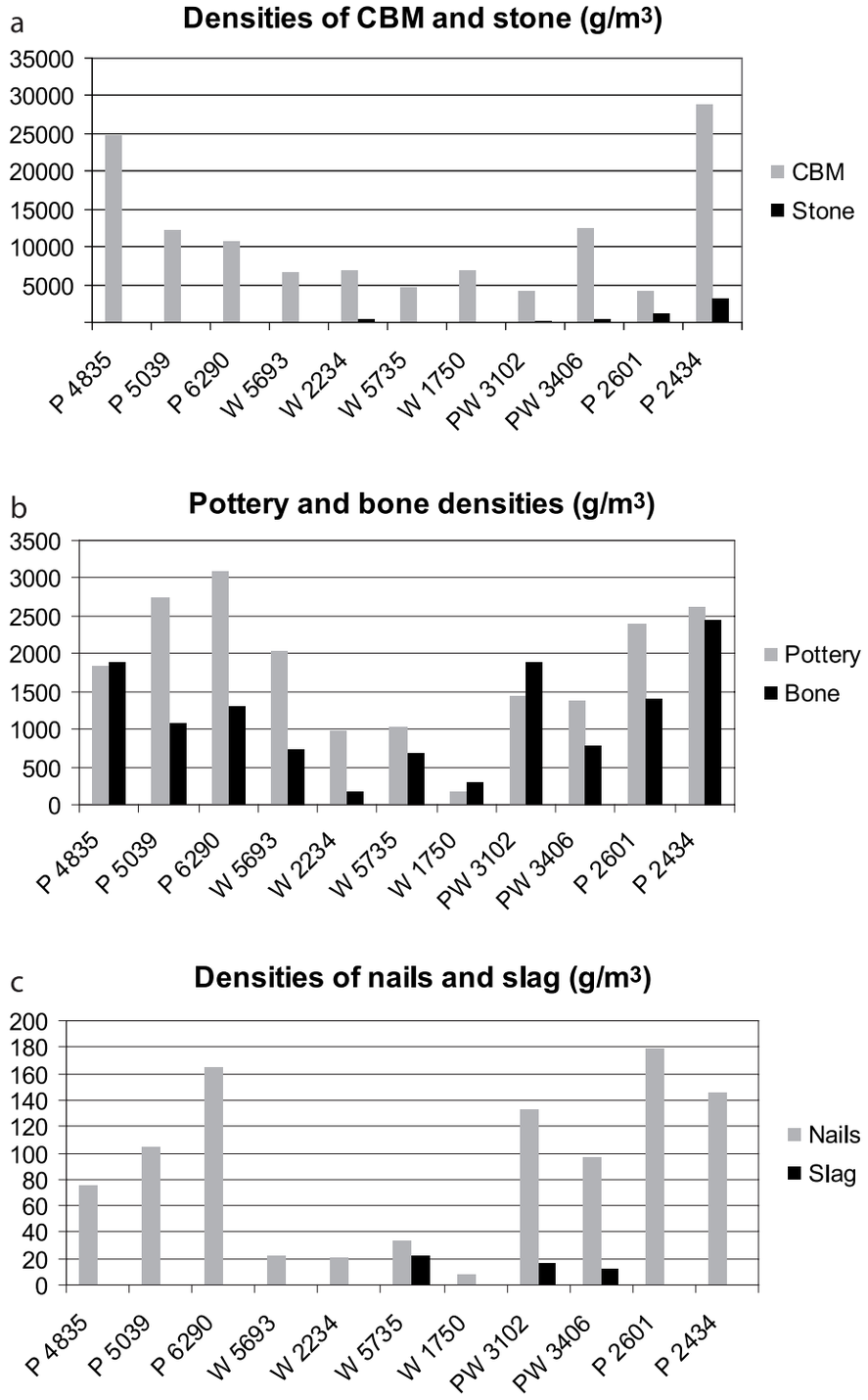

FIG. 138. Densities of (a) cbm and stone, (b) pottery and bone, and (c) nails and slags from pits and wells of Periods 3 and 4.

nails. Slag relates to metalworking, although as with all material deposited in cut features, it is not possible to say whether this occurred in the immediate vicinity of the pit or well. Nails appear to be more common in pits as opposed to wells, perhaps reflecting the disposal of decaying timber.

Slag only occurs in Period 4 cut features, a finding echoing the less frequent occurrence of

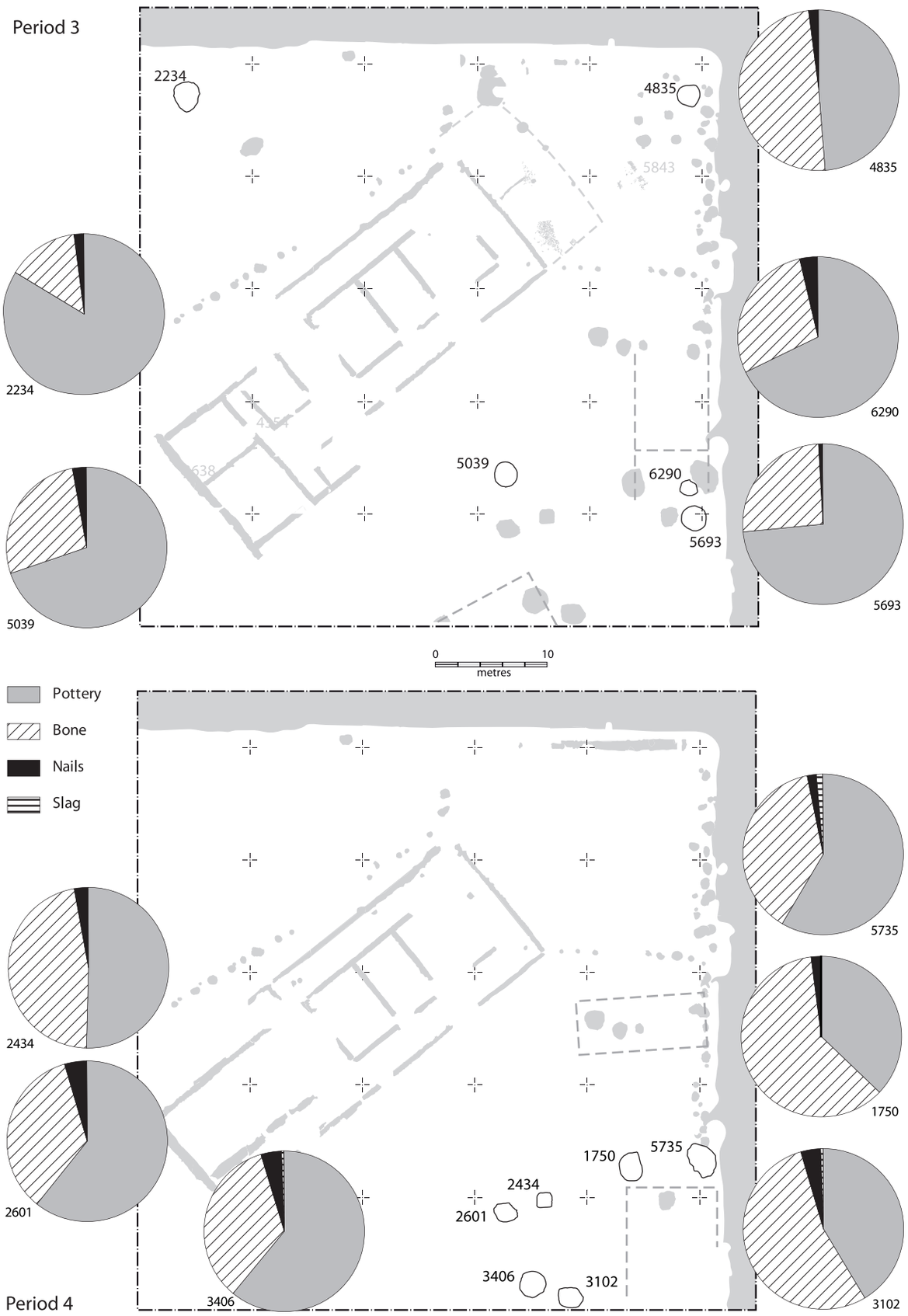

FIG. 139. Proportional representation of principal categories of finds from pits and wells of Periods 3 and 4.

slag in Period 3 layers (Tootell, above, Ch. 11). However, hammerscale and microscopic slag were recovered from pits 5039 and 6290. For Period 4, three cut features contained slag. Well 5735 is located immediately next to the north–south street, and adjacent, too, to the putative building MRTB 4 in the south-eastern corner of the excavation. The neighbouring pits/wells 3102 and 3406 are located just to its west, perhaps suggesting that one of the functions of this elusive structure was as a workshop, perhaps servicing MB 3, the structure with which most of the metalworking evidence was associated (Tootell, above, Ch. 11).

We can map the proportional representation of domestic waste in individual pits and wells (FIG. 139). This reiterates the point that in Period 3 both pit and well assemblages are dominated by pottery vessels, with the exception of pit 4835 in the north-east corner of the insula. In Period 4, animal bone is generally more strongly represented, perhaps indicating a change in disposal practices for butchery and food waste. Well 1750, which was already almost totally excavated by the Victorians, should perhaps be ignored, but it is interesting that the other two Period 4 features with a high proportion of animal bone (2434 and 3102) are located immediately to the west of the possible workshop/service building MRTB 4 in the south-eastern corner of the excavation. The spatial patterning is, however, not as marked as it was for the late Roman period, where pits containing relatively large amounts of animal bone clustered in the southern part of the site, and appeared to be associated with the main masonry buildings (cf. Eckardt 2006, fig. 109). It remains to be seen whether these more subtle variations will be echoed in the early Roman and late Iron Age pits.

SELECTED PITS IN DETAIL

As for the Late Roman report, three pits and wells (2601, 5735 and 2434), distinguished by the presence of what appear to be 'special' deposits, were selected for more detailed analysis (cf. Eckardt 2006, 238–44). The overall assemblage composition for each feature is already illustrated in FIGS 138–9 above, but here, first, the distribution of material across fills and, secondly, the composition of selected fills, in particular those containing 'unusual' finds, will be examined. In the bar charts, fills are illustrated with the topmost fill to the left, running towards the basal fill on the right.

PIT 2601

This probable cess-pit contained an articulated dog skeleton and the ivory folding-knife depicting two mating dogs (FIG. 59, pp. 49–50), and represents perhaps the clearest example amongst the mid-Roman pits of structured deposition. We do not have all the material originally deposited in this pit as its fills were truncated and effectively bisected by the construction of Late Roman Building 1. It is dated to Period 4.

FIGS 140–141 illustrate the deposition of ceramic building material across fills; this is uneven, with most of this bulky material dumped in the middle fills 2623 and 2762. Fill 2762 also contained a relatively large amount of pottery, while most other fills have a more even mixture of pottery and animal bone. Overall, jars predominate in the assemblage and drinking vessels are not significantly represented. Amongst the upper fills several cross-joins between sherds from different contexts were noted, suggesting rapid infill of the pit. Animal bone occurs in most fills, but only context 2758 has more animal bone than pottery. The partial skeleton of a dog, probably originally deposited as a complete carcass, was found in context 2622, which also contained the remains of further dogs. Fills 2623 and 2762 also contained dog remains. Partial raven skeletons were found in fill 2762.

No slag was recovered from pit 2601, and there is a relatively even scattering of nails throughout the fills. Stone is concentrated in fill 2623, which also contained very large amounts of tile, suggesting deliberate dumping.

In terms of small finds, the most outstanding find from this pit, and indeed the site, is a folding-knife or razor with an ivory handle in the form of two coupling dogs (FIGS 43 and 59; above, pp. 110–13; SF 1734). This was found in context 2622, which also contained the articulated dog

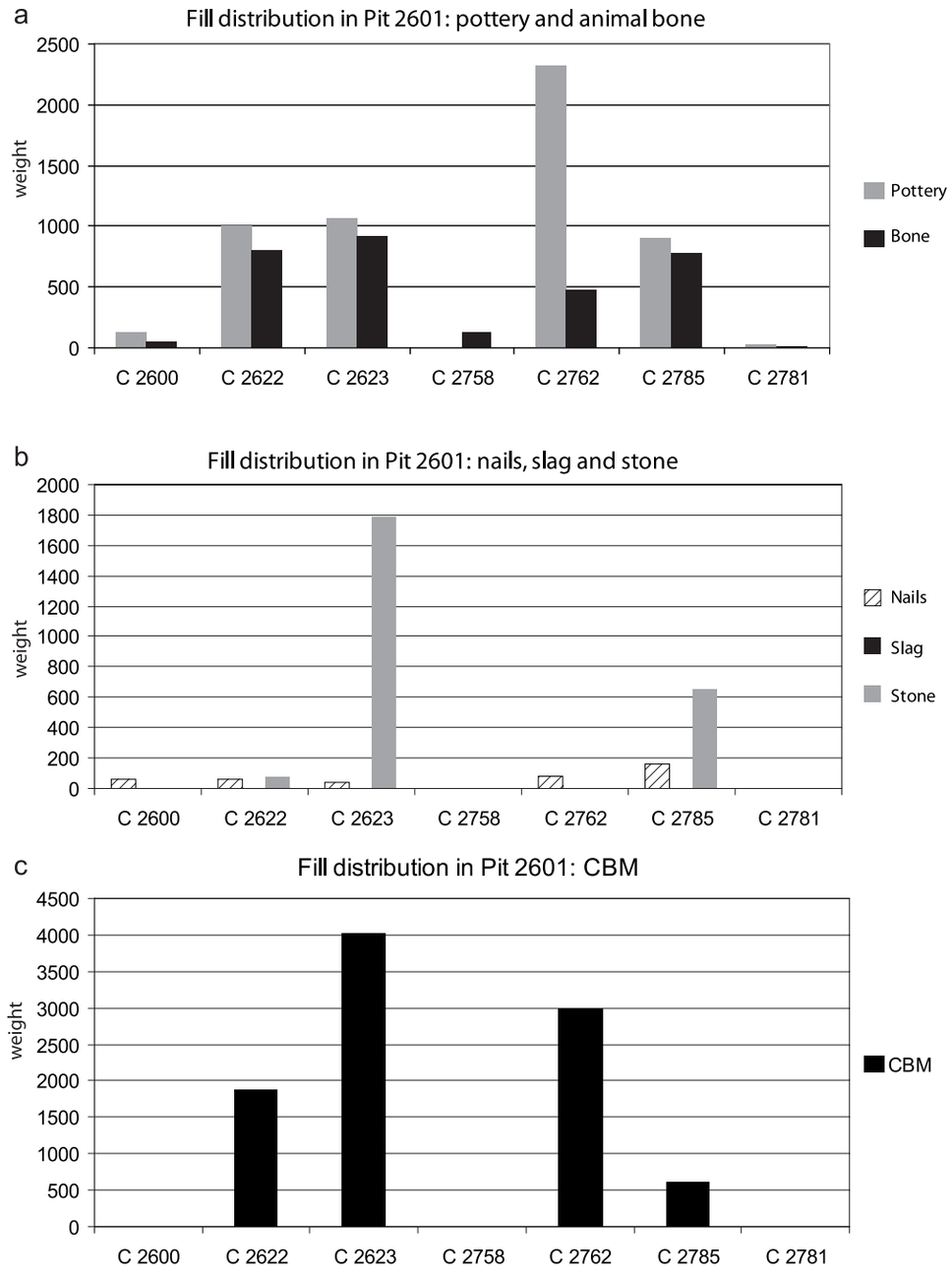

FIG. 140. Weights of (a) pottery and animal bone, (b) nails, slag and stone, and (c) cbm from each context of Period 4 pit 2601.

skeleton. The other small find of note from this pit is a Republican silver coin dated to 55 B.C. (SF 02431) in context 2623.

FIGS 140–141 illustrate that fill 2622, so outstanding in terms of the knife and dog skeleton, is not very different from the fills preceding it in terms of the overall representation of finds. There are of course differences, such as the strong showing of stone in fill 2623, and the varying amounts of pottery, but it would be difficult to argue that 2622 is different in terms of the material deposited with the dog carcass and knife. One interesting pattern to emerge is that 2623 and especially 2762 contain relatively little animal bone other than the dog and raven remains.

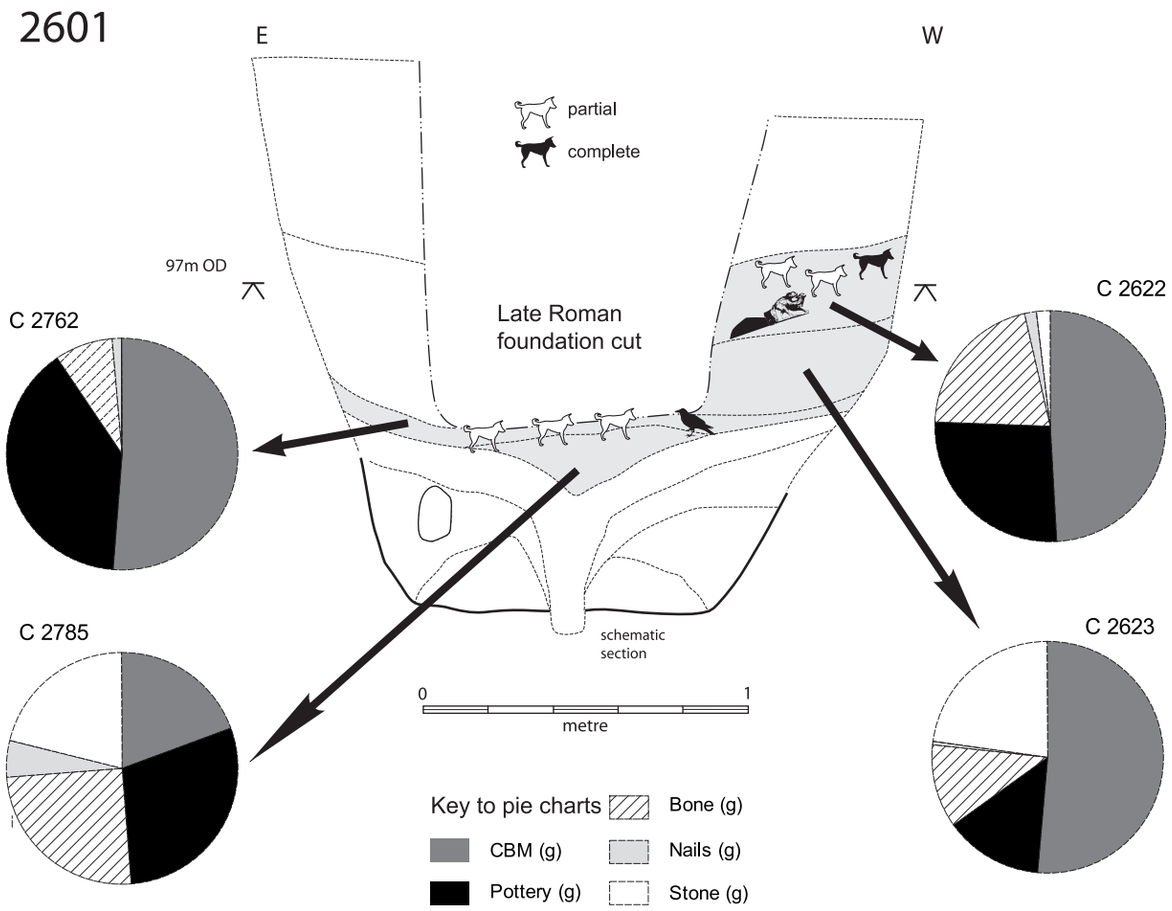

FIG. 141. Proportional representation of principal categories of finds from each context of Period 4 pit 2601.

WELL 5735

For the earlier of the Period 4 wells, 5735, there is clearly an uneven distribution of artefacts by weights across fills (FIGS 142–143). The top fill (5697) contains the most ceramic building material, with quantities of tile decreasing markedly in the lower fills. This suggests the deliberate dumping of material to consolidate the top of the feature, prior to the construction of the late Roman buildings. Pottery is, by weight, more strongly represented than animal bone in most fills, with the largest quantities again recorded in the top fill 5697. Fulford (see above, p. 44) has already commented on the high proportion, almost one third (31 per cent), of vessels associated with drinking (beakers, cups and flagons) in this well. Relatively large quantities of animal bone are recorded in fills 6294 and 6436.

Nails have only been recorded from the top two fills of this feature; together with the ceramic building material, this perhaps suggests the deliberate dumping of structural remains (that is timbers with nails remaining) to stabilise the feature prior to further building activity. Slag and stone only occur in fill 6424.

We have already noted the presence of a number of 'special' deposits of small finds from this well, and these are concentrated in one fill. The lower fill 6436 had a depth of 0.8m and was waterlogged, preserving fragments of wood and the leaves of box and holly. In this one context were found a writing-tablet of maple (SF 4386), a bucket handle (SF 4413) and the handle of a copper-alloy foot-handle jug (SF 4399, see Crummy, above, pp. 114–16; FIGS 36, 37 and 60). The dog remains may represent one individual, but were scattered over several fills; a scapula

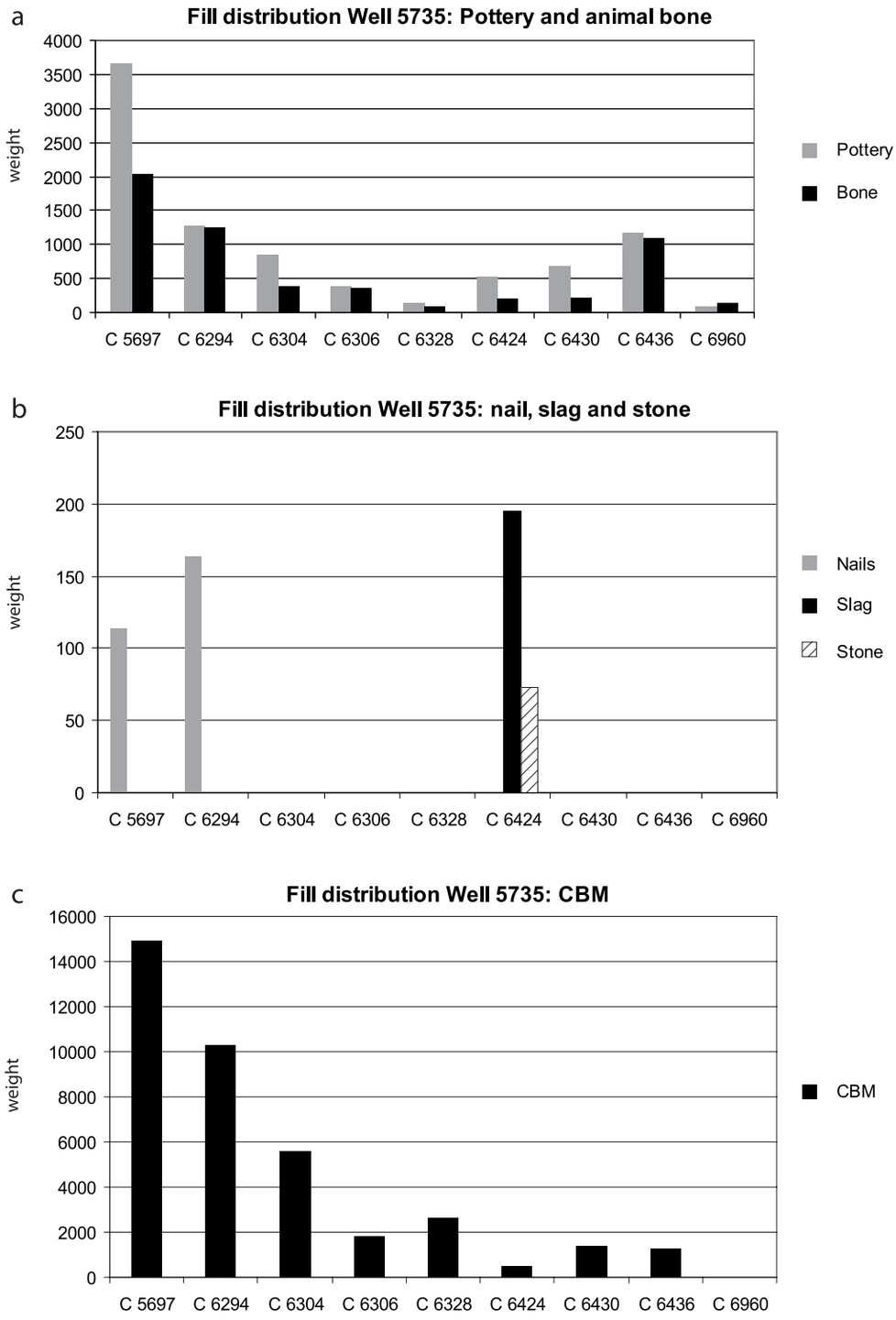

FIG. 142. Weights of (a) pottery and animal bone, (b) nail, slag and stone, and (c) cbm from each context of Period 4 well 5735.

came from fill 6436, which also contained multiple small finds; 6430 contained a tibia and metacarpal and the top fills (6294 and 5697) contained a further metacarpal and femur.

FIGS 142–143 illustrate the proportional representation by weight of the various find categories within individual fills. This once again illustrates the dominance of tile in the top two fills, and to a lesser extent in fill 6430. 6424 stands out for the occurrence of slag and stone. 6436 contains

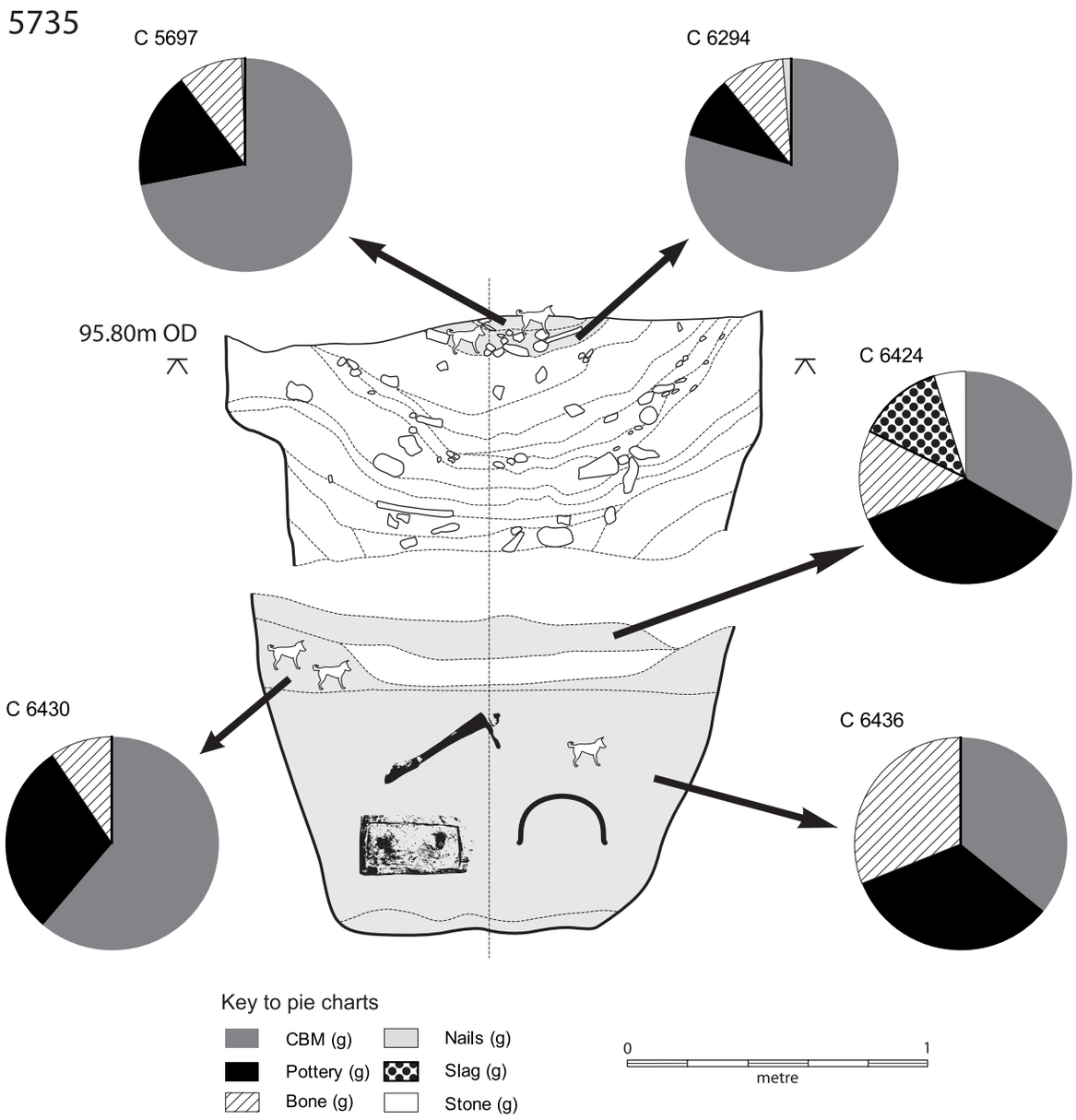

FIG. 143. Proportional representation of principal categories of finds from each context of Period 4 well 5735.

a relatively even mixture of bulk finds. In terms of the dog remains, it is interesting that, with the exception of fill 6436, none of the fills containing dog bones contains large amounts of other animal remains.

PIT 2434

As with well 5735, analysis shows an uneven distribution of material across the fills of cess-pit 2434, also dated to Period 4. The uppermost fill (2602) is dominated by ceramic building material prior to the construction of Late Roman Building 1 whose foundations overlay the pit. This context also included an unworn coin of Carausius (SF 01612). Smaller quantities of tiles occur in fill 2605, but tiles are otherwise relatively rare in the lower fills.

FIGS 144–145 illustrate that while animal bone is strongly represented in the top three fills,

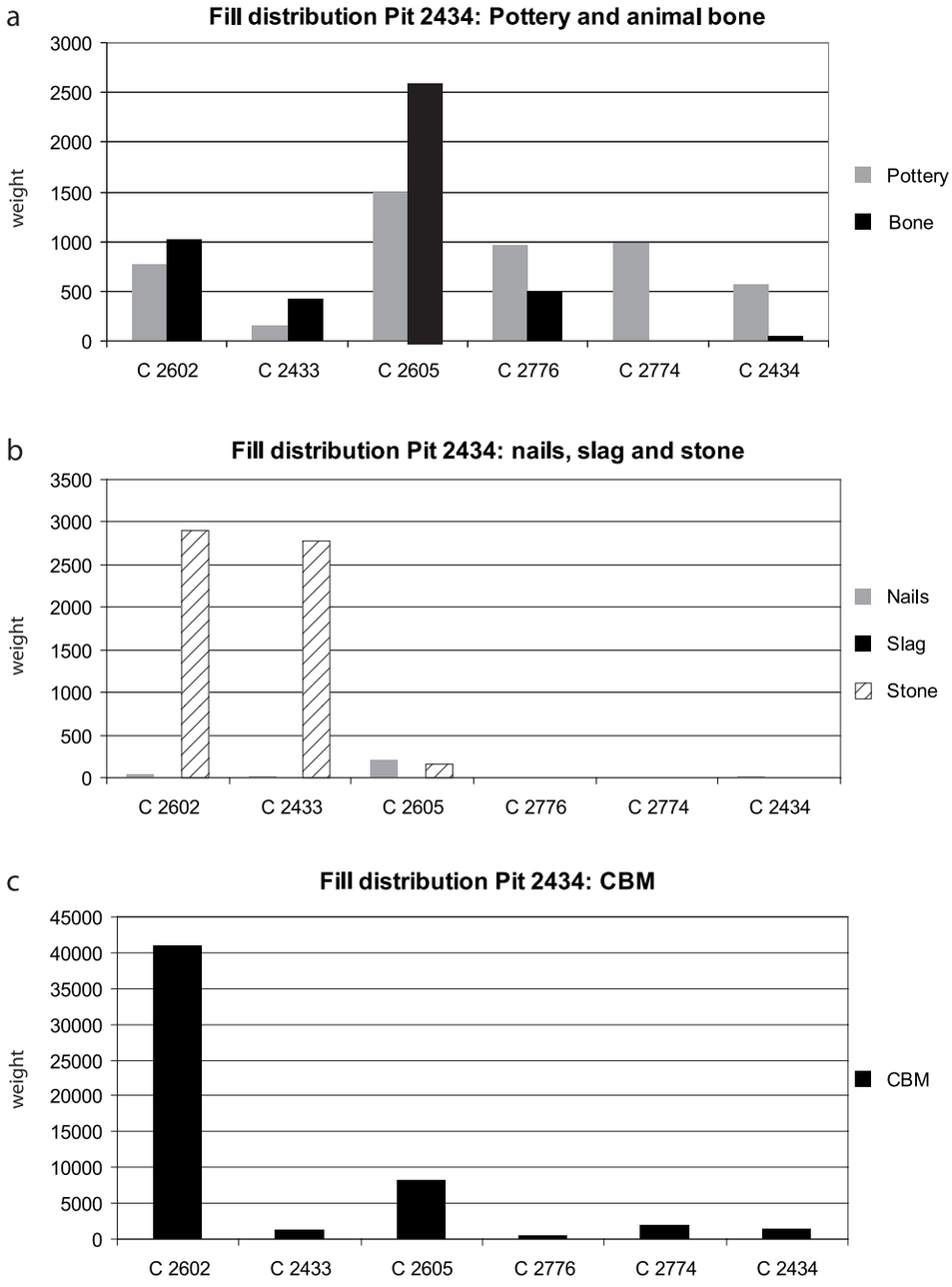

FIG. 144. Weights of (a) pottery and animal bone, (b) nails, slag and stone, and (c) cbm from pit 2434.

pottery is more dominant in the lower fills. This change in the disposal of domestic rubbish may relate to a change in function from cess to rubbish pit.

The small assemblage of pottery contained a high proportion (26 per cent) of drinking vessels (cups, mugs and beakers). The faunal assemblage is dominated by cattle, but there are significant proportions of wild animals, in particular two partial badger skeletons (contexts 2602 and 2605). Overall, context 2605 contains most of the animal bone and pottery, perhaps representing concentrated rubbish disposal prior to the consolidation and subsequent building in the area.

No slag was found in this pit. The relative concentration of stone in the top two fills supports their interpretation as deliberate dumps prior to construction. Nails are most common in fill 2605, but they also occur in the top two and the basal fills.

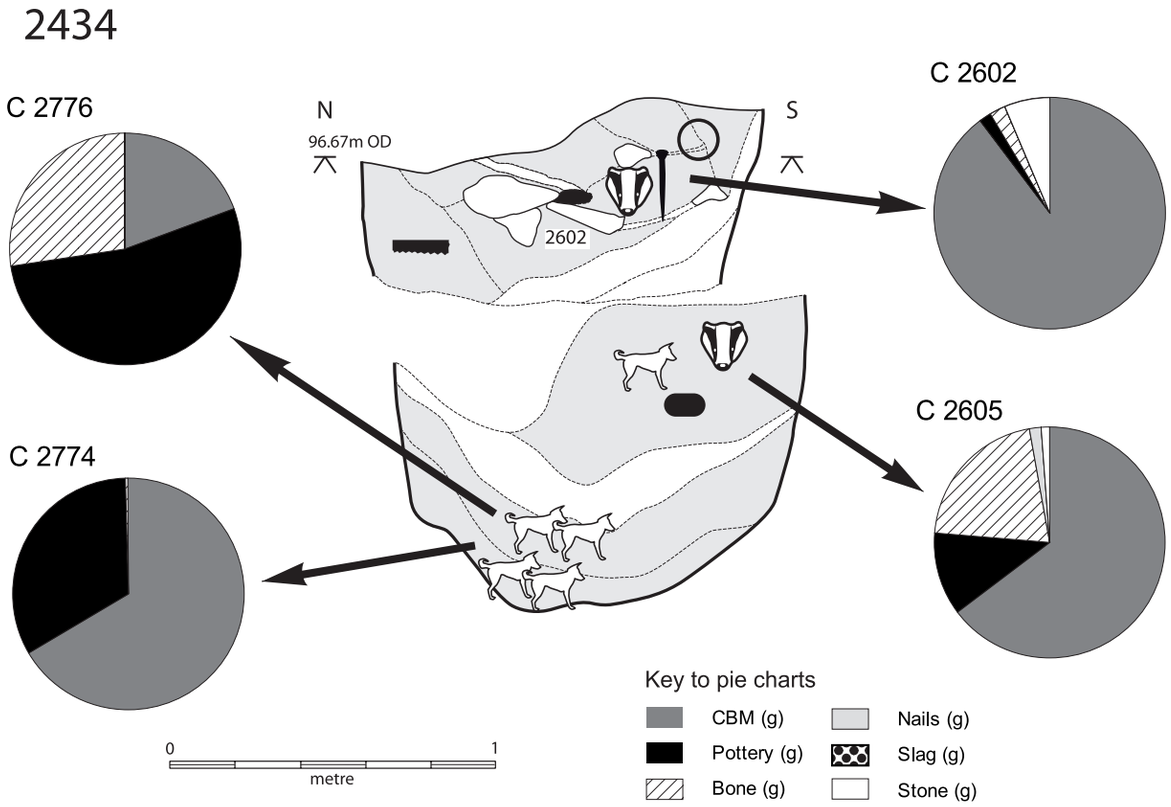

FIG. 145. Proportional representation of principal categories of finds from Period 4 pit 2434.

For pit 2434, the most obviously 'special' deposit is that of the two partial badger skeletons from fills 2602 and 2605. Fill 2605 also contained 25 dog bone fragments. Dog remains also occur in fills 2774, 2776, 2602 and 2433, suggesting the repeated disposal of partial dog remains in this area, perhaps from nearby middens. The combined occurrence of dog and badger in fills 2602 and 2605 may reflect how these animals were treated in death, or simply the fact that these two fills contain large amounts of animal waste generally.

While there are small finds from this pit, many are items of personal adornment, potentially easily lost amongst other household rubbish. A glass bead (SF 1826) comes from fill 2605, while a bone hairpin (SF 1755) and a shale armlet (SF 1754) are both from the top fill 2602. There was also a saw (SF 01542) from context 2433.

DISCUSSION

The preceding analysis has shown differences in the deposition of the main categories of finds across the site, but in contrast to the late Roman period there was no clear-cut spatial patterning in, for example, the deposition of animal bone within pits. There are changes between the two mid-Roman phases, with, for example, slag only occurring in Period 4 features; shown in relation to pottery, animal bone is also more strongly represented in the later period. While infants were only recorded from Period 3 features and complete or almost complete pottery vessels are more common in Period 3, dogs and the articulated remains of wild animals are more common in Period 4. However, given the small sample size, these observations cannot be described as clear trends. Re-uniting bulk find assemblages with their contexts does also allow for the identification of deliberate dumps, often prior to the construction of new buildings in the same area. Future work should include more detailed comparison of finds assemblages from pits with material from layers and spreads.

A number of cut features contained deposits which may be seen as 'special', in particular articulated animal skeletons and complete pottery vessels. How to define and interpret 'special' deposits has been debated for some time in prehistoric archaeology (e.g. Hill 1995, 13–15, 27–9) and the question is beginning to be addressed within Roman contexts (cf. Fulford 2001). Whether animal remains in particular should be seen as 'ritual' as opposed to being interpreted in functional and economic terms as butchery waste can be addressed using criteria such as those suggested by Wait (1985, 138–45), which include the presence of articulated skeletons and skulls. This approach does, however, fail to allow for the possibility that the disposal of waste was almost certainly governed by symbolic attitudes to rubbish, dirt and pollution, expressed through structured deposition in daily, weekly or monthly activities (cf. Hill 1995, 16, 95–101).

It should also not be forgotten that while chthonic associations of cut features persisted into the Roman period, most of the 'ritual' pit deposits on Iron Age sites such as Danebury relate to grain storage pits, and may well be linked to specific beliefs about crop fertility (Cunliffe 1995, 80–8). In Roman Silchester, we are essentially dealing with wells and cess-pits, and while a secure water supply must have been of considerable importance, there appears to be little difference in the material deposited in wells as opposed to pits. We may also have to consider the periodic emptying of cess-pits, a practice effectively leaving only the very last fill of a feature for analysis.

In any case, by comparison with the late Roman period 'special' deposits appear to be rarer in Periods 3 and 4, and no infant remains were found within mid-Roman pits and wells. This may be an accident in sampling, or reflect real changes in the deposition of such remains. The difference is especially striking for dogs, with only one articulated skeleton recovered from mid-Roman pit 2601.

Archaeologists studying prehistoric sites have led the way in the detailed examination of pit fills (Bersu 1940, 48–64; Cunliffe 1995, 80–8; Hill 1995, 37–44). Such analysis can potentially distinguish between erosion and natural infill from rain-wash and wind-blown material and the rapid or slow filling of pits. There may also be trends, such as the deposition of 'special' finds in lower fills (Cunliffe 1995, 84; Hill 1995, 46–8), and patterns of association and exclusion (Hill 1995, 54–5). This chapter has analysed three cut features in detail, to examine whether there are differences across pit fills, and whether fills containing 'special' deposits are also distinguished in other ways.

In the late Roman pits 3235 and 3251 articulated dogs were found in the lower fills, and infants in the top and middle fills respectively. For the mid-Roman period, only pit 2601 contained an articulated dog skeleton within one of its middle fills, and while dog remains occur only in the lower fills of pit 2434, they do occur both in the lower and upper fills of well 5735. Small finds can occur with dog remains (e.g. well 5735) but only in pit 2601 is there a striking combination of a knife decorated with mating dogs and a complete dog carcass. Analysis has demonstrated that quantities and types of material vary between fills, but the multiple variables make it difficult to identify clear patterns. Apart from providing a context for the material, and re-uniting the diverse range of materials studied by archaeological specialists, perhaps the greatest value of such an analysis will lie in the final comparison with the late Iron Age and early Roman pits, when it will be possible to track changes in the disposal of 'rubbish' within a single insula over more than 400 years.