

# CHAPTER 5

## RELIGION AND THE RURAL POPULATION

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### INTRODUCTION

*First sprinkle the ground with water, and sweep it, and decorate the sheepfold with leaves and branches, and hide the festive door with a trailing garland. Make dark smoke with pure burning sulphur, and let the sheep bleat, in contact with the smoke. Burn male-olive wood, and pine, and juniper fronds, and let scorched laurel crackle in the hearth. Let a basket of millet keep the millet cakes company: The rural goddess particularly loves that food. Ovid, *Fasti*, book 4*

That religious thoughts and practices pervaded all aspects of rural life in the Roman world is demonstrated by a number of ancient poets and authors, including Ovid's account of the *Paralia* festival, excerpted above, and Seneca's description of caves, springs, rivers and woods imbued with a divine presence (cf. Rives 2007, 89–92). However, it remains very difficult to attempt any reconstruction of the religious experiences of those residing in the countryside (North 2005), and, of course, the accounts of classical authors are firmly rooted in the Mediterranean, with perhaps minimal relevance to the situation in Roman Britain. Nevertheless, the wealth of archaeological evidence from this province does enable some considerable insight to be gained into ritual practices, even if the motivations and beliefs behind these actions remain more elusive. Furthermore, as Hingley has recently reiterated (2011), the use of archaeology enables us to draw away from a study of religion that is focused upon the elite perspectives of classical writings, and instead focus on the religious activities of a broader section of society.

This chapter presents a review of the archaeological evidence for religious practice in the late Iron Age and Romano-British countryside, including the different sites and structures interpreted as being sacred in nature, the varied material culture, animal remains and plant remains associated with ritual activities, and the nature of ritual deposition in both ostensibly 'sacred' and 'secular' contexts, as far as these can be differentiated. Throughout these analyses, the geographical and chronological variations in cult practice will be highlighted, in order to assess the degree of continuity and regionality in religious expression, subjects that have been repeatedly highlighted in recent literature on the subject (e.g.

Derks 1998, 181–2; Ghey 2007, 19; King 2007a; Revell 2007, 226; Adams 2009, 115; Hingley 2011; Garland 2013, 195; Atkinson and Preston 2015, 91; Rose 2016).

The nature of this archaeological evidence, discussed in more detail below, is such that the emphasis of analysis remains firmly on the practice and context of religious acts, as opposed to beliefs and doctrines. Indeed, such a 'practice-centred' approach to religion seems entirely appropriate to the Roman world, where orthopraxy – ensuring the 'correct' religious actions such as sacrifice and offering – appears to have been more important to ensure civic and cosmic stability than orthodoxy – ensuring 'correct' beliefs – at least until the rise of Christianity in the fourth century A.D. (Frankfurter 2006, 557; though see below, p. 182).

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

With only the occasional ancient written source touching upon religious aspects (cf. Ireland 2008, 167–204), and relatively few religious inscriptions away from military zones (with some stark exceptions; see below p. 180), we are left with an extensive and often bewildering array of archaeological evidence with which to reconstruct ritual practices in late Iron Age and Roman Britain. The well-known difficulties of identifying religious ritual in the archaeological record have been discussed at length elsewhere (e.g. Renfrew 1994; Hill 1995a; Whitehouse 1996; Morris 2011; Chadwick 2012; 2015; Garrow 2012), and are touched upon in all of the sections below. Even in cases where the interpretation of ritual activity and/or locations does seem more unequivocal, there will still be many aspects of the 'religious experience' that remain largely unknown, including specific sights, sounds and smells, that, from analysis of contemporary religions, are certain to have played crucial roles in peoples' perceptions of cult and the divine (Chryssides and Geaves 2014, 58). As Rives (2007, 1) has lamented with regard to an overview of Roman religion in the empire, it is like putting together a jigsaw when most of the pieces are missing, and the pieces we do have can fit together in many ways. Nevertheless, there are new approaches developing to the archaeology of

religion, notably highlighted in Raja and Rüpke's edited volume, *A Companion to the Archaeology of Religion in the Ancient World* (2015), where the concept of *Lived Religion*, a contemporary, ethnographic framework for understanding people's religious beliefs, practices, and experiences, is being utilised to study aspects of ancient religions.

Perhaps the most consistently studied aspect of religion in the archaeological record is that of sacred space – the shrines, temples and other places in the landscape where there appears to have been a close connection with the supernatural (cf. Carmichael *et al.* 1994). Such sacred sites have been the subject of much academic attention, both in the wider Roman world (e.g. Orlin 2002; Stamper 2005) and in Roman Britain (e.g. Lewis 1966; Woodward 1992; Smith 2001; King 2007a), though the present study has demonstrated that the range of sites appears far more diverse than most previous accounts have indicated, notwithstanding the major problems of interpretation (see below).

In many cases, the interpretation of sacred sites relies upon a recognition of religious qualities in the associated material culture, either intrinsically (e.g. religious figurines or inscriptions; see Bird 2011) or in the quantities, types and contexts of objects recovered. Analyses of these artefacts can inform on the nature of rituals and other activities within sacred sites, and, on rare occasions, provide a glimpse into the types of gods worshipped, the religious attendants, and even the aspirations and concerns of the religious supplicants. Perhaps even more important, analysis of 'ritual' material culture away from shrines and temples can reveal crucial insights into the levels of religiosity inherent in peoples' everyday lives, in the fields, farms, and nucleated settlements of Roman Britain.

It is, of course, not just material culture that aids in our understanding of religious ritual. The extract from Ovid's account of the *Paralia* festival presented at the start of this chapter provides a striking demonstration of the role that plants and animals could play in Roman religious life. The mass of developer-funded excavation data of the past 25 years in England and Wales has led to a greatly increased corpus of environmental remains that appear to have been associated with ritual activity, and brings with it the potential to enhance further our understanding of Iron Age and Romano-British religious practices. This is particularly the case with faunal remains, with large assemblages from some temple sites representing both ritual feasting and selective deposition (King 2005), and animal bones from settlement contexts forming prominent elements within many 'structured deposits' (Maltby 2010a; Morris 2011; see below pp. 192 and 199).

Overall, the evidence from archaeological features, material culture and environmental remains, occasionally supplemented by epigraphy, can provide considerable insights into certain types of religious ritual, and the contexts within which they were performed. This evidence appears to cover a broad social spectrum, from those residing in modest farmsteads to elaborate villa complexes, though geographically it is heavily biased towards the south and east. Any understanding of religious ritual further north and west in the province is hampered by the relative lack of material culture and poor survival of plant and animal remains, but there were also undoubtedly genuine regional differences in the mechanisms of religious expression.

## DEFINITIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Throughout this chapter a range of terms will be used to describe various aspects of religion in Iron Age and Roman Britain, and it is worth noting here how some of these are being defined, along with an account of the main issues involved with their interpretation in the archaeological record.

### Sacred space

Sacred space in general can cover a very broad spectrum of structures and places, and the present author has previously used the wide definition of 'a place subject to a range of regulations regarding people's behaviour to it, based upon a set of beliefs in a supernatural identity' (Smith 2001, 6). In the Roman Rural Settlement Project database, sacred sites have been divided into 'Romano-Celtic temple' and 'shrine'. The characteristics of the former will be outlined below (p. 132), while the latter covers a very broad range of sites and structures, and should not be viewed as homogeneous; it is essentially a 'catch-all' term for all rural sacred sites, or at least those interpreted as such, that are not defined as Romano-Celtic temples.

It is in the interpretation of the 'shrine' category that most ambiguity arises, and so this will now be examined in more detail. There has been a large increase in the incidence of structures or places suggested as Roman shrines within archaeological publications in recent years, with c. 80 per cent of the 224 records from the current project dating after 1990. Much of this is simply due to the general upsurge in archaeological activity from this time, with many more Roman rural sites being excavated (see Smith *et al.* 2016, 2, fig. 1.1), but there also appears to have been a genuine increased appreciation of the broad range of features that could have functioned as shrines when examined in a fully contextualised manner. Of course the

degree of certainty with regard to the religious interpretation of these sites varies tremendously, with a recently published example from Mucking in Essex (Lucy and Evans 2016) providing a prime example. Here, a rectangular gully, 4 × 4.6 m, enclosed (and was partially cut by) a penannular gully, 3.3 m in diameter, with both entrances aligned (FIG. 5.1). There was no obvious function for this arrangement, and the authors of the report suggested, ‘it is possible that together these constitute some kind of minor shrine setting’ (*ibid.*, 99). Although such an interpretation is perfectly feasible, the lack of any other corroborating evidence necessitates caution, and there are many other similar examples across England and Wales, of late Iron Age and Roman date.

In order to obtain a more robust interpretative platform for analysis in this volume, those structures or places suggested as shrines have been divided into three categories, based upon four criteria that have been used in reports as positive indicators of a religious nature. The first of these criteria is an association with finds of a particular type (e.g. religious object; see below), or quantity, such as an unusual concentration of coins and/or brooches. Second is the association with one or

more structured or placed deposits, although, as discussed below (pp. 123 and 182), such deposits are also relatively widespread in general settlement contexts. Third is an interpretation based upon morphology or characteristics of the structure, either the fact that it appears ‘unusual’ within a contemporary domestic context, or that it resembles another place/structure that has a more robust interpretation as a shrine. The dangers of using purely morphological criteria to identify religious sites have been previously expressed (Smith 2001, 15–16), yet, as discussed below, the fact that a site or feature looks ‘a bit out of place’ remains a relatively common parameter in the identification of shrines. The final criterion is concerned with the general context of the ‘shrine’, with factors including a direct stratigraphic/spatial relationship with more certain sacred sites (usually an Iron Age feature underlying a later Roman temple), position within an otherwise open area of the settlement, and association with a prominent landscape feature (hill, spring, rock outcrop etc.) or earlier monument.

Each of these criteria by themselves may leave a great deal of room for uncertainty, though when found in combination they provide stronger levels of interpretation. FIGURE 5.2 presents the three different categories of shrine according to the four criteria just outlined. Category 1 shrines generally conform to three or more of the criteria, with almost all containing a significant associated finds signature and over 80 per cent having one or more structured deposits. An example from Haddenham in Cambridgeshire, near the junction of the River Great Ouse and the peat Fens, originated in the second century A.D. as an octagonal masonry-footed building and another associated building on the site of an earlier Bronze Age barrow, set within a ditched enclosure (Evans and Hodder 2006).

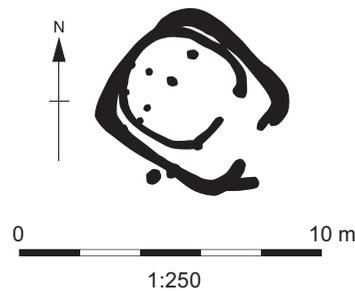


FIG. 5.1. Plan of possible shrine within Romano-British village at Mucking, Essex (Lucy and Evans 2016)

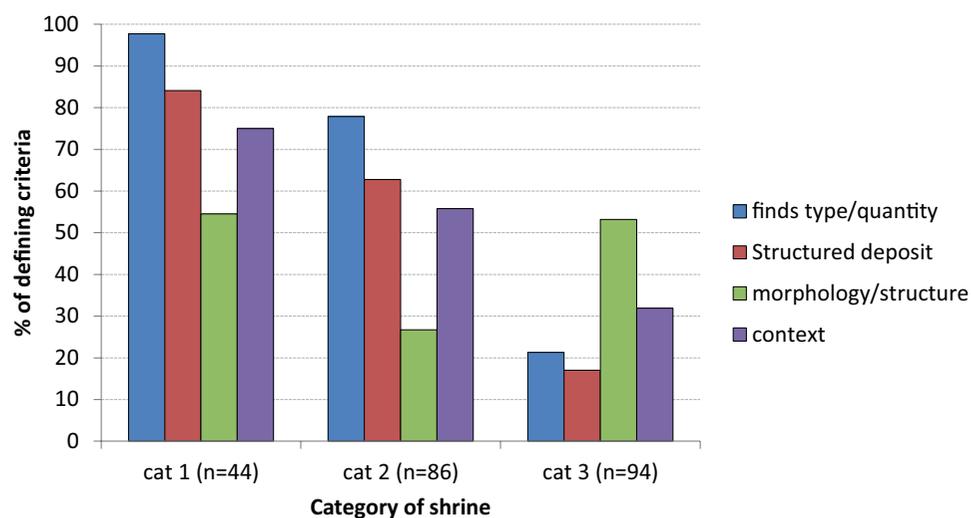


FIG. 5.2. The three categories of shrine against their defining criteria

A large animal bone assemblage included structured deposits of sheep, alongside coins and pottery vessels (*ibid.*, 352–8). In category 2 the shrines generally have two associated criteria, though in the same order as category 1. A recently examined example includes a site at Llanddowror in Carmarthenshire, where a pipeline excavation revealed an early/mid-Roman rectangular structure built within a former Neolithic henge ditch, with a contemporary pit cut into the henge terminal containing the burnt bones from up to two sheep/goats, a neonatal sheep/goat, and cereal remains, and suggested as a possible structured deposit (Barber and Hart 2014). The ‘shrines’ with the least robust level of interpretation (category 3) typically rely on just a single criterion, which, in over 50 per cent of cases, is morphology, such as the Mucking example provided above. These category 3 ‘shrines’ form *c.* 40 per cent of all those recorded in the current project, highlighting the need for some level of caution when reviewing the results of analyses presented below.

### Religious objects

The ‘religious object’ category of the project database covers a wide range of artefact types that could have been used for many different purposes. As Whitehouse (1996, 11–12) has demonstrated, defining the term ‘ritual object’ (used in this sense to denote religious ritual) is problematic in that there can be a continuum of values attached to artefacts, from mostly practical to mostly symbolic, with some objects having shifting biographies (i.e. changes in function and perceived value). Furthermore, it is sometimes only when objects are found in specific archaeological contexts (e.g. as grave goods or within temples) that their religious symbolism may become apparent to us. Nevertheless, Whitehouse (*ibid.*, 13) has identified six different categories of ritual object: *sacra* (objects of worship), votaries (representations of people making offerings), offerings, objects used in rites (including furnishings and priestly equipment), grave goods and amulets. While all of these categories are examined at some level below, or in the case of grave goods in Chapter 6, the artefacts defined as ‘religious objects’ are here limited to those objects that appear to have been specifically manufactured for religious use, or at least have frequent associations with religious contexts, as recently summarised by Bird (2011).

### Structured deposits

As just stated, it is often only when objects are found in certain archaeological contexts that any possible religious associations may become apparent, and, notably, this includes those found within what have been termed ‘structured’ or

‘placed’ deposits. This project has collected data on a considerable number of these structured deposits, included mostly on the basis of their explicit interpretation as such within the excavation report. The problems with interpreting such deposits are manifold, and a particular issue to be noted from the start, which has been recently highlighted by Garrow (2012, 94), is that there are no consistent parameters used in their definition. Following Garrow (*ibid.*), therefore, a two-fold categorisation can be advanced that covers the multitudinous definitions of structured deposits. Firstly are *odd deposits*, which seem ‘out of place’ compared to contemporaneous patterns of discard. Examples include complete horse burials at Marsh Leys, Kempston, Bedford (Luke and Preece 2011) and Horcott Quarry, Glos (Hayden *et al.* 2017), an inverted cattle skull placed in a small pit in the centre of a doorway in an aisled hall at Thruxton, Hants (Cunliffe and Poole 2008a), and an unusual three pronged iron object that lay on the base of an enclosure ditch terminal at Love’s Farm, Cambs, which was argued as ‘representing the community’s respect for iron as a source of social and cultural power’ (Hinman and Zant forthcoming). The second category comprises *material culture patterning*, whereby the nature of deposits seems to have been governed by intentional, clear-cut spatial and/or temporal patterning. Examples recorded within the current project include the sequence of animal, human and plant deposits in a ritual shaft at Springhead, Kent (Andrews *et al.* 2011, 80, fig. 2.55), the differential spatial patterning of animals and pottery within the rubble banks of the settlement at Thornwell Farm, Chepstow (Hughes 1996, 97), and clear spatial selectivity of different animal species within the temple site at Chanctonbury, West Sussex, with a mass of pig bones in the polygonal shrine and sheep and cattle skulls in the surrounding ditch (Rudling 2001). Most examples of structured deposits recorded within excavation reports and analysed below would seem to lie within the *odd deposits* category, rather than *material culture patterning*, presumably because such types are easier to recognise in the archaeological record.

Of course, as Garrow and others (notably Chadwick 2012) have noted, such categorisation disguises a broad continuum of depositional practices, making it very difficult in most cases to isolate religious and secular motivations for such acts. It is most unlikely that all instances of structured deposition relate to some form of dialogue with an otherworld (cf. Morris 2011, 182–5; Chadwick 2015, 53), and even when they occur within defined religious locations they may still represent the final stages of a wide range of

different rituals associated with a variety of beliefs (Smith 2016a, 643–4). The heterogeneity evident in structured deposits clearly represents the varied motivations of the actors engaged with their creation, which highlights the need to assess their meaning on an individual basis (Hingley 2006, 239; Roskams *et al.* 2013). However, collective analyses of the *c.* 1400 examples from 599 sites collated for this project do enable broad regional and chronological patterns to be observed in the character and context of these deposits, which appear to have been a widespread form of ritual expression throughout the Iron Age and Roman periods.

### THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICE IN THE LATE IRON AGE

In order to assess the impact of Roman conquest and administration on religious practice, some account must be provided of the situation in the preceding Iron Age. Here, classical sources along with early medieval Welsh and Irish literature have been used in the past to describe a world of druids, human sacrifice and sacred groves (e.g. Ross 1967; Green 1986; Webster 1986). In reality, very few of these texts specifically relate to Britain, and the tendency to produce accounts of a static, pan-European ‘Celtic’ religious culture has now received its fair share of critical attention (e.g. Fitzpatrick 1991, 126; 2007; Webster 1992, 312; 1995a; Smith 2001; Joy 2011). Although, if used critically, the literary accounts undoubtedly do contain much useful information on certain aspects of religion in the Iron Age, it is only when integrated with archaeology that the variety of pre-Roman ritual practices becomes slightly more apparent. A brief summary of this archaeological evidence will now be provided, focusing upon religious objects, sacred sites and landscapes, and patterns of deposition. An account of late Iron Age burial is presented in Chapter 6, although there is no *a priori* reason why ‘religious’ and ‘burial’ rituals should be viewed as separate constructs at this time, as clearly evidenced below.

#### RELIGIOUS OBJECTS IN THE IRON AGE

Unlike the relative wealth of evidence for religious objects in the Roman period, the late Iron Age, in Britain at least, has very few identifiable artefacts that may be related clearly to divine beliefs or cult practice. This is not to say that much of the imagery seen, for example, on Iron Age coinage (Creighton 2000, 191) or the occasional anthropomorphic bucket handle (e.g. Baldock; Stead and Rigby 1986, 51–61), would not have had any religious reference, but that objects

specifically created as cult images (*sacra*), amulets or as ‘priestly equipment’ appear extremely rare. A notable exception is the concentration of chalk figurines depicting sword-bearing warriors (some decapitated) from the East Riding of Yorkshire, part of a very distinct regional ritual tradition of Iron Age date, alongside square-ditched funerary barrows and chariot burials (Stead 1988; Halkon 2013, 117–18). Fitzpatrick (2007) has further identified a number of objects that he suggested may have been associated with a class of religious specialists, including a small number of what are called spoons (shallow, oval-shaped, bowls) found across Britain, thought to date from the mid- to late Iron Age and to have had lunar symbolism. Other, mostly antiquarian finds, included probable Iron Age headdresses at Newnham Croft, Cambridgeshire, Old Castle Down, Vale of Glamorgan, Cerrig-y-Drudion, Clwyd, and Hounslow, Middlesex, as well as one from an excavated inhumation burial at Mill Hill, Deal, Kent, which was dated later third or early second century B.C. (*ibid.*, 299–302; Parfitt 1995).

Religious objects of late Iron Age date have only been recorded on a handful of excavated sites within the current project database. A crude sandstone figurine was noted in association with the shrine at Stansted, Essex, found in a pit alongside pottery of the mid-first century A.D. (Havis and Brooks 2004), while a chalk figurine was found in a possible subterranean shrine at Mill Hill, Deal, Kent, though this could be early Roman in date (Parfitt and Green 1987). Miniature objects, assumed to have had some ritual significance, are somewhat more numerous, being recorded from excavated late Iron Age contexts at Harlow, Essex (Smith 2001, 39), South Witham Quarry, Lincolnshire (Nicholson 2006a), and Meare lake village, Somerset, the latter site also having a copper-alloy figurine of a boar (Foster 1977, 6–7). The miniaturisation of objects, typically wheels, axes and weapons, has a widespread tradition across the Mediterranean and north-west Europe, and is particularly prevalent during the Roman period in Britain and Gaul (Kiernan 2009; see below p. 178). They are much rarer within British Iron Age contexts, though a well-known hoard from near Salisbury contained 24 miniature shields, 46 miniature cauldrons and two miniature socketed axes (Stead 1998). A group of 22 miniature shields, six spears, four swords, and two model axes was found by a metal detectorist in Lincolnshire in the 1970s, recently discussed by Farley (2011) in the context of other Iron Age miniature objects from Lincolnshire. The site, at Nettleton Top, lay at the highest point in the Lincolnshire Wolds, where excavations over many years have revealed a multi-

period ritual complex and settlement (Willis 2013b). It was thus a suitable context for the concentration of these miniature weapons, which were regarded as a late Iron Age ‘innovation’ (notwithstanding the existence of late Bronze Age miniature socketed axes) developed from earlier traditions of offering full-size weapons at non-settlement sites like Fiskerton (Field and Parker Pearson 2003), the miniaturisation allowing ‘these powerful symbols to be deployed in a ‘safer’ and more controlled form, appropriate to occupational sites’ (Farley 2011, 45).

### IRON AGE SACRED SPACE

The extent to which Iron Age peoples in Britain made use of specific sacred sites in the landscape, or at least sacred sites that were modified by human agency, has long been debated (e.g. Lewis 1966; Wait 1985; Woodward 1992; Webster 1995b; Smith 2001; King 2007a). There can be little doubt, however, that there were some shrines in use at this time, being identified at 49 sites in the current project database, although 34 per cent of these occupy the lowest level of interpretational confidence (category 3; see above, p. 122). These have been broken down by type within FIG. 5.3. A few were clearly purpose-built structures, although these types do not appear to have been particularly numerous, and despite traditional assumptions that have equated rectilinear buildings of this date with shrines, the current study has provided a far more mixed picture with regard to morphology (see also Moore 2003 and Smith 2016b, 50). In a review of constructed sacred space conducted in the late 1990s, the present author identified only eight convincing shrines of late Iron Age date, with

their nascent development suggested as being associated with increasing socio-political complexity and ideologies derived from Gaul (Smith 2001, 162; see Garland 2013 for recent discussion of ritual connections between Gaul and pre-Roman Britain). While the dismissal of some sites interpreted as shrines may have been a little over-zealous (e.g. Danebury and Heathrow, included here as category 3 shrines), it remains striking how few additional excavated structures of late Iron Age date have been suggested as shrines in the past two decades, despite the massive increase in the volume of archaeological fieldwork. One of these newly discovered built ‘shrines’, at Duxford in Cambridgeshire, was closely associated with funerary activity (Lyons 2011), while another at Marsh Leys, Kempston, Bedford, was interpreted largely on the basis of its morphology – a rectangular timber building defined by a gully (Luke and Preece 2011) (FIG. 5.4). Based upon slightly firmer interpretative ground was a rectangular timber structure at Sigwells, Charlton Horethorne, in Somerset, which lay immediately west of pits and ditches containing whole and partial animal and human burials, pottery vessels and Iron Age metalwork deposits (Tabor 2002). This site lay near to a late Iron Age shrine with similar characteristics within the hillfort at South Cadbury, Somerset (Barrett *et al.* 2000; Smith 2001, 44–50). None of these, however, has quite the same surety of evidence as at Hayling Island in Hampshire, which, despite being excavated between 1976 and 1981, remains as the stand-out example of a late Iron Age shrine in Britain (King and Soffe 2013; FIG. 5.4). This site, which awaits final full publication, is thought

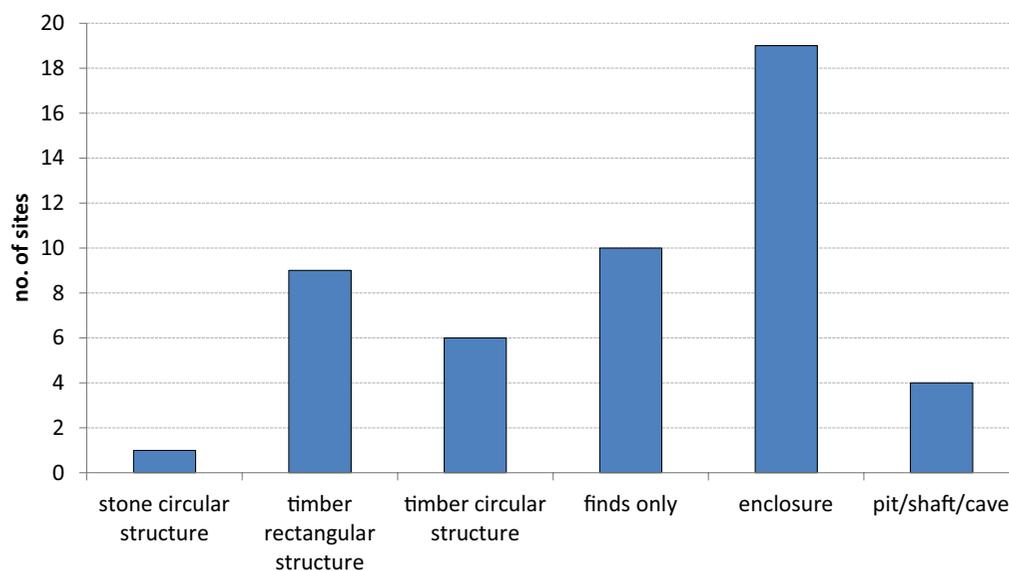


FIG. 5.3. Characteristics of late Iron Age shrines

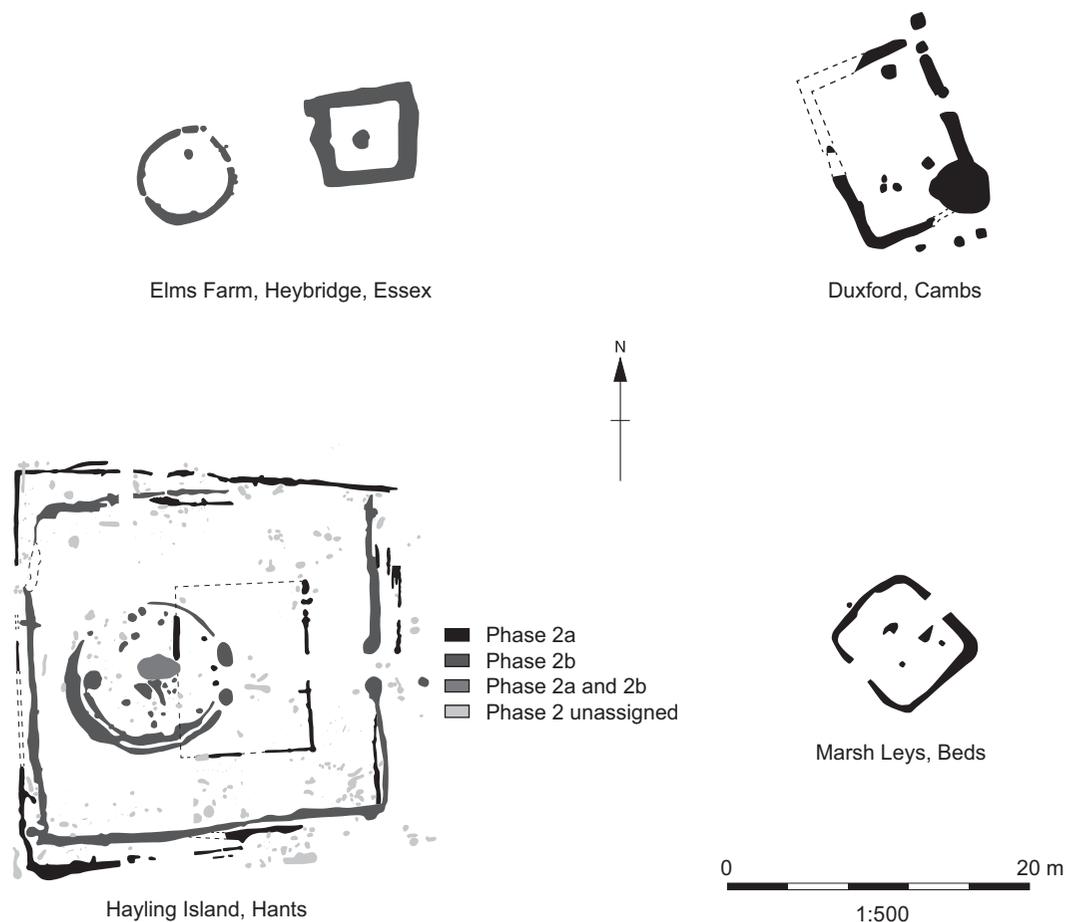


FIG. 5.4. Plans of selected Iron Age built shrines (Atkinson and Preston 2015; Lyons 2011; Luke and Preece 2011; King and Soffe 2013)

to have had two main phases during the late Iron Age – the first, of early to mid-first century B.C. date, comprised inner and outer palisaded enclosures with a central pit, while in the second phase the inner enclosure was demolished to make way for a circular timber shrine, which resembled a typical domestic roundhouse (*ibid.*, 5–6). The spatial organisation and substantial finds assemblage demonstrated clear links with Gaul, where such shrines are far more commonplace.

Although relatively few shrine structures of Iron Age date have been excavated, there are an increasing number of other sites where sacred space of this date has been postulated. The earliest phase of Hayling Island provides some indication that, for the most part, it was an enclosed, separated space that was the most important feature of religious sites, and furthermore, as Webster (1995b, 459) has previously pointed out, ‘an enclosure ditch was not simply a delimiter of sacred space; it was itself a primary focus of cult activity’. This is borne out by the nineteen sites of Iron Age date where an enclosure remained the principal component of the shrine (see FIG. 5.3). Most of these sites did have other associated features, however, which often provided the

evidence to make the interpretative leap towards a religious function. At Irchester, Victoria Park, Northants, for example, a small late Iron Age sub-rectangular enclosure contained a tree-throw hole in the centre, suggested as a possible ritual focus, while deliberately deposited globular jars came from the fill of the ditch (Morris and Meadows 2012). A more impressive site at Hallaton, Leics, spanned the very late Iron Age to early Roman period, and comprised a possible polygonal enclosure on a hilltop associated with intense deposition of a mass of animal bone (mostly pig), alongside coins and other metalwork (Score 2011). Together, these ritual enclosures make up almost 40 percent of postulated late Iron Age shrines, while others appear to consist of finds concentrations only, or else apparently isolated pits or shafts containing structured deposits (FIG. 5.3). At Springhead in Kent, there are suggestions of a ritual landscape of late Iron Age date, focused around the source of the Ebbsfleet River (Andrews *et al.* 2011, 190–2; FIG. 5.5). Features include a ‘processional way’, leading to a terrace above the springs, several pits with structured deposits and a rectilinear enclosure, extended on two occasions, which was associated with cremation burials,

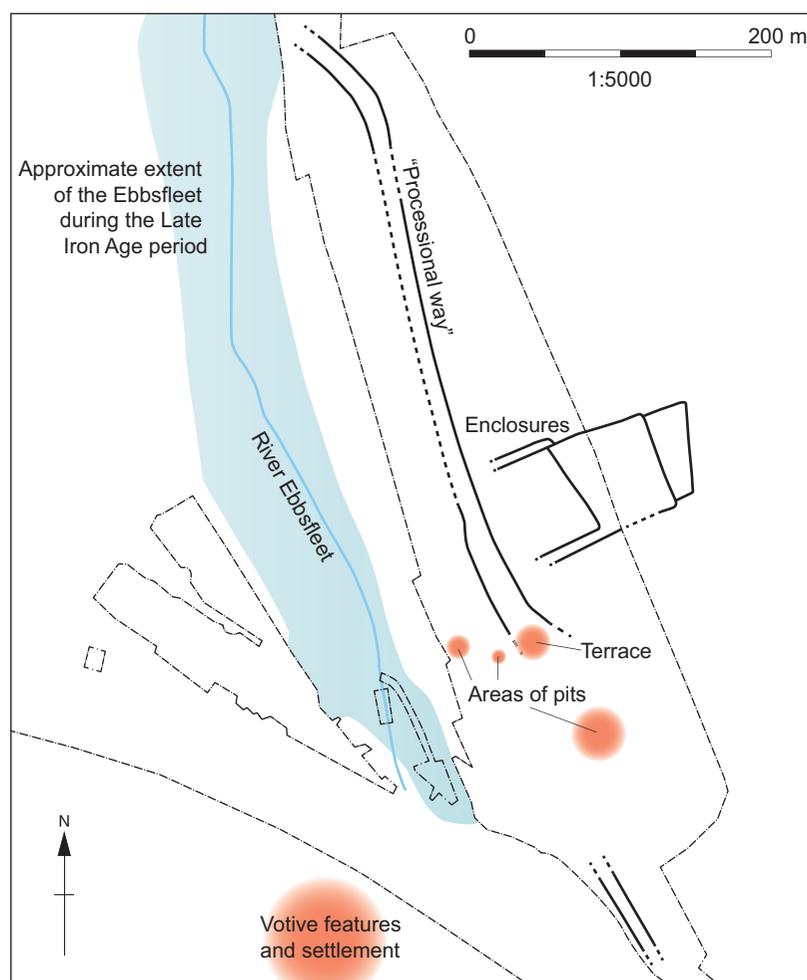


FIG. 5.5. A late Iron Age ritual landscape at Springhead, Kent (after Andrews *et al.* 2011, 190, fig. 4.1). Reproduced with permission HS1, © HS1

discrete deposits of pottery and possible free-standing posts. Around 100 Iron Age coins were also recovered from the springs, and the site later developed into a major Romano-British religious complex (see below, p. 163).

Sites where late Iron Age shrines have been interpreted are almost exclusively concentrated in parts of southern and eastern England (FIG. 5.6). Those incorporating built structures have an even narrower distribution in the south, though with some western outliers as far as Uley in Gloucestershire (Woodward and Leach 1993) and South Cadbury in Somerset (Barrett *et al.* 2000). A particular grouping of built shrines is noted in parts of Essex/south Cambridgeshire, including that at Elms Farm in Heybridge, which has recently been published (Atkinson and Preston 2015). The earliest shrines here comprised adjacent small square and circular buildings dating to the second half of the first century B.C., with three other post-built structures in the vicinity thought to have been further parts of an apparently unenclosed sacred complex (*ibid.*, 87). To the north of this grouping of sacred structures, in East

Anglia and around the Fens, all postulated shrines comprise enclosures or finds concentrations devoid of any structural component, such as the potential late Iron Age/early Roman ceremonial enclosure at Love's Farm in the Ouse Valley, represented by two concentric ring ditches, 55 m in diameter externally, on a ridge overlooking the main agricultural focus, some distance from the contemporary settlement foci (Hinman and Zant forthcoming). If genuine, this pattern of non-structural shrines may reflect a tradition that continues into the Roman period, when this region generally had less of an architectural emphasis than other areas further south and west, with status seemingly reflected more in portable wealth (Smith and Fulford 2016, 396).

The overall concentration of shrines in south and east England may be a consequence of the relative lack of objects and faunal remains from many areas further north and west, as these are so often used in the interpretation of sacred space (see above, p. 122). However, this does not explain the apparent lack of late Iron Age shrines in the north-east, where faunal remains and material

culture are generally well attested (Allen 2016b, 273–80). There is some indirect evidence for the veneration of sites in this area, as seen with the remarkable sequence excavated at Ferry Fryston in West Yorkshire (Brown *et al.* 2007). This landscape, lying by a crossing of the River Ouse between the Pennines and Vale of York, had clearly been of ritual significance since the Neolithic, with a variety of monuments and burials, and was the location of a square-ditched chariot burial, radiocarbon dated to the early second century B.C. Some cattle bones in the primary ditch fills of the barrow were contemporary with the burial, but the vast majority, which represented a total of 162 cattle, were radiocarbon dated to the later first to fourth centuries A.D., with a definite emphasis on the later Roman period. Isotope analysis indicated the cattle derived from a wide geographical area, and it seems that at least some of the bones were curated over many years before being eventually deposited in the ditch during the late Roman period (*ibid.*; Orton 2006). While it cannot be proven that there was any continuity of ritual activity at the monument from the middle Iron Age to the late Roman period, it seems quite likely that some sense of sanctity persisted, as is also suggested

by the deposition of a bent Iron Age sword scabbard in the nearby henge ditch (Halkon 2013, 79).

Elsewhere in the north and west there is very little evidence for the definition of sacred space in the late Iron Age, though the association of possible Roman-period shrines with earlier prehistoric features at places like Capel Eithin, Gaerwen (White and Smith 1999) and Cefn Cwmwd, Rhostrehwfa (Cutler *et al.* 2012), in Gwynedd, may hint that, like Ferrybridge, some persistence of sacredness was maintained from earlier times (see below, p. 160, for discussion of Roman ritual re-use of prehistoric monuments). There are also a number of sites where what would appear to have been ritual deposits have been found in watery contexts, highlighting the significance of natural sacred space, and particularly water, in pre-Roman religious practice (Green 1994; Bradley 1998). Of these sites, by far the best known is Llyn Cerrig Bach in Anglesey, where 181 items of iron and copper alloy, including swords, spears and slave chains, as well as animal bone (and possibly human bone) were deposited in a lake, probably intermittently, between the third century B.C. and the end of the first century A.D. (MacDonald 2007; Steele 2012).

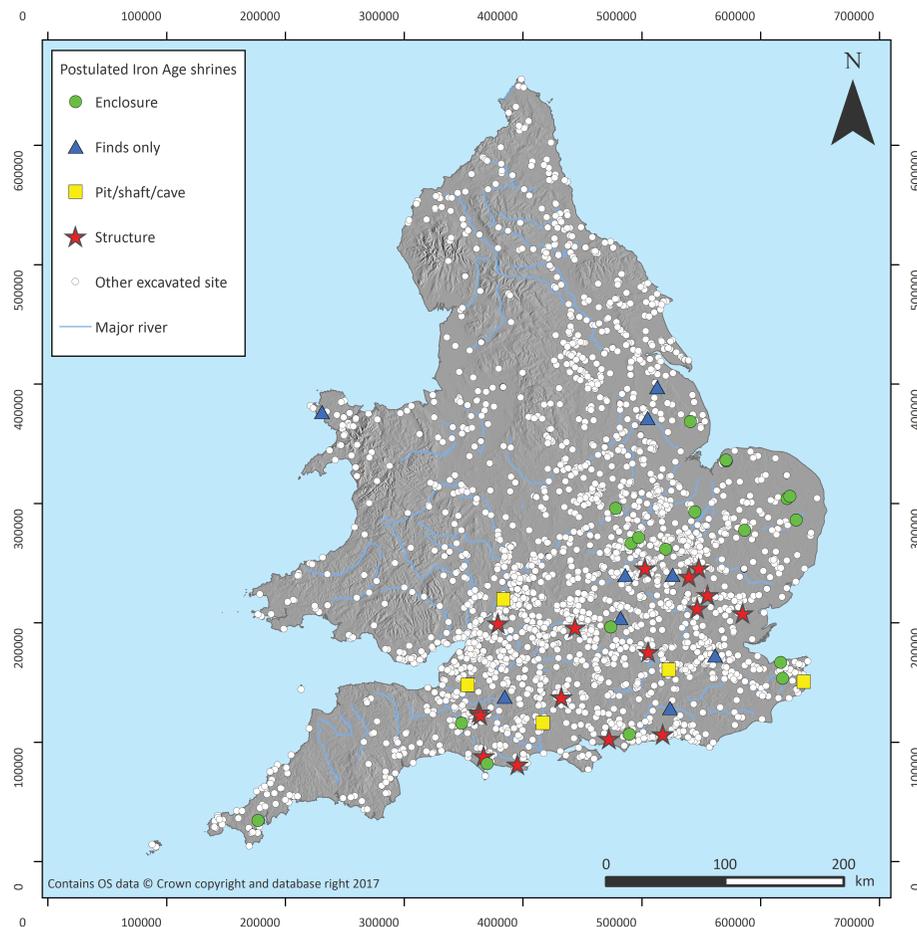


FIG. 5.6. Distribution of excavated sites where one or more late Iron Age shrines have been postulated

The overall picture of sacred space in the late Iron Age, as far as can be ascertained from the archaeological evidence, is one of relative scarcity and general diversity. There were places in the landscape that appear to have been imbued with particular sanctity, though rarely were they elaborated structurally to any great degree. Where dating evidence is refined enough, most shrines appear to have been established *de novo* at this time, many during the later first century B.C. to early first century A.D., possibly as part of a more centralised, focused approach to religious practice, as has been suggested by regional studies of ritual practice in late Iron Age Norfolk and Lincolnshire (Hutcheson 2004, 92; Farley 2011, 42). Their appearance should in turn be linked with other widespread changes of the late Iron Age in central and southern Britain, including the relatively widespread use of coinage, adoption in some areas of cremation burials, and significant increases in the overall number of settlements (Creighton 2000; Smith and Fulford 2016, 408). The distribution of shrines is strikingly similar to that of Iron Age coinage (Creighton 2000, 223, fig. A.2), and there is indeed a strong association between the two, these coins being present in 24 of the 30

late Iron Age shrines with recorded finds assemblages, sometimes in considerable numbers (e.g. Harlow, Essex and Hallaton, Leics; see Haselgrove 2005). There is also a close connection between at least eight Iron Age shrines and another late Iron Age phenomenon in south-eastern Britain – cremation burial – with structures/enclosures thought to have been associated with mortuary rituals (e.g. Westhampnett, West Sussex; Fitzpatrick 1997; see Ch. 6). As with the changing burial traditions, use of coinage, and increasing numbers of settlements, the emergence of specialised shrines in parts of southern Britain at this time appears to have been linked with major upheavals in the socio-political system, at least in the upper echelons of society, and certainly had a profound effect upon aspects of ritual expression during the Roman period, which is discussed further below.

#### RITUAL DEPOSITION IN THE IRON AGE

Iron Age studies have long recognised that structured deposition of objects and bones within pits and ditches were seemingly regular expressions of religious propitiation (e.g. Cunliffe 1992; Hill 1995a; Wilson 1999; Pitts 2005), with Tracey

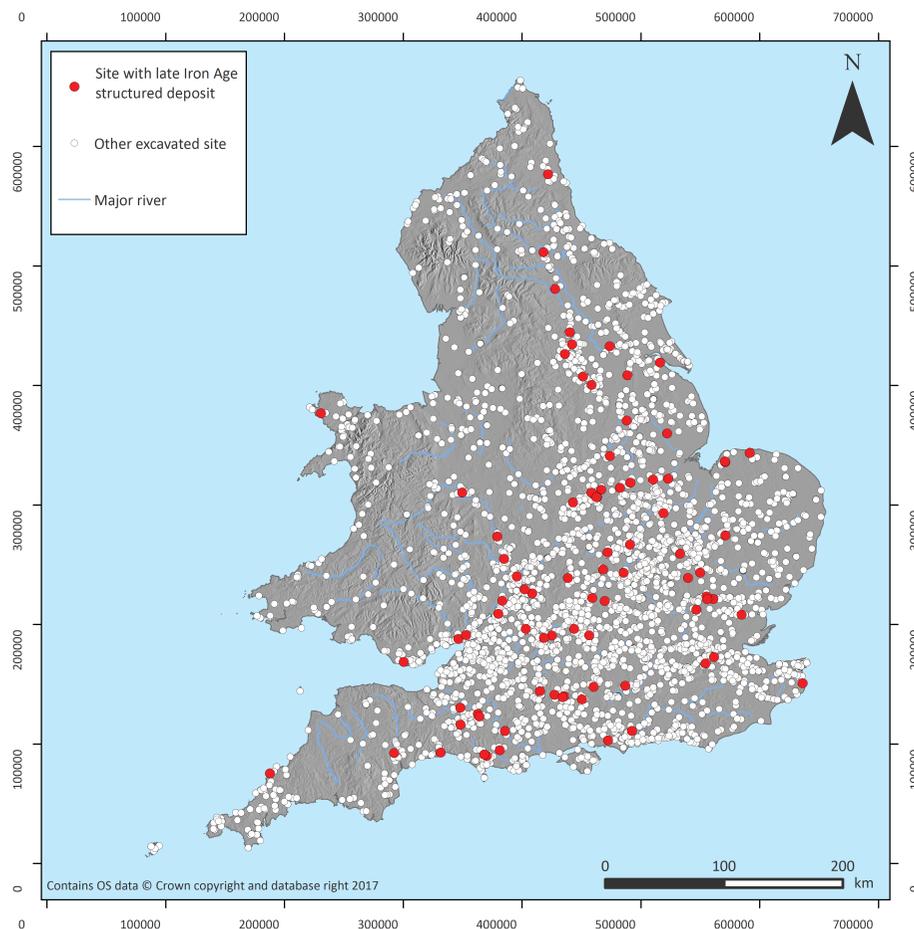


FIG. 5.7. Distribution of excavated sites where one or more late Iron Age structured deposits have been postulated

(2012) recently highlighting the variability of such rituals, even within relatively close geographic proximities. Within the current project, *c.* 194 structured deposits of certain late Iron Age date have been identified on 84 sites, spread over a wide area, though still largely absent from much of the north and west (FIG. 5.7). Ten of these sites have been interpreted as shrines, while the rest comprise farmsteads (58), hillforts (6), funerary sites (3), villages/*oppida* (3), field systems (3) and an ironworking site. As discussed in Chapter 1, for pragmatic reasons it has not been possible to systematically catalogue each individual structured deposit found on every site, but instead the amalgamated features of such deposits were recorded by site and phase. Although this may disguise a great deal of individual variation, there are wider patterns that can be observed in the character of these deposits, patterns that provide the basis for an examination of change from the late Iron Age to the late Roman period, discussed in detail below (p. 182).

The general character of late Iron Age structured deposits is shown in FIG. 5.8, in terms of their broad composition and the types of features with which they are associated. Overall, the deposition of material in pits appears most commonplace, followed by ditches and then structures, with water deposits only being recorded in the lake at Llyn Cerrig Bach and springs at Springhead, both discussed above, alongside Cotswold Community in the Upper Thames Valley, where a rare complete Gaulish Unguiforme brooch in the upper fill of a later Iron Age waterhole was very tentatively suggested as a ritual deposit (Powell *et al.* 2010, 106–9). Of course, as this project is only dealing with sites that have had some element of excavation, it has not recorded the many examples of Iron Age (and Roman) objects found, mainly dredged up from river beds (e.g. River Thames; Booth *et al.* 2007, 217), which may suggest that watery deposition was actually a much more common occurrence than the excavated evidence suggests (see Bradley 2000, 47–63). Furthermore, it remains possible that some of the pits that received structured deposits may have functioned as waterholes, or at least may have been periodically inundated.

Although, overall, pits were clearly a favoured context for this type of deposition, there are notable geographic differences. Pits are a feature at 70 per cent of sites with structured deposits in the East region, and 85 per cent in the South region, being particularly prominent within the Wessex chalk downlands (see Cunliffe 1995, 87–8). This compares to just 44 and 33 per cent of sites in the Central Belt and North-East respectively. In these latter areas, it seems that

deposits were much more likely to have been made within ditches (58 and 55 per cent of sites as opposed to 24 per cent in the South), with a particular concentration in and around the Fenlands, where perhaps drainage ditches may have taken on a greater spiritual significance as protection against flooding. One example is a group of three cattle skulls placed in a mid- to late Iron Age ditch terminus in a settlement close to the Fen edge at Mill Drove, Bourne, Lincolnshire (Jarvis 1995). Deposition within ditch termini, such as the example observed here, is a well-noted phenomenon (e.g. Rees 2008; Chadwick 2010, 397; 2012, 301), and has been recorded at 42 per cent of all late Iron Age sites with ditch deposits in the current project. Such apparent traditions seem to be widespread but disguise variations in the exact patterning of deposits and, of course, in the types of objects that were being placed.

As shown in FIG. 5.8, pottery vessels and animal remains are the two most common items forming parts of structured deposits of late Iron Age date, though only twenty sites (23 per cent) have records of both found in contemporary deposits. Deposits of animal bone, usually articulated (Associated Bone Groups = ABGs; see Allen below, p. 192), are the most ubiquitous across all regions, although unfortunately the poor survival of bone from much of the north and west precludes any real understanding of how widespread they were across the country as a whole. Nevertheless, the rare survival of cattle skulls in an inner enclosure ditch terminal at Blagdon Park on the Northumberland Coastal Plain (Hodgson *et al.* 2013), together with the animal bone in the Iron Age lake deposit at Llyn Cerrig Bach, hint that such deposits were to be found in all areas. Cattle are the most numerous of the animal species represented by ABGs in these deposits, found at 27 per cent of sites, followed by horse (24 per cent) then dog (18 per cent). Sheep/goat occur at just 15 per cent of sites, though this rises to 38 per cent of those sites in the South region, with a corresponding near absence from sites in the North-East (with the exception of late Iron Age/early Roman examples from Wattle Syke, West Yorkshire; Martin *et al.* 2013), despite their relatively good representation within general faunal assemblages of this date in this region (Allen 2016b, 277). The distribution of pottery vessels (and possibly their contents) in structured deposits is almost as widespread as that of animal bone, though they rarely occur at sites lying to the north of South and West Yorkshire.

Aside from animal bone and pottery there is a range of other items occasionally found within structured deposits, including items of metalwork, quernstones and textile-processing objects. Much

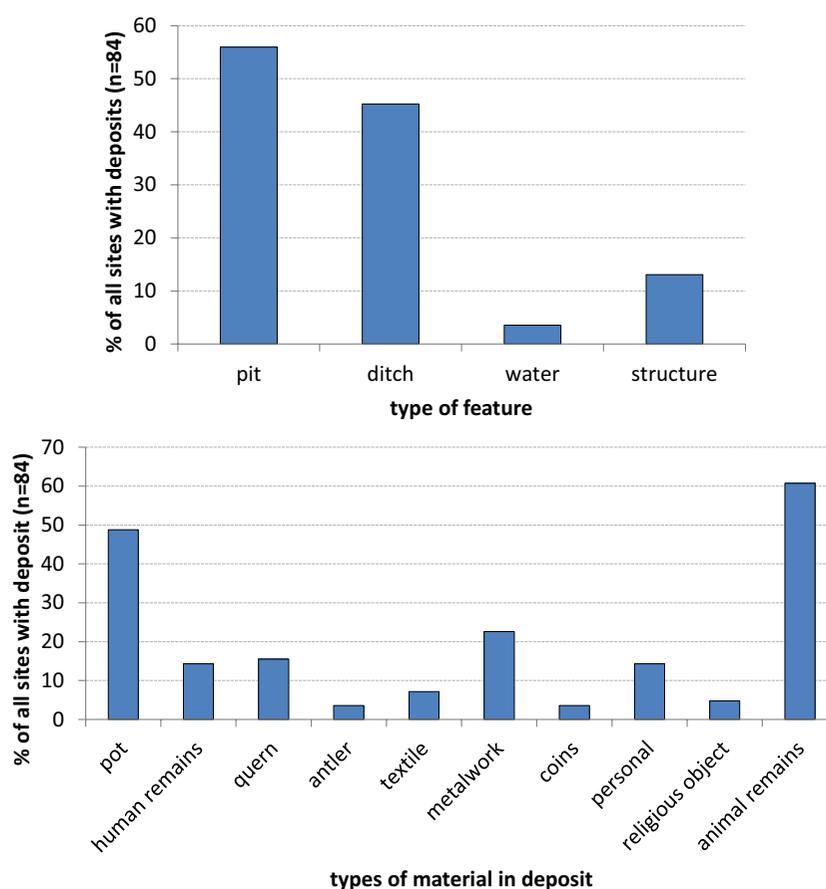


FIG. 5.8. Character of structured deposits within late Iron Age sites showing the types of associated features and types of material incorporated into deposits

of the metalwork, which includes brooches, tools, currency bars and items of a martial nature, is found in deposits from southern Britain, often alongside other objects and animal bone. For example, at Runfold Farm, Farnham Quarry in Surrey, deposits from opposing entrance ditch terminals to the farmstead included animal bone, pottery, fossils, an intact quernstone, and a brooch (Lambert 2009). Quernstones also feature in late Iron Age deposits at twelve other sites (c. 16 per cent of the total), indicating a particular symbolic role for this artefact. Peacock has recently highlighted the religious significance of querns and mills throughout many past and contemporary cultures, suggesting that they may be representative of the cycle of death, regeneration and new life (2013, 166). Such associations are strengthened by the discovery of Roman millstones with phallic symbols found near Winchester and Rochester (*ibid.*, 168–9).

Human remains are specifically recorded in late Iron Age structured deposits at twelve sites, these mostly comprising fragments of adult skeletons in features, often deliberately placed with animal bone and artefacts. For example, salvage excavations during construction work at Rushey

Mead, Leicester, revealed a pit containing the torso and head of an adult male along with a deposit of charred clean grain, sawn antler and a range of ceramic artefacts, including fragments of at least two loomweights (Pollard 2001). This feature well demonstrates the highly blurred boundary between what we now term ‘structured deposits’ and ‘regular’ graves, which are of course among the most structured deposits of all. The large number of infants found buried within and around buildings, and sometimes interpreted as foundation deposits (e.g. two burials associated with a late Iron Age roundhouse at Middle Barn, Selhurst Park, West Sussex; Anelay 2010) are another prime example of this blurred boundary. Where they are complete burials, these have generally not been included under the ‘structured deposit’ category (see instead discussion in Ch. 6), but they demonstrate the important role human remains could take in matters of religious observance (cf. Smith 2001, 69).

Overall, it seems clear that the placing of ‘unusual’ deposits within pits, ditches and structures of settlements was a fairly widespread phenomenon across much of England and Wales during the late Iron Age and, unlike the nascent

development of shrines, was seemingly part of a much longer tradition of religious propitiation (Garrow 2012). However, although geographically widespread, they have still only been revealed (or recognised) in *c.* 12 per cent of all excavated settlements of this date, and may have been created quite sporadically on an *ad hoc* basis in particular or unusual circumstances. On the sites where we do have evidence, most (60 per cent) have just one deposit recorded, and so these are unlikely to have been regularly performed rituals that may, for example, have structured the agricultural year (cf. Roskams *et al.* 2013; Chadwick 2015, 52). Of course there may well have been many more examples of this behaviour involving the use of perishable materials such as plants and wooden objects, or perhaps just involving the deposition of single items such as a brooch or coin, that would simply not be recognised archaeologically as having had a ritual motivation. In the absence of clearer evidence we are still left with only faint, ill-understood traces of the rituals and beliefs of those in Britain prior to the Claudian conquest.

### RELIGION IN THE COUNTRYSIDE OF ROMAN BRITAIN: SACRED SITES

#### ROMANO-CELTIC TEMPLES

Since Lewis's iconic and influential national survey of Romano-British temples published in 1966, *Temples in Roman Britain*, there have been a number of more or less detailed accounts of sacred space within the province (e.g. Wilson 1975; Rodwell 1980; Blagg 1986; Henig and King 1986; Woodward 1992; Smith 2001; King 2007a; Adams 2009). Classical temples, of the type generally seen in the city of Rome, were rare in Britain, and largely unknown outside urban or military contexts, and so with a few exceptions (e.g. Bird 2004a; Ghey 2005), the focus of these studies has been primarily centred upon the most widely recognised of all religious structures in the north-west provinces, the Romano-Celtic (or Gallo-Roman) temple. These temples are defined by their element of concentricity, with an inner cella, generally believed to house the main cult focus (in most cases probably a statue of the deity), surrounded on at least three sides by a walkway, or ambulatory. Although other religious structures certainly share an element of concentricity and have quite reasonably been termed Romano-Celtic temples on this basis (e.g. Hayling Island: King and Soffe 2013, 24; Heybridge: Atkinson and Preston 2015, 96), here the term is reserved more strictly for those buildings with an architecturally integral cella and

ambulatory, although there are still many variations on this arrangement. Some of these variations can be seen in FIG. 5.9 (see also Smith 2001, 152–3). Although the majority were relatively substantial masonry-footed rectilinear structures (typically *c.* 150–200 m<sup>2</sup> though with examples up to 500 m<sup>2</sup>), a smaller number were circular or polygonal (e.g. Chelmsford), while some had annexes to the front, sides or rear (e.g. Marcham/Frilford) or comprised two conjoined temples (e.g. Friars Wash). A recently published example from within a roadside settlement at Scole on the Norfolk/Suffolk border had the basic concentric elements of a Romano-Celtic temple, but was much smaller than most (76.5 m<sup>2</sup>), comprising an insubstantial masonry outer-sill-footing with an inner cella defined by postholes (Ashwin and Tester 2014, 207–8). Many of these temples were sited within sacred precincts, usually described as the *temenos* (though see Killock *et al.* 2015 251–2, for a recent discussion of terminology within Roman temple sites), and, where excavation was extensive enough, there was sometimes a variety of other associated features in the vicinity including ancillary structures (some possibly additional shrines), ovens and pits, all of which served the functioning of the temple cult to some degree (Smith 2001, 152, fig. 5.12).

The dominance of the Romano-Celtic temple in previous studies has led to the acceptance that such buildings were the 'standardised' form of religious architecture in Roman Britain (King 2007a, 13; Wintle 2013, 67). Given their easily recognised morphology and often (though not always; see below, p. 168) rich assemblages of material culture, this is perhaps not that surprising, yet this dominance comes at the expense of attempts to understand other forms of sacred space. Hingley (2011, 754) has recently commented, in relation to sacred sites across the Roman Empire, that 'archaeological attention has focused on the most monumental and impressive temple complexes, while less monumental and open-air cult places have been comparatively ignored'. In many ways this recalls the domination of villas vis-à-vis farmsteads in previous studies of Roman rural settlement and architecture, discussed in Volume 1 (Smith 2016b, 44). Although Romano-Celtic temples are clearly very important to our understanding of Romano-British religion and society, they are, as with villas, quite restricted in their numbers and geographic spread, and by themselves provide only a limited understanding of religious practice in Roman Britain.

The mass of mainly developer-funded archaeological excavation that has taken place since 1990 has led to a huge corresponding increase in the number of interpreted sacred sites of non-Romano-Celtic form, here initially all

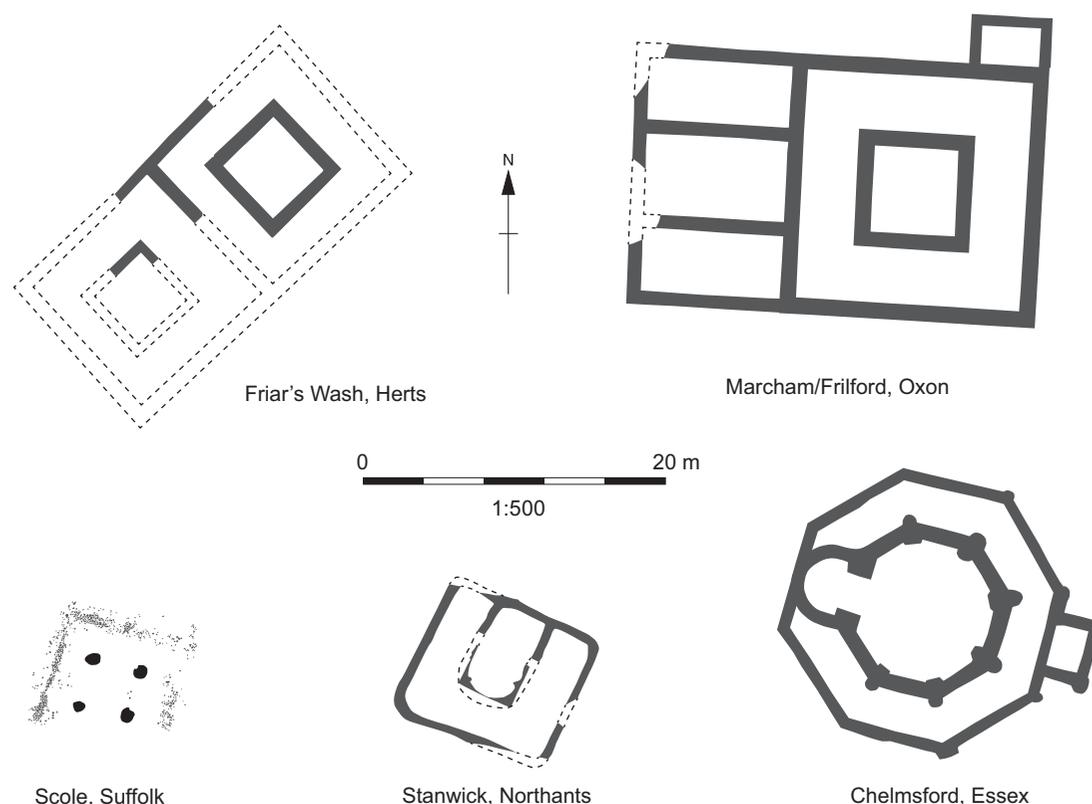


FIG. 5.9. Site plans of Romano-Celtic temples at Scole, Suffolk (Ashwin and Tester 2014), Marcham/Frilford, Oxon (Bradford and Goodchild 1939), Stanwick, Northants, Chelmsford, Essex (Wickenden 1992) and Friars Wash, Herts (Birbeck 2009)

grouped together under the umbrella term ‘shrine’ (see definitions above, p. 121) and discussed by type below. A total of 207 sites in the project database have had one or more structures or places dating to the Roman period interpreted as shrines, almost 80 per cent of which have only been reported (via published or grey literature) since 1990. As with the upsurge in excavated and reported farmsteads discussed in Volume 1 (Smith *et al.* 2016), this ensures that the wide range of different enclosures, shafts, open spaces and structures grouped as shrines can now take on more of a central role in our understanding of Romano-British religious practice.

#### DISTRIBUTION AND CHRONOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS SITES

The distribution of all excavated rural sites with shrines and Romano-Celtic temples is shown on FIG. 5.10. It is immediately apparent that the 54 sites with Romano-Celtic temples have a much more restricted spread than the wider, heterogeneous group of shrines, with all but two found to the south of the line approximately from the Wash to the Severn Estuary, notwithstanding a few others known from urban (e.g. possible examples near the classical temple in Wroxeter; White and Barker 2000, 95–6; White *et al.* 2013,

191) and military contexts (Vindolanda) further north. In contrast, religious sites of a different form are to be found within all major regions, from a possible rock shrine north of Hadrian’s Wall at Yardhope, Northumberland (Charlton and Mitcheson 1983), to Nornour on the Isles of Scilly, where prehistoric circular buildings appear to have been the focus for ritual deposition throughout much of the Roman period (Butcher 2004a; though see Fulford 1989a for an alternative interpretation). Despite their general ubiquity, there are still some areas such as South Wales, much of the South-West and large parts of the Central West region where there remain very few interpreted shrines; as there are many sites with evidence for structured deposits in these areas (see below), this perhaps suggests a different emphasis of cult practice, without the need for obviously defined sacred sites.

FIGURES 5.11 and 5.12 show the steady increase in the number of sacred sites in use over time, reaching a peak, at 141 sites, during the late Roman period. The apparent growing need for the definition of sacred space, particularly in much of central and eastern England, is probably related to the major changes in rural life witnessed here. The rituals performed within shrines and temples may have been actively utilised to create and maintain

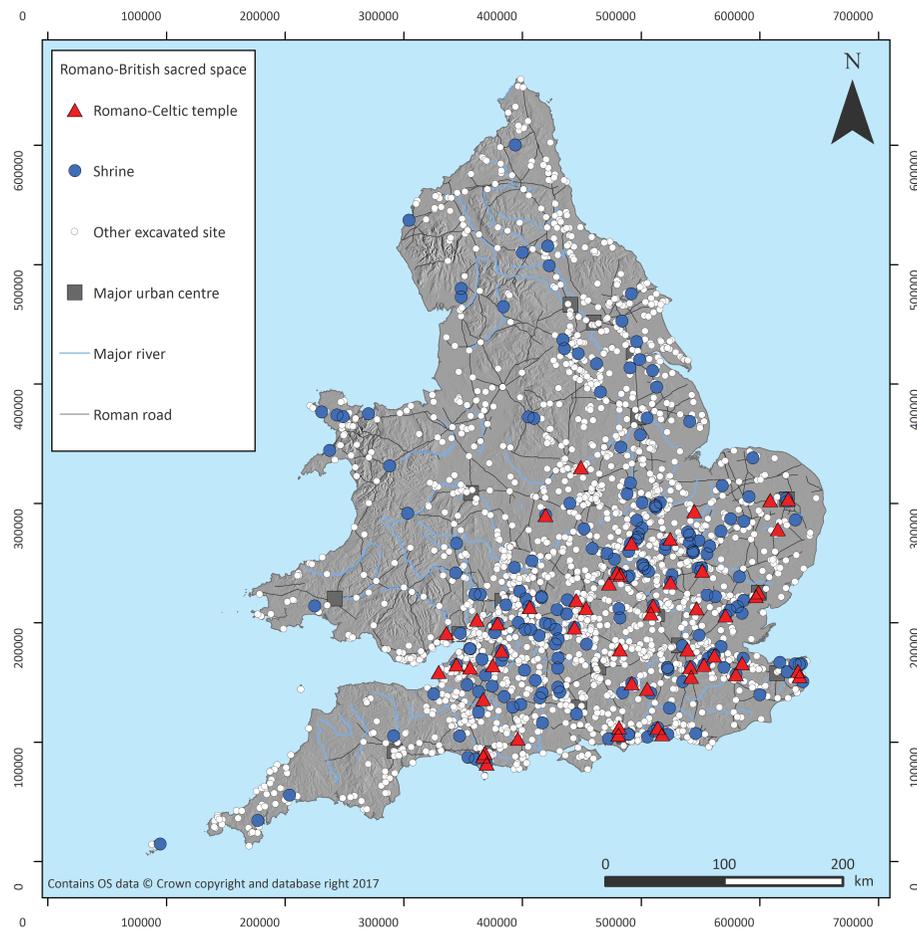


FIG. 5.10. Distribution of excavated Romano-British sites where one or more sacred sites have been postulated

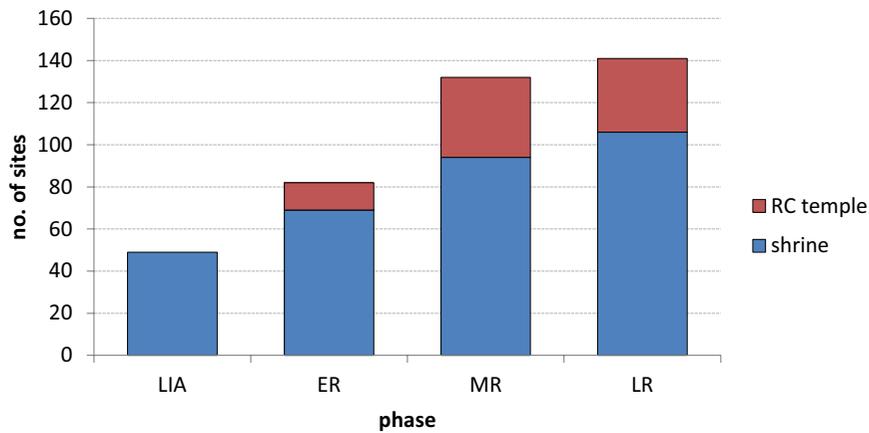


FIG. 5.11. Number of sacred sites in use over time

community identities, which would have become increasingly important in an ever-changing world.

The overall chronological pattern of sacred sites is, however, far from uniform across the province, with the numbers in active use appearing to decline in the South region during the late third and fourth centuries, especially in the south-east, much in line with the wider settlement evidence (Allen 2016a, 81, fig. 4.6). In the North-East, meanwhile, not

only do the number of sacred sites increase during the late Roman period, but these shrines are now more likely to comprise built structures, such as the masonry, sub-rectangular building (15 × 11.5 m) at West Heselton, which was part of a larger rural sanctuary in a dry valley at the foot of the Yorkshire Wolds (Powlesland 1998).

As highlighted above, one of the major points of discussion with regard to Roman-period sacred



FIG. 5.12. Distribution of sacred sites in use over time (red = Romano-Celtic temple; blue = shrine)

sites is the degree of continuity with cult sites of Iron Age date. It has just been established that the 49 Iron Age sacred sites were a diverse and diffuse group that developed in parts of southern and eastern Britain, mostly within the 100 years or so preceding the Claudian conquest. Of the 82 rural sites with shrines or temples belonging to the early Roman period, 37 (45 per cent) had some evidence for previous ritual activity, including almost 60 per cent of the early Romano-Celtic temples. Indeed, the overall distribution of Romano-Celtic temples, even at their maximum extent in the mid- to late Roman period, closely follows that of late Iron Age shrines (see FIG. 5.6 above) in being restricted to parts of central and southern Britain. The origin of this temple form has long been debated, with some arguing for an indigenous development (e.g. Wilson 1975, 15; King 2007a), largely on the basis of parallels with a single concentric structure from

Heathrow, which was very loosely dated to the mid- to late Iron Age (Grimes and Close-Brooks 1993, 336). The Gallo-Roman temple became well established in parts of northern Gaul from the Claudio-Neronian period (Derks 1998, 183), and it remains most likely that the concept came to Britain from there alongside new forms of high-status domestic architecture (i.e. villas), with both building forms maintaining a close relationship in central and southern Britain into the late Roman period (Smith 2001, 114; Adams 2009, 115–16; see below, p. 152). Nevertheless, the lack of Romano-Celtic temples in the North-East, where there are many examples of villas, suggests that their distribution was not just mirroring the extent of ‘Roman’ style domestic architecture, but was linked to underlying traditions of constructed sacred space. This indicates how the late Iron Age development of

sacred sites had a fundamental impact on the religious landscape of the Roman period.

At least twenty sites show evidence for continued use from the late Iron Age right through to the late or even post-Roman period, including Harlow in Essex (France and Gobel 1985) and Farley Heath in Surrey (Poulton and Bird 2007). Perhaps the best known of these is Uley in Gloucestershire, which developed from a late Iron Age shrine, utilising earlier prehistoric features, to become a major Romano-British religious complex with a Romano-Celtic temple, and a possible post-Roman Christian chapel, though the evidence for the latter is somewhat tenuous (Woodward and Leach 1993; cf. Heighway 2003, 59). In many other cases there is evidence for decline within the Roman period, although continuity of cult may still be apparent at sites even where there is evidence for dereliction of shrine/temple buildings, such as at Springhead in Kent, where deposits of coins were found above the rubble of one of the shrine buildings (Penn 1962, 116). Structural alterations and decline in temples dating to the fourth century have sometimes been attributed to a conflict with Christianity (Watts 1998; see below, p. 203). Ultimately, however, the fortunes of most sacred sites appear more likely to have been tied up with those of the surrounding settlements, and there is little evidence that specific late Roman ‘anti-pagan’ imperial policies from Christian emperors had any effect upon the fate of these cults (Smith 2008).

Of the 141 sacred sites recorded in the current project that show evidence of use in the late Roman period, 110 (78 per cent) are thought to have continued in use at least until the end of the fourth century. In most cases, the exact end of activity from this time remains uncertain, as is often the case with settlements of this date (see Smith and Fulford 2016, 414–16), though sixteen are argued to have continued at least into the early fifth century, usually on the basis of a very strong late Roman finds signature or associated dated features. One example comprises the late Roman shrine/mausoleum at Cannington in Somerset, which is thought to have acted as a focus for the surrounding cemetery that continued in use until the seventh or eighth century A.D. (Rahtz *et al.* 2000).

Overall, it remains very hard to gauge the ‘end’ of use of most of these late Roman religious sites, and although there have been suggestions that many became the focus for subsequent Christian churches (e.g. Henig 2008), unequivocal evidence is usually lacking. It is quite likely that most continued to exhibit an aura of sanctity in the minds of local people for a considerable period, even if the specific rituals and practices undertaken during the Roman period had long since ceased.

## SHRINES: FORM AND DEVELOPMENT

The analysis of late Iron Age shrines above demonstrated a variety in physical characteristics, from apparently open sites with concentrations of finds, to pits, shafts, enclosures and different types of built structure. All of these forms of sacred space are found in the Roman period, though with the increase in numbers came an even greater variation in their attributes. The form and development of Romano-Celtic temples has been touched upon above, and here all of the other sacred sites falling into the category of ‘shrine’ will be dealt with. The problems relating to the interpretation of shrines have already been outlined (p. 122), and 40 per cent of the examples here lie within the weakest interpretative category (3), many of these comprising structures that seem unusual within their local context, such as that at Mucking in Essex cited above (see FIG. 5.1). Such interpretational fragility must be kept in mind when considering the patterns revealed in the analysis below.

FIGURE 5.13 shows the principal characteristics of all 207 sites interpreted as having Roman-period shrines in the current dataset, including those that developed from Iron Age sites. The broad categories disguise a wealth of variation in individual form and development, and these will now be examined in more detail.

### Constructed shrines

Just over half of all shrines shown in FIG. 5.13 comprise some type of structure. As discussed above, during the late Iron Age the concept of constructed sacred space appears to have been in its infancy, with, in particular, relatively few examples of actual roofed buildings used as cult houses. Nevertheless it is clear that the incidence of constructed shrines increases significantly over time, from accounting for 32 per cent of shrines in the late Iron Age to over 60 per cent by the mid- and late Roman periods (FIG. 5.14). If Romano-Celtic temples were to be included, then the proportion of built structures would increase to 70 per cent of all sacred sites by the late Roman period.

Variation within the ‘built shrine’ category is enormous. A few were clearly small household shrines sited internally within villas, and these will be examined below when looking at the wider context and use of sacred space (p. 147). The graph and map on FIG. 5.15 break the remaining constructed shrines down into basic form and construction material, but there are still many differences in scale, levels of embellishment and in the type and extent of surrounding features. Rectangular masonry (or at least masonry-footed) buildings are the most commonly defined shrine

structures, being interpreted as such on 37 sites, mainly across parts of central, southern and eastern areas of the province. At one end of the spectrum these buildings include a small classical-type temple lying within a sacred precinct alongside a circular shrine in the military *vicus* at Maryport, Cumbria (FIG. 5.16), the only certain example of its type known outside of urban contexts in Britain and recently excavated by Newcastle University (<http://www.senhousemuseum.co.uk/excavation>). At the other end lies a number of small structures usually

interpreted as shrines by association with certain objects or structured deposits such as at Monkston Park, Milton Keynes, where a small stone-footed structure (2 × 3 m) produced much animal bone including a near-complete dog skeleton along with eight later fourth-century coins (Bull and Davis 2006). Further articulated remains of horse and cattle lay in a nearby ditch, and the site lay within an enclosure group on a valley slope overlooking the main farmstead. Aside from their basic form and construction material, there is no real cohesive element to any of these structures,

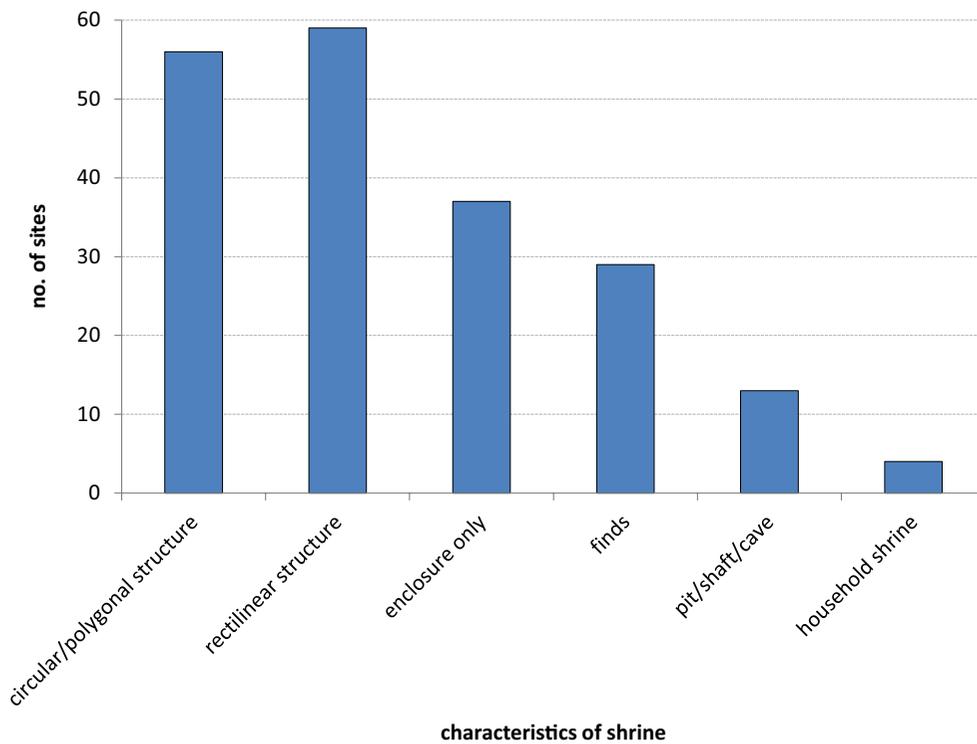


FIG. 5.13. Characteristics of rural Roman shrines

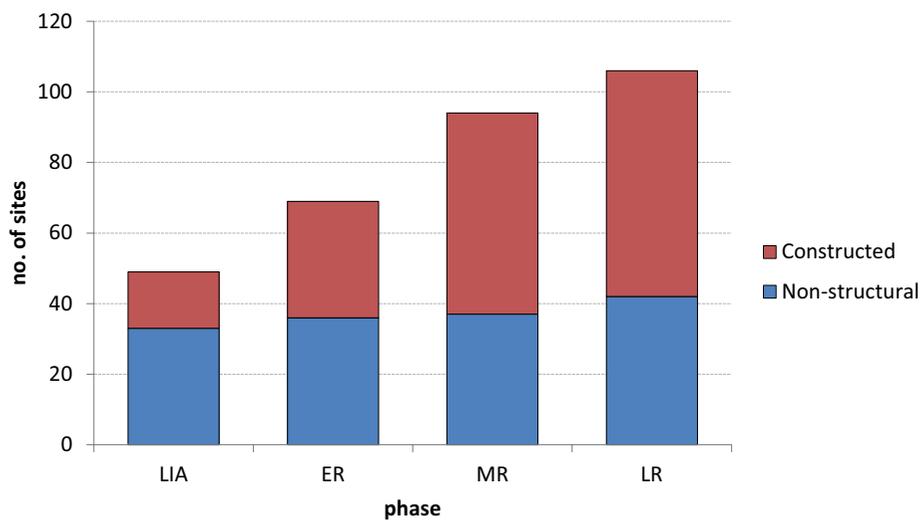


FIG. 5.14. Development of constructed shrines

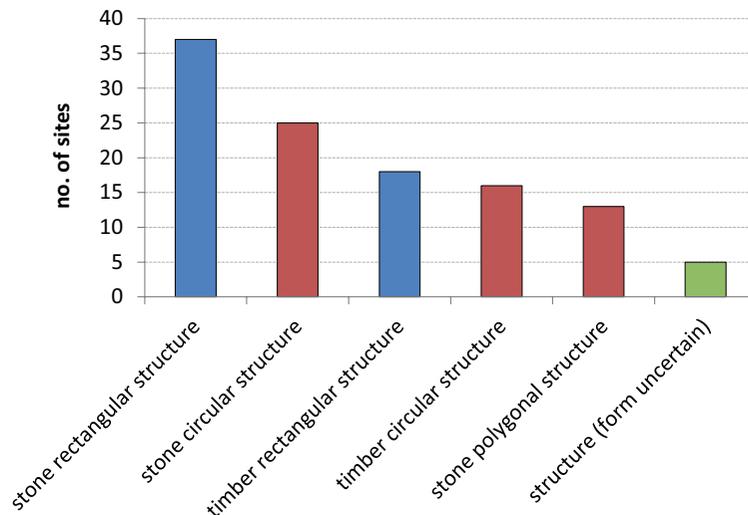
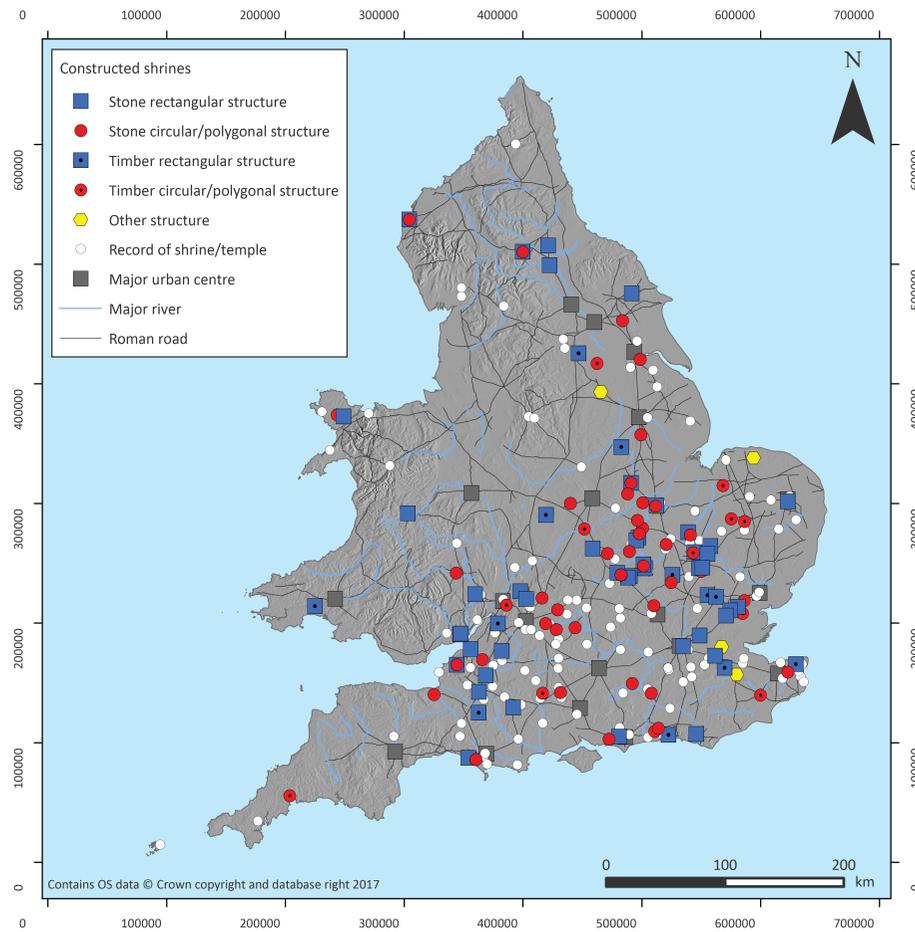


FIG. 5.15. Distribution and forms of constructed shrines

although most were on a somewhat larger scale than that of Monkston Park, and were sometimes surrounded by a defined enclosure, assumed to demarcate the temenos or sacred area. Some may have performed a similar role in ‘public cult’ to that of most Romano-Celtic temples, discussed below, the variations in building form highlighting the fact that such religious architecture need not

be standardised, which is somewhat at variance with the rigorous formulaic approach taken to orthopraxy.

In total, 25 sites contained one or more circular masonry buildings interpreted as shrines, while a further 13 sites produced polygonal masonry shrines. They are fairly widespread, but with a definite concentration in the West Anglian Plain to

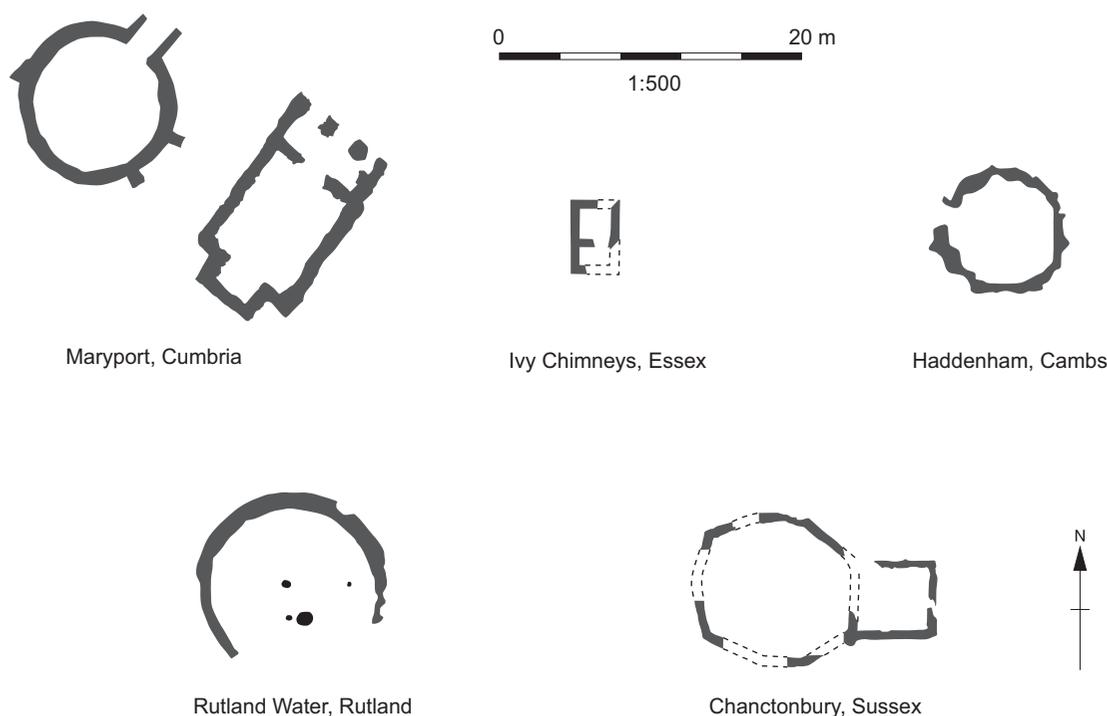


FIG. 5.16. Selected site plans of constructed masonry shrines of Roman date (Turner 1999; Evans and Hodder 2006; Carlyle 2011; Rudling 2001)

the west of the Fens, as well as in and around the Upper Thames Valley (FIG. 5.15), the former relating to an area that had a strong tradition of circular architecture continuing right through the Roman period (Smith 2016b, 47–51). On occasion such buildings are found in association with Romano-Celtic temples, such as at Marcham/Frilford in Oxfordshire (Kamash *et al.* 2010), Chanctonbury in West Sussex (Rudling 2001) and the religious complex at Friars Wash, Redbourn, Herts (Birbeck 2009), where they are usually argued to have served as subsidiary shrines. In other cases the circular shrine is seen to be replaced by a Romano-Celtic temple, as at Wanborough in Surrey (O’Connell and Bird 1994) or Nettleton Scrubb in Wiltshire (Wedlake 1982). At the latter site a circular temple built on a raised knoll later had an octagonal platform built around it, perhaps functioning as an ambulatory, before being completely replaced with a rather more elaborate octagonal Romano-Celtic temple in the mid-third century A.D. (*ibid.*). On most sites, the circular/polygonal shrine represented the primary religious structure, which could be quite a substantial building, certainly in the range of most Romano-Celtic type temples, such as the polygonal structure, 15–17 m in diameter, partially revealed during an evaluation adjacent to Ermine Street in a roadside settlement at Navenby, Lincs, and suggested as a possible shrine (Allen and Palmer-Brown 2001, 5). The economic investment required to build masonry shrines of this scale would have been considerable, and certainly no

less than for most Romano-Celtic temples. Furthermore, as with some of the rectangular masonry shrines, the material culture assemblages from many of these circular/polygonal shrines matches that recovered from many Romano-Celtic temples (see below, p. 174), with the indication that all building types could be used as settings for the performance of public religious rituals, the differences perhaps relating to local traditions and preferences of those responsible for funding the construction of the religious site.

Timber structures interpreted as shrines are found in lower numbers but cover the same broad distribution as masonry shrines. They do, nevertheless, form a slightly higher proportion of sacred sites in parts of eastern England, an area noted for generally high concentrations of timber and/or mass-walled (i.e. made of turf or cob) buildings during the Roman period, partly due to the relative lack of good building stone (Smith 2016b, 52, fig. 3.8). The less substantial nature of such buildings probably ensures that they remain relatively under-represented, while many may be hard to differentiate from domestic dwellings or other more utilitarian structures. For example, a circular timber or mass-walled building within the late Roman village at Butterfield Down, Amesbury, on the Wessex chalk, was suggested as a shrine largely owing to the presence of a sceptre head on the floor surface and an infant burial in one of the drip gully terminals (Rawlings and Fitzpatrick 1996). Without the fortuitous survival of the

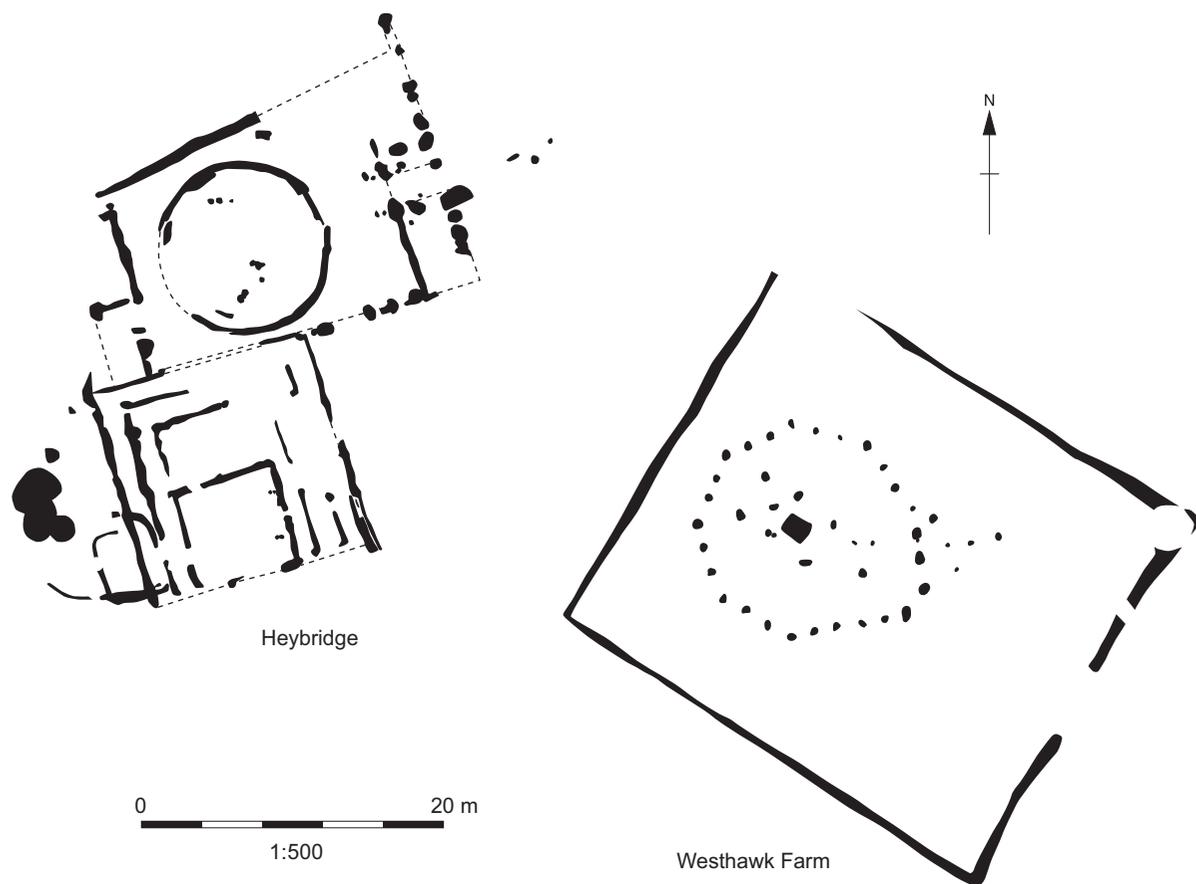


FIG. 5.17. Site plans of Roman-period constructed timber shrines at Heybridge (Atkinson and Preston 2015) and Westhawk Farm (Booth *et al.* 2008)

sceptre head (which still may not necessarily have been used in religious ritual), it is doubtful whether such an interpretation would have been advanced, although it was the only circular structure noted during the excavations. Likewise, a four-post structure (2 × 2.5 m) built into the footprint of a henge ditch at Land East of Vaynor Farm, Llanddowror, in Carmarthenshire, was only suggested as a possible shrine, with the alternative being a storage structure, on the basis of its context and the presence of a nearby pit containing a structured deposit (Barber and Hart 2014).

Not all timber structures interpreted as shrines are necessarily that modest, however, with some representing important cult centres within their local and wider landscapes. One such site is Heybridge in Essex, which has already been discussed in terms of its Iron Age cult site. The religious focus of this growing nucleated settlement clearly became more important during the early post-conquest period, with significant architectural changes to the shrine site, including a large timber building with internal labyrinthine sub-division, and an 11 m diameter circular timber shrine, possibly un-roofed, set within a trapezoidal enclosure just to the north (Atkinson and Preston

2015, 89; FIG. 5.17). It was suggested that the sacred precinct was used for large congregations, and further conjectured that it was a place for pilgrimage (*ibid.*, 99). Another quite striking example of a fairly elaborate timber shrine, also situated within a nucleated settlement, was at Westhawk Farm in Kent (Booth *et al.* 2008, 94–102; FIG. 5.17). Here, a polygonal shrine defined by postholes lay within a rectangular-ditched enclosure, which was located within a large area of seemingly open space on the south side of the road from the Weald to Canterbury. As with Heybridge, whether the shrine was roofed remains uncertain, though on balance the excavators considered it unlikely, with the polygonal arrangement of postholes instead either representing screens or free-standing posts surrounding a large, central post (*ibid.*, 379). Sites such as Heybridge and Westhawk Farm seem to blur the boundaries between constructed shrines as buildings and shrines defined by enclosures alone.

### Religious enclosures

The importance of enclosure in the morphology of sacred space is well demonstrated, (e.g. Parker Pearson and Richards 1994, 24; Smith 2001, 17),

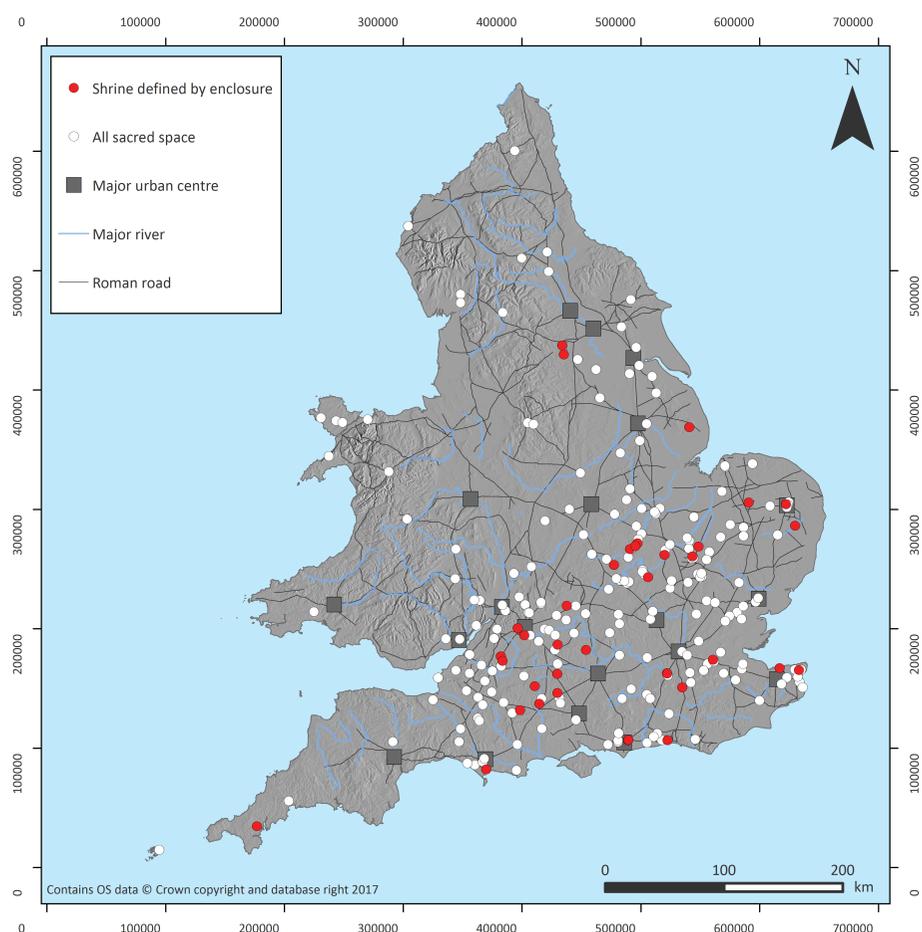


FIG. 5.18. Distribution of shrines of Roman date defined by enclosures only

and has been commented upon above (p. 126) with regard to Iron Age cult sites (cf. Rees 2008). Many Gallo-Roman temple sites originated as enclosures and pits without any major structural element (Smith 2001, 70–1; Ghey 2007, 19), and there are a few examples that suggest similar developments in Britain, such as at Nettleton Scrubb, Wilts (Wedlake 1982), Jordan Hill, Dorset (Drew 1932) and Folly Lane, Herts (Niblett 1999). In addition there is evidence from the recently excavated Roman religious site at Tabard Square in Southwark, London, to suggest that the area was enclosed as a sacred precinct prior to the construction of the two Romano-Celtic temples (Killock *et al.* 2015, 243). In many of the other 79 cases where a religious structure is demonstrably surrounded by an enclosure, it is unfortunately not possible to determine which element – structure or enclosure – came first, though there are cases where the enclosure certainly appears to have been the most impressive feature of the site, notably at the conquest-period shrine at Fison Way, Thetford, in Norfolk (Gregory 1991). In addition, it is certainly not the case that all or even most shrines progressed in a sequence from enclosure to constructed shrine, as there are a

total of 37 shrines of Roman date that would seem to have been defined solely by an enclosure, and which did not develop any obvious internal structure. The distribution of these sites is shown on FIG. 5.18, appearing largely concentrated in a band from the Wessex chalk through to the West Anglian Plain (Nene and Ouse Valleys) and parts of East Anglia, though with other examples in the south-east and further north.

A high proportion (75 per cent) of these sacred enclosures had ditched boundaries, though others utilised timber palisades and masonry walls. The majority were relatively small, with all but six below 0.3 ha, and most falling in the region of 500–2500 m<sup>2</sup>. Given that there were often very few other features within the enclosure, many would still have been able to hold reasonably large numbers of people, assuming that they were designed for such ‘congregational’ type rituals, which is far from certain. Nine (24 per cent) of the enclosures had two or more concentric boundaries, perhaps reflecting the concentricity found in Romano-Celtic temples. However, there is a danger of interpreting every ‘unusual’ double or triple enclosure in the Romano-British countryside as religious in nature, as analysis for this project

has shown that there are many examples of such enclosures that appear to be farmsteads, the arrangements possibly reflecting differences in social status and/or the control of movements of livestock (Allen and Smith 2016, 26–8). As ever, it is only in the contextual analysis of the site and associated features and finds that any religious function may be postulated.

FIGURE 5.19 shows the main characteristics of these enclosures that have enabled them to be interpreted as shrines. Over 50 per cent have some kind of structured deposit, either in the enclosure ditch or in one or more ‘ritual’ pits/shafts, similar to certain rectilinear enclosures from the Continent termed *Viereckschanzen*, which have often been viewed as pre-Roman cult sites, though with increasing debate over any homogeneity of religious function (Brunaux 1989; Venclova 1993; Webster 1992, 35). Sometimes the presence of one or more structured deposits may be the only indication of the religious nature of the site, as at Luton Road, Wilstead, Bedford, where a late Roman enclosure contained minimal evidence for domestic occupation, but was associated with a hollow containing three sheep skulls, all apparently carefully positioned on their sides facing different directions (Luke and Preece 2010). Whether this was a dedicated shrine or else a stock pen containing a dedicatory deposit is of course uncertain and once more highlights the blurred boundaries between secular and religious use of space. The somewhat more elaborate structured deposits within some enclosures may provide greater clarity of dedicated sacred space, such as at Rothwell Haigh, Leeds, where almost the only feature within a square ditched enclosure (0.27 ha) was a 12.3 m deep, unlined well containing a sequence of deposits suggested as a closure event, including complete pottery vessels,

a yew bucket, ash spade, ash drinking vessels, querns, hobnailed shoes, articulated animal bone and a human adult skull (Cool and Richardson 2013; FIG. 5.20). Yet even here the excavators, although proposing ritual activity, have not actively interpreted the whole site as a shrine (*ibid.*).

Specific religious objects (see definition above) have been found at twelve of the enclosure sites, including possible sceptre bindings at Stratton Farm, Godstone in Surrey (Hall 2007) and Slonk Hill in West Sussex (Hartridge 1978), tazze (incense burners) at Claydon Pike, Glos (Miles *et al.* 2007), and representations of Mercury at Lee’s Rest, Charlbury in Oxfordshire (Bagnall-Smith 1995, 201), and Great Bedwyn/Shalbourne in Wiltshire (Brindle *et al.* 2013). A copper-alloy hairpin from the ‘ceremonial’ enclosure ditch at Love’s Farm St Neots in Cambridgeshire was modified, seemingly to represent a model spear (Hinman and Zant forthcoming).

The wider contexts of shrine sites will be discussed below, but it is worth noting here that seven of the proposed ritual enclosures appear to be related to funerary activity, and may have been used for quite different purposes from shrines, including possibly as places for excarnation of human remains. In some cases, the association seems more connected with possible ancestral cults, such as is suggested at Thruxton in Hampshire, where a late Roman fenced enclosure was built around a late Iron Age grave and ritual shaft, which was thought to have still been open to some level (Cunliffe and Poole 2008a). An undated square post-hole structure/enclosure (20 m<sup>2</sup>) lying near to the middle Iron Age chariot burial at Ferry Fryston, West Yorks, discussed above (p. 128), is thought by the excavators to have been a possible shrine contemporary with the mass deposition of

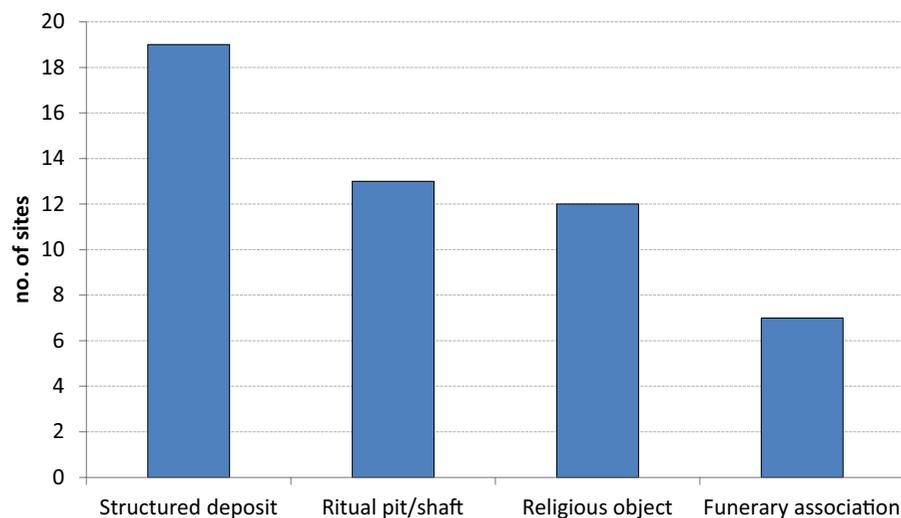


FIG. 5.19. Characteristics of religious enclosures of Roman date

cattle bones in the barrow ditch, and may represent part of a similar ancestral cult.

Aside from subterranean features such as pits, shafts and wells, there are usually few other features associated with the sacred enclosures. At least five were associated with prehistoric monuments, with those at Slonk Hill, West Sussex (Hartridge 1978), Uffington, Oxfordshire (Miles *et al.* 2003), and within the roadside settlement at Stanwick, Northamptonshire (Crosby and Muldowney 2011), actually encompassing Bronze Age barrows, part of a more widespread association between prehistoric features and Roman ritual discussed below (p. 160). The last site initially took the form of a narrow ditch dug around the barrow with a sand and gravel path encircling it, during the late Iron Age/early Roman period. The temenos underwent elaboration in later first century A.D. with a limestone surface replacing the old path and a possible pier base set up to the west. A pit was cut into the centre of the burial mound during the second century A.D. to hold a post/column, and the whole area was re-metalled in the third century, with another pier added to

form an entrance on the approach road. A stone-footed building by this path may have served in a cult ancillary role. Final major alterations occurred in the late third to mid-fourth century when an encircling wall was built and some kind of water feature was associated with the entrance into the temenos.

The increasing elaboration of the entrance zone is seen in an even more spectacular fashion at an enclosure shrine just a few kilometres away in the Nene Valley at Higham Ferrers (Lawrence and Smith 2009; FIG. 5.20). Here, a shrine of second-third century date was located on the western periphery of a roadside settlement, adjacent to a single Bronze Age cremation burial, although it remains uncertain if a burial mound was still visible and therefore acted as a marker for the Roman sacred site. It was defined on three sides by a masonry wall and left open to the west near the steep break of slope leading down to the River Nene. There appear to have been two separate 'precincts', with the outer south-facing entranceway comprising a huge pitched-limestone foundation over 20 m long and 3.6 m wide, with colonnette

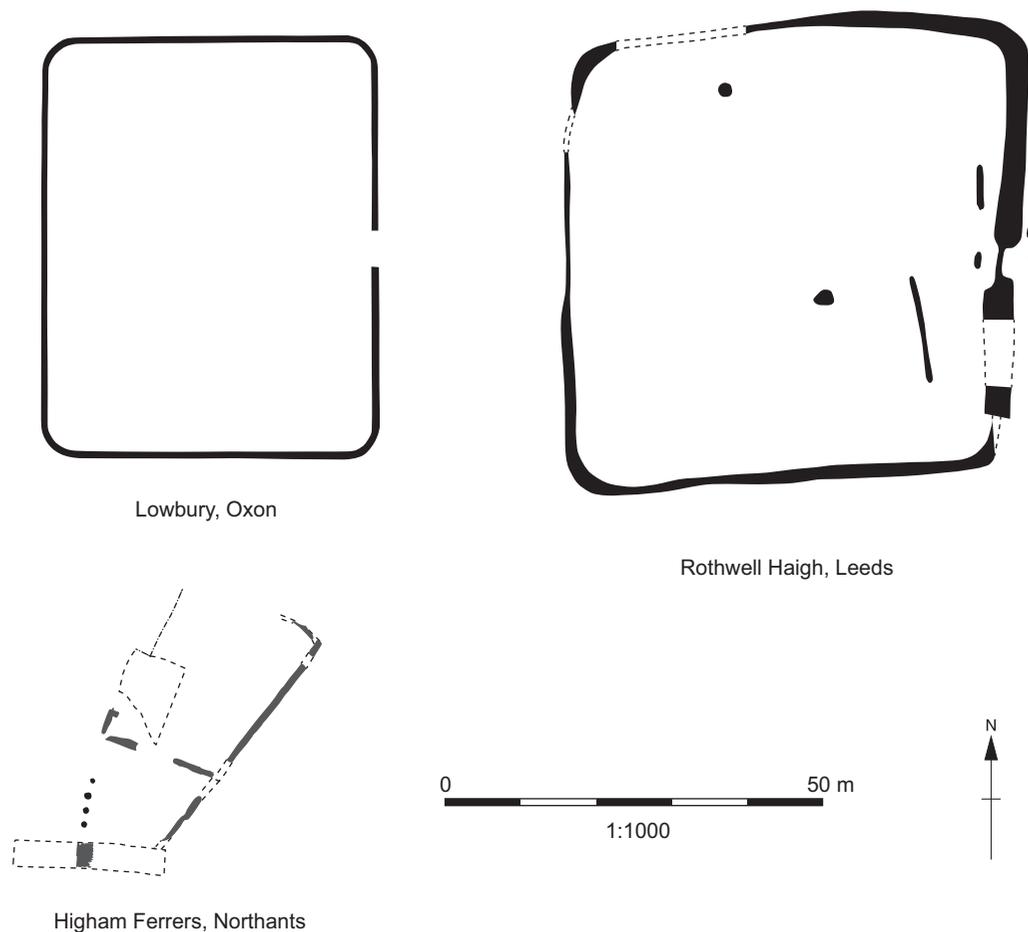


FIG. 5.20. Selected site plans of religious enclosures of Roman date (Lawrence and Smith 2009; Atkinson 1916; Cool and Richardson 2013)

fragments and concentrations of tile suggesting some level of embellishment. The only other feature of the shrine with any hint of monumentality was the entrance to the inner precinct, within which was a mass of votive deposits but no evidence for any central focus aside from a cleared area of space devoid of any finds, which may have contained an altar or statue. Shrines like Higham and Stanwick ably demonstrate that, even within nucleated roadside settlements with all the trappings of 'Roman' architecture and material culture, religious sites did not have to include a central, covered building, but that a bounded space was deemed more important, with the emphasis being firmly placed on marking the transition from profane to sacred.

### **Shrines as shafts, wells and caves**

The deposition of what would appear to be ritually motivated structured deposits in wells, pits and shafts of Iron Age and Roman date has long been recognised (e.g. Piggott 1968; Webster 1997; Black 2008, 1–8), usually thought to be propitiatory offerings to chthonic deities. Yet such features are typically found within and around settlements (see above, p. 129, for Iron Age discussion and below, p. 182, for Roman discussion), or associated with more readily defined ritual contexts, such as those described above, and are rarely seen as 'shrines' in their own right (though note Ross 1968 and Rudling 2008b, 118–19). There is, however, a small group of otherwise apparently isolated (or at least clearly separated from any nearby settlement) wells and shafts containing 'unusual' deposits, which may mark out the loci as sacred space. There may have been a distinction between 'dry' shafts, dug specifically to allow communication with chthonic deities/the underworld, and wells, which could have originally been dug for a more practical function as a water source, before 'attaining' a more overt religious significance. Both shafts and wells, however, produced a similar range of structured material (see below, p. 189), and the distinction may not ultimately have been that significant.

The distribution of sacred sites principally defined by wells and/or shafts is shown in FIG. 5.21, with a clear grouping across the south of England, which is corroborated by a similar concentration of shafts/wells with structured deposits from certain farmsteads (e.g. Oakridge, Hants; Oliver 1992; see discussion below, p. 194), villas (e.g. Keston, Kent; Philp *et al.* 1991; 1999) and larger religious sites (e.g. Springhead, Kent; Andrews *et al.* 2011). At Deal in Kent a 2.5 m deep shaft was located between two cemeteries of Iron Age–early Roman date, and gave access to an underground chamber (Parfitt and Green 1987;

Parfitt 1995, 156). This was filled in during the second century A.D., and was suggested as a shrine partly on the basis of the recovery of a small carved chalk figurine. Elsewhere in the south-east a possible Roman shaft with animal bone, pottery and oyster shell lay within an Iron Age hillfort at Mount Caburn near Lewes (Hamilton 1998, 33), while a number of late Iron Age/early Roman pits and deep shafts on the dip slope of the North Downs near Ewell, overlooking the nearby roadside settlement, produced a wide range of finds, including rotary querns, loomweights, spindlewhorls and articulated animal bone (Cotton 2001; see discussion below, p. 195). Further west were possible ritual wells containing votive material at Armsley, Godshill, in Hampshire, at a spring located near the confluence of the River Avon and the Millersford Brook (Musty 1977), and another possible ritual well, of late Roman date, lay within a hillfort at Cadbury Castle, Devon (Fox 1952). The site at Godshill is ill understood and may have been part of a larger settlement, though the well from Cadbury Castle appears to have been the only feature of this date in the vicinity. As with Mount Caburn, and other shrines/temples within hillforts, the outer ramparts of the fort may have acted as a sacred boundary, and so these two sites may be better viewed as religious enclosures.

The only 'isolated' ritual shaft to be included in the current dataset further north was that recently excavated at Bretton Way, Peterborough in the Central Belt region (Pickstone and Drummond-Murray 2013). Here, a late Roman shaft/well (construction cut 6.5 × 3.5m, 2.5m deep) was lined with 36 re-used limestone blocks from a monumental building, and contained a large finds assemblage, probably of ritual origin, including 14–16 leather shoes, iron bucket handles, bone sledge runners, articulated animal remains (including a drilled cattle skull) and three folded strips of some fibrous material, probably birch bark, tentatively suggested as organic curse tablets (*ibid.*). The feature lay near to an agricultural aisled building within a field system, and possibly represented a small field shrine within a larger (villa?) estate.

In addition to sacred shafts and wells, there is evidence that some natural subterranean features were imbued with a certain sanctity, including the Alveston fissure (remnants of a cave system) in South Gloucestershire, which contained the remains of many dog and human skeletons, including one with evidence for cannibalism, radiocarbon dated to around the time of the Roman conquest (Aldhouse-Green 2004a, 196–7). The ritual use of caves in particular is very well attested across many cultures and periods (Moyes

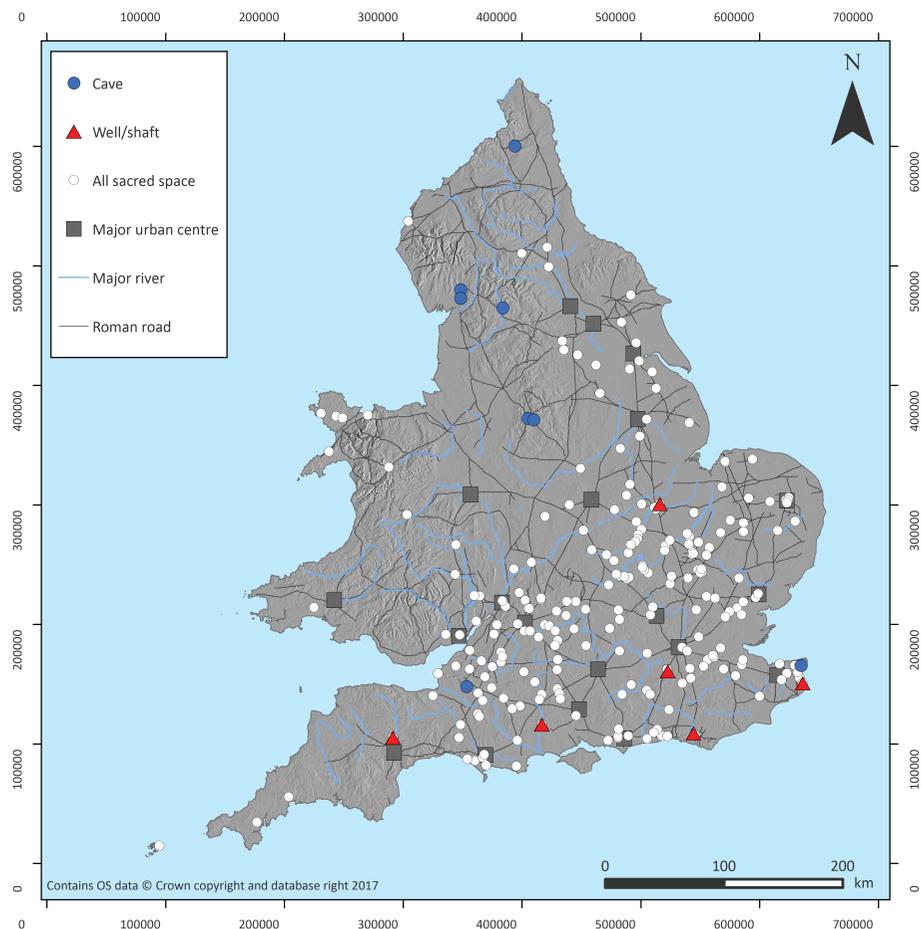


FIG. 5.21. Distribution of religious caves and well/shafts

2012a), being particularly associated with the worship of Pan within the Greco-Roman world (Orlin 2015, 690). These were dark, mysterious places, surely perceived as the junction between different worlds, with Moyes (2012b, 9) recently suggesting that ‘the very nature of the cave as a natural, chthonic, immovable cavity, carved in stone, can represent the earth itself, its associated deities, and its enduring presence’.

Roman artefacts alongside human remains and animal remains have been found within many cave systems in Britain, though they have not always been systematically excavated and reported (Branigan 1992). It is usually very difficult to ascertain the nature of Roman activity in these caves, although some certainly appeared to have had at least temporary domestic use, while industrial use is also attested at sites such as White Woman’s Hole in Somerset, where there is evidence for late Roman coin counterfeiting (Barrett and Boon 1972). However, it does seem that certain caves were used for ritual purposes, including for human burial and possibly as subterranean shrines, or indeed as both (Branigan 1992, 15–16). This project has not included all

caves where a possible religious use has been suggested, but instead has incorporated a selection of excavated cave sites where use as a shrine seems quite possible, these being shown on FIG. 5.21. As would be expected, almost all are concentrated in the main limestone cave areas in the west and north of England, though a cave exposed by chalk quarrying at Spratling Court Farm, Manston, in 1996 contained deposits of animal bone radiocarbon dated to the second century A.D. (Baker 2006). It was suggested that this seemingly isolated and still-wooded part of the Thanet ridge was the site of a possible early Roman pit/cave shrine (*ibid.*).

Further west, there are a great many caves in the Mendip Hills with evidence for Iron Age and Roman activity, though the largest cave system utilised was at Wookey Hole on the southern edge of this landscape (Branigan and Dearne 1991a). Here, activity of second to fourth century A.D. date was recovered from four chambers, including a cemetery of at least 28 individuals within the furthest chamber, and a large quantity of objects found elsewhere, though mostly from the entrance area. Although in a re-appraisal of the finds

Branigan and Dearne suggested likely domestic occupation (*ibid.*, 77), the quantity of objects, including over 130 coins, 17 brooches and almost 100 hairpins, was far in excess of the assemblage from most local non-nucleated settlements, with a composition more in line with many temple sites (see below, p. 169). It is perhaps more likely to have functioned as liminal, sacred space, also suitable for human burial, associated with the settlement known *c.* 100 m from the cave entrance (Ashworth and Crampton 1964).

Other possible Romano-British cave shrines lie to the north, including Poole's Cavern (Smithson and Branigan 1991) and Thirst House Cave (Branigan and Dearne 1991b) in the Peak District, both of which contained artefacts of unusual quantity and quality compared to local domestic settlements. A religious interpretation for these sites has generally been disregarded in favour of metalwork manufacture, though they are of course not mutually exclusive. Victoria Cave, near Settle in North Yorkshire, is one of many caves in this area with evidence for Roman activity, and, as with the other sites just discussed, had what seems to be an exceptionally large volume of finds for the area, including almost 60 brooches and 118 coins (Dearne and Lord 1998). Unusual finds included 23 perforated spoons of uncertain function, of which more examples were found in other local caves, altogether accounting for *c.* 60 per cent of all such objects found in the country (Eckardt 2014, 127). Possible cave shrines are also known outside of the Roman province in Britain, such as at High Pasture Cave on the Isle of Skye in Scotland. Here, investigations revealed a steep flight of stone steps leading to a natural limestone cave, in which was found human remains of Iron Age date and a wide range of unusual artefacts and ecofacts (<http://www.high-pasture-cave.org/>; Aldhouse-Green 2010, 199).

Ultimately it is the nature and scale of the finds assemblages in these caves that mark them out as possible shrines, though there is one example, a natural rock chamber rather than a cave, that contained no finds, but was interpreted as a shrine on the basis of a figure carved on the rock face (Charlton and Mitcheson 1983). The site, at Yardhope in Northumberland, lay immediately below the summit of a long ridge, and the figure was identified with the god Cocidius, known from inscriptions on Hadrian's Wall (*ibid.*). Other features in the 2 m<sup>2</sup> chamber comprised a posthole cut into rock by the doorway and a hearth. It remains uncertain whether there are other similarly modified natural contexts that were used as shrines, but its presence is surely a reminder of the extremely varied nature of Romano-British cult sites.

### Shrines identified by finds alone

This category of 29 'shrines' (FIG. 5.22) represents a very heterogeneous group that in many ways could be conflated with those just outlined, in that their religious interpretation relies upon the presence of finds concentrations of unusual character and/or quantity. At nine sites, nearly all of them nucleated settlements, the presence of shrines has only been tentatively suggested owing to the generally high quantities of religious objects recovered during excavations. One such site, at Gill Mill in Oxfordshire, had items including a stone Mater-type goddess figure, an incomplete altar to a Genius, a small stone-relief panel of a horse and rider, a stone miniature altar, three 'pipeclay' figurines and two unusual lead and copper-alloy dodecahedrons (Booth and Simmonds 2018; see below). The actual location and form of any shrine remain unknown, though it was suspected to lie at the heart of the settlement where excavation was not possible (*ibid.*). At five other settlements, a shrine was proposed due to the concentration of religious objects in a particular area, though no associated features or structures were noted. At a farmstead in Devizes, Wiltshire, for example, there was an extensive late Roman midden deposit containing an inscribed lead curse tablet, a crushed copper-alloy garment collar, suggested as priestly regalia, alongside coins and personal items (Valentin and Robinson 2002).

All of the remaining fifteen sites represent possible shrines where there may genuinely have been no man-made focal or defining features. Four of them comprise concentrations of objects found in relation to prehistoric monuments, discussed further below (p. 160), while four others relate to objects deposited in watery contexts, such as the large numbers of artefacts found in the river bed by the bridge crossing the River Tees at Piercebridge, County Durham, to the south of the military *vicus*. These include personal items, large amounts of military equipment and many religious objects such as copper-alloy and pipeclay figurines, votive plaques, miniature objects and fragments of rolled lead sheets, possibly curse tablets (Walton 2016). The final seven sites in this category are represented by concentrations of finds in otherwise 'rural' settings, such as the many coins, brooches and other objects found within a Roman field system at Leaze Farm in the Upper Thames Valley, near to the confluence of the Rivers Thames and Leach (Miles *et al.* 2007, 311–13) (see also discussion of coin hoards below, p. 191). At Frensham on the Surrey/Hampshire border, metal-detector survey and excavation near the top of a hill revealed over 400 coins associated with small pits and over 60 miniature pots, the preliminary testing of which indicated the presence



FIG. 5.22. Distribution of shrines postulated on the basis of finds only

of cannabis (Graham 2001). Further evidence for religious activity from this site comprised fragments of iron sceptre binding and parts of a copper-alloy vessel, though the only features, aside from the pits, comprised parts of a possible field system (Bird 2008, 70).

The sites discussed here and above illustrate how, ultimately, it was the place itself rather than any specific form of man-made feature that was the most important element of any sacred site. The reasons that certain sites were chosen as places of veneration may seem fairly clear to us on one level, such as an association with an extant prehistoric monument, or landscape feature like a cave or spring. In most other cases any reasoning is far harder to discern, and of course the specific cosmological rationale behind a place being deemed sacred – the site of a mythological event, the home of a local supernatural being, a place associated with ancestors, etc. – is largely recondite without contemporary records. Archaeological evidence can, however, provide some evidence for patterning in the settlement and landscape contexts of sacred sites, as well as providing a limited understanding of how at least some of these religious loci may have functioned.

#### THE WIDER CONTEXT AND USE OF SACRED SITES

Archaeological evidence for sacred space can be found across all regions and within all settlement types to some extent. Although it is clear that ritual practices were also tightly interwoven with everyday domestic life (see below, p. 182), this suggests that there was a need for specific religious space within many communities, perhaps facilitating family and wider public gatherings with the performance of rituals in order to bind people together. Some sites may also have attracted religious visitors, or pilgrims, from far afield, as has been attested elsewhere in the Greco-Roman world (Gray 1999; Elsner 2008). As has just been shown, the form that this sacred space could take varied markedly, with some evidence for spatial patterning of different types across different landscapes. There are also some notable patterns relating to sacred sites within different settlement and landscape contexts, some of which may relate to the type and scale of rituals and other activities performed there. FIGURE 5.23 provides a breakdown of the broad contexts for Romano-Celtic temples and all of the other many forms of

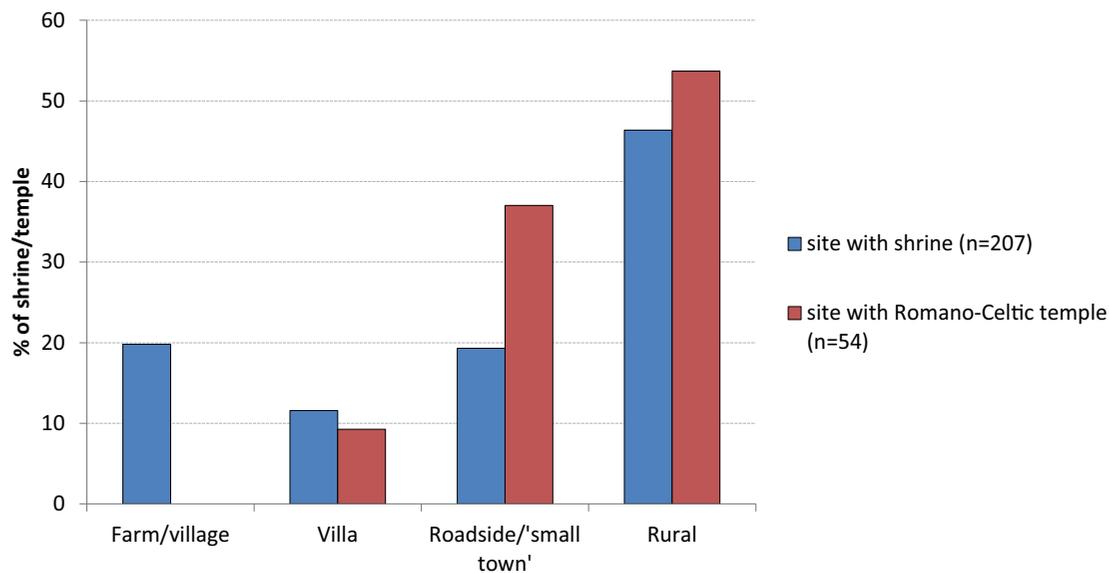


FIG. 5.23. Contexts of shrines and Romano-Celtic temples

sacred space grouped together as 'shrines', which will now be discussed in turn.

#### Sacred sites on farmsteads

Despite the fact that farmsteads are by far the most numerous type of settlement in Roman Britain, and have benefited particularly from the recent upsurge in developer-funded excavation, there are very few that have been directly associated with any sacred space. Just 33 farmsteads of Roman date have been suggested as containing defined religious space, representing less than 2 per cent of all excavated examples, and with a slight emphasis on those of the later Roman period. None of these have buildings of Romano-Celtic form; instead the evidence comprises a variety of generally small timber and masonry structures, alongside enclosures and concentrations of finds (FIG. 5.24). Some examples, such as the small masonry building at Monkston Park, Milton Keynes, have been highlighted above, while another comprised two circular structures/gullies found within an enclosure in the midst of a farmstead at Topham Farm, Sykehouse, South Yorkshire, which were suggested as superimposed shrines on the basis of the unusual nature of construction and possible structured deposits of complete pottery vessels (Roberts 2003; FIG. 5.25). Many of the shrines lay on the periphery of the farmstead, such as at Little Paxton Quarry in Cambridgeshire, where a circular foundation trench (15 m dia.) at the southern end of a rectangular enclosure lay close to Bronze Age barrows on the north-western edge of a farmstead. Its religious interpretation was suggested on the basis of its form, location, concentration of coins and the presence of three votive letters (Jones 2001; FIG. 5.25). At Broughton, Milton Keynes, a

pentagonal enclosure containing a smaller sub-rectangular enclosure/structure and a posthole structure was located to the south-west of the main settlement (Atkins *et al.* 2014). It lay in the vicinity of a late Iron Age/early Roman cemetery, and the fact that the smaller enclosure surrounded a mid-second century A.D. cremation burial indicates that the function of this 'shrine' was closely interwoven with funerary ritual, an association more readily found in villa and non-settlement 'rural' settings (see below and Ch. 6).

At Claydon Pike in Gloucestershire, a probable double-ditched enclosure-shrine of second to third century A.D. date lay at the heart of the complex farmstead, overlooking a central area of cleared space (Miles *et al.* 2007; FIG. 5.26). Among the radical changes made at this settlement during the late Roman period was a complete change in its religious focus, with the central enclosure shrine no longer being used and a new circular masonry shrine built *c.* 50 m to the east on the edge of marshy ground, with a metalled path leading around the building and into the marsh (*ibid.*). Such a momentous shift in the location and form of the sacred space may have marked changes in the rituals and ideologies of the inhabitants, going from a central, perhaps communal, enclosed space with evidence from the ceramic and glass assemblages for feasting and the burning of incense, to a more distant, private devotion characterised by the offering of coins and personal votives. This may be a direct reflection of the transformation of the nature of the settlement, arguably from an estate centre with a relatively large and diverse community focused in part on a centrally placed religious enclosure, to a much smaller community with a different focus.

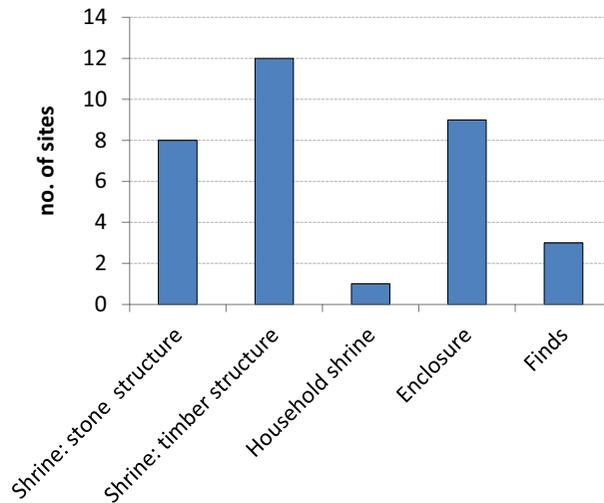
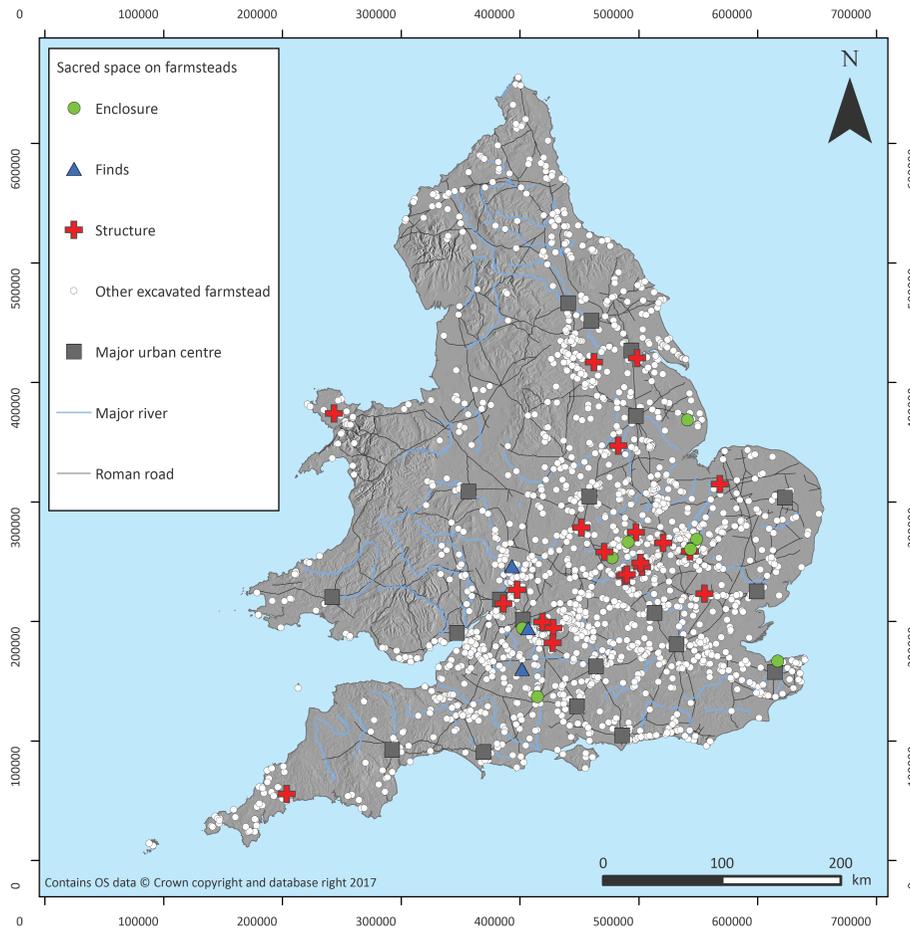


FIG. 5.24. Distribution and types of sacred site on farms

The distribution of farmsteads with suggested shrines shown in FIG. 5.24 highlights their marked concentration in the Central Belt region, which has 24 of the 33 sites. Most of these (sixteen examples) are complex farmsteads, mainly lying in the principal river valleys of the Nene, Ouse, Thames and Severn. Such farmsteads are

characterised by their physical differentiation of space (Allen and Smith 2016, 28), with particular zones being utilised for a variety of domestic, agricultural and industrial activities. It is therefore hardly surprising that this type of farmstead is more likely to have had separated and distinct provision for certain forms of religious expression.



FIG. 5.25. Site plans of farmsteads at (a) Little Paxton Quarry, Cambs (Jones 2001) and (b) Topham Farm, Sykehouse, S Yorks (Roberts 2003) showing location of shrines

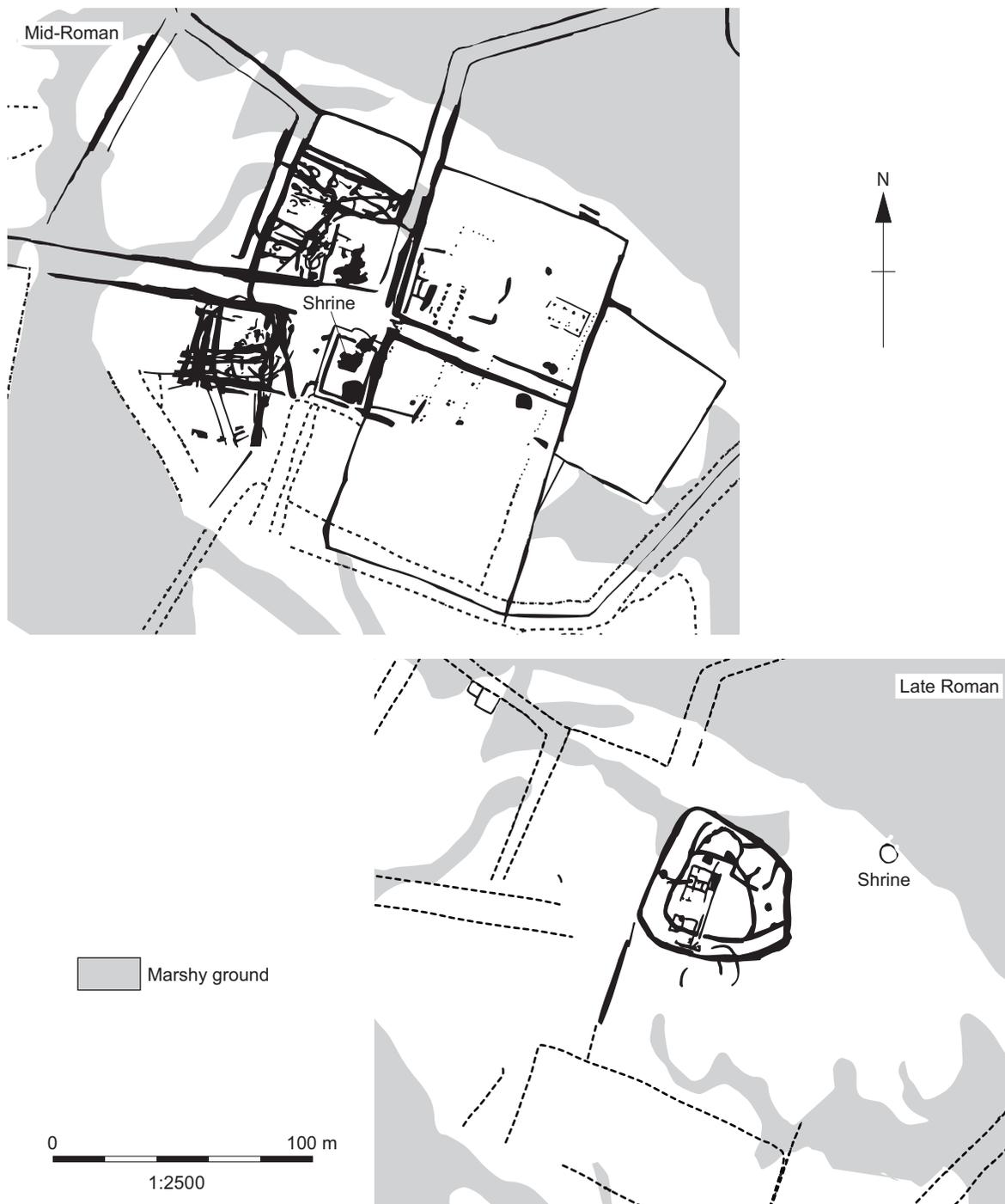


FIG. 5.26. Plan showing shifting location of religious focus within different phases of the farmstead at Claydon Pike, Glos. (Miles *et al.* 2007)

This is not to say, however, that there was necessarily any greater division between sacred and profane at these sites than in any other settlement, as indicated by the many instances of structured deposits found in all parts of the settlements, discussed below. The differences may lie partly in larger population sizes within certain complex farmsteads, with some perhaps comprising multiple family units of the same kin-group, and others, like Claydon Pike, seemingly incorporating different zones of more socially

distinct occupation, including those of higher status and general agricultural workers of the farming estate (see also discussion of villas below). In these cases, the provision of dedicated sacred space within or in close proximity to the settlement may have provided one means of maintaining some level of immediate social cohesiveness, perhaps even reinforcing social hierarchies, with certain members of the community acting in a priestly capacity to perform public ritual actions, as is likely to have been the case within larger

nucleated settlements (see below, p. 155). However, it must be remembered that the proportion of even complex farmsteads with evidence for shrines remains very small, and it is likely that most 'public' ritual would have taken place either within local nucleated settlements or else in other special places in the surrounding countryside.

### Sacred sites on villas

A total of 28 villa sites had some form of postulated sacred space directly associated with the main settlement, representing just under 10 per cent of all excavated villas. These included five with Romano-Celtic temples, which in three cases, Lullingstone and Keston in Kent and Bancroft in Milton Keynes, were believed to have functioned as funerary monuments, essentially being used as mausolea. The remaining two comprised a substantial but ill-understood temple at Chedworth, on a hill terrace overlooking the River Coln, c. 800 m from the large multi-courtyard villa (Baddeley 1930), and a possible early/mid-Roman Romano-Celtic variant within the villa complex at Thurnham in Kent (Booth and Lawrence 2006), although a religious interpretation of the latter is now thought unlikely (Booth 2011b, 283–6). A further Romano-Celtic temple lay within the villa complex at Cosgrove, Northants, though by the time of its construction in the late second century A.D. (succeeding an earlier timber shrine), the main villa building appears to have gone out of use, with a more simple house remaining the only domestic structure (Quinnell 1991).

The remaining sacred sites on villas comprise other freestanding masonry structures, alongside a few internal rooms/features grouped under the term 'household shrines', a fenced 'ritual enclosure' at Thruxton, Hants, discussed above (p. 142), and two sites, Gestingthorpe in Essex (Draper 1985) and Salford Priors in Warwickshire (Palmer 2000), where shrines were suggested on the basis of the quantity, type and distribution of finds (FIG. 5.27). Two of the household shrines comprised sunken rooms within the main villa building, including the well-known cult room at Lullingstone in Kent (FIG. 5.28), which had a small well or cistern in the middle of the floor and wall paintings including three water nymphs in a niche in the wall (Meates 1979). The cellar in the villa at Wortley in Gloucestershire had painted plaster walls and an underfloor drain, suggested as being connected with a possible lead tank in the middle of the room (Wilson *et al.* 2014). Perring (1989) has argued that a series of common characteristics in cellar location and design within other Roman-British buildings (mostly villas) is indicative of a general

association with cult practice, though more definitive evidence is usually lacking. The importance of water at both Lullingstone and Wortley is found repeated in many other freestanding villa shrines, including possible nymphaea (water shrines) suggested at Chedworth in Gloucestershire, Box and Groundwell Ridge in Wiltshire, Darenth in Kent, Whatley Combe in Somerset and Swainshill in Herefordshire, to which can probably be added a hexagonal building enclosing a well-shaft with possible structured deposits close to the main villa building at Truckle Hill, North Wrexall, Wiltshire (Andrews 2009a).

Most of the external, freestanding villa shrines, including the possible nymphaea, were relatively modest structures, sometimes interpreted on no stronger a basis than unusual morphology, such as the octagonal building near the villa at Bancroft, Milton Keynes (Williams and Zeepvat 1994; FIG. 5.28), and the apsed building at Preston Court Farm, Beddingham, West Sussex (Rudling 1998). Larger and more unusual buildings do occasionally occur, however, such as the substantial Y-shaped building near to the modest corridor villa south of the Roman town of Caistor-by-Norwich, which was suggested as either a temple or summer triclinium (Bowden 2011). A possible classical-style temple has also been suggested at Castor in Cambridgeshire, on the site of a monumental Roman building complex near the town of Durobrivae, which may have had an administrative function (Upex 2011). For the most part, however, dedicated sacred space within villa complexes appears either to have been for specialised funerary purposes (temple/mausolea) or else to have been on a very modest scale, some probably used solely by the villa owners and family for the worship of household deities, and others by the immediate estate workers.

The veneration of household gods had a very strong tradition within Mediterranean Roman culture, with two particular groups of deities, the Lares and Penates, featuring in many literary accounts (e.g. *Aulularia* of Plautus, 1–36), although their nature remains quite ill understood (Rives 2007, 118). The hearth was the typical focus for domestic rituals, though specialised shrines called *lararia* also existed, with many varied examples being found within Roman houses in Italy (*ibid.*, 119). Such household shrines are far rarer in Gaul (Fauduet 2014, 79) and in Britain are only really visible in villas such as Lullingstone and Wortley just mentioned, alongside another suggested example comprising an arrangement of ceramic tiles set into a corner wall in a modest villa/farmstead building at Alfred's Castle in Oxfordshire (Gosden and Lock 2013), and further possible examples in urban houses (cf. Boon

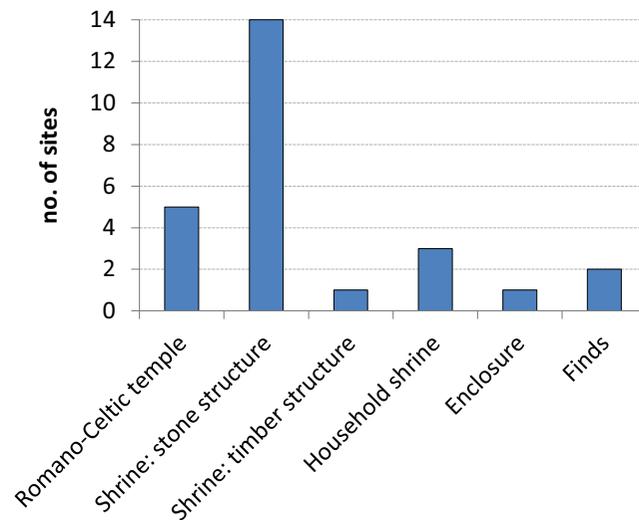
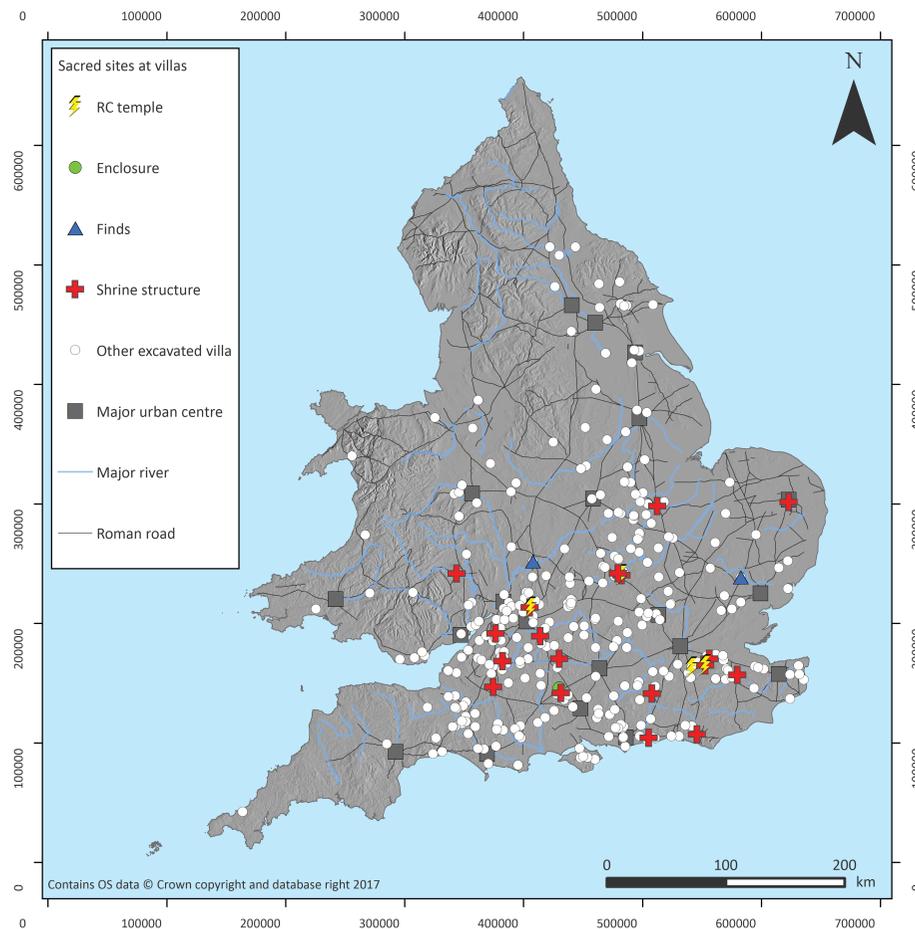


FIG. 5.27. Distribution and types of sacred site on villas

1983; Perring 2002, 197). How far any of the other small shrine structures on villas may have been used for the worship of household deities remains uncertain; some may have been erected for the *genius* or divine alter-ego of the head of the household, which was not uncommon in central parts of the empire, and used to help reinforce

social hierarchy within the household (Rives 2007, 119). There may, of course, have been a variety of sacred spaces within villa complexes, each serving a different function and/or related to different social groups, as was possibly the case at Lullingstone, where a Romano-Celtic temple/mausoleum, circular shrine and internal cult room

have all been identified in relatively close proximity (FIG. 5.28). The temple may have originally served a purely religious function, before later being used as a mausoleum for two adult individuals (Meates 1979). During the late Roman phase of the villa at Bancroft, there were two possible shrines, an octagonal building lying close to the main villa, which was devoid of diagnostic finds, and a

circular building lying *c.* 350 m to the west on a hill overlooking the complex (near to an earlier temple-mausoleum), containing structured deposits of coins, iron spear tips/heads and a complete articulated pig (FIG. 5.28). Assuming the octagonal building was used in a religious capacity, the shrines were clearly being used for variable ritual strategies, perhaps relating to differences in

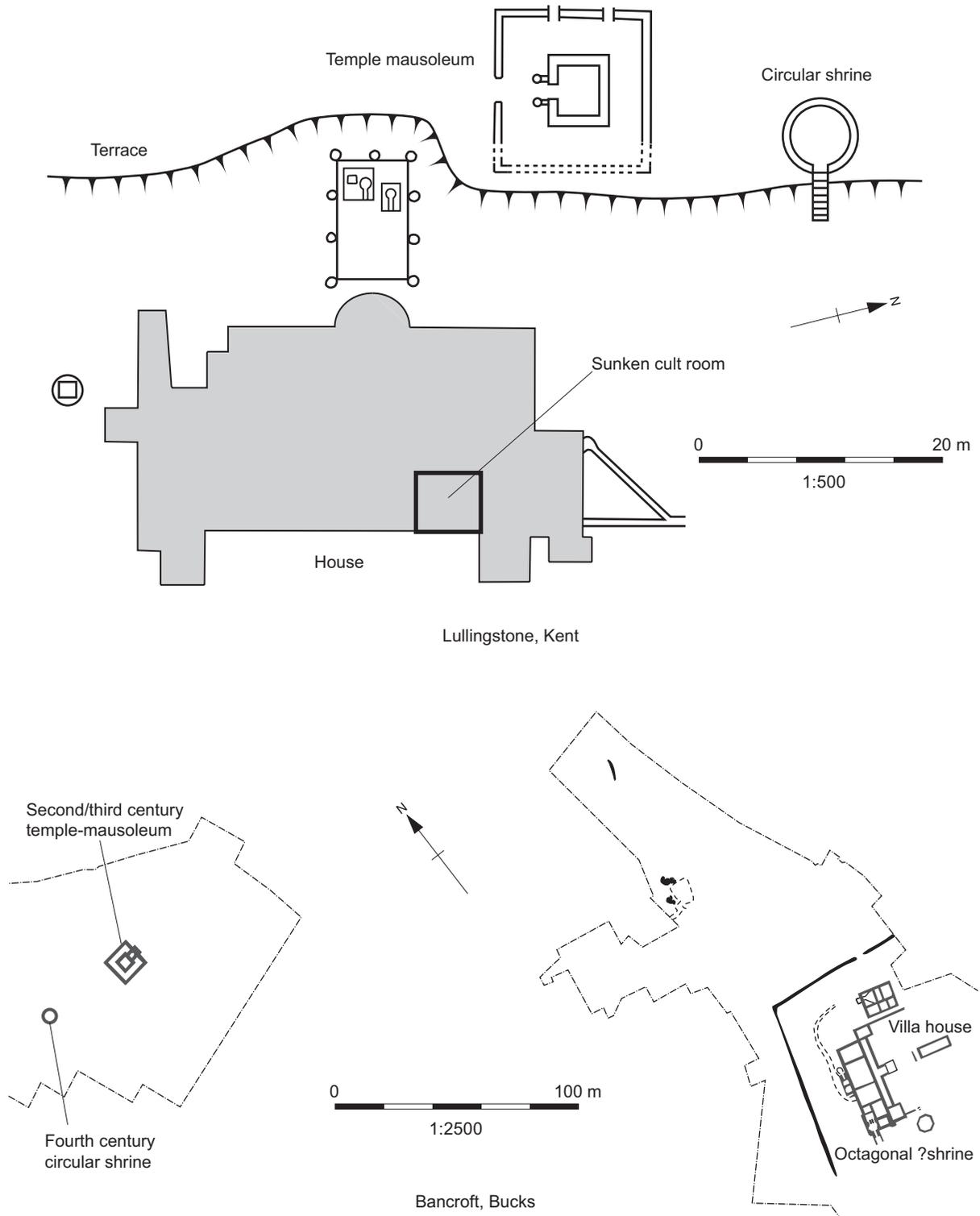


FIG. 5.28. Site plans of villa complexes at Lullingstone, Kent (Meates 1979), and Bancroft, Milton Keynes (Williams and Zeevat 1994) showing location of defined sacred space

the deities worshipped, and/or to the social groups participating in the rituals. On a wider geographic scale it is likely that many of the apparently isolated rural shrines and temples in parts of central and southern Britain, discussed below, lay on villa estates, and may represent a further element in the complex organisation of religious expression that seems apparent in the Romano-British countryside.

### Sacred sites in nucleated settlements

Nucleated settlements with larger populations have, unsurprisingly, much more evidence for sacred space than smaller farms and villas. These 58 sites comprise defended small towns (8), roadside settlements (37), military *vici* (4) and villages (9), while an additional five sites have been included in this contextual category as 'semi-urban' on the basis that they lie less than 1 km from a town and are clearly associated. Sacred sites lying within or immediately outside of major towns (e.g. London, Colchester, Verulamium, Canterbury, Caerwent etc.) have not been included, nor have temples in small towns that are known only from aerial photographs, such as the

Romano-Celtic temples from Alchester in Oxfordshire. A number of these sites are, however, referred to for comparative purposes.

The distribution of nucleated settlements with sacred sites is shown in FIG. 5.29, along with an account of their variable type. There is a much stronger association between Romano-Celtic temples and nucleated centres than with other settlement types, although this connection appears largely concentrated in the east of England. Here, such temples have been found in association with nucleated settlements at Crownthorpe and Scole in Norfolk, Stonea Grange and Godmanchester in Cambridgeshire, Irchester in Northamptonshire and Chelmsford in Essex, while also being found in 'semi-urban' locations outside of Great Chesterford, Verulamium (Folly Lane), Colchester (Sheepen) and Caistor-by-Norwich (FIG. 5.30). These latter sites were all located within substantial precincts that may well have been designed to congregate large numbers of people from the urban centres, perhaps in seasonal festivals, with processions leading from the towns (cf. Esmonde Cleary 2005; see also Perring 2011 for discussion of ritual processions within Roman London). The two recently published Romano-Celtic temples

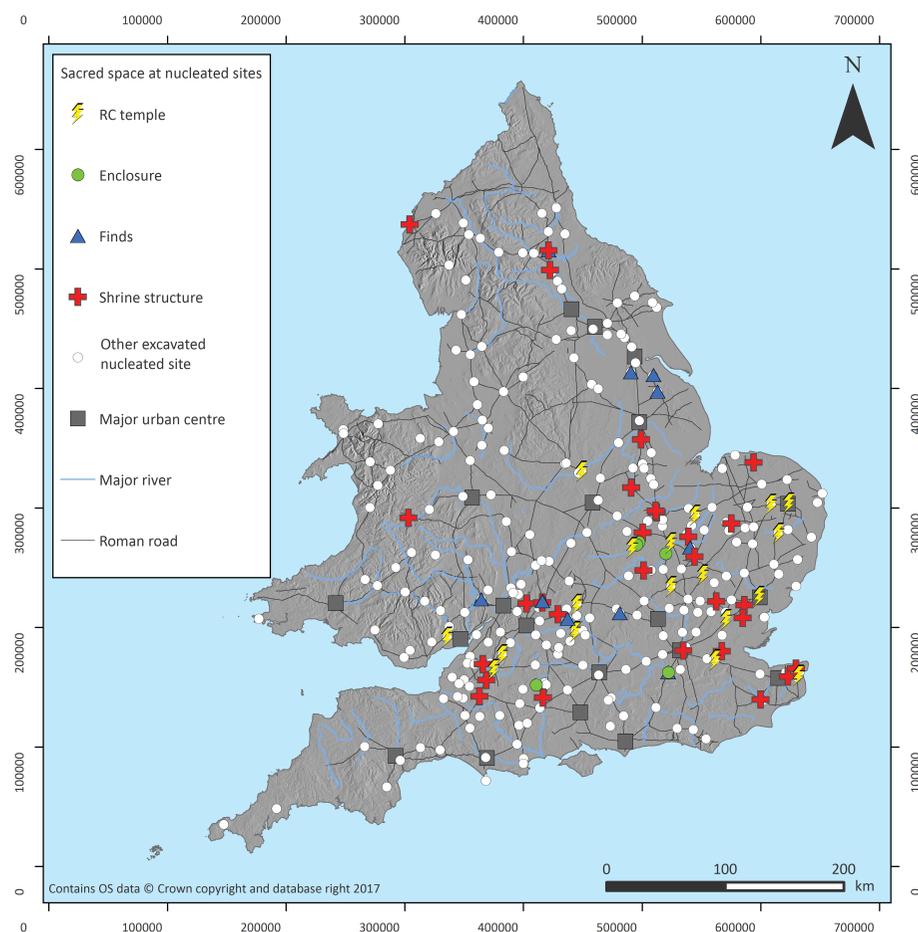


FIG. 5.29. Distribution and types of sacred site on nucleated settlements

from Tabard Square, Southwark, on the periphery of a suburb of Roman London, were also set within a large precinct, and were argued to have been designed by the town's authorities 'to satisfy the religious needs of the population of *Londinium*' (Killock *et al.* 2015, 254; FIG. 5.30). Such large, religious public cult complexes would have been relatively costly to build and maintain, and would undoubtedly have relied upon civic patronage, perhaps with local magistrates acting as priests (Rives 2000, 253; see below, p. 178).

The Romano-Celtic temple was clearly deemed a suitable form of religious architecture for the performance of public ritual in these cases, and indeed, in much of the east of England their use is largely confined to larger settlements and urban centres. Further west the situation was more mixed, with the majority of such temples being found in rural contexts. Examples within nucleated settlements have been revealed by aerial photographs within the walled town at Alchester (M. Foster 1989, 147) and the roadside settlement

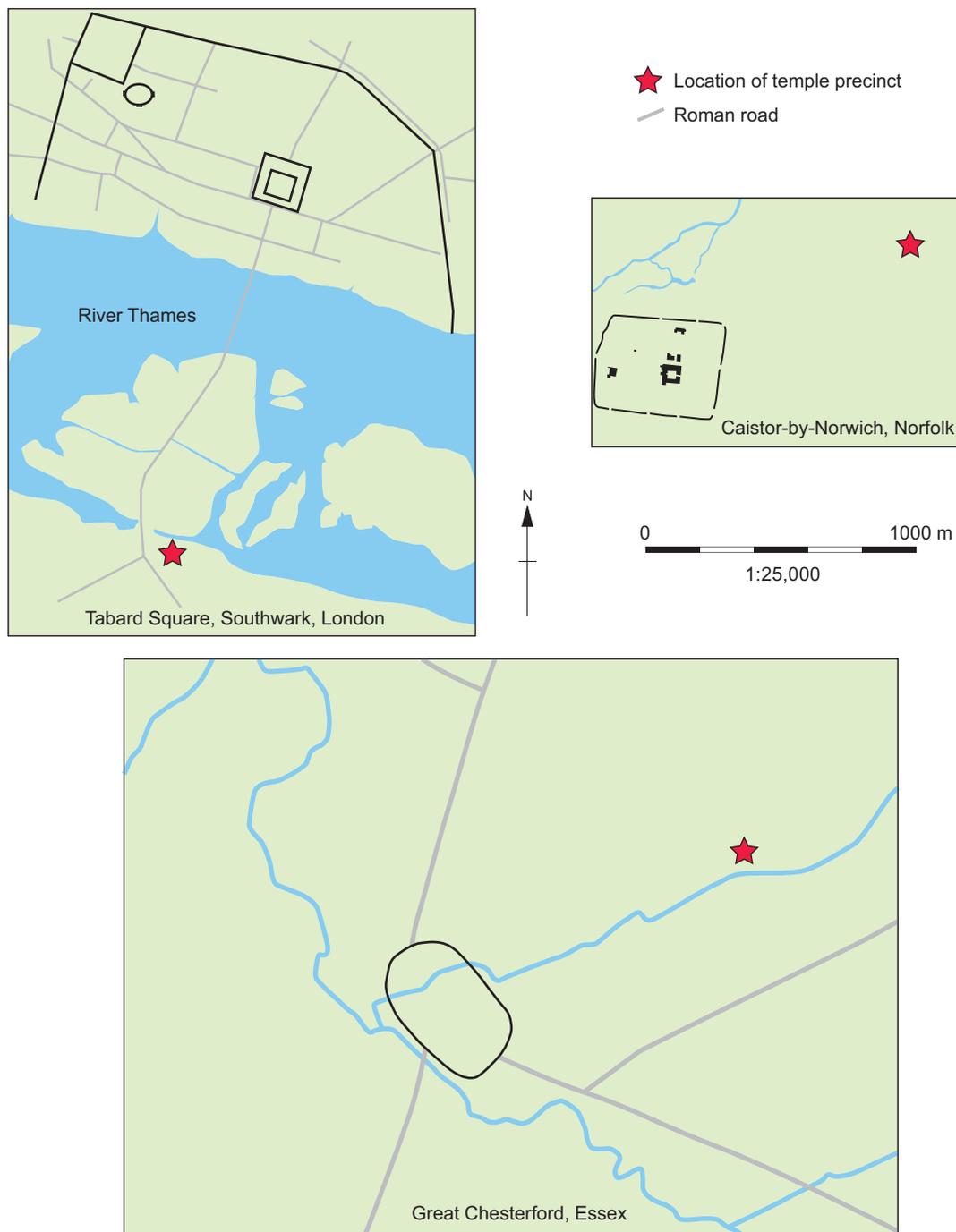


FIG. 5.30. Locations of 'semi-urban' temple precincts at Tabard Square, Southwark, London (Killock *et al.* 2015), Caistor, Norfolk (Gurney 1986a), and Great Chesterford, Essex (Medlycott 2011)

at Sansom's Platt, both in Oxfordshire (Winton 2001, 306). In addition, there is a possible Romano-Celtic temple revealed by geophysical survey in a roadside settlement at Great Bulmore near Caerleon, Newport, in South Wales (Yates 2000), and nearby is the well-known excavated example in the centre of the *civitas* capital at Caerwent (Ashby *et al.* 1910). The remaining three nucleated settlements with recognised Romano-Celtic temples within the west of Britain – Marcham/Frilford, Bath and Nettleton Scrubb – are perhaps best described as large rural religious complexes rather than 'typical' nucleated roadside settlements. As such, these sites will be discussed further below, along with the religious complex/roadside settlement at Springhead in Kent (p. 163).

While Romano-Celtic temples are more readily associated with nucleated settlements than with farms and villas, especially in the east of England, they are still outnumbered by other types of sacred space in these contexts. Most of these comprised different forms of masonry or timber buildings, some contained within enclosures or at least set within an area of cleared space. On occasion they could be quite monumental in scale, such as the shrine complex at Elms Farm in Essex noted above (p. 140), and a large late Roman basilican temple almost 20 m by 14 m in size, which replaced an earlier circular shrine within an ill-defined roadside settlement/religious complex at

Thistleton in Rutland (Smith 2001, 257). More often, however, the shrines identified within nucleated settlements were the usual array of smaller rectangular, circular and polygonal structures, along with the occasional enclosure, such as those at Higham Ferrers and Stanwick in the Nene Valley discussed above (p. 143). The variety in scale was considerable and some are likely to have been little more than wayside shrines, such as the rectangular arrangement of chalk footings, just *c.* 3 x 4 m in size, with coin deposits by the junction of two roads in the roadside settlement at Springhead in Kent (Andrews *et al.* 2011, 89; FIG. 5.31).

The shrines interpreted within the nine village settlements were all either fairly small timber structures or else enclosures or finds concentrations, and would seem more akin to the range of sacred sites found on farmsteads. A small rectangular timber building adjacent to a trackway on the western fringes of the settlement at Monkton in Thanet, Kent, has been interpreted as a roadside shrine (Bennett *et al.* 2008), while in the Roman village at Longstanton site XIX in Cambridgeshire, sacred space was only suggested on the basis of a concentration of 'votive' material in one evaluation trench, possibly associated with inhumation burials from the same trench (Evans *et al.* 2006). The fairly modest architectural nature of these village shrines befits the status of their parent sites as essentially

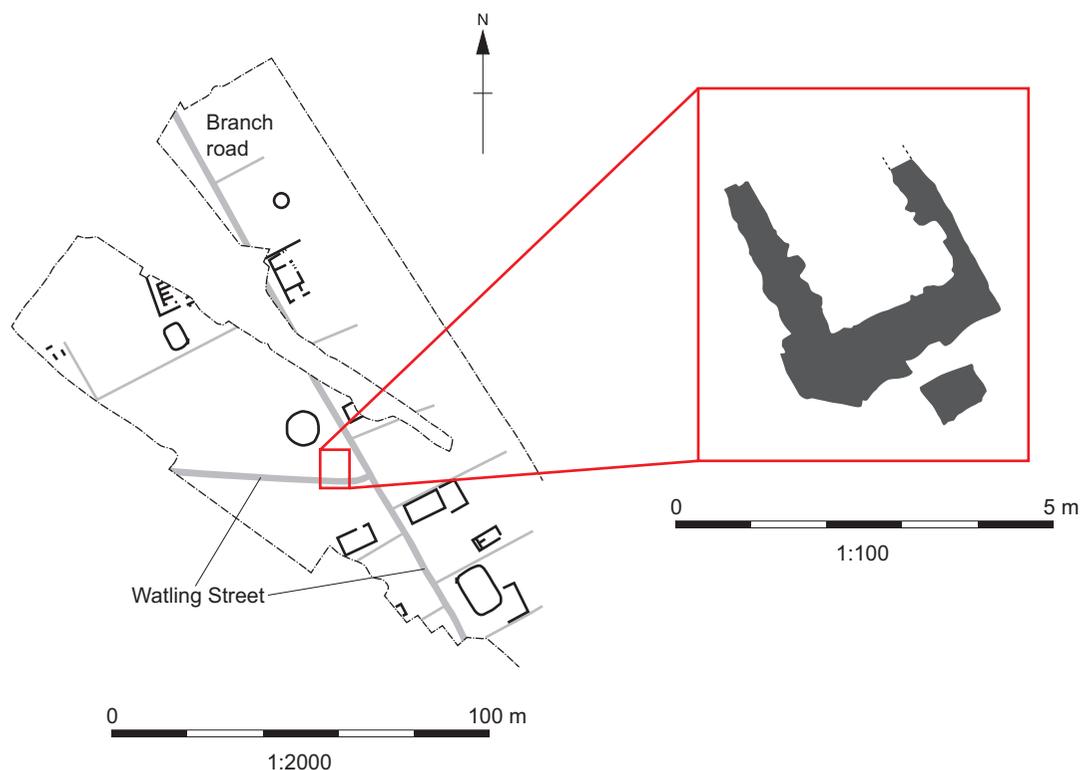


FIG. 5.31. Plan of roadside shrine within settlement at Springhead, Kent (Andrews *et al.* 2011)

large, aggregated farmsteads, though the fact that they were interpreted in over 15 per cent of excavated examples suggests that they may have been important parts of these larger communities.

Just four of the military *vici* included in this study (i.e. excluding those from the Hadrian's Wall/Stanegate area) contained evidence for religious structures, including a square building enclosed by a palisade at Caersws in Powys (N.W. Jones 1996), and the small rectangular classical temple and adjacent circular shrine within the military *vicus* at Maryport in Cumbria, noted above (p. 139). However, additional *vici* in the area of Hadrian's Wall and the Stanegate include sacred sites, such as at Vindolanda, which contained the northernmost example of a Romano-Celtic temple, probably dating to the early second century A.D. (Birley 2009). Elsewhere there is the remarkable situation of three sacred sites outside of the fort at Carrawburgh – a mithraeum, a nymphaeum and a shrine dedicated to a local goddess Coventina, which comprised a stone-lined well within a precinct wall, associated with thousands of coins and other finds (Allason-Jones and McKay 1985). It is possible that these shrines were components of a larger religious site sited in the valley leading out of Coventina's Well, though further landscape study is needed to support such an idea. Whether or not it was only soldiers who frequented these shrines is not easy to tell, but work on the finds from a sanctuary within the *colonia* at Apulum in Dacia indicated quite firmly that here at least, soldiers and civilians were using the cult place contemporaneously over long periods (Haynes 2014).

The evidence overall indicates that nucleated sites were more likely to have had some provision for sacred space than any other form of settlement, as is also suggested by the type and quantity of religious objects, discussed below (p. 168). Some of these shrines/temples could be quite substantial, and undoubtedly provided for the formal religious requirements of the inhabitants and probably people from other settlements in the vicinity. In places like the east of England, where nucleated settlements appear particularly common and few farmsteads would have lain more than a day's journey away (Smith 2016c, 222), they may have catered for the wider population. Elsewhere, the distance to such centres would often have been too far, and instead a network of large and small rural sanctuaries is likely to have fulfilled these religious needs.

#### **Sacred sites in rural 'non-settlement' contexts**

Around half of all excavated sites with evidence for sacred space do not seem to be associated with any specific settlement, instead being found in general 'rural' environments. These, however,

cover an extremely broad range of sacred sites, from what would appear to have been major rural sanctuaries with many associated buildings, to minor and perhaps infrequently visited places in the landscape, such as some of the cave sites discussed above, whose remoteness and sense of danger may be relevant and important reasons why such loci were chosen. Questions then arise as to why so many sacred places were located away from settlement contexts, why specific sites were 'chosen' as being worthy of devotion, and what connections did they have with surrounding landscape features, other sacred sites and the settlements where most people lived?

All of these questions are very hard to address, given the lack of historical sources and vagaries of the archaeological evidence. The distribution and form of these rural sites is shown in FIG. 5.32, well spread across much of England and Wales, though with caves/rock shelters being the only type known in the far north and north-west of England, with the exception of circular and rectangular masonry shrines at Scargill Moor in County Durham, which were clearly related to the fort at Bowes, 3 km to the north (Richmond and Wright 1948). Elsewhere a slight concentration of ritual enclosures is seen in parts of East Anglia, continuing the trend seen in the late Iron Age (see above p. 128), while rural Romano-Celtic temples are largely confined to central southern England. The proportion of sacred sites located in settlement and rural 'non-settlement' contexts in the South, East and Central Belt regions is shown in FIG. 5.33, and clearly demonstrates the greater dominance of rural sites in the South. This is largely because of the increased number of farmsteads in the Central Belt with evidence for shrines, as noted above, while there is also a higher percentage of postulated sacred space located in nucleated sites in the East and Central Belt (c. 34 per cent) than is the case in the South (c. 22 per cent). Nevertheless, the higher number of rural sacred sites in the South may also reflect the higher numbers of shrines in this region during the late Iron Age and the fact that many of these places seem to have retained some level of sanctity into the Roman period, even though no associated settlement was ever established. One example located on a distinctive hilltop at Farley Heath in Surrey appears, on the basis of the quantity and type of finds, to have been a late Iron Age ritual site, which then developed into a Romano-Celtic temple within an unusual polygonal enclosure during the Roman period (Poulton and Bird 2007). While there is evidence for some Roman-period activity outside the temenos, it does seem that the site remained an essentially rural sanctuary right up until the end of the Roman period or even beyond (*ibid.*).

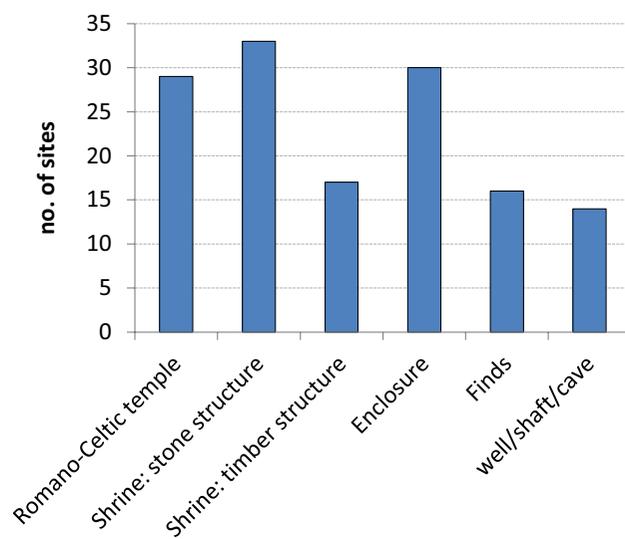
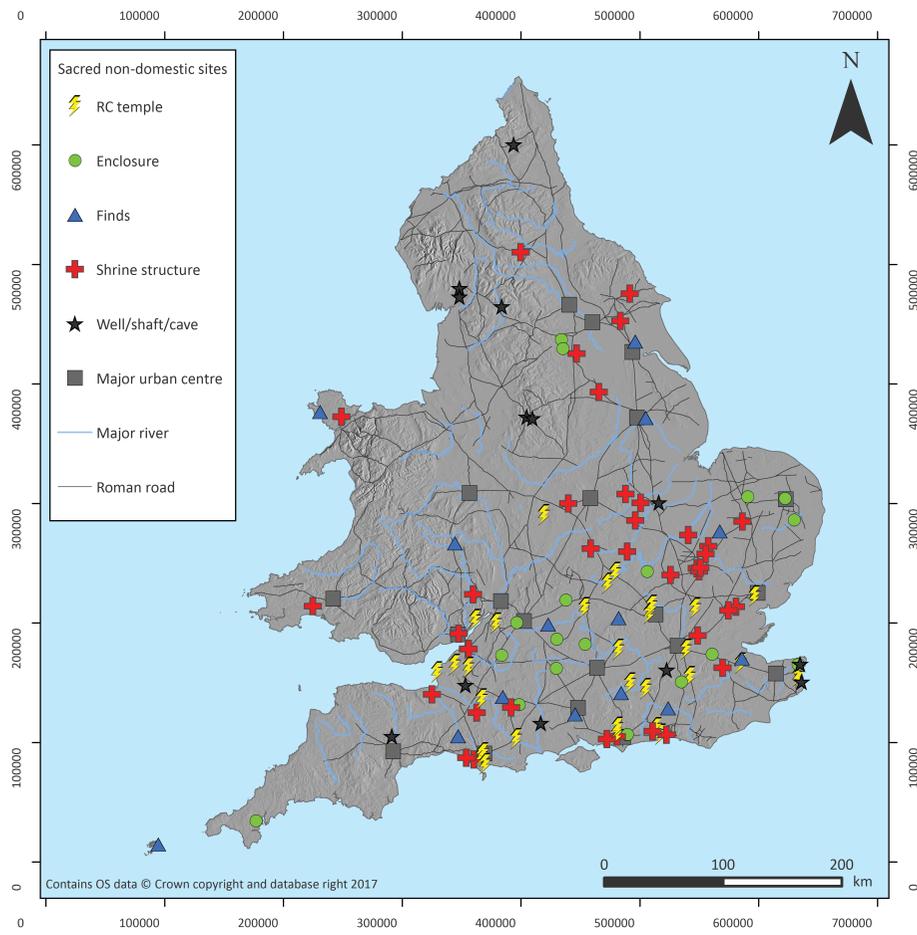


FIG. 5.32. Distribution and types of sacred site on rural 'non-settlement' sites

The location of many of these rural sacred sites – and indeed those in other contexts – may have been governed in a large part by the existence and manipulation of collective memories within communities regarding specific places in the landscape. In a recent assessment of the role and processes of memory in Roman Britain, Kamash (2016) has highlighted how communities may have created ‘legendary topographies’ around extant monuments such as Neolithic and Bronze Age barrows, with sacred sites in particular being established in relation to such features in order to direct collective memories towards a much earlier, more idealised, past. The association between Roman-period sacred space and prehistoric monuments is now well established, both in Britain (Williams 1998; Smith 2001, 150; Hutton 2011), and in other parts of the empire (García Sanjuán *et al.* 2008). Of the 35 examples of such

association explicitly noted in this project, 80 per cent were located in non-settlement rural contexts, with features ranging from Bronze Age cairns to Neolithic henge monuments. Sometimes this involved the construction of substantial religious buildings, such as the Romano-Celtic temples close to prehistoric barrows at Uley in Gloucestershire (Woodward and Leach 1993) and Brean Down in Somerset (Apsimon 1965). In other cases the evidence for religious appropriation of earlier monuments is far slighter, such as the small rectangular building found next to a large Bronze Age circular ditch surrounding a natural chalk outcrop at Red Lodge, Suffolk; the building contained pits with structured deposits of pig skulls facing east with coins placed on their forehead, while further Roman objects were recovered from the ditch fill (*Current Arch.* 2017). Sometimes, indications of possible religious use

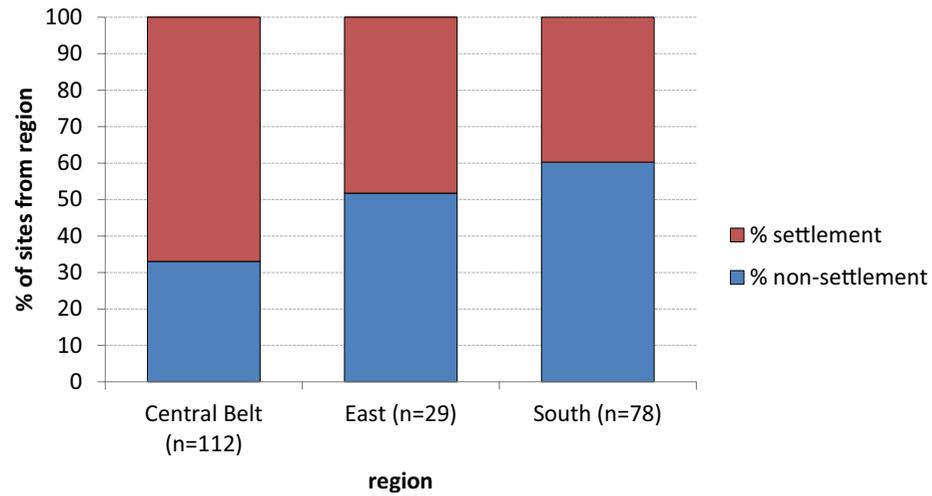


FIG. 5.33. Percentage of sacred sites located in settlement and rural ‘non-settlement’ contexts in the Central Belt, East and South regions

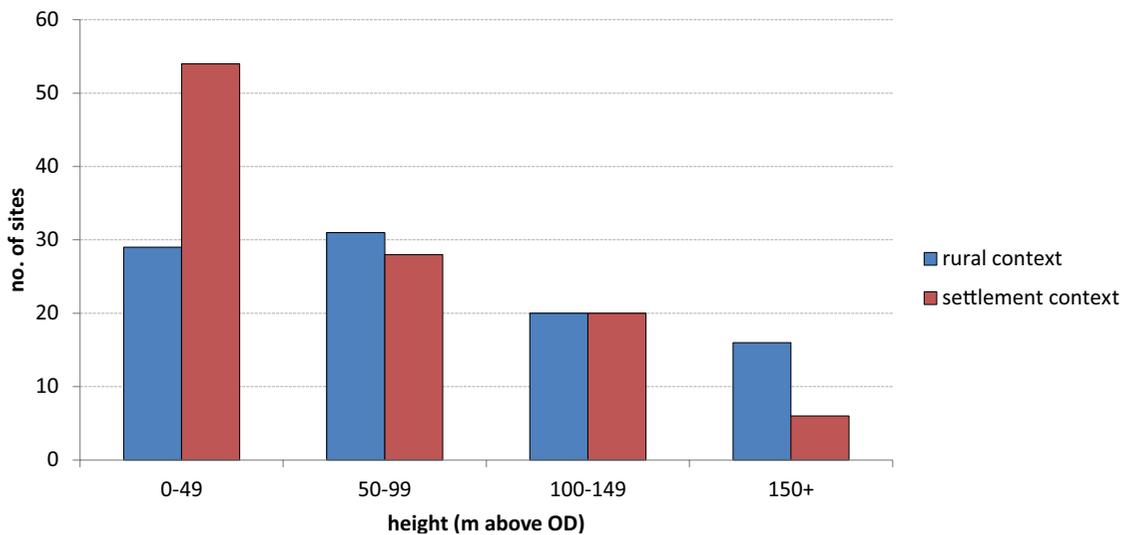


FIG. 5.34. Spot height of all sacred sites in Central Belt and South regions showing difference between those in rural and settlement contexts

are limited to objects alone, such as the Roman artefacts, including a copper-alloy votive leaf, placed in and around a Neolithic oval barrow on a prominent chalk ridge on the Chiltern escarpment at Whiteleaf Hill, Buckinghamshire (Hey *et al.* 2007). As Hutton has reiterated, it remains difficult in these instances to gain any measure of how such sites were used, in particular ‘whether it was formal or informal, or private, involved individuals, families or larger groups, or was dedicated to specific deities, to spirits specific to the location concerned, or to dead humans, or to any mix of these’ (Hutton 2011, 14).

The creation of ‘legendary topographies’ need not, of course, be limited to observable prehistoric monuments. Specific natural landscape features may well have been imbued with special religious significance, perhaps as a way of anchoring communities to their local environment. Specific context details were not systematically collected for all rural sacred sites in this study, though at least 40 were described as being situated on a hill top or upper slope, with an emphasis on visibility. Spot height analysis for the South and Central Belt regions, where most excavated examples lie, indicates that overall they have a greater preference for higher ground than sacred space located within settlements, or indeed than settlements in general (FIG. 5.34; see spot height analysis in Smith *et al.* 2016, 114, 175). A particularly notable group of possible religious enclosures lie in prominent positions on the chalk downs of central southern England, including Lowbury Hill (Atkinson 1916; Fulford and Rippon 1994; see FIG. 5.20 above) and Uffington (Miles *et al.* 2003) along the line of the Ridgeway, and Great Bedwyn/Shalbourne on the western slope of Carvers Hill (Brindle *et al.* 2013). The preference for late Iron Age and Roman rural sacred sites to be situated on elevated positions in the landscape has been commented on before (Smith 2001, 150; Bird 2004a, 83; Ghey 2005, 112; Garland 2013, 193), with certain landscapes having a number of inter-visible sacred loci. These may have acted as fixed spiritual points in the landscape, creating sacred or pilgrimage pathways, and maintaining linkages between communities.

Most rural sacred sites are likely to have had strong associations with settlements in their localities. Of the 132 ‘rural’ sacred sites, almost 85 per cent lay within 5 km of an excavated settlement (farmstead, villa or nucleated site), suggesting a high level of connectivity. As just outlined, rural Romano-Celtic temples were largely restricted to parts of central southern Britain, and 23 of the 26 examples (88 per cent) lay within 5 km of a contemporary settlement, 15 lying in the near vicinity of a villa. Most of these temples developed

in the mid- to late Roman period at around the same time as the majority of villas in this area (see Smith *et al.* 2016, 92, 158) and their similar chronology, close geographic proximity and in many cases similar construction methods suggest that many of them were integral parts of wider villa estates. A Romano-Celtic temple at Wood End Lane, Herts, was built on a plateau c. 5 km west of Verulamium and c. 3.5 km from two villas lying on either side, at Gorhambury and Gadebridge (Neal 1984; FIG. 5.35). It was interpreted as a mausoleum on the basis of a sunken chamber in the cella, but the monumental nature of the complex, set around a walled temenos of 0.8 ha, with ancillary buildings including possible subsidiary shrines and a bathhouse, suggests a more important religious site, despite the relative lack of finds. The meagre dating evidence suggested activity in the second and third centuries A.D., contemporary with major architectural developments in the nearby villas, and it is not hard to suppose that it lay within the estate of one of the villas, or perhaps upon their common boundary, and was used periodically for festivals by the inhabitants of the estates, including those in the three contemporary excavated farmsteads that lay within 2 km of the site.

Located just 7 km north of Wood End Lane was another religious complex at Friars Wash, with two conjoined Romano-Celtic temples and two possible subsidiary shrines set within a ditched temenos enclosure (Birbeck 2009). Unlike Wood End Lane it is located on lower ground, 60 m east of the River Ver and c. 400 m from the major Roman road of Watling Street, at approximately the point where it changes direction (FIG. 5.35). The complex probably owed its architectural elaboration, if not its actual existence, to the regular traffic along Watling Street, and may have catered largely for a more transient group of supplicants. The overall context of the site, together with the quantity of coins recovered from the small area excavated, suggests a different type of cult place from Wood End Lane; Burleigh (2015, 110) has argued that it marked the boundary between the territories of *Durocobrivae* (Dunstable) and Verulamium.

Most excavated examples of rural religious sites did not comprise Romano-Celtic temples, but a variety of other masonry and timber structures, along with enclosures, finds concentrations, wells, shafts and caves (see FIG. 5.32). At least sixteen of these had wider associations with funerary ritual, such as the late Roman shrine/mausoleum on the highest part of the hill at Cannington in Somerset, which was represented by a circular rock-cut trench with traces of a red sandstone revetment, and probably formed the focus of a major late/

post-Roman cemetery (Rahtz *et al.* 2000). At most other sites this association was on a smaller scale, as at Gallows Hill, Swaffham Prior in Cambridgeshire, where an early Roman ritual site on a chalk hill near the Fen edge comprised enclosures and structures, including a single small masonry shrine/mausoleum containing an adult burial, belonging to the final phase of use (Malim 2006).

The location of the Gallows Hill site overlooking the Fen edge can be viewed as part of the well-noted wider religious fascination with water in Roman Britain (Rogers 2007; 2013; Kamash 2008), with shrines often lying close to springs, water courses, or marshy areas. Another example

nearby is the octagonal masonry-founded shrine within a rectangular enclosure at Haddenham, Cambridgeshire, which lay near the junction of the river Great Ouse and the peat Fens (Evans and Hodder 2006). Further afield, the probable enclosure shrine at Hailey Wood Camp, Sapperton in Gloucestershire, lies close to a spring that may have been viewed as the source of the River Thames (Moore 2001), while a shrine at Wycomb in Gloucestershire lies close to the source of the River Coln, a tributary of the Thames (Timby 1998). At Bawtry, South Yorkshire, archaeological monitoring of a wetland area produced late Roman coins, pottery and a number of possible lead curse tablets, along with *in situ* column bases, positioned

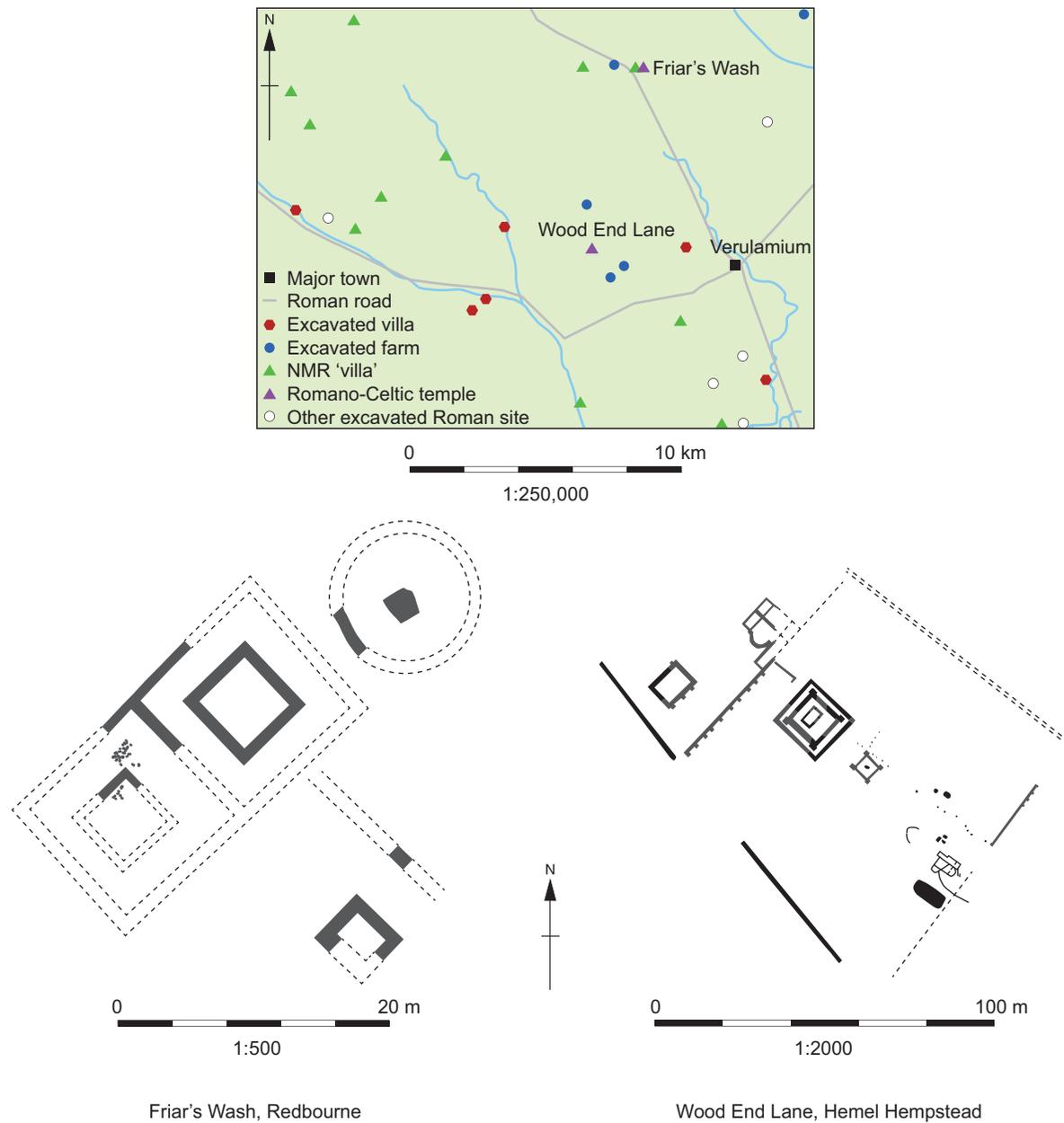


FIG. 5.35. Landscape context around rural Romano-Celtic temples near Verulamium and plans of temple complexes at Friars Wash (Birbeck 2009) and Wood End Lane (Neal 1984)

near to where a Roman road crossed the River Idle (Berg and Major 2006). This was probably a riverside shrine, located *c.* 5.5 km south-east of the known villa at Stancil.

There are a number of exceptional rural religious complexes in central and southern Britain that nearly all have some association with water, and often with roles connected with healing. The scale and context of some of these sites has led to debates regarding whether they should be viewed as nucleated settlements with a major religious focus, or else as large rural religious complexes with associated domestic, commercial, social and

industrial infrastructure that catered for the needs of the cult and its attendants. Ultimately this may be a meaningless distinction, but, as outlined above (p. 157), for the purposes of this study such sites are discussed in this section as 'rural' religious complexes.

One of the most extensive of the known rural religious complexes is at Springhead in Kent, lying at the head of the Ebbsfleet Valley around the source of the river (Andrews *et al.* 2011; FIG. 5.36). The late Iron Age ritual activity at this site has already been discussed (p. 127), and post-conquest it appears that religious activity continued

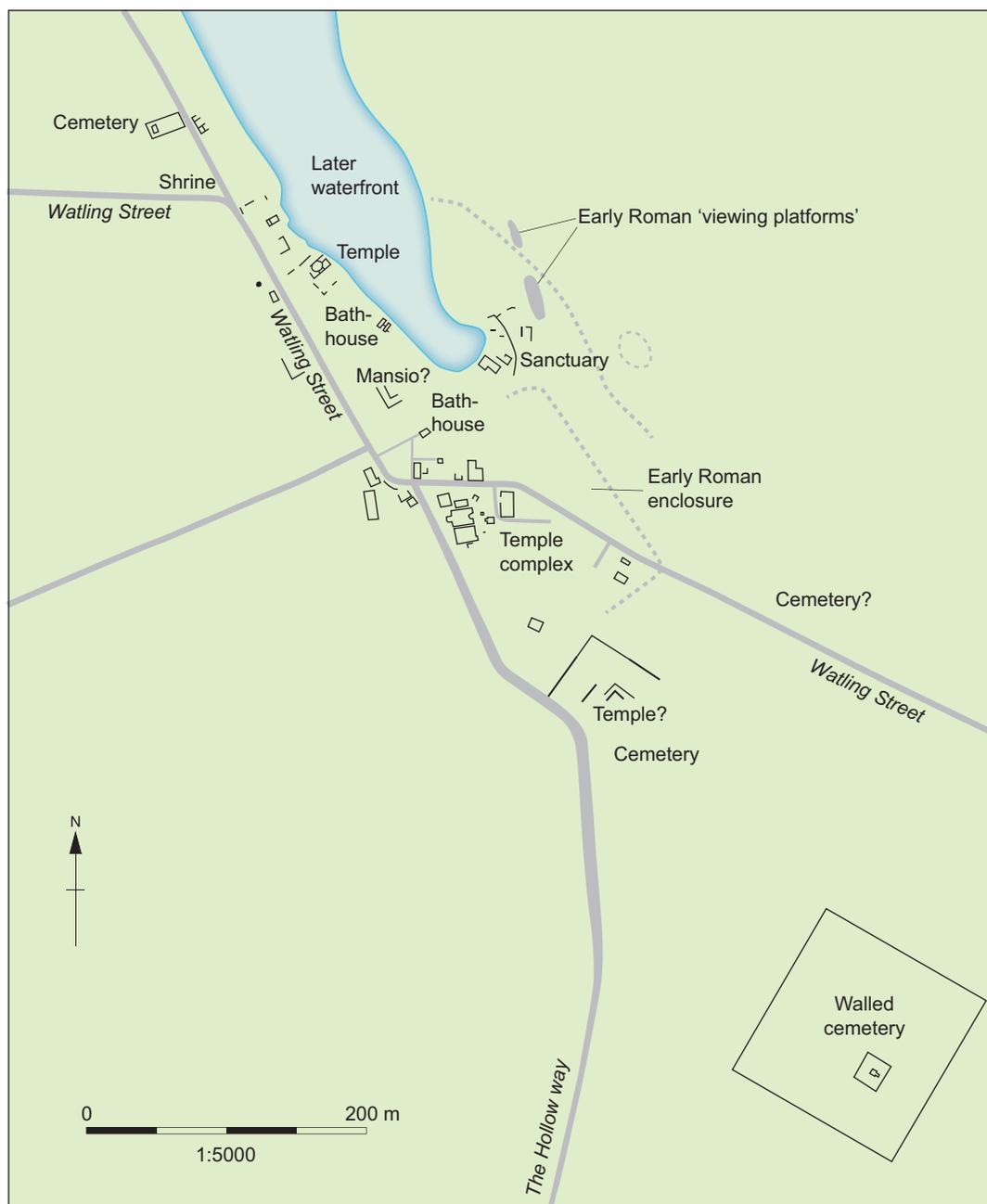


FIG. 5.36. Roman roadside settlement/religious complex at Springhead in Kent (after Andrews *et al.* 2011, fig. 4.2). Reproduced with permission HS1, © HS1

around the springs, while settlement soon developed further west along Watling Street, which was probably in place by A.D. 50. During the later first and particularly the second century there is clear evidence for a monumentalisation of religious expression, with a complex of five temples – three of Romano-Celtic form – built within the heart of the site at the point where Watling Street changed its course. In addition, a ‘sanctuary’ was created around the springs, and at least two other large temples were built in the near vicinity (*ibid.*, 209). Of the many objects associated with the religious complex were some that suggested an association with healing (see below, p. 171). There is evidence for decline from the later third century, in line with much of the settlement in Kent (Allen 2016a, 82), and by the mid-fourth century the main temple complex was falling into decay, a group of

faded and crumbling buildings situated within what was by then probably a sparsely populated and dispersed rural settlement. Votive deposits were still being made within ruinous temples right through the fourth century, however, while the small late Roman roadside shrine noted above (p. 157; FIG. 5.31) also points to some level of continued sanctity.

One exceptional Romano-British cult site that was also focused upon sacred springs and had some association with healing is of course Bath (*Aquae Sulis*). Here, the earliest phase of this massive temple-baths complex around the thermal springs, constructed *c.* A.D. 70–80, seems to have occupied a largely open setting surrounded by trees and shrubs, with no evidence for any other monumental buildings (FIG. 5.37), although there was significant occupation revealed *c.* 1 km to the

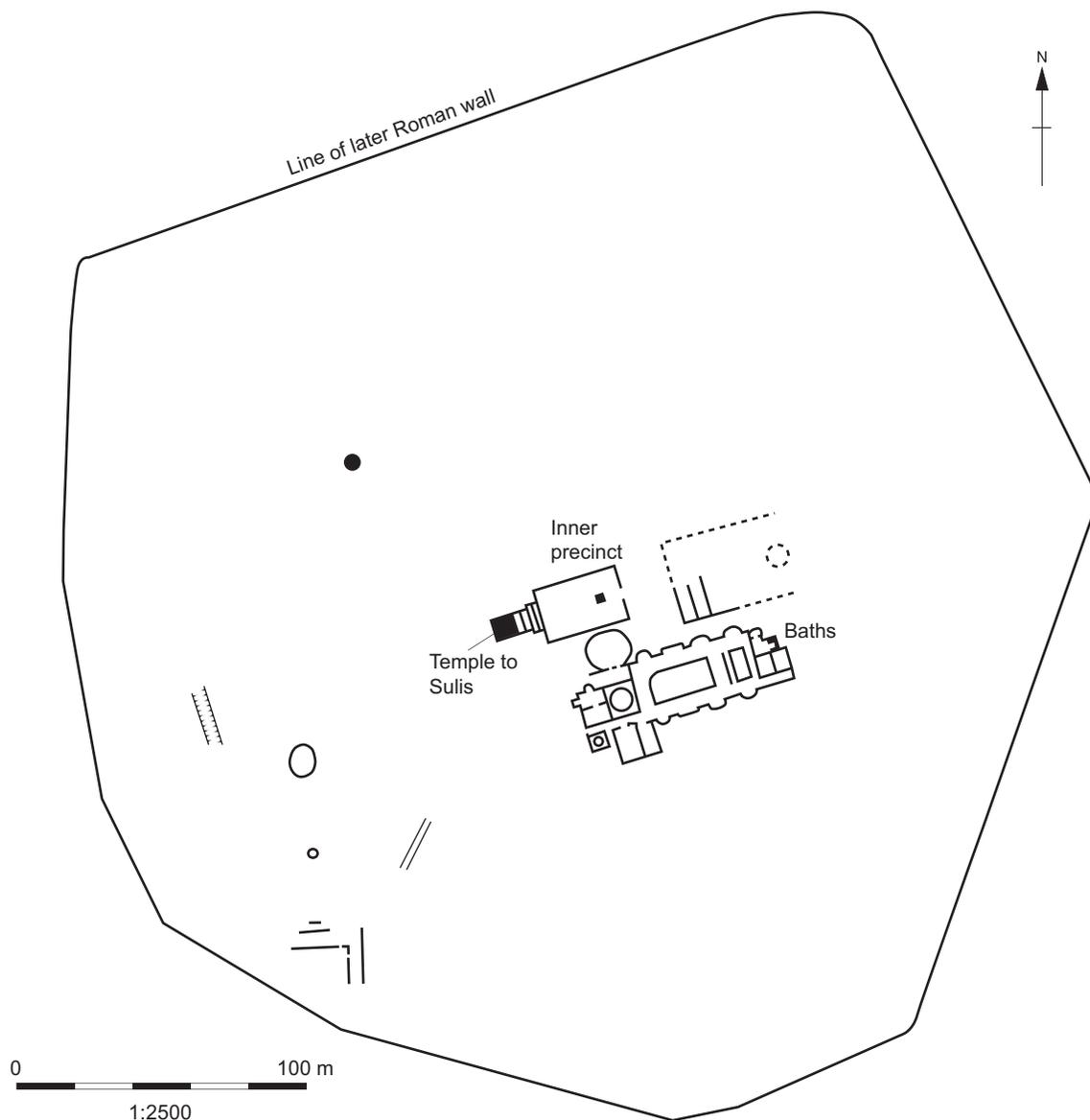


FIG. 5.37. Late first/early second century A.D. Bath within the later walled area (after La Trobe-Bateman and Niblett 2016, fig. 2.31)

north at Walcot, which seems, at some point at least, to have become part of a continuous suburban development along the road outside of the walled precinct (Davenport 2000; La Trobe-Bateman and Niblett 2016, 98–9). The temple at Bath is well known for being one of the few examples of a classical-style temple known from Britain, though, from the late second or early third century A.D., the addition of an ambulatory around the temple appears to change it into more of a hybrid Romano-Celtic form, perhaps indicating more fundamental changes in religious practices and beliefs. This period also saw a gradual increase in the number of buildings around the expanded temple/baths complex, although these could all have been associated with the public cult, including pilgrim hostels, shops and accommodation for workers, while the earth rampart along the line of the later walls probably defined the temenos boundary (La Trobe-Bateman and Niblett 2016, 101). The fourth century saw major changes within the walled area, with increasing numbers of high-status domestic dwellings and, from the middle part of the century in particular, a rise in the number of workshops; it would seem by this time that the religious significance of the site had waned and it may possibly have taken on more of an administrative role, similar to other walled late Roman towns.

Other major rural religious complexes connected with water include what is likely to have been an additional thermal bathing complex at Buxton in Derbyshire, recorded as *Aquae Arnemetiae* on the Ravenna Cosmology, a list of all the towns and road-stations throughout the Roman Empire recorded during the seventh century A.D. (Haverfield 1905, 222; Rivet and Smith 1979, 254–5). However, although Roman buildings, including a possible temple and baths, are known at this location, no systematic excavation has taken place.

At Marcham/Frilford by the River Ock in Oxfordshire, many years of excavation by the University of Oxford have revealed an extensive area of activity to the west of a walled temple compound. This includes what appears to be a ‘semi-amphitheatre’, c. 40 m in diameter, at the head of a relict stream channel, deliberately positioned to harness its relationship with water (Kamash *et al.* 2010, 115). This association is furthered by the deposition of large numbers of artefacts within a marshy area on the edge of the palaeochannel near where the drain came out of the semi-amphitheatre (*ibid.*, 116). Other excavated parts of this religious complex, which lay close to a Roman road crossing the Vale of the White Horse, included additional shrines, pathways, workshops and possible dining areas,

while a major cemetery was located further to the north. At Nettleton Scrubb in Wiltshire, a large religious complex developed on the Fosse Way road, c. 14 km north of Bath, with the temple positioned next to a specially canalised water course, which seems to have been a focus for deposition (Wedlake 1982; Smith 2001, 94). Another religious complex further west at Lydney Park, Glos, may not have been sited immediately on a water source, though a possible spring could have fed the tank that supplied the bathhouse, but nevertheless had definite aquatic associations, as shown by the images of fish and monsters on the mosaic floor in the temple cella (Wheeler and Wheeler 1932; Smith 2001, 134–5). Furthermore, it was sited on a hillfort spur overlooking the River Severn (and possibly inter-visible with the temple complex at Uley, c. 17 km to the east; FIG. 5.38), with which it may have been connected, perhaps being associated with the Severn bore, a spectacular natural phenomena in the form of a surge wave, which develops in the estuary at about this point (Boon 1989, 212). The Lydney temple was also associated with healing, with votive objects including a copper-alloy model arm showing possible evidence for iron deficiency – particularly appropriate for a site that had associations with iron mining (Hart 1970).

The distribution of all these larger excavated Roman rural sanctuaries in southern Britain is shown in FIG. 5.39; the only possibly comparable example outside of this area is at West Heslerton, in a dry valley at the foot of the Yorkshire Wolds (Powlesland 1998). These sanctuaries are defined as those places where in addition to the main temple there are at least two other buildings and/or shrines, and include the sites just discussed where the division between nucleated settlement/religious complex is more blurred. A possible religious complex recently investigated at ‘Blacklands’, Faversham, in Kent incorporated what is thought to be a theatre dug into the hillside and two probable bathhouses, with other buildings revealed by geophysical and aerial survey over an area of up to 8 ha (Wilkinson 2013; see Ch. 3). The full physical extent of most of these sites, however, remains uncertain, as often little investigation has taken place beyond the immediate area of the temple, and so there are probably other apparently ‘isolated’ rural temples that may well have been part of larger complexes. The apparent lack of larger rural religious complexes in much of the East of England may simply be because of the more developed network of nucleated centres here, which, as noted above, often had provision for sacred space that may have fulfilled much of the public religious needs of surrounding communities. There were, in addition, many

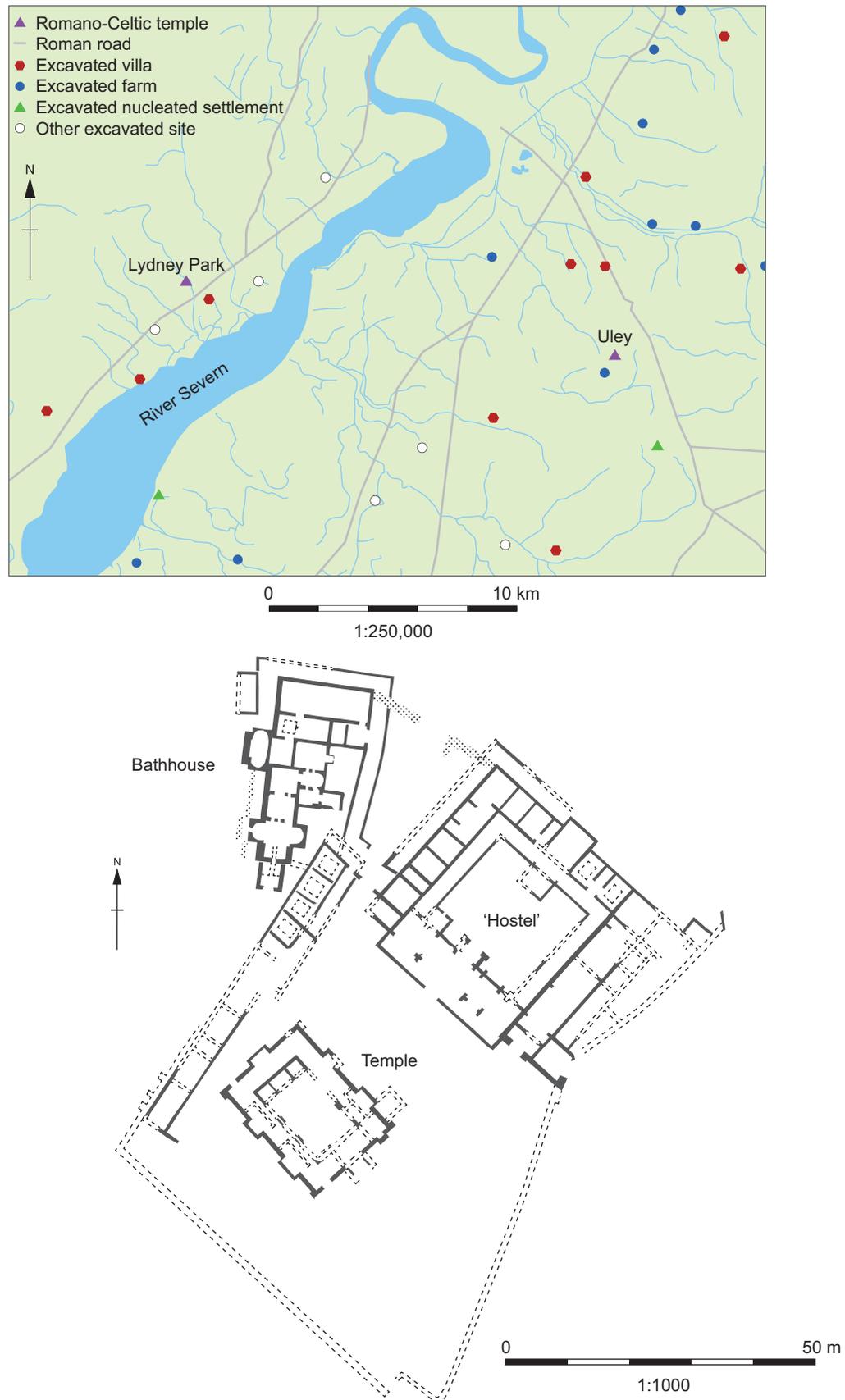


FIG. 5.38. Site plan and landscape context of the rural temple complex at Lydney Park, Glos (Wheeler and Wheeler 1932)

smaller scale rural religious sites, both in the East and elsewhere in the South and Central Belt (see FIG. 5.32).

The large rural religious complexes are comparable to many sites in Roman Gaul such as at Ribemont-sur-Ancre, Orrouy-Champlieu, Sanxay and *Fontes Sequanae*, which Derks (1998, 191) has proposed as public sanctuaries of the *pagi*, the local administrative districts within the *civitates*. These Gallic sanctuaries sometimes covered vast areas, *c.* 35–40 ha at Ribemont, and votive inscriptions occasionally record the financial contributions of local families to the construction and maintenance of cult buildings (*ibid.*, table 4.3). No such inscriptions come from rural sanctuaries in Britain, though it is likely that a similar situation existed here, at least for some temples. The well-known letters of Pliny dating from the late first/early second centuries A.D. certainly suggest that in other parts of the empire the local wealthy elite funded and maintained temples on their estates for the benefit of the surrounding population (*Ep.* 9.39; see below p. 168). Pliny also mentions a town/community at Hispellum (Spello) in Umbria owning a rural spring sanctuary, and providing amenities

including a baths complex and ‘entertainment’ (*Ep.* 8.8). The scale of the largest rural sanctuaries in Britain would suggest that ownership is likely to have been on a civic level, with Bath, for example, being suggested as being established by the client king Togidubnus and subsequently belonging to the *civitas Belgarum* on the basis of an attribution by Ptolemy (Henig 1999). A more plausible scenario here is perhaps an early association with the military, as suggested by the epigraphic evidence (La Trobe-Bateman and Niblett 2016, 100; see below, p. 181). It remains possible, however, that some of these large sanctuaries may have been independent cult communities, or at least had some measure of financial autonomy, perhaps based on rental income from temple estates, including in some cases, as suggested by Fulford and Allen (1992, 204) for the temple at Lydney Park in the Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire, revenue from the control of mineral resources. Elsewhere in the classical world it is known that temple cults could gain revenue from a number of different sources – private benefactions, civic funds, fees of worshippers and the incomes from leased land (Kvium 2008; Horster 2010; 2016). Determining how far this may have been the case

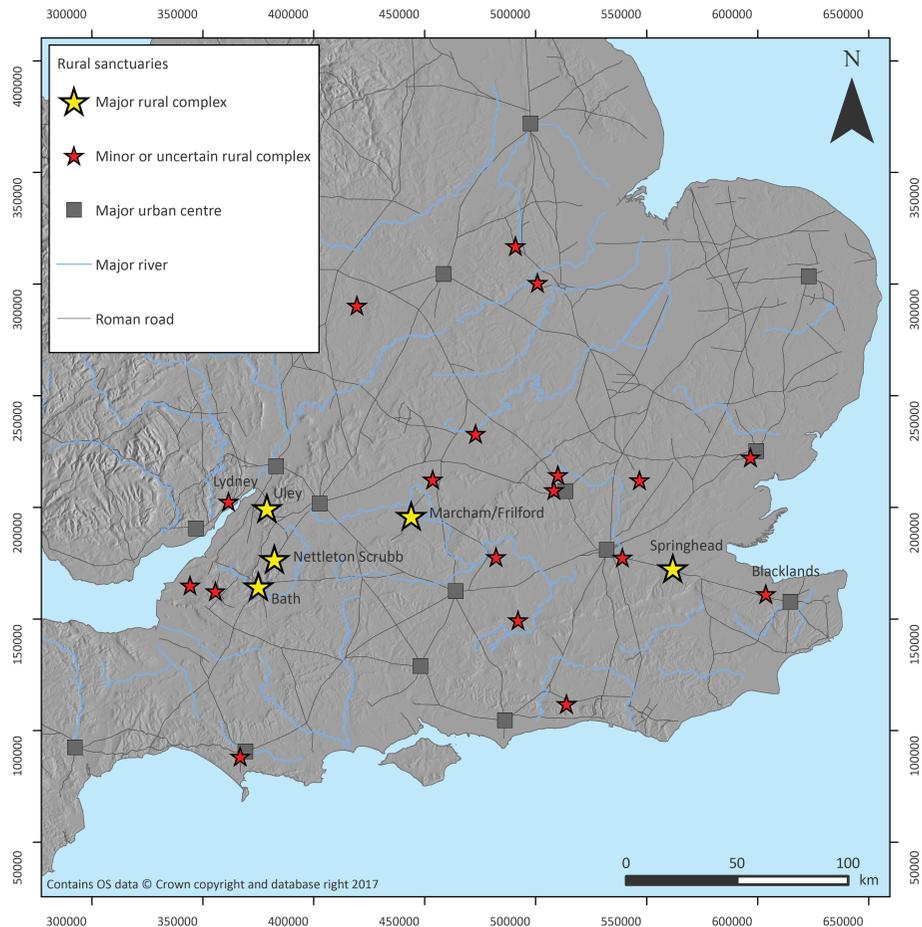


FIG. 5.39. Distribution of rural Roman sanctuary complexes in southern Britain

at rural Roman sanctuaries in Britain is highly problematic and would need detailed archaeological examination of the wider use of space around temple complexes. King (2016) has, however, recently argued that the enclosures seen on the periphery of some rural temples may have been used to hold sacred flocks or herds, which has potential implications for them as landowners (see also King 2005, 334, and below p. 195).

#### ROMANO-BRITISH SACRED SITES: A SUMMARY

The provision of dedicated sacred space was a fundamental part of religious expression in many areas of Roman Britain, with evidence suggesting that overall its importance increased over time. The rituals performed at such places may have helped bind communities together and reinforce social hierarchies, providing a framework of surety in an increasingly changing world. In this sense, the major recurrent associations of sacred sites with certain places – water, hills, caves and extant earlier monuments – may have helped to create and maintain bonds with the landscape and perhaps between peoples. The form that sacred space took was in many ways less important than the place itself, and is more likely to reflect the type and scale of cult practice. Romano-Celtic temples were but one form of religious architecture – one that was relatively restricted numerically and geographically. They were largely confined to the larger population centres in the East region, while being found more often in rural contexts elsewhere in central southern Britain. In all areas they would seem to have been important elements in most of the larger civic public sanctuaries, which often developed from pre-Roman ritual sites, some becoming particularly extensive with evidence for associated subsidiary shrines, baths, guesthouses and other amenities. These may have held important social and commercial roles, particularly during festival periods when people could have been attracted from considerable distances. Aside from such large religious complexes there was an array of smaller religious sites, though this is not to say that these were any less important in the religious lives of the local communities. Indeed, some may still have attracted considerable numbers of people on festival days, as, for example, with the small, old temple of Ceres mentioned by Pliny on his estates in Italy, which was said to be ‘very crowded on a particular day. For, on the ides of September, a large assemblage is gathered there from the whole district, much business is transacted, many vows are undertaken and many are paid, yet there is no refuge near at hand against the rain and sun’ (Pliny, *Ep.* 39). Notwithstanding the many problems of interpretation, these

religious structures, enclosures, shafts, caves or just particular places in the landscape, would have fulfilled a variety of spiritual roles, whether they lay within settlements or in the wider countryside. Patterns in their social and geographic distribution demonstrate the great variation in religious traditions across different parts of the Roman province, matching other differences previously noted within rural settlements (Smith *et al.* 2016), and the economy (Allen *et al.* 2017). These differences are further noted in the material culture associated with religious expression, which will now be examined in more detail.

#### THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF RURAL ROMANO-BRITISH RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

In any account of religion based primarily upon archaeological evidence, it is the material culture along with animal and plant remains that play a pivotal role in our interpretation and understanding (cf. Houlbrook and Armitage 2015). Objects given to the gods may tell us something of the concerns of the supplicant or the nature of the deity, while temple furnishings and priestly regalia can provide a glimpse into the organisation of the cult. Occasionally cult images and written dedications survive to provide some evidence for the range of gods worshipped, and changes over time. With regard to ‘Roman’ and ‘native’ divinities, the precise nature of any syncretism will remain largely unknown (cf. Zoll 2016). This section will discuss in broad terms the variety of material culture found on many of the shrines and temples discussed above, as well as providing more detailed accounts of specific ‘religious’ artefacts (see definition above, p. 123) in terms of their association with various types of excavated site. The two other important components within ritual assemblages – animal and plant remains – will be discussed in the following section as part of a wider discussion on ritual practices in the Romano-British countryside.

#### MATERIAL CULTURE FROM SACRED SITES

Roman religious sites are well known for having lots of ‘stuff’ (Woodward 1992; Smith 2001; Bird 2011; Ferris 2012, ch. 2). The very fact that unusually large numbers of objects are found in a particular place is often one of the primary criteria for identifying sacred sites in the first place (see above p. 122). However, it is not the case that all sites proposed as sacred space produced lots of objects, or even any at all, and the quantity and type of finds is as variable as the physical form of

TABLE 5.1: DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF OBJECTS RECORDED FROM SACRED SITES DIVIDED INTO 'VOTIVE' AND 'NON-VOTIVE' ASSEMBLAGES

<i>'Votive' assemblage</i>	<i>Other finds from sacred sites</i>
Coins	Tools
Brooches	Textile processing (spindlewhorls, loomweights, needles)
Other personal objects (hairpins, bracelets, finger rings etc.)	Cereal processing (querns, millstones)
Religious objects of stone, metal, pottery, wood (altars, sculpture, figurines, miniature objects etc.; see below)	Security (locks, keys)
Martial objects (spearheads, other weapons, armour etc.; miniature weapons included under religious object category)	Recreation (dice, counters)
Toilet objects (tweezers, probes etc.)	Writing (styli, seal boxes)
Specialist pottery (face pots, tazze, miniature pots etc.)	Weighing (weights, steelyard)
	Craftworking debris (slag, hammerscale, boneworking debris etc.)

the sites in question. The objects from sacred sites discussed here have been broadly divided into two groups (TABLE 5.1): first, the artefacts which – for the most part – appear to have been offered to the deity or deities at the cult site, presumably as 'ex votos', that is given in fulfilment of a vow (see *rites and practices* below); second is the much broader group of items, which may relate to other practices occurring within the environment of the sacred site.

There are many problems in trying to separate 'votive' assemblages from more prosaic objects on sacred sites, with explicitly religious objects such as altars or figurines of deities being comparatively rare, and many other object types often having a great deal of interpretational ambiguity. In these cases, the identification of 'votive' assemblages is only possible through a detailed contextual consideration of the finds. In this study, only the object types most commonly interpreted as offerings in excavation reports have been included in the 'votive' dataset, though this is not to say that all of these were used in such a way, with, for example, coins probably having various uses within ritual, social and commercial spheres (see below, p. 173). Similarly, it is quite possible that any of the other finds types, such as writing equipment, tools and objects associated with weighing and recreation, may have been used as ex votos. In some case they most demonstrably were, such as at Elms Farm, Heybridge, where a series of ritual pits in the shrine precinct contained animal bone, personal objects and religious objects alongside styli, tools, spindlewhorls and needles (Atkinson and Preston 2015, 101–5). Nevertheless, by restricting the 'votive' assemblages to the more commonly identified finds categories, broad patterns may be recognised in the material culture

according to the type, context and chronology of the cult sites. An additional significant problem, however, is that for many of the sacred sites lying within settlement contexts, it was not possible to firmly differentiate and quantify the finds assemblage from the shrine/temple separately from that of the remainder of the site. Where this is the case, such sites have been excluded from the more detailed analyses presented here.

#### 'Votive' assemblages from sacred sites

The above discussion of Iron Age shrines noted a number of sites such as Hayling Island and Hallaton where large numbers of objects were recovered and assumed to have been offerings made to a divine presence. During the Roman period there was a similar proportion (c. 65–70 per cent) of sacred sites with evidence for a 'votive' assemblage, though in general the quantity and variety of objects found was much greater. Perhaps the biggest variable with regard to the presence of such assemblages is the context of the sacred site, as shown in FIG. 5.40. Most of the structures or places interpreted as sacred at farmsteads and, in particular, villas, do not have evidence for votive offerings, save for the occasional object, usually within a structured deposit, such as a complete pottery vessel or the articulated remains of an animal. Assuming of course that the features in question were actually shrines (see above, p. 121), this has significant implications for our understanding of ritual practices at these sites, suggesting either that the supplicants were more likely to have offered perishable objects such as organic matter (flowers, fruit etc.), or that different types of rituals occurred here, without the need for any regular offering of artefacts. Some of these sites were associated with funerary ritual, such as

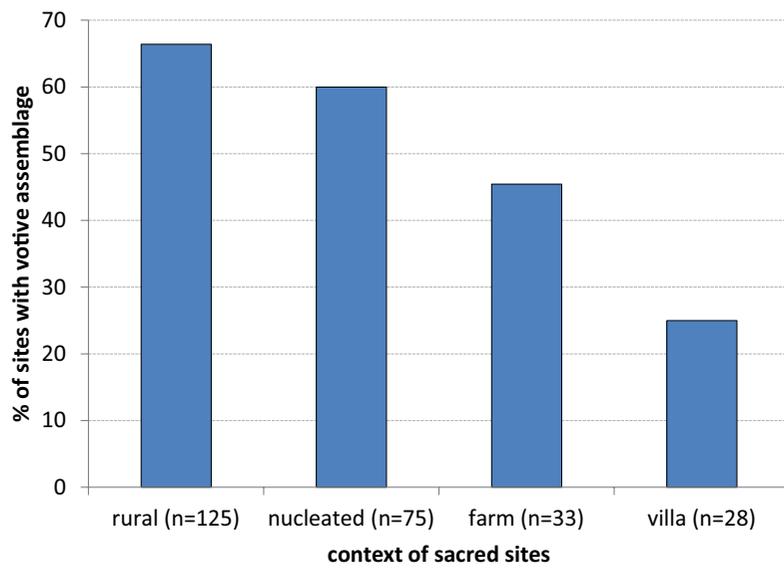


FIG. 5.40. Proportion of sacred sites from different types of rural settlement with evidence for ‘votive’ assemblages

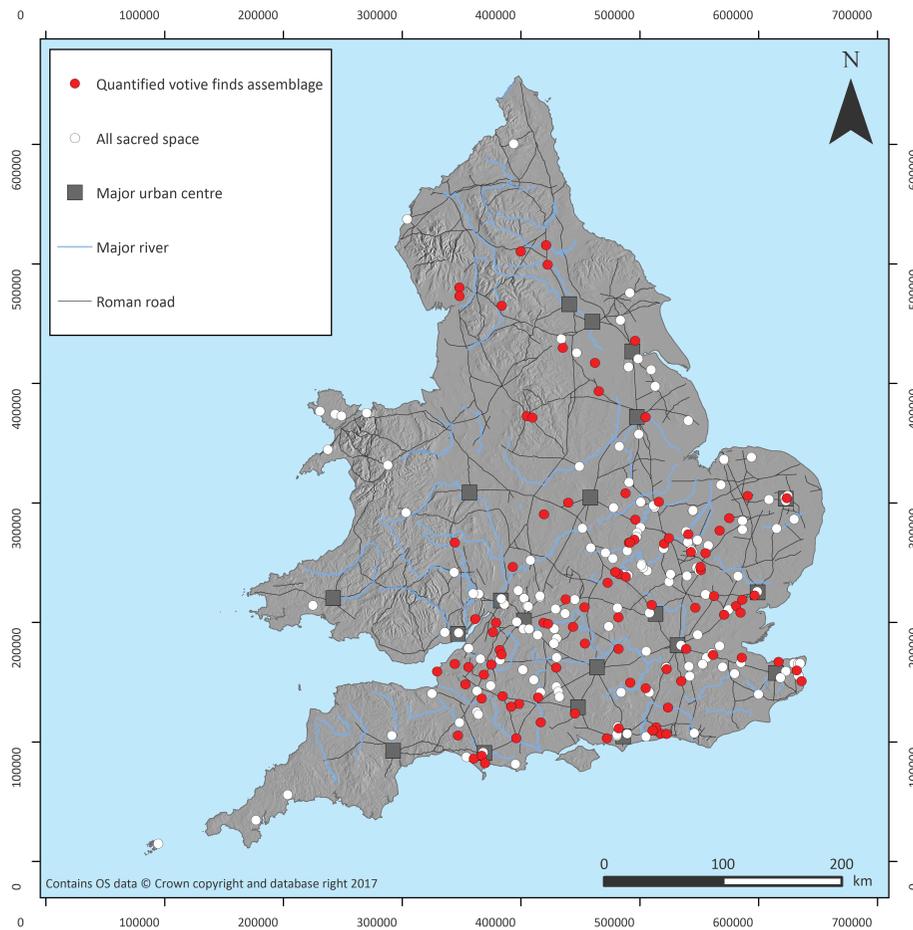


FIG. 5.41. Distribution of all 96 sites with quantified ‘votive’ assemblages directly attributable to a shrine or temple

the Romano-Celtic temple-mausoleum on a hillside above the villa at Bancroft (Williams and Zeepvat 1994), while most would seem to have been relatively simple shrines used by families or small communities, seemingly without the same need for regular offerings as seen at most larger sacred sites. Yet even within a few of these larger sites, such as that within the nucleated roadside settlement at Westhawk Farm, the number of possible votive objects was minimal, here including a fragment of stone pine and some coins from a waterhole on the opposite side of the road to the shrine (Booth *et al.* 2008).

The distribution of all 96 Roman period sacred sites with quantified 'votive' assemblages is shown in FIG. 5.41. These include 33 Romano-Celtic temples, which, as has been discussed above, are the most prominent form of religious building within larger sanctuaries. With their generally more impressive architectural presence and increased association with public cults, it is hardly surprisingly that a higher proportion of Romano-Celtic temples had evidence for the regular offering of ex votos than other sacred sites (FIG. 5.42). Nevertheless, the overall range of ex votos and their relative frequency is comparable across religious assemblages from all types of sacred site,

with coins generally being the most favoured object, followed by items of personal adornment and toilet artefacts. The religious significance of brooches, particularly horse-and-rider and plate types, is well noted (e.g. Ferris 2012, 35–9) and has already been commented upon in Chapter 2. It remains unproven whether different types of brooch can be associated with particular deities (*ibid.*), but it is clear that many appear to have been carefully chosen as offerings to the deity, and were not simply a generic 'token' personal offering. Further work would be required to ascertain whether specific types of other personal item were selected as ex votos, though in a review of the ritual significance of jewellery in Roman Britain, Puttock (2002, 115) suggested that the shapes, colours, motifs and materials were all specifically chosen and were at least as important as the object type itself. It is notable, however, that hairpins are quite well represented in many cult sites, and are thought to be particularly associated with women and linked with aspects such as childbirth and fertility (*ibid.*). As such their particular proliferation within known healing sanctuaries such as Lydney Park (over 300 examples) and Springhead (over 100 examples) is perhaps to be expected. Glass bangles, which are particularly notable in the

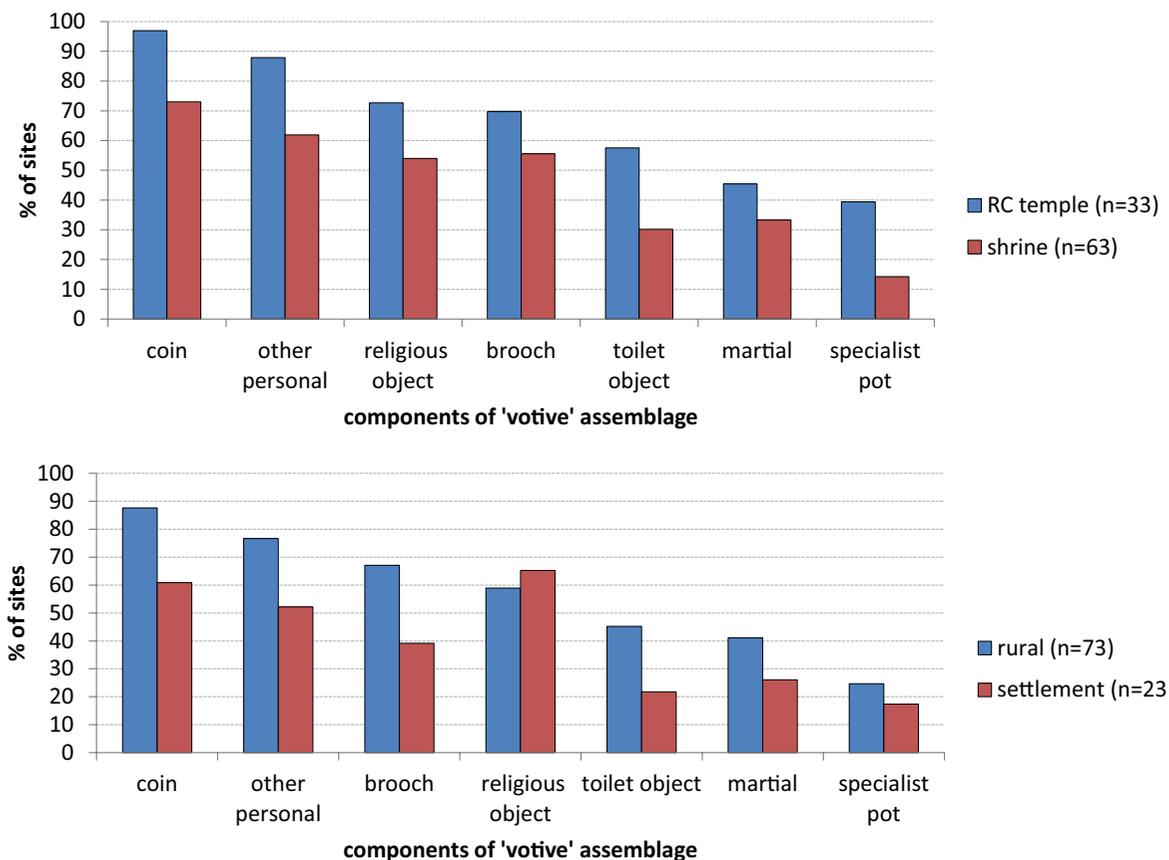


FIG. 5.42. Relative frequency of 'votive' assemblage components within different forms of sacred space, and different contexts of sacred space (Note: The rural category comprises all those sites with no associated settlement and the major 'rural' religious complexes; see FIG. 5.39)

north of England, have also been suggested in Chapter 2 as having possible apotropaic/magical properties, and are found in a number of votive assemblages, including that at Victoria Cave in Settle, North Yorkshire.

Objects specifically manufactured to be used as ritual offerings or in cult ritual were, unsurprisingly, common, occurring in over 70 per cent of votive assemblages from Romano-Celtic temples, and *c.* 50 per cent from other shrines; indeed many of those from the latter formed key elements in their religious interpretation. The specific nature of some of these religious objects is examined below. The final type of object found recurrently as part of 'votive' assemblages comprises artefacts of a martial nature. Aside from assemblages within shrines intimately connected with military sites, such as the river deposits from Piercebridge in County Durham, which included a range of different military equipment (Walton 2016), these martial items invariably comprise spear and other projectile heads. At Bancroft in Milton Keynes, for example there were four spearheads and fourteen miniature spearheads or bolt heads in the late Roman circular shrine (Williams and Zeepvat 1994), while ten spearheads were found among a significant votive assemblage within the ritual enclosure at Lowbury Hill in Oxfordshire, some with unusual features that suggest ceremonial use (Atkinson 1916; Fulford and Rippon 1994). Further indications of the ritual significance of weaponry come from large numbers of miniature weapons found both on and at a distance from sacred sites (see below p. 178).

Keeping in mind that many of the objects recovered from religious sites in settlements were not able to be separately quantified, it appears

that, in general, the votive assemblages from rural sacred sites (i.e. those without any associated settlement and major religious complexes) have higher frequencies of most types of finds (FIG. 5.42). Coins, for example, are found in 87 per cent of rural assemblages, as opposed to 60 per cent of those from settlements. Assuming that not all of the coins from rural shrines were used as votive offerings, then this might reflect a wider market function at some of these sites – perhaps periodic country fairs based around certain religious festivals. The only component to counter this overall trend is religious objects, found in over 65 per cent of settlement votive assemblages, against 58 per cent in rural contexts, although the difference is not that marked. Most of these objects came from shrines in military *vici* and roadside settlements, which follows the correlation noted below in terms of the reasonably widespread occurrence of religious artefacts within larger settlements, possibly in part because it was in these places where much of this material was probably manufactured.

Assessment of chronological changes in the character and individual components of votive assemblages is difficult, as generally finds are not phased within excavation reports and so consequently were not recorded in phase groups within the project database, unlike, for example, the plant or animal remains. To attempt any meaningful analysis of change over time, it has been necessary to break down the votive assemblage dataset into those sites where all activity was confined to the early to mid-Roman period (first to early third century A.D.) and those of the late Roman period only (later third to end of fourth century). This has necessarily restricted the

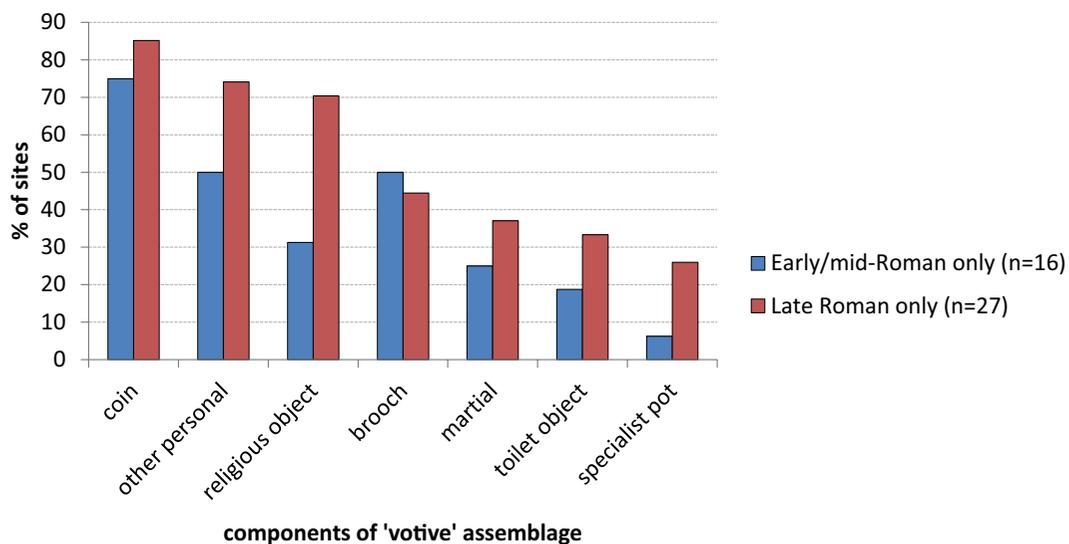


FIG. 5.43. Relative frequency of 'votive' assemblage components within sacred sites of early to mid-Roman (first to early third century A.D.) and later Roman (later third to end of fourth century) date

number of sites that can be considered, but nevertheless has brought out some trends in chronological patterning (FIG. 5.43). Some of these patterns make sense in terms of the wider proliferation of different object types, with brooches, for example, being more common in assemblages from earlier Roman sites, and other personal items being more prevalent in the later Roman period, when items such as bracelets and hairpins are more commonplace. The chronological difference in coinage is much less marked than may have been expected, given the huge imbalance in rural coin use pre- and post- the mid-third century A.D. (Brindle 2017a). This suggests that coins (possibly to be regarded as 'discs with images' rather than money) have always had a strong religious significance, as has been argued on a number of previous occasions (e.g. Haselgrove 2005; King 2007b; Wythe 2007). However, the possible motivations and beliefs behind this association and the many ways that coins could be used in ritual are subjects that are only just starting to be addressed, as seen in the 2015 conference at the University of Tübingen, *Money and Ritual in the Greco-Roman World*.

Religious objects are particularly prevalent in late Roman votive assemblages when compared with those of earlier date, although not all of these may have been fabricated at this time, as for example the pipeclay Venus figurine from the late Roman shrine at Hockwold, Norfolk (Gurney 1986b), which was probably manufactured in central Gaul or Cologne during the first or second century A.D. (see below, p. 180). The greater prevalence of religious objects at late Roman shrines may simply reflect their survival after the eventual demise of cult activity. Some objects may have been selectively retrieved from sacred sites that had been abandoned earlier in the Roman period.

The analyses above highlight patterns in the broad range of object types present within votive assemblages, but do not indicate the quantities in which some of these objects were recovered. At twelve sites, for example, over 1,000 coins were recovered, numbers far above those found in the majority of rural settlements, even with the benefit of metal-detecting. Brooches are also recorded in their hundreds at six sites, including the remarkable collection of 236 from the shrine at Bosworth Field, Sutton Cheney in Leicestershire, with up to 101 horse-and-rider examples (Ray and Farley 2012). Most of the sites with substantial quantities of one type of find also have significant assemblages of other probable votive objects. These invariably comprise sacred loci in rural contexts, particularly if the large 'rural' religious complexes such as Springhead, Bath and Nettleton Scrubb are

included (e.g. such religious complexes make up 31 of the 35 sacred sites with 150 or more coins). The generally large votive finds assemblages from these rural sanctuaries contrast with those from many of the shrines and temples in nucleated settlements, suggesting either that the objects from the latter were more likely to be disturbed and/or removed, or that there were inherent differences in their organisation and ritual behaviours. The larger rural complexes in particular may have been operating as independent communities, as discussed above, and this is also suggested by the type and scale of other finds recovered from these sites.

#### Other finds from sacred sites

Most of the attention on material culture from sacred sites is usually focused on the inherently religious objects, or at least those artefacts deemed to have been used within cult rituals. However, it has been noted in a previous study by the present author that on some sites the finds suggest that a variety of other activities were taking place (Smith 2001, 158). As stated above, it can be difficult to determine the final use of an object prior to deposition; it may have served an essentially utilitarian function for most of its 'life', but then ultimately have been deposited in a ritually motivated manner (cf. Gosden and Marshall 1999). For example, it has been highlighted in this chapter (p. 131) how quernstones often form part of structured deposits, but their presence need not necessarily imply that there was grain processing occurring in the immediate vicinity. Nevertheless, many sacred sites contained a variety of artefacts that do not appear on the face of it to have been used in religious ritual, and were probably associated with wider industrial, commercial and social activities, or were related to the physical infrastructure of the site.

FIGURE 5.44 presents the frequency of occurrence of some of the main 'non-votive' object types recovered from Romano-British religious sites. They have been divided by broad context and it is immediately apparent that, even more so than with the votive assemblages, this material generally occurs more frequently on 'rural' shrines and sanctuaries (including the major religious complexes), as opposed to those directly associated with settlements. Tools of all different types are particularly common, with, for example, iron chisels and a farrier's comb coming from the complex at Uley, a variety of horticultural tools and an animal shackle from the Springhead Sanctuary area, and cleavers, an axe blade, a chisel and a reaping hook from the temple at Farley Heath, Surrey. Some of these may relate to the construction and general maintenance of buildings, though others suggest that certain sites may have

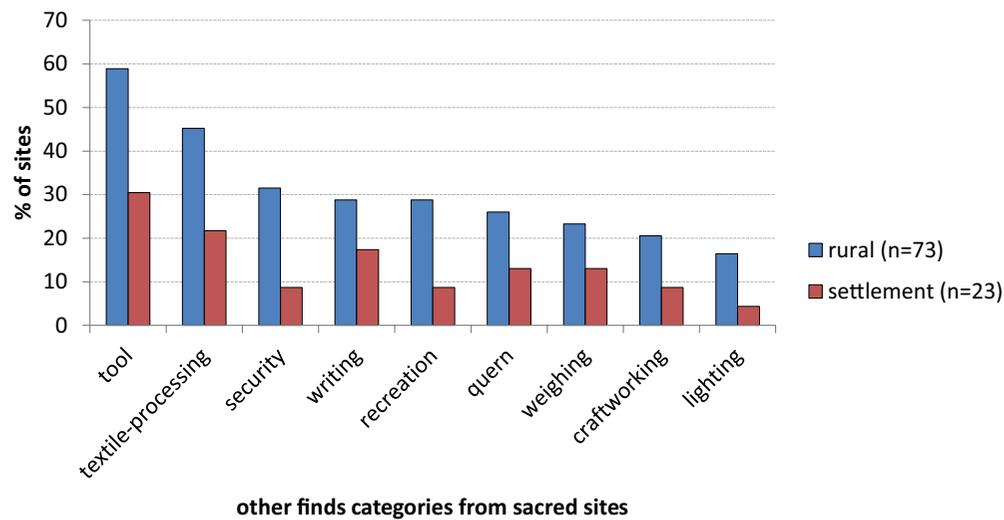


FIG. 5.44. Relative frequency of other 'non-votive' finds categories from sacred sites, according to site context

been keeping their own animals and growing their own food. A rural temple complex at Grimstock Hill, Coleshill in Warwickshire, contained a large number of tools including a saw blade, drill bit, chisel, punches, a smith's hammer and a cobbler's anvil, indicating smithing and other craftworking facilities, which was also suggested by plentiful slags and furnace bottoms (Magilton 2006). General craftworking debris, usually comprising concentrations of slag, but also with occasional boneworking waste, was also found in sixteen other sites, almost all in rural contexts.

The overall evidence of the material culture suggests that many of the larger rural sanctuaries in particular may have had at least some permanent resident population – cult attendants, craftsmen, shop/innkeepers and labourers – that was no doubt swelled significantly at times of festivals. Some of these complexes may even have been run like businesses, either independently or as part of the public religious cult of the wider *civitas*, perhaps in order to help control areas well-removed from the principal centres of civic administration (cf. Haeussler 2013, 269). At the smaller rural shrines, where the financial requirements of the cult may have been relatively minimal, it is more likely that they were run by local communities or within villa estates, catering for a population mostly living in dispersed small rural farmsteads, and probably only utilised at certain times of the year. There is little evidence from the finds that these sites were engaging in any significant commercial, industrial or agricultural practices. Shrines and temples associated with nucleated population centres would have had ready access to the facilities of the settlements, which perhaps explains the relative paucity of some categories of 'non-votive' finds (e.g. craftworking and textile-processing objects)

from the specific area of the cult site. These sacred sites would have been components of their associated settlement, rather than being 'self-contained' cult communities as was probably the case with many of the larger rural sanctuaries.

#### RELIGIOUS OBJECTS

There has been a great deal written recently about religious objects and imagery from Roman Britain (e.g. Aldhouse-Green 2004b; 2012; Bagnall-Smith 2008; Bird 2011; Ferris 2012; Durham 2012; Fittock 2015; Esposito 2016), and it is not the intention here to discuss the various types at any great length (for definition of religious object, see above, p. 123). Instead, the emphasis will be placed on examining these objects in their excavated contexts, and looking at broad social and geographic patterns.

#### Context and distribution of religious objects

A total of 1931 religious objects were recorded from 427 separate excavated sites. FIGURE 5.45 shows the frequency of occurrence of these objects on different types of site, while FIG. 5.46 shows the distribution of these sites across England and Wales. Such objects occur on over 50 per cent of military sites, mostly military *vici*, but including some supply depots, and are also prevalent on nucleated settlements and, unsurprisingly, rural religious sites. Over a quarter of excavated villas had evidence for religious artefacts, but this falls to just 5 per cent of farmsteads, this latter proportion barely changing throughout all the regions. However, complex farmsteads were considerably more likely to have these objects (present on *c.* 14 per cent) than enclosed types (present on *c.* 3 per cent), which reflects their generally more diverse range of material culture, and their greater provision for sacred space noted above.

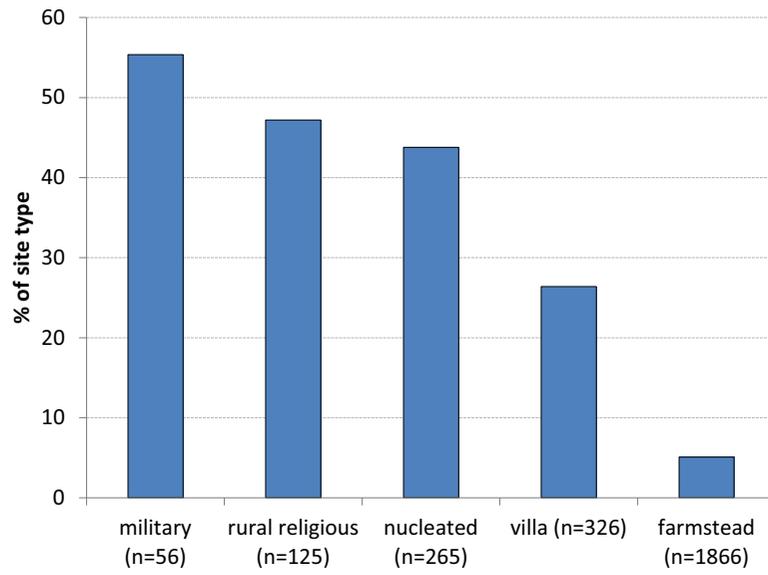


FIG. 5.45. Percentage of site type with evidence for religious objects

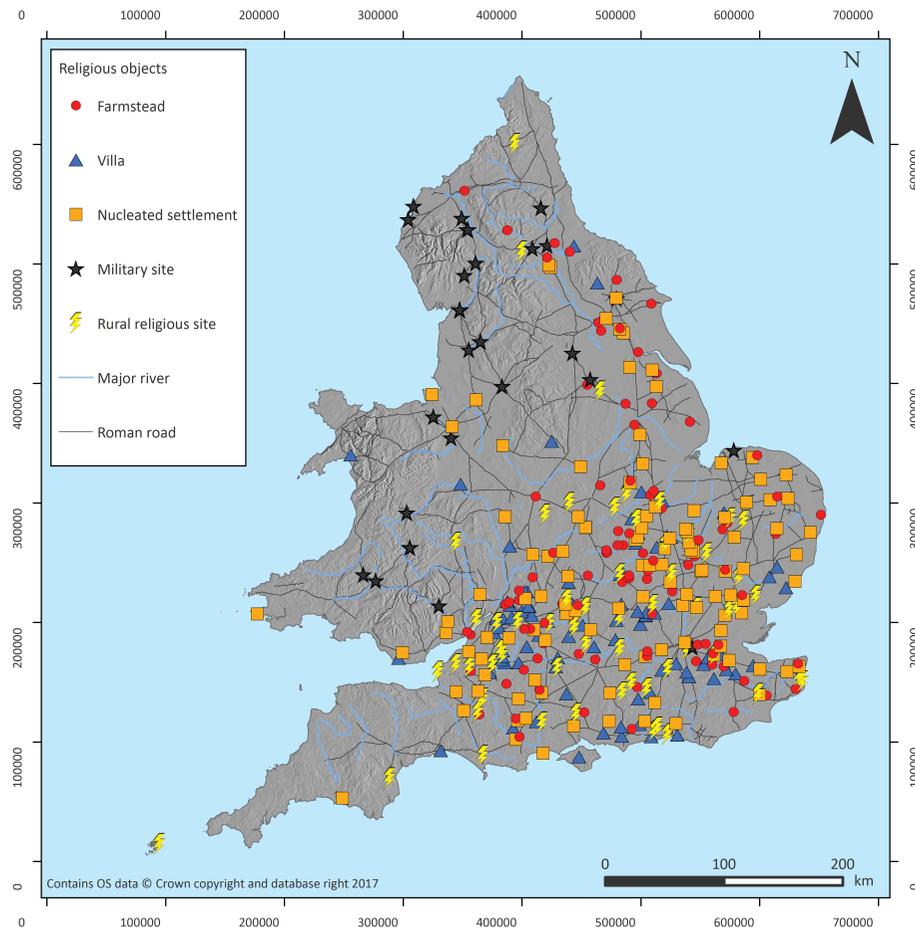


FIG. 5.46 Distribution by site type of records with religious objects

TABLE 5.2: CATEGORIES OF RELIGIOUS OBJECTS BY TYPE OF SITE

- \* includes 13 farmsteads, 10 villas and 40 nucleated sites with evidence for sacred space  
 + includes major 'rural' religious complexes at Bath, Marcham/Frillford, Nettleton Scrubb and Springhead  
 ++ includes 20 possible curse tablets from Piercebridge

Context	No. sites with religious objects	Total no. of objects (selected 'religious' categories)										
		figurine	sculpture	other image of deity	miniature object	voivie leaf/ plaque	priestly regalia	curse tablet	voivie letter	altar	amulet	inscription
farmstead	95*	29	9	7	23	2	4	24	1	5	7	2
funerary	14		1	1			1					
industry	18	8		5						1		
military	31	29	6	8	11		21++			38	2	30
nucleated	116*	132	67	37	69	45	18	11		24	6	14
rural (field system & 'isolated' rural context)	8			1			2				1	
rural religious	59+	95	47	36	114	96	299	62	22	22	5	32
villa	86*	54	39	12	11	5	2	5	5	5	11	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>427</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>79</b>

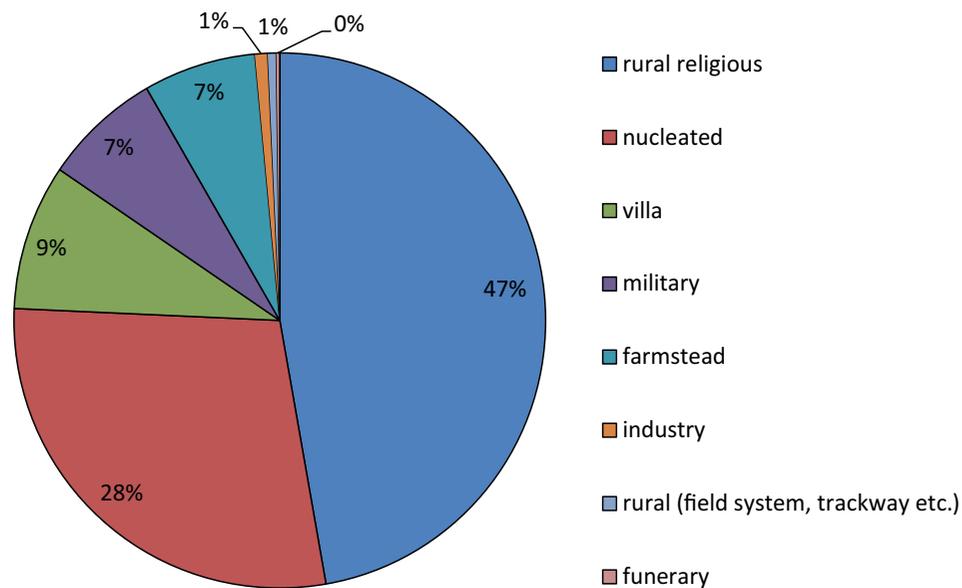


FIG. 5.47. Percentages of total number of religious objects (n=1931) from different types of site

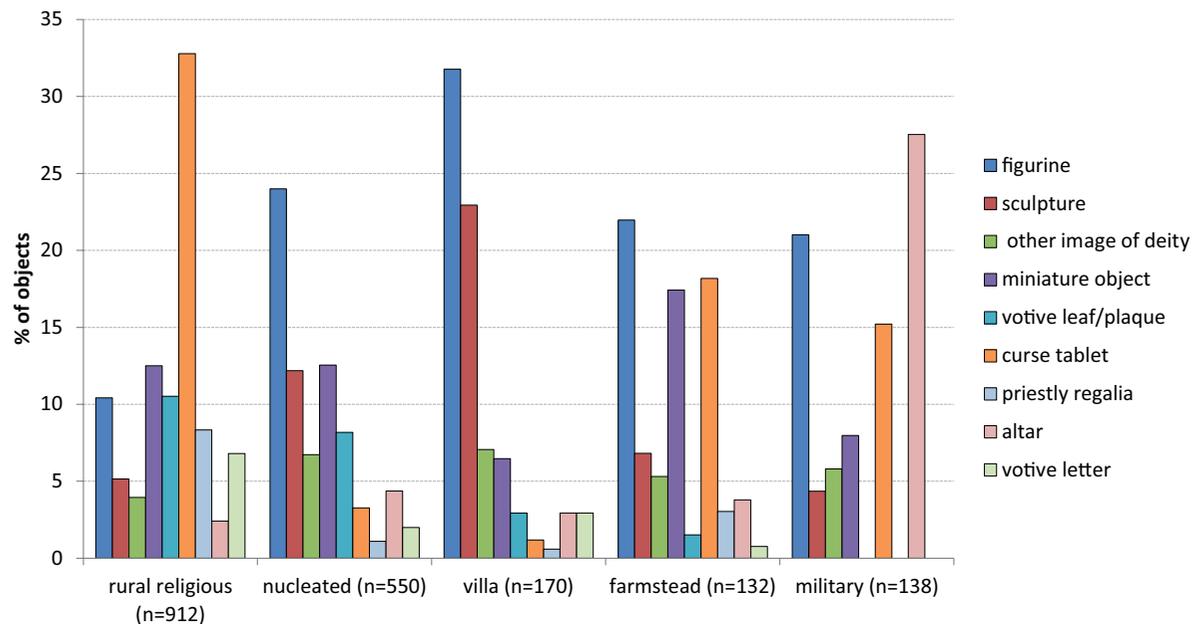


FIG. 5.48. Selected categories of religious object from different types of site (n=total number of religious objects from site type)

In terms of the actual numbers of religious objects, 'rural' religious sites are very much dominant, primarily because of the major complexes like Lydney Park, Uley and Bath (FIG. 5.47). However, not all large rural sanctuaries necessarily had many religious objects, as shown at Marcham/Frilford in Oxfordshire, where despite comprehensive excavations over many years producing large volumes of finds, very few explicitly cult items were recovered, one of the few being a fragmented fired clay representation of a bull. This is in stark contrast to another rural sanctuary in Oxfordshire at Woodeaton, which, with the exception of Bath and Uley, produced one of

the largest collections of religious objects in the country, with over 75 artefacts including copper-alloy letters, miniature weapons and representations of Mars, Venus, Minerva and Cupid (Bagnall-Smith 1995; 1999). Away from some of these larger rural sanctuaries the numbers of religious artefacts from individual rural religious sites are generally quite small, particularly those categorised as 'shrines'. As ever, there are notable exceptions, including the newly discovered shrine at Ashwell End, near Baldock, where a hoard of 'temple treasure', was found by a metal detectorist in 2002, and subsequent excavations revealed further objects, these including a silver gilt figurine and

decorated votive leaf plaques, many of which contained images of Minerva and dedications to a local goddess named Senuna, who may have been depicted as the Roman goddess (Burleigh 2015, 94–9; Jackson and Burleigh 2017).

The next largest group of religious objects comprises the 550 items from nucleated sites, 63 per cent of these coming from settlements that also had evidence for sacred space, though the objects did not necessarily derive from such areas. The remaining objects are split fairly evenly between farmsteads, villas and military sites, although, as just discussed, a very small percentage of the first contained such artefacts.

Combining all religious objects together of course disguises an extremely heterogeneous group of artefacts. The only thing they have in common is that they were explicitly manufactured to have some association with the divine, whether as ex votos, cult images, priestly regalia, temple furnishings or as talismanic items. TABLE 5.2 and FIG. 5.48 show that different types of site can have very different 'suites' of cult artefact. This in part reflects the individuality of religious expression, though it may also be associated with broader variances in social structure, identity and the types of ritual practices carried out in these different environments.

As just stated, the substantial number of religious objects from rural religious sites is dominated by those of a few large sanctuaries, with the curse tablets from Uley and Bath in particular forming a very high proportion of the overall number of cult artefacts from these sites. The curse tablets, or *defixiones*, were messages, usually inscribed on lead, which would be written by an individual or dictated to a scribe in order to ask the deities to act on their behalf against another, usually in the case of a perceived wrongdoing (see <http://curses.csad.ox.ac.uk/index.shtml> for many translated examples from Britain). They can often be quite dark and vengeful and are part of a widespread tradition found across the Roman Empire, the curses occasionally being accompanied by figurines fashioned from wax, lead and clay, linked to 'magic' practices, which bound victims to the practitioner's desires (Bailliot 2015). Although these were in effect private rituals, the great majority of curse tablets from Britain come from major rural religious complexes, over 70 per cent from the sacred spring at Bath and from within and around the temple building at Uley. The extent to which professional scribes were used remains uncertain (see Ch. 3, p. 76), although there is a 'scribal' link between Bath and Uley, as seen in the style and formulae of curses from both sanctuaries. Whatever the situation, the likelihood is that provision was made for the manufacture

and purchase of such curse tablets on the temple site, indicating that, here at least, they were a part of mainstream religious practice and not some secretive superstitious activity. However, away from Bath and Uley, the practice does not seem that widespread, with *defixiones* – some only probable examples – being found on just ten other rural religious sites.

Aside from curse tablets, rural religious sites have the broadest mix of other types of religious objects, including figurines, cult statues and other sculpture, altars, miniature objects and votive copper-alloy letters, which may have been attached to a wooden plaque for a dedicatory inscription that could be re-used as necessary (cf. Hassall 1980, 85) (FIG. 5.49). Miniature objects are particularly well represented on rural shrines and temples, most probably used as ex votos, though, as Kiernan (2009, 211–13) has suggested, with a wide variety of underlying meanings. Unlike their representation at sacred sites within settlements (nucleated sites, villas and farmsteads), axes were not the most common form of miniature object, with martial/hunting items – notably spears – being more numerous, correlating with, but outnumbering, the incidence of full-size items on cult sites highlighted above. Most of the small numbers of miniature anatomic objects (forming part of Whitehouse's (1996) 'votaries' category of ritual object; see above p. 123) were also found on rural religious sites, with heads, legs, arms, feet, toes, thumbs, eyes, breasts and even possible hearts all being recorded. The sites in which these objects were found, such as Lydney Park and Springhead, are likely to have been healing sanctuaries, with the body parts reflecting the various ailments of the supplicants who came there asking for divine intervention.

Most of the religious objects highlighted above are likely to have been offerings or votives given to the temple deities, or else the actual images of deities that were worshipped (*sacra*) at the cult loci. However, rural sacred sites also provide the only excavated contexts where there is any reasonable artefactual evidence for the priests themselves, though there are indications that some of these items may also have been ultimately deposited as votive offerings (Esposito 2016). Eighteen rural shrines/temples contained 76 objects that may have formed parts of priestly headdresses, sceptres/staves, or possible sacrificial implements, such as the jet knife handle with silver binding from Gestingthorpe in Essex (Draper 1985). These are all located in the Central Belt, East and South regions, with a notable concentration in parts of Surrey and West Sussex, though other, largely unstratified, examples are mostly found in rural landscape contexts in the east of England (Esposito

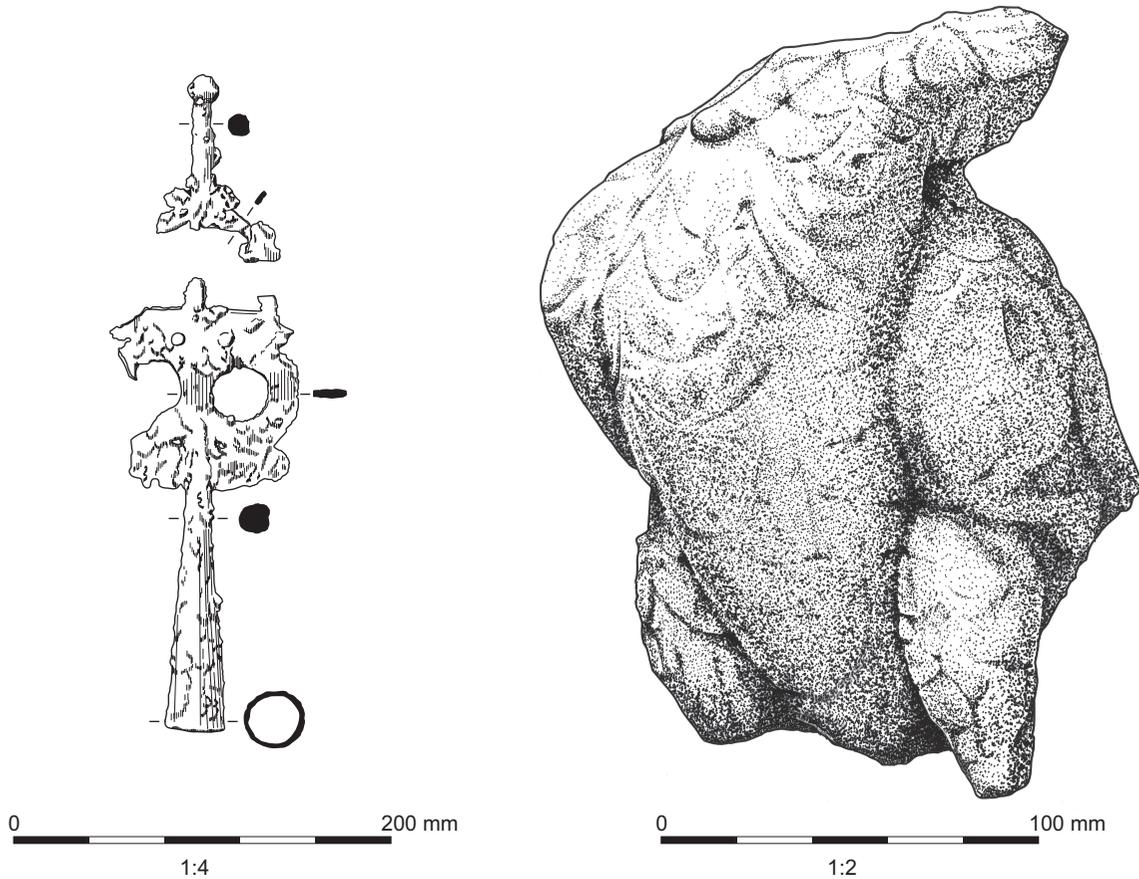
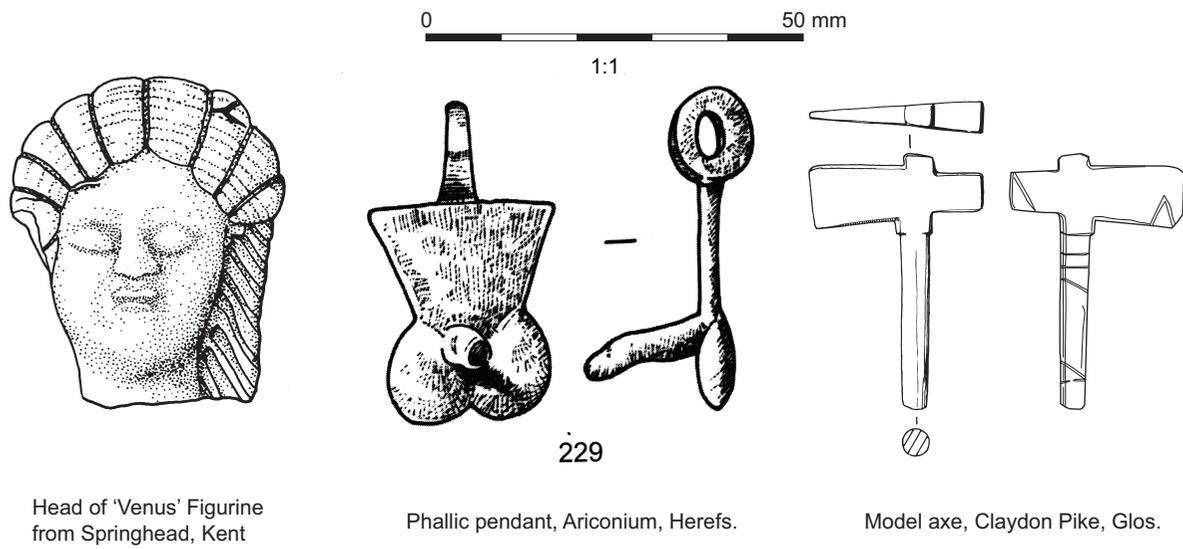


FIG. 5.49. Illustrations of selected types of Romano-British religious object (Biddulph *et al.* 2011, fig. 147 (Reproduced with permission HS1, © HS1); Jackson 2012, fig. 440; Miles *et al.* 2007, figs 6.19 and 9.19; Lawrence and Smith 2009, fig. 5.27)

2016, 106, fig. 2). The most extensive excavated assemblage of priestly regalia comes from Wanborough in Surrey, where parts of five priestly headdresses and at least 22 sceptres were recovered, some of the crowns carrying a wheel symbol, thought to be a 'Celtic' manifestation of Jupiter (O'Connell and Bird 1994; Bird 1996).

The overwhelming preponderance of priestly regalia at certain rural temple sites needs some consideration. Were these just chance survivals providing glimpses of religious specialists that were officiating across all types of cult site, or was it only certain, larger, religious complexes that had such specialists, or at least specialists that

required such paraphernalia? Public priestly offices in the Roman world were usually drawn from the ranks of the elite who may have actively competed for them to enhance their social prestige (Frankfurter 2006, 550; Hingley 2011, 749). There is well-known epigraphic evidence for priests from the sanctuary at Bath, where Calpurnius Receptus (*RIB* 155), a priest of Sulis, and Memor, the *haruspex*, each left a 'footprint' (Cunliffe and Davenport 1985, 65, 130). How far religious specialists convened rituals on smaller, local cult sites is less certain, though the presence of fragments of sceptre binding and a 'special' bronze vessel at the open air hilltop shrine at Frensham, Surrey (Graham 2001), suggests that they may have existed, perhaps as peripatetics, able to serve a number of communities within an area. The paucity of evidence for priestly regalia from within settlement contexts may be partly because such items were dispersed away from any shrines and temples, and so were perhaps not as readily identified as such. There are some examples of these objects, particularly from nucleated settlements, such as the iron 'cult spearhead' from the roadside shrine in the settlement at Higham Ferrers, Northants, which may have been used by specialists within the religious site for rituals and/or processions (Lawrence and Smith 2009, 220). Nevertheless, it is notable that items interpreted as priestly regalia make up less than 2 per cent of all 550 religious objects from nucleated settlements.

The overall corpus of religious artefacts from nucleated settlements – as with all other domestic contexts – was dominated by figurines, with 132 examples from 61 sites, most of them probably used in personal worship (Durham 2012). Within nucleated sites the numbers were equally divided into pipeclay and metal (usually copper alloy) examples. Pipeclay figurines were made in parts of Gaul during the first and second centuries A.D., with the divinities represented mostly comprising Venus, along with Dea Nutrix, Apollo, Mercury and Minerva. Recent work on the large corpus of pipeclay figurines from Roman London has suggested that many may have been deliberately broken into different recognisable body parts prior to deposition, perhaps used as *ex votos* linked with divine pleas for healing, as would appear to be the case with model votive body parts just discussed (Fittock 2015, 128). A study of the metal figurines of Roman Britain by Durham (2012) noted over 1000 examples, with multiple and widespread representations of the most popular gods, such as Mercury, Hercules and Jupiter, as well as many other divinities, including limited numbers depicting some of the household deities – *Genius paterfamilias* and the Lares – which may have been

kept in small household shrines as discussed above (p. 152). Of the 579 metal figurines in Durham's study that came from known Roman sites, most were from urban and military contexts, with London in particular having a very large number; just 155 were from rural contexts with most of these coming from a small number of religious sites (*ibid.*, table 11).

In addition to figurines, roadside settlements and villages also had relatively high quantities of miniature objects (primarily axes) and 'religious' stone sculpture, the latter being even more common than in rural religious sites. This may be partly because some of these sculptured pieces actually derived from funerary monuments on the periphery of the settlement, such as the fragments of two statues – one of a lion and one of a human torso, two-thirds life size – found in early excavations at Girton College in north-west Cambridge near to a number of Roman burials (Evans and Newman 2010, 148). Other sculpture may have come from public shrines or temples (or funerary monuments) within the nucleated settlements, though much of this material appears to have been removed from its original context, such as the 30 or more items of highly accomplished figured sculpture re-used in later features at the roadside settlement at Stanwick, Northants; these depicted subjects from classical mythology, including life-size figures of Hercules, Minerva and a river god (Neal 1989).

The emphasis on divine imagery is seen most clearly in the corpus of religious objects from villas, where over 60 per cent of all such artefacts comprise either figurines, sculpture or other depictions of the deity, such as a lead plaque of the goddess Isis from the villa at Groundwell Ridge, Swindon (Brickstock *et al.* 2006). These may be combined with the many images of gods, goddesses and mythological creatures and events seen in the figurative mosaics within many villa buildings in Britain (cf. Neal and Cosh 2009), to suggest the overall importance of display. These villas, particularly the large later Roman examples from the west of England such as Chedworth in Gloucestershire (Esmonde Cleary 2013), appear actively to use religious imagery, usually in its most 'Roman' form, to help define the status of their occupants, as part of the wider suite of cultural indicators, including architecture, landscaping, personal appearance and culinary tastes (see Chs 2 to 4). This is not to say that the underlying beliefs of the villa occupiers were necessarily superficial, but just, perhaps, that it was important that their peers would perceive their piety to be of the 'correct' kind. How far any of the divine images were actively used in cult ritual is largely uncertain, though many were no

doubt placed in the various *lararia*, *nymphaea* and other shrines within and around the villa as noted above (p. 152).

The relatively limited numbers of religious artefacts from the small proportion of farmsteads to have such items are, like villas, most likely to comprise figurines, with sculpture and other divine representations being very scarce. Most of these figurines were of copper alloy, though wooden examples may have been more common, with rare survivals found in other contexts, such as at Ickham in Kent (Bennett *et al.* 2010, 215). As with those on other settlement types, the figurines were probably used in personal worship, which is corroborated by the fact just three of the 23 farmsteads with figurines also had possible evidence for sacred space. Many of these figurines were fragmentary and some may even have been furniture or cart fittings rather than free-standing statuettes, such as the rather crudely modelled left hand and hip of a draped female figure from a Romano-British farmstead in the Stour Valley near Wixoe in Suffolk (Atkins 2014). Twenty-three miniature objects were also found at sixteen farmsteads, these mostly comprising axes, such as that found near to a late Roman shrine on the edge of the farmstead at Claydon Pike in Gloucestershire (Miles *et al.* 2007). The copper-alloy model of a human leg found at Waste Management Park, Waterbeach, Cambridge, may have been an *ex voto* related to the shrine tentatively identified in the vicinity (Ranson 2008), though most of these objects probably functioned as personal religious tokens/amulets, albeit reflecting a variety of underlying beliefs and concerns. Up to 24 possible lead curse tablets were recovered from seven farmsteads, hinting that these highly personal rituals were not always confined to the larger religious sites. However, in most cases this attribution remains uncertain as there was either no writing or any script remained undecipherable, and small pieces of rolled up sheet lead could also, for example, have functioned as net weights (Dütting and Hoss 2014). The possibility remains, nevertheless, that these represent ‘verbal curses’, as may have been the case for the eight rolled lead sheets found within the shrine at Higham Ferrers, Northants, which were all blank except one, which had illegible ‘pseudo-text’ (Tomlin 2009). The only legible curse tablet from a farmstead came from a late Roman settlement at Nursteed Road, Devizes, Wiltshire, which was largely undecipherable, but included the line ‘the person who stole this’ (Valentin and Robinson 2002). It was found in a large midden along with other possible religious objects, all of which may have originally derived from a nearby shrine.

Military *vici* and possible supply depots represent the last major context type within which religious objects have been recorded, and here we are limited by the fact that data were not collected from the region of Hadrian’s Wall. Nevertheless, although objects such as figurines are still well represented across many sites, it is immediately noticeable that altars form a distinctly larger proportion of the overall corpus than in any other context. In part this is influenced by the large number of altars found in pits in the *vicus* at Maryport, most dedicated to Jupiter Optimus Maximus, that were re-used as footings for a large timber building (Haynes and Wilmott 2012). Yet even without this it would appear that altars are generally more frequent on such sites, at least in the north of England, when compared with settlements or even religious loci further south, with the exception of places like Bath, where numerous altars and altar fragments have been found. The altars from this site include those with dedications by military personnel, such as that by Forianus of the Sixth Legion Vitrix to the Genius Loci (*RIB* 139), suggesting that the development of this religious complex had close connections with the army (see above, p. 167). Inscribed altars have long been noted to have been concentrated in military zones, both in Britain and in Gaul, all generally dating to the second and early third centuries A.D. (Derks 1998, 82; Zoll 1995; 2016). This north–south, or ‘military–civilian’, division in the provisions of inscribed altars has been argued to relate to wider variances in the articulation of social and spiritual identities within differing communities (Zoll 2016, 636).

#### RELIGIOUS MATERIAL CULTURE: A SUMMARY

Despite presenting a very incomplete picture, material culture associated with religious beliefs remains a very important evidential base for attempting any understanding of the range of divinities worshipped and rituals practiced, as well as how the various cults were organised in rural Roman Britain. The excavated objects form a key element in interpreting the nature and function of sacred sites, and also in assessing variations in the way that different communities and social groups articulated religious expression and identity.

It has been established that the physical form of sacred space could vary widely across rural Roman Britain, and the associated material culture is just as varied. What have been termed ‘votive’ assemblages – primarily the physical remains of offerings to the gods – may be relatively consistent in terms of the range of object types (coins, personal objects etc.), but are largely absent, or present in very small quantities, from shrines

situated in farmsteads and villas, suggesting either different types of offerings (e.g. perishable remains) or divergent forms of rituals. Further differences lie between religious sites associated with most nucleated settlements and those in rural, non-settlement contexts, with the latter generally having much larger assemblages of both ‘votive’ and ‘non-votive’ finds. Many of the more extensive rural sanctuaries in parts of central and southern Britain in particular have quantities and types of artefacts that suggest they had at least some permanent resident population, possibly acting as largely independent cult communities, or as outposts of the public religious cult of the wider *civitas*, with associated industrial, commercial, and agricultural practices.

Away from defined sacred sites, we are left with fairly limited evidence for religious belief and ritual behaviour, but these include the range of intrinsically religious objects found across different settlement and landscape contexts. It is clear that the types of religious object recovered varied across these contexts, partly reflecting differences in the way that religious beliefs were articulated within their social environments, as seen with the emphasis on divine imagery and display within villa settlements. This analysis has focused upon the context of religious finds from excavated sites, but other work using primarily unstratified data can provide complementary evidence for the regional variance in religious expression, as seen for example in Daubney’s (2010) analysis of inscribed ‘Tot’ rings, referring to the god Toutatis, which are found almost exclusively in eastern parts of the Central Belt region.

Clearly the type, quantity, distribution and broad context of material culture are of significance for our wider understanding of religious expression in rural Roman Britain, but just as important is an understanding of how such objects were actually used, alongside animal and plant remains, within religious rituals in the countryside.

### **COMMUNICATING WITH THE GODS: RELIGIOUS RITUAL WITHIN THE COUNTRYSIDE OF ROMAN BRITAIN**

The complex, shifting, multifarious range of divinities and spirits encountered across the Roman world would all have required some form of dialogue with their supplicants, whether as grand spectacles of public ritual and sacrifice for the well-being of the state, or private prayers beseeching help for personal concerns. Individuals and communities may have interacted with numerous deities, and the details of such divine dialogue would have varied tremendously, both geographically and chronologically, and across

different cults. Nevertheless, there were a number of key ritual practices thought appropriate for communication with the divine realms that would appear more widespread across the Roman Empire, notably prayer, sacrifice and divination (Rives 2007, 24–7).

The importance of using ‘correct’ procedures for these religious rites and practices is often seen as paramount within Roman religion, or at least in terms of the public cult, in order to provide civic and cosmic stability, these two worlds being completely entwined (Whittaker 1997). Such public religious rituals were organised through large numbers of festivals detailed in official calendars, and comprehensive literary articulations of ‘traditional’ Roman religious practices were set out by the likes of Varro and Cicero in the late Republic (Ando 2007; MacRae 2016, 141). Central to these rituals was the sacrifice of animals by a priest or official upon an altar within a temple complex, often followed by divination of the entrails by a specialist, and subsequent feasting – sacrifices essentially being ‘meals that the human community shared with gods’ (Frankfurter 2006, 557; see discussion on the ritual use of animals and plants below, pp. 192, 199).

While the overall emphasis on orthopraxy – ensuring the correct ritual behaviour – in Roman religion is important, it does potentially obscure the multiplicity of beliefs behind Roman ritual behaviours, as recently demonstrated by Hunt (2016) in her study of the use and symbolism of trees in Roman ritual practices. It is also not necessarily the case that such a rigid adherence to certain ritual behaviour was always followed in Britain, even within civic cult sites, let alone in the wide range of other sacred loci discussed above. Nevertheless, it does seem that all of the key rituals noted above were practised in this province, and were no doubt used to help create and maintain shared identities at a number of different levels – family, wider community and even a sense of ‘Roman-ness’ (cf. Revell 2007, 211).

Archaeological evidence for these rituals is occasionally glimpsed from inscriptions, as for example the curse tablets discussed above, or dedications found on objects such as those to the goddess Senuna revealed on some of the votive plaques from the shrine at Ashwell End, Hertfordshire, including one reading ‘To the goddess Senua[.....] Firmanus [.....] willingly fulfilled his vow’ (Tomlin 2008). Most of our archaeological evidence for ritual, however, does not come from inscriptions, but from observation of depositional patterning in objects, animal and plant remains. The majority of artefacts within the ‘votive’ assemblages recovered from sacred sites discussed above would likely have been offerings to

the deities, possibly deposited in such loci as part of formal vows (*ex votos*), an established and formulaic method of communication with the deity within the Roman world (Derks 1995; Bagnall-Smith 2008, 153–4; Smith 2016a). The *solutio* part of this ritual relates to the paying of the vow by the supplicant, and is directly attested on numerous inscribed altars mainly from military frontier zones (Zoll 2016), as well as on other objects such as the votive plaques at Ashwell End just noted. Quite how many of the other coins, brooches, figurines, animal remains, etc. found on sacred sites would also have been deposited as part of the same formulaic ritual is uncertain, but it would seem likely that the same basic principle of paying the divine debt was in operation, even if the mechanics of the overall ritual were more varied.

It is clear that not all artefacts, and animal and plant remains from sacred sites, were treated in the same way, with some material being specifically deposited in sub-surface features such as pits, wells and ditches, while others were recovered from floors within buildings or across exterior surface layers. In most cases this surface material has been truncated and re-deposited and so any 'formal' spatial patterning that might relate to religious ritual or another function is largely lost or difficult to ascertain (cf. Smith 2001, 20). One of the few exceptions is the distribution of artefacts, including hobnails, brooches and hairpins, on the ground surface of the inner shrine enclosure at

Higham Ferrers in Northants, many of which were arranged around a central cleared space, presumed to have been the location of the main cult focus (Lawrence and Smith 2009). The inclusion of so many hobnails is unusual and, rather than representing shoes, it was suggested that some may have been used alongside other nails as fixings to attach objects (offerings?) to the focal feature (*ibid.*, 331; FIG. 5.50).

The material from pits, ditches, wells and shafts within sacred sites includes that which can reasonably be defined as being part of structured deposits (see definition and discussion above, p. 123). This may have been material that was originally displayed in the temple or shrine structure – if such a feature existed – before being carefully collected and deposited, perhaps in formally orchestrated ceremonies. Animal remains from the shrine at Haddenham in Cambridgeshire were divided into those from surface deposits, which were thought to have been used in divination (examining the entrails), and those deposited in pits, which were suggested as representing sacrifices used in asking divine favour or paying off divine debt (Evans and Hodder 2006, 358). As will be discussed below, many sacred sites appear to have no evidence for any structured deposit, while at others the practice appears commonplace, again pointing to the variability of ritual practice across different religious loci, even within those with similar chronologies and architectural arrangements.

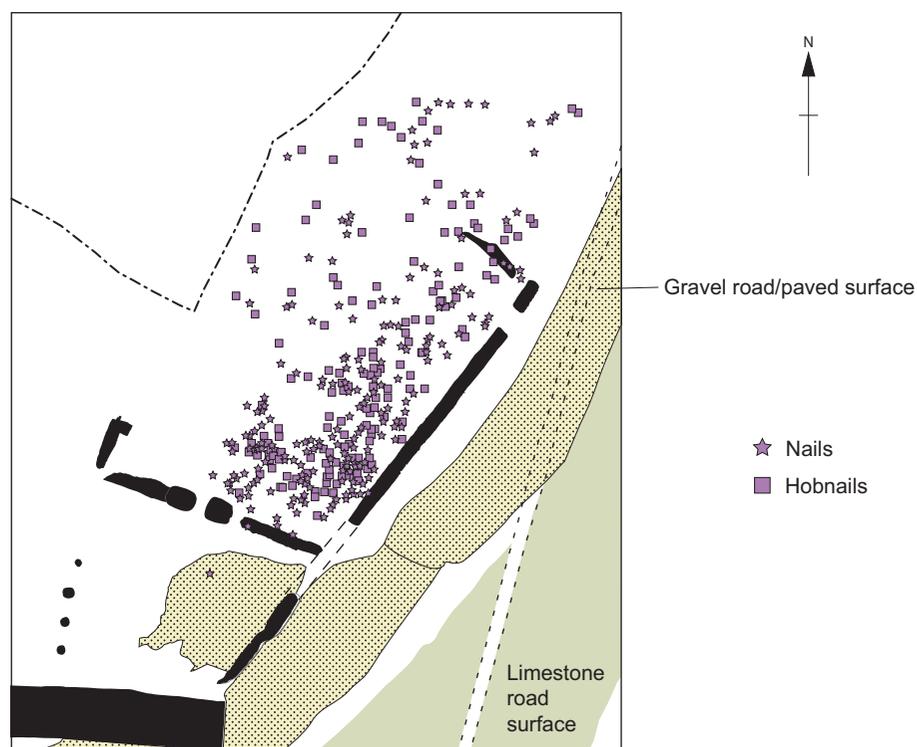


FIG. 5.50. Distribution of nails and hobnails within the shrine at Higham Ferrers, Northants (Lawrence and Smith 2009)

While the occurrence and significance of these ‘special’ deposits within Romano-British sacred sites has long been appreciated, it is only fairly recently that attention has been drawn to other instances of seemingly ‘unusual’ or ‘patterned’ deposits in Roman-period contexts located away from dedicated sacred space (e.g. Fulford 2001; Hingley 2006; Chadwick 2012; Smith 2016a). Such deposits have a longer history of investigation within Iron Age studies, and the brief analysis of late Iron Age ritual presented above (p. 129) has revealed broad geographic patterns in their materials and contexts. This will now be taken forward into the Roman period, when it appears that the concept of communicating with the otherworld through such acts of deposition continued in strength.

### STRUCTURED OR PLACED DEPOSITS

There has been a large increase over recent years in the incidence of structured deposits being reported from Romano-British sites. Over 60 per cent of the 516 Roman sites, accounting for *c.* 1200 examples included in this project’s database, were identified in reports produced after 2001,

which is, in large part, due to the much greater recognition of the significance of these unusual or ‘patterned’ deposits, following on from work such as Fulford’s ‘Pervasive “ritual” behaviour in Roman Britain’ (2001). Of course, as discussed above (p. 123) not all of these articulated animal skeletons, complete pottery vessels and other ‘odd’ arrangements of artefacts and ecofacts may necessarily have been deposited as part of religious rituals, and even of those that were, the motivations behind such actions were undoubtedly complex and varied. But nevertheless, as highlighted above with the late Iron Age examples, there are certain broad characteristics and patterns that can be drawn out of the necessarily rudimentary data collected on these deposits as part of this project.

The Roman sites with structured deposits are spread throughout much of the province (FIG. 5.51), covering more of the north and west than was the case with the late Iron Age examples (see FIG. 5.7). Chronologically, both in terms of numbers of sites and deposits, there was an increase in occurrence during the late Iron Age–early Roman period (deposits dating to the first century A.D.) and another, much larger, spike

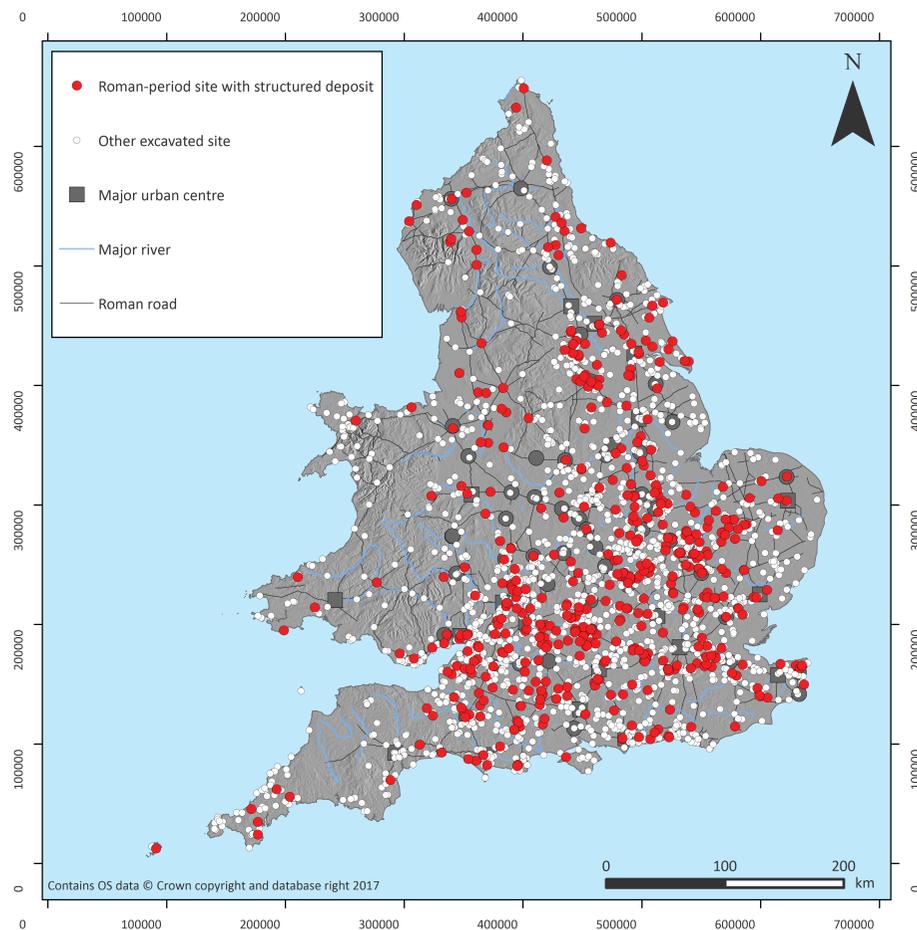


FIG. 5.51. Distribution of excavated Roman-period sites with evidence for structured deposits

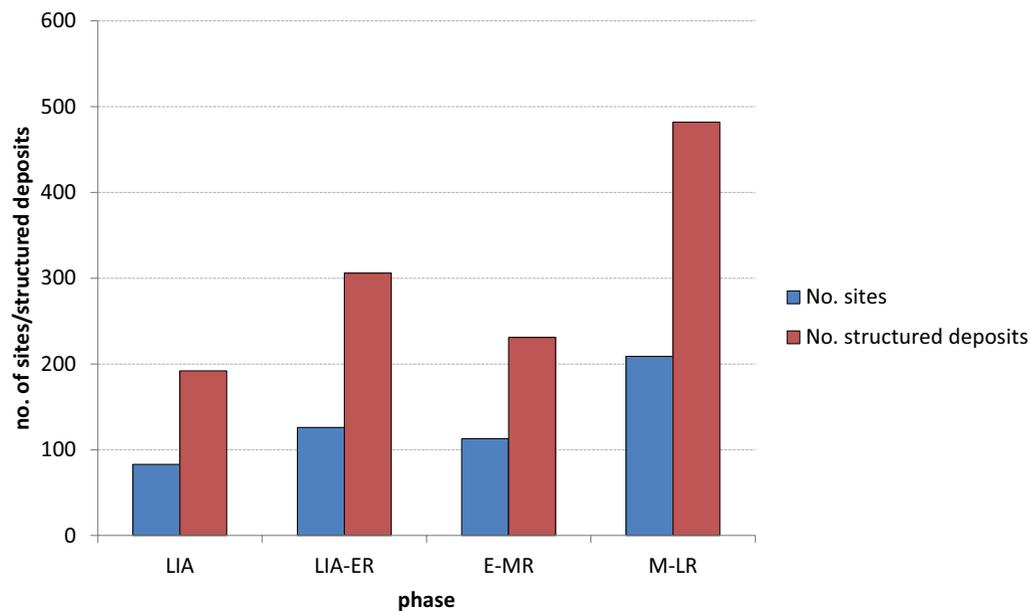


FIG. 5.52. Occurrence of structured deposits over time

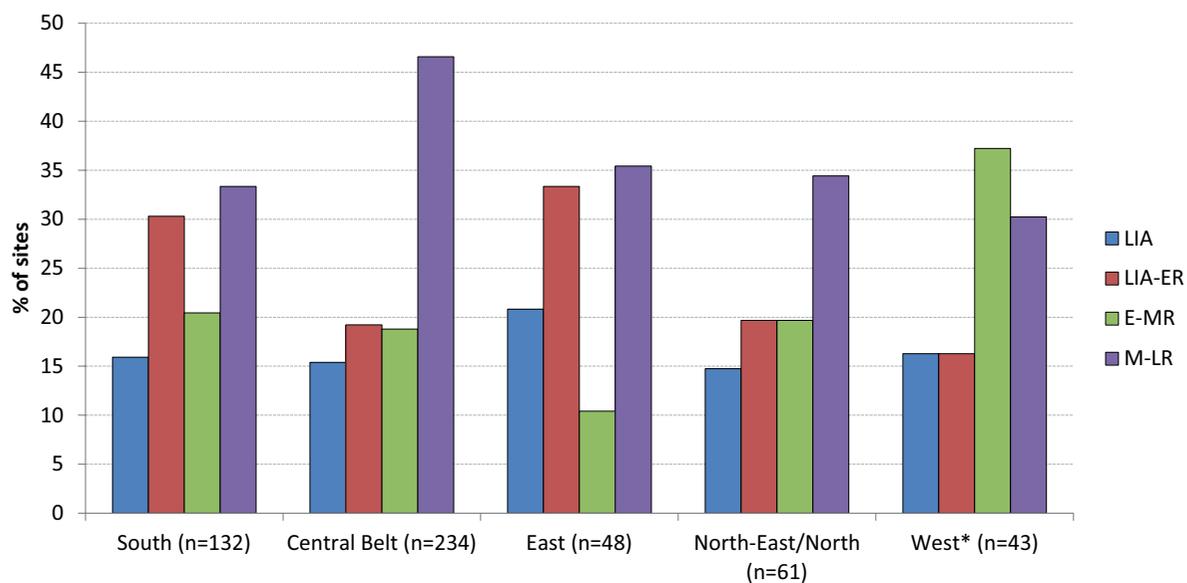


FIG. 5.53. Regional variation in occurrence of structured deposits over time (\*West includes Central West, Upland Wales and the Marches and South-West regions)

during the mid- to late Roman period (third to fourth century A.D.) (FIG. 5.52). This pattern does not simply follow the overall chronological trajectory of settlements in use, as these peak during the second century A.D. (Smith and Fulford 2016, 405), a period where there appears to have been a reduction in the number of structured deposits. One possibility is that the peaks in the numbers of such deposits are related to periods of greater stress and upheaval. Kamash (2016, 688) has highlighted the major role that religion can play in social renegotiation in times of stress, with other possible examples being the revival of activity at certain prehistoric sites in the south of

England at the start of the Roman period, and particularly from the late third century A.D. onwards, as shown by Hutton (2011, 15–16). FIGURE 5.53 shows the incidence of structured deposits over time across different regions, and it is clear that the major spikes during the late Iron Age to early Roman (LIA–ER) period only occur in the South and East – arguably the areas most affected by the early aftermath of the Claudian invasion and particularly the Boudican revolt. Elsewhere, the west of England and Wales is the only ‘region’ to have the greatest rise in deposits during the early to mid-Roman period (later first to early third century A.D.), which corresponds

with the period of greatest Roman military expansion in these areas. Meanwhile the Central Belt and North-East are marked by major spikes during the mid- to late Roman period, perhaps affected by the many changes in settlement form, landscape character and agricultural regimes witnessed in these parts at this time (Smith *et al.* 2016; Allen *et al.* 2017). Of course these are only broad regional and chronological trends and there are undoubtedly many individual and local circumstances that may have contributed towards a rise in the incidence of ritual deposits.

As mentioned above, the occurrence of structured deposits is not limited to sacred sites; they can be found across all types of settlement, as well as in wider parts of the landscape, including field and trackway ditches, and in rural cemeteries and industrial sites (TABLE 5.3). Most have been identified within farmsteads, though this is both a product of the sheer number of these sites, and the fact that many more have been excavated in recent years (cf. Allen and Smith 2016, 20). As a proportion of the total number of sites in each category, farmsteads actually have the lowest incidence of structured deposits (at 13 per cent), followed by villas (16 per cent), with much greater representation at nucleated settlements (*c.* 52 per cent). Interestingly, rural religious sites are not any more prolific in terms of evidence for these deposits than nucleated settlements, and both have a similar average number of deposits within sites where they do occur. The incidence still remains fairly low at between three and four examples per site, although, unsurprisingly, this is higher than at farmsteads, villas, and wider rural landscape features. There are of course many individual exceptions, with, for example, 24 deliberate deposits within pits in the shrine precinct at Elms Farm, Heybridge, Essex, and over 40 further examples in ditches, pits, wells and structures within the main settlement (Atkinson and Preston 2015, 105–15). For the most part, however, there are relatively few recognised examples of these ritual deposits at any site type, especially given the duration of use of many of the sites, and – as suggested for the late Iron Age above – it is debatable how far they were ever regular acts of propitiation. It is perhaps more likely that many of the archaeologically detectable examples of structured deposits highlighted here were specific responses to certain circumstances, perhaps in times of particular celebration or stress. Of course we have to accept that there may well have been many other less ‘unusual’ deposits of objects, plant remains or animal parts that could have been ritually motivated, but would be impossible to distinguish within the archaeological record (cf. Chadwick 2015, 50–2).

TABLE 5.3: TYPES OF SITE WITH STRUCTURED DEPOSITS DATING TO THE ROMAN PERIOD

	<i>No. sites</i>	<i>No. deposits</i>	<i>Average no. of deposits</i>
farm	245	443	1.81
villa	53	104	1.96
nucleated settlement	95	313	3.29
military	15	52	3.47
religious	66	257	3.89
rural/field system	24	26	1.08
Other (industrial, funerary)	18	20	1.11

It was highlighted above how, in the late Iron Age, most structured deposits were found in pits or ditches, with a particular emphasis on the terminals of the latter features. While this largely continued into the earlier post-conquest period, the pattern appears to change from the end of the first century A.D. onwards, with a greater variety of other features being utilised (FIG. 5.54). The deposition of material in wells and waterholes in particular appears to increase, some with fairly simple deposits such as the complete Savernake jar placed upright on the base of a waterhole in a farmstead at South Marston Industrial Park, Swindon, Wiltshire (Askew *et al.* 2014). Others were more complex, for example a late second/early third century A.D. well in the roadside settlement at Staines, with deposits of whole pots, including two Rhineland hunt cups, at least sixteen dogs, two rotary querns and a complete red deer antler (Jones 2010, 182; FIG. 5.55). The existence of ‘sacred wells’ has long been recognised in many cultures, often suggested as being places of healing, fertility and life (Varner 2009, 1), and the structured deposition of material in such places would seem to have been part of the wider religious association with water noted above (pp. 144, 162 ). Certainly there are many instances of what may have been ritually deposited objects of Roman date in rivers, lakes and wetlands (e.g. Rogers 2007; 2013, 124), with pewter in particular having a strong association (Poulton and Scott 1993). Lee (2009, 103) noted a distinction between deposits of pewter jugs in the Fenlands and more mixed assemblages from the Rivers Thames, Walbrook (in London), and Ver in Hertfordshire. Pewter vessels were also placed within the sacred spring at Bath (Cunliffe 1988b).

Many of the well/waterhole deposits recorded in this project were interpreted as ‘closure events’, at the end of the feature’s practical life (cf. Chadwick 2015, 41). This does not necessarily mean that these features were not already imbued with some level of sanctity while being used as a water supply,

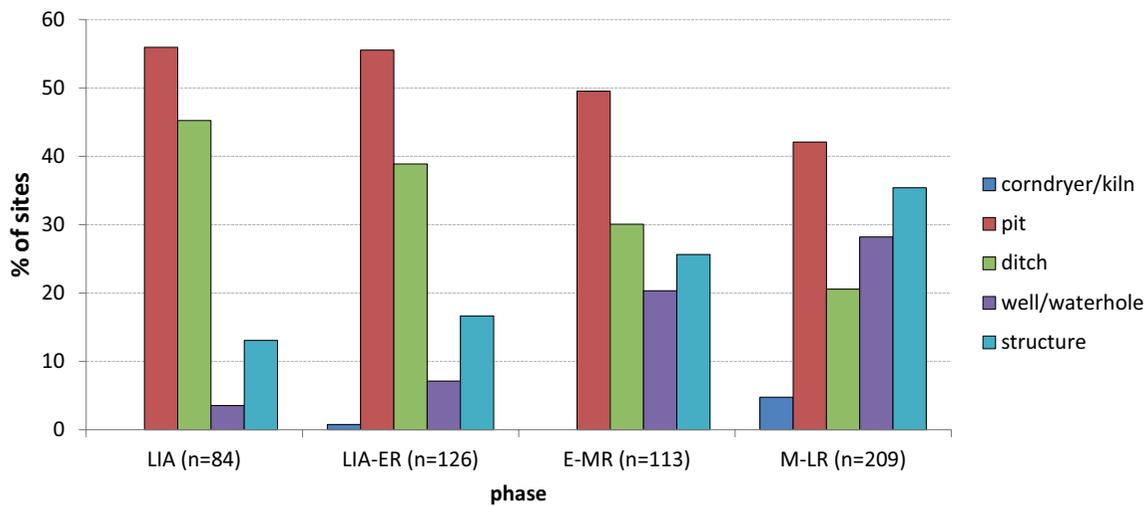


FIG. 5.54. Chronological variation in the contexts of structured deposits

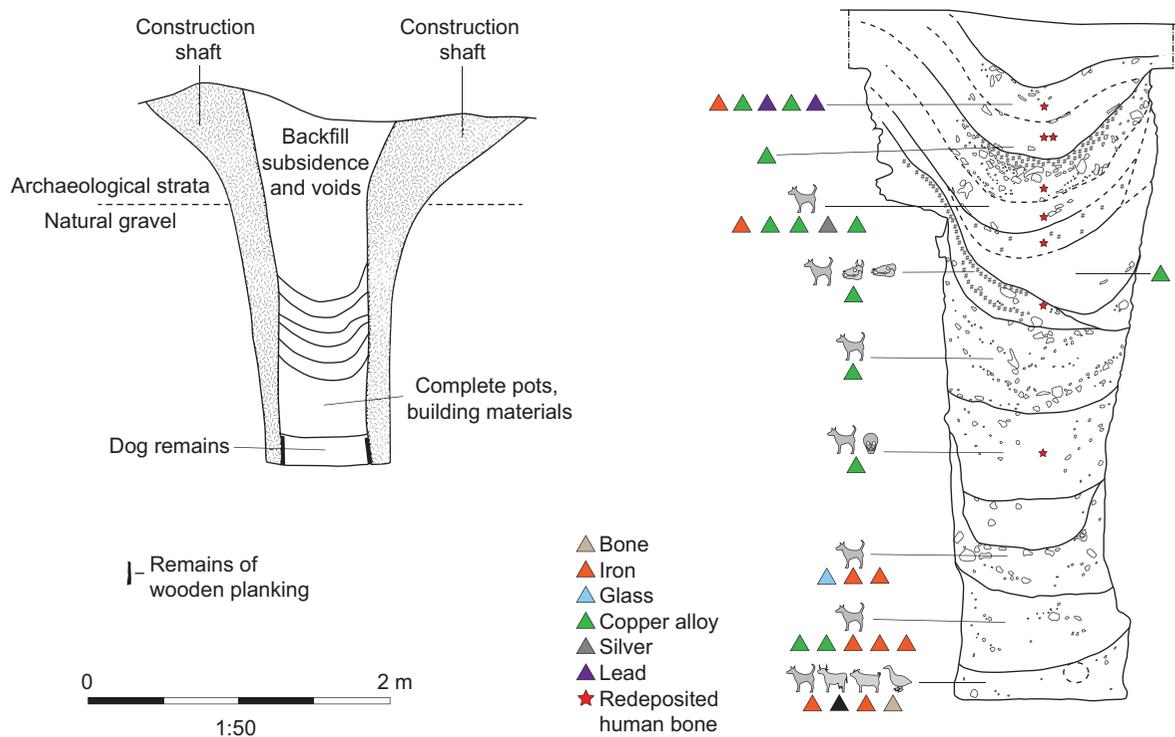


FIG. 5.55. Section of well with structured deposits from County Sports Ground, Staines (after Jones 2010, fig. 3.14), and section of ritual shaft at Springhead (after Andrews *et al.* 2011, fig. 2.55; Reproduced with permission HS1, © HS1)

with most of the small number of villa nymphaea discussed above (p. 152), such as that at Chedworth, probably combining roles as water sources and shrines. It is also possible that some of these wells never had any practical function. Some of the ritual shafts discussed above could have functioned as wells, or at least have been periodically inundated, but probably did not act as primary water sources, as for example the 4.5 m deep ritual shaft at Springhead Sanctuary, where deposits, primarily of animal remains, were made periodically throughout the life of the feature (Andrews *et al.* 2011, 80–2; FIG. 5.55).

In addition to the increase in structured deposition within wells and waterholes, there was a marked rise in the number of deposits within structures, including corndryers, kilns and larger buildings, particularly during the late Roman period (FIG. 5.54). Eight sites had corndryers of third to fourth century date with ‘unusual’ deposits, such as neonatal puppies found alongside millstone fragments in a dryer at Leadenham Quarry, Lincs (WYAS 2001), and a group of nine coins found close together in the flue of a corndryer at Burnby Lane, Hayton, East Riding of Yorkshire, four of them in association with partial skeletons

of two dogs and a neonatal pig (Halkon *et al.* 2015). Alongside the ritual use of cereal remains discussed by Lodwick below (p. 199), this serves to highlight the significance of arable farming in the Central Belt and North-East regions. Those deposits within buildings are often interpreted as foundation offerings, such as the inverted cattle skull placed in a small pit in the centre of a doorway in the west wall of the aisled hall at Thruxton, Hampshire (Cunliffe and Poole 2008a). Others were associated with the end of the building's life, as with the almost complete domestic fowl skeleton that was placed in a feature

seemingly linked with the demolition of the villa at Blacksmith's Corner, Walberton, West Sussex (Robertson 2008). As discussed above, it seems likely that such deposits were not regular offerings, but instead marked specific, important episodes in the life of the building.

The changing pattern in the context of structured deposition is in part due to the types of site that these features were associated with. Villas in particular were more numerous in the mid- to late Roman period, and had much higher incidences of deposits within buildings and wells than other sites (FIG. 5.56). Elsewhere pits

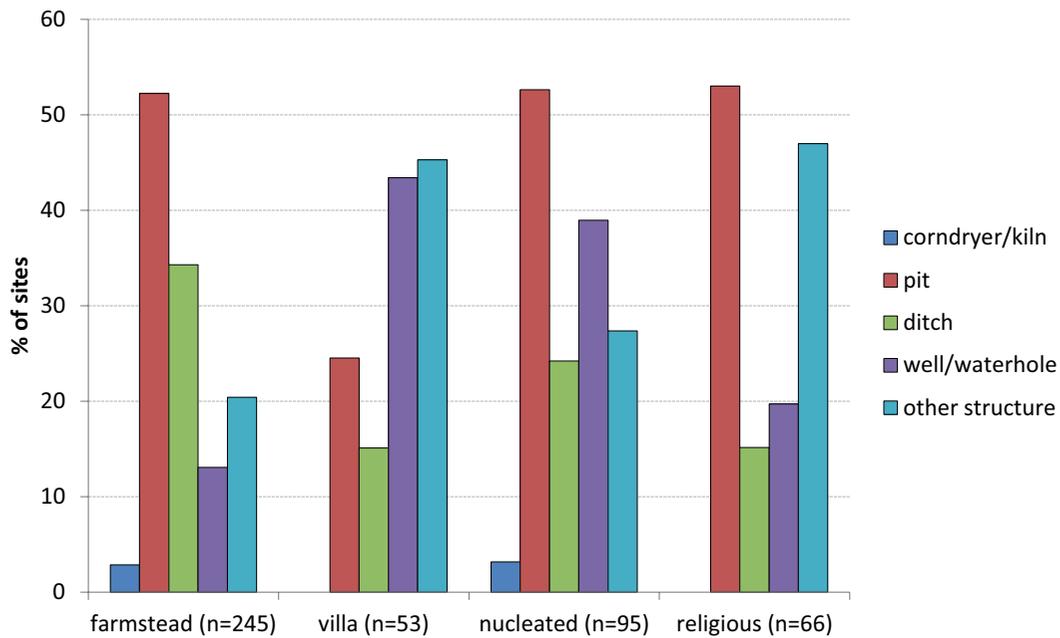


FIG. 5.56. Variation in the contexts of structured deposits of Roman date by site type

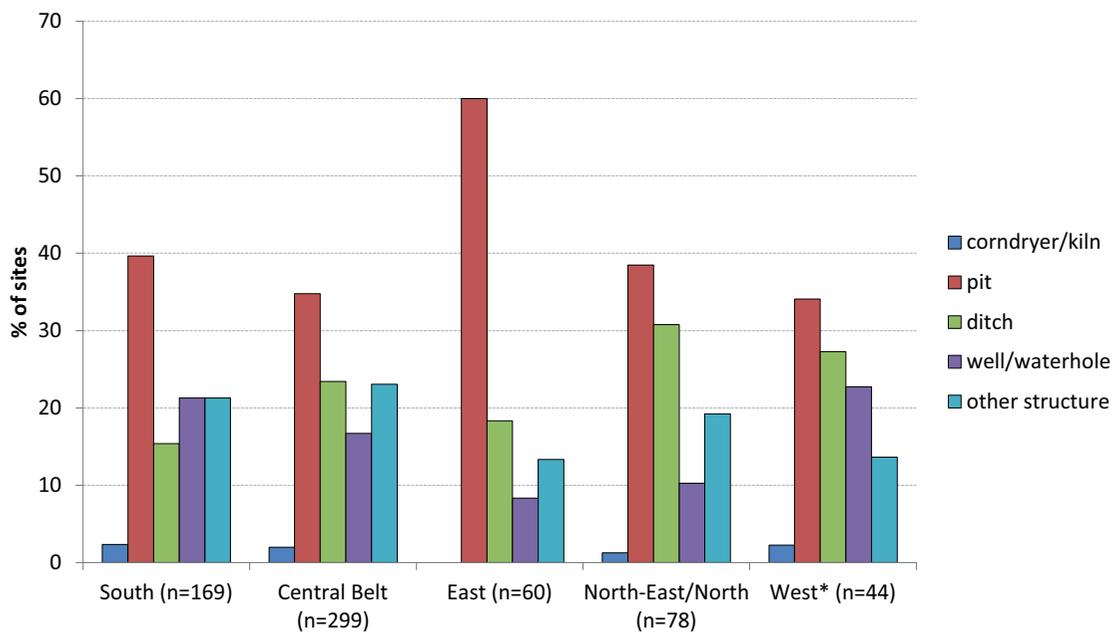


FIG. 5.57. Regional variation in the contexts of structured deposits of Roman date

remained the most common context for structured deposits, though wells were also well represented in nucleated settlements (e.g. the Staines well noted above), and there are many incidences of deposits associated with shrine or temple buildings, such as the three small fourth-century cups buried in pits within the circular shrine at Rutland Water (Carlyle 2011). All of these types of site were at their most numerous during the mid- to late Roman period.

The analysis of structured deposits from late Iron Age contexts above (p. 122) noted major regional differences in the types of associated features, with pits being particularly prevalent in the South and East regions, and ditches being better represented further north and west.

Although the pattern is not quite as stark for the Roman period, the evidence does generally suggest that such traditions continued (FIG. 5.57). The East in particular is very much dominated by pit deposits, and had a low incidence of deposition associated with buildings compared with the South and Central Belt, this probably reflecting the limited evidence for buildings as whole in this region (Smith 2016c, 225–7).

In general, the major types of material incorporated into structured deposits of the Roman period differed little from the late Iron Age, with complete pottery vessels and, in particular, animal remains being dominant (FIG. 5.58; see FIG. 5.8 above). Noticeable differences in the minor categories include a reduction in the

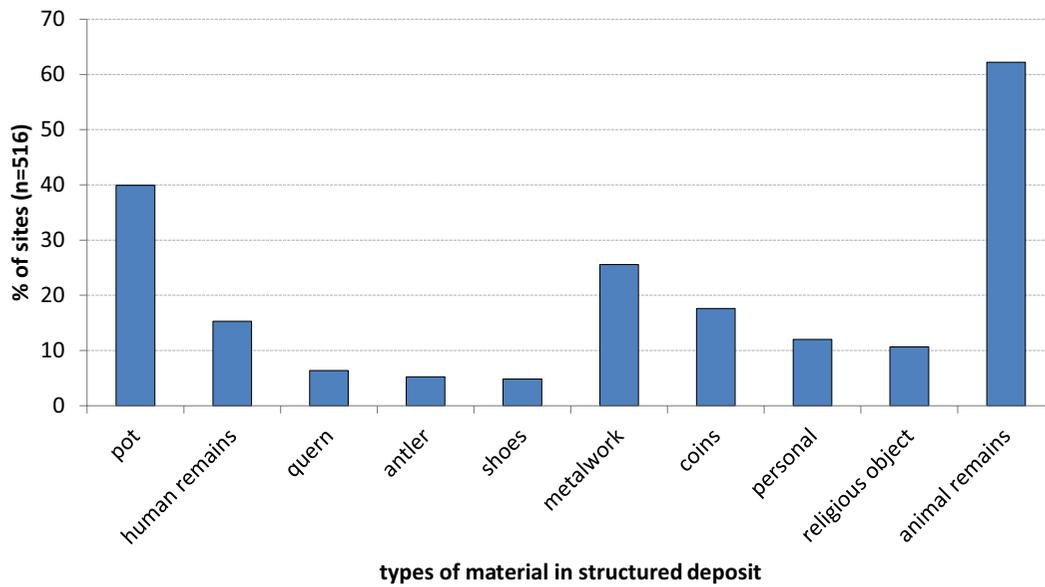


FIG. 5.58. Incidence of the principal types of material within structured deposits of Roman date

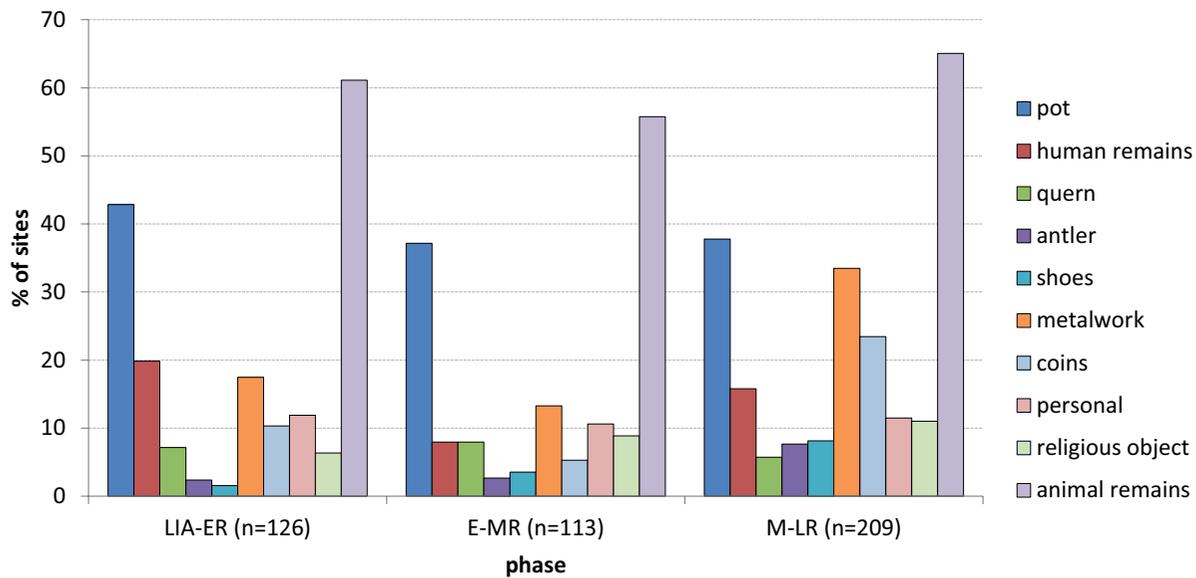


FIG. 5.59. Chronological variation in the principal types of material within structured deposits

proportion of deposits with quernstones, and increases in those with coins and religious objects, this reflecting their much greater abundance in the Roman period. Likewise, the incorporation of shoes in deposits at 25 sites remains a post-conquest phenomenon. There were some broad changes in composition within the Roman period, most notably an increase in coins and other metalwork during the third and fourth centuries A.D., the former reflecting the major increase in coin loss in the countryside at this time (FIG. 5.59; see also discussion of coin hoards below, p. 191). The inclusion of human remains (other than burials as reported in Ch. 6) peaks at *c.* 20 per cent and *c.* 16 per cent of deposits during the late Iron Age to early Roman (LIA–ER) and mid- to late Roman (M–LR) phases, with an intervening fall to just *c.* 7 per cent in the early to mid-Roman (E–MR) period. The use of human bone within these deposits, such as the fragment of human skull placed with a pottery vessel and animal bone in a LIA–ER pit at Stone Castle, Kent (Haslam 2009), probably held great symbolic value, and may have been reserved for particular periods of societal stress, as has been suggested for the occasional practice of human sacrifice (Aldhouse-Green 2001a, 169; see also Ch. 6, p. 275).

The relative prevalence of different materials within structured deposits varied according to the type of site they were associated with (FIG. 5.60). Deposits within farmsteads generally contained few materials apart from pottery vessels and animal remains, though, as highlighted by Lodwick below, plant remains are occasionally recorded on

such sites, and were probably far more common than current evidence suggests. Villas and nucleated settlements had a similar prevalence of pot/animal deposits, though with much higher incidences of other finds, particularly metalwork and coins. This reflects the generally greater range and higher quantities of artefacts recovered from these types of settlement, and there is nothing at this level of analysis to suggest that occupants of villas and nucleated sites were choosing radically different assemblages to incorporate into these ‘special’ deposits. As ever, it is only when analysis is scaled down to the level of the individual site that the full variety in the composition, context and form of deposits can be appreciated.

Religious sites exhibit the most variation in terms of the composition of their structured deposits. Although animal remains and pottery vessels are still commonly incorporated (see discussion of animal remains below, p. 192), metalwork is just as frequently found, including many coins, personal items and specifically religious objects. Antler is found in far fewer deposits, though it is relatively common compared with other site types. Some of these objects no doubt entered the ground as the result of larger scale public ritual, such as the mass of mainly young lambs, oyster shell and pottery from large pits in the corner of the temenos at Great Chesterford, which surely represents the remnants of ritual feasting (Medlycott 2011, 84). In other cases, however, the structured deposits may have arisen from smaller scale personal devotions within the cult site, more akin to the deposits seen within settlements and

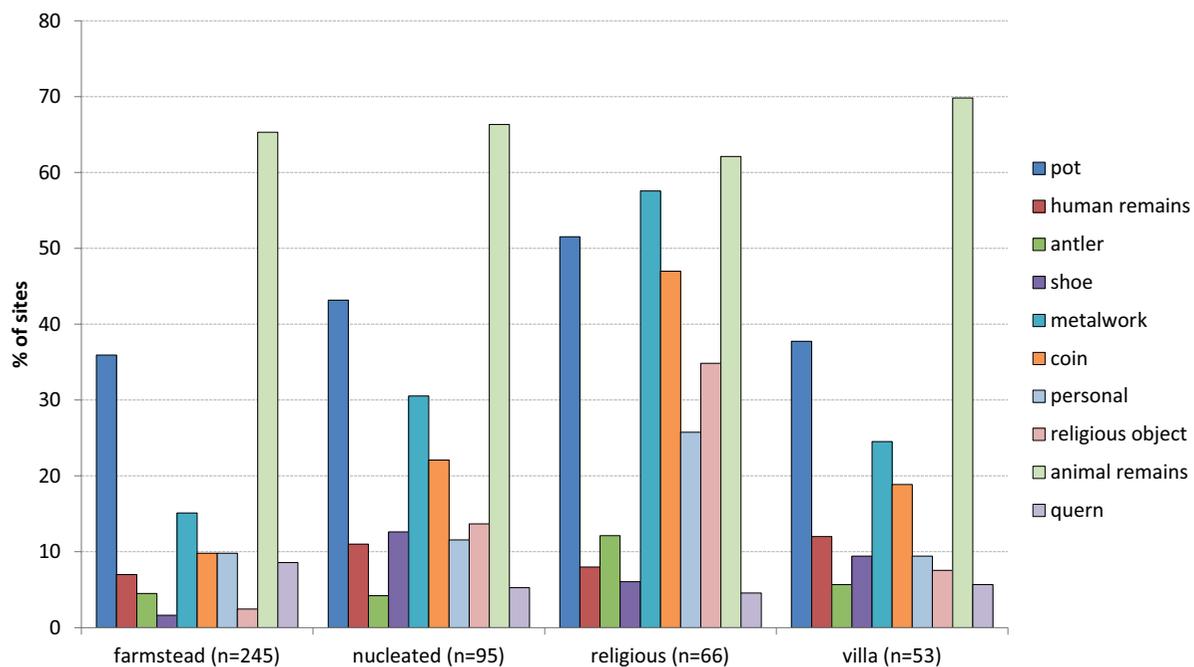


FIG. 5.60. Incidence by site type of the principal types of material within structured deposits

field systems, though presumably in most cases sanctioned by any attending cult personnel.

The analyses presented here on the chronological, contextual and compositional elements of structured deposits in the Roman period disguise a huge degree of individual variation. Furthermore, the ritual use of different material elements of these deposits has the potential to be studied in much greater detail than is possible in this publication; indeed this has been done for a number of types such as metal objects (e.g. Hobbs 2006; Lee 2009; Lundock 2015), coins (King 2007b; Wythe 2007), shoes (van Driel-Murray 1999) and animal bone (e.g. Maltby 2010a; Morris 2011). In this context, some wider consideration of the ritual significance of certain materials/categories will now be presented, namely coin hoards, animal remains and plant remains.

## COIN HOARDS

*By Tom Brindle*

While Roman coin hoards are often seen in economic and/or political terms, as stores of wealth hidden with the intention of recovery, particularly in times of political or social instability, there has also been a long-held recognition that not all groups of coins were necessarily deposited for such reasons (e.g. Aitchison 1988; Reece 1988; 2002; Johns 1994; Millett 1994; Hobbs 2006; Bland 2013). This section presents a brief discussion of the potential ritual significance of some coin hoards. First, however, it is important to emphasise that the Roman Rural Settlement Project focused primarily on the excavated evidence for Romano-British settlements. Relatively few coin hoards have been recovered from excavated settlement sites (indeed, only 201 coin hoards were identified, recovered from 136 sites – just 4 per cent of sites on the project database), and they are far more often discovered by metal-detector users. A recent major collaborative project between the University of Leicester and the British Museum has sought to explore the various reasons for the hoarding of coins during the Roman period (see Bland 2013). That project has shown how, where the contexts of such coin hoards have been explored, they are often recovered from outside core settlement areas, frequently in the landscapes surrounding domestic sites, a pattern previously recognised for hoards generally (e.g. Johns 1996b, 8–9); this largely explains the scarcity of coin hoards in the current RRSP database. Readers are therefore directed towards the University of Leicester/British Museum forthcoming monograph for a detailed and nuanced discussion of coin hoarding during the Roman period, as well as for an overview of the

extensive literature associated with the study of hoarding, and how our perceptions of them have changed, and, indeed, continue to do so.

By using the term hoard in this section, there is an intention to differentiate between coins deposited at known, formalised, religious sites (temples and shrines, discussed above, p. 132), and those buried in the wider landscape, where the ritual significance of the location is not always clearly obvious, and which, before the greater awareness of the potential votive nature of some coin hoards, were usually considered in purely economic terms. It is important to emphasise, however, that groups of coins were evidently buried for a wide range of reasons, which are usually unknowable. Some, without any doubt, must have been stores of wealth, buried for safekeeping, as references in ancient textual sources tell us (see Johns 1994 for examples). We should therefore be wary of unquestioning assumptions that coins were buried for any particular reason, whether as stores of savings, emergency deposits or votive offerings, but open to a range of possibilities, guided by the specific context within which an individual coin hoard is found. A further point to make concerns the definition of the term ‘hoard’; while coin hoards, by their very nature, tend to be defined by the deposition of multiple coins together, single gold coins often represent more value than finds of multiple coins of base metal, and in this sense, as stores of value, ought not automatically to be considered as distinct from groups of lower denominations (Haselgrove 1993, 50; Hobbs 2006, 7; Bland 2013).

Although often difficult to establish archaeologically, the difference between a hoard hidden for safe keeping and that deposited for votive purposes has often been seen as the distinction between a group of objects that were hidden with the intention of recovery, and that which was dedicated for religious purposes, where no recovery was anticipated (e.g. Reece 1988, 262). However, Johns (1994; 1996b) has made the point that the votive dedication of a hoard need not necessarily have meant its permanent removal from circulation; ‘safekeeping’ and ‘votive’ are not mutually exclusive categories (Johns 1996b, 6). Coins (or other objects) dedicated at temples, for instance, were not necessarily permanently removed from circulation; they may have been used by priests for temple expenditure, thus re-entering circulation (*ibid.*, 10), or else have been deposited temporarily at the cult site to be guarded by the gods until needed (no doubt for a fee), as was the case at certain Greek sanctuaries (Tomlinson 1976, 64–71). Coins deposited at temples were not therefore necessarily ‘ritually abandoned’.

There are also concerns over the unquestioning and uncritical use of the term ‘votive’ (Johns 1996b). Even where a coin hoard may have been deposited for ‘ritual’ purposes, ‘votive’ practices are likely to have been dynamic, with cultural, geographical and temporal differences. Seeking to interpret coin hoards in a normative fashion does an injustice to what may have been important distinctions in terms of the meaning and ways in which hoards were buried. As with other ‘structured’ deposits noted above, there may have been many religious reasons for depositing coin hoards in the ground, in wells, rivers or other places, and they need not all have been similar. The landscape context of hoarding has been given a great deal of recent attention, and the choice of where to deposit a hoard has often been seen as an indicator as to its potential meaning. The ancient meanings of any landscape are, however, impossible to reconstruct through modern viewpoints, and meanings are likely to have varied over time and between individuals. Such issues are discussed at considerable length in the forthcoming publication by the ‘Hoarding in Iron Age and Roman Britain’ project (Ghey pers. comm.).

While the complex nature of coin hoards and the difficulties surrounding their interpretation require considerable caution to be exercised, the remainder of this section discusses some particular instances of coin hoards recorded by the Roman Rural Settlement Project which, potentially, may be regarded in some way as being of ritual significance. For instance, at Ilchester Mead in Somerset a group of 56 dispersed late third-century A.D. radiate coins were recovered from one of the rooms of the villa (Hayward 1982). The dispersed nature of the hoard only makes interpretation all the more difficult, yet it is striking that this site had a number of features that might be regarded as being of particular ritual significance. These include the burial of an infant in a lead coffin outside the paved entrance to the northern range of buildings, as well as stone-lined pits that contained what may be interpreted as ‘special’ deposits, including a late third-century coin in a jar and animal bone in another. The presence of these other features at the site do not, of course, necessarily mean that the dispersed hoard was originally buried with any particular ritual significance, but they are evidence for behaviours at the site that make little sense from a modern perspective, and which suggest that a form of religious observance should at least be considered a possibility.

At West Park, Rockbourne, Hampshire, a hoard of late third/fourth century A.D. coins, placed in a pot, was deposited in a shallow pit outside a building, accompanied by ‘sprigs of spice’ within

the vessel (RCHME 1983). We do not know whether these ‘spices’ were considered valuable, and were therefore hidden with the coins for safekeeping, or whether they had a religious votive significance. It is notable that this villa also had an infant burial placed outside the building where the coin hoard was found.

At Bradley Hill, Somerset, one building contained a group of six third-century A.D. radiate coins and three *nummi*, found together with a pot and a sheep’s skull (Leech 1981). Within the corner of the same building there lay an infant burial. There is an analogous example from Wint Hill, Banwell, in North Somerset (Cottrell *et al.* 1996). Whether or not there is any firm association between coin hoards and infant burials, and, if so, whether these are related to ritual practices of some sort, are topics for future research.

The above examples demonstrate how important it is to consider the precise archaeological context, not only of large coin hoards but also of single and small groups of coins, in order to better understand how they may have been used. It is, however, important to reiterate a point made in Volume 2. In such cases we witness only the final deposition of the coins, and the particular use of them at only one moment. Such instances tell us nothing about the circulation of these objects prior to their selection for that specific process (Brindle 2017a, 240; Johns 1996b, 5).

## RITUAL USE OF ANIMALS

*By Martyn Allen*

Animals played a central role in religious practices and beliefs throughout Britain and Europe during the Iron Age and Roman periods (Green 1992, 92–127). Many Celtic and Roman gods were themselves imbued with the ability to take on animal forms and the iconography of the period is littered with examples of human–animal hybrids (Aldhouse-Green 2001b; Gilhus 2006). Historical literary sources depict priests as being able to observe and interpret animal behaviour, entrails, and other omens as divine messages (Green 1992, 97; Papaioannou 2016). Animals were representatives of the gods on earth, and their sacrifice was a principal method of communication between humans and deities.

Iconographic and historical evidence suggest that animal sacrifices were commonplace in the Roman world. Livestock may even have been bred specifically for this purpose, with size and colour, for example, being important factors in the choice of animal (MacKinnon 2004). Pliny’s description of two white bulls being chosen for sacrifice by druids during the mistletoe festival on the sixth day of the moon in Gaul suggests that animal

selection may have been just as important in Iron Age cultures (*Hist. Nat.* XVI, 95). Such literary evidence relating specifically to Britain is lacking, and for direct evidence of animal sacrifice we must turn to zooarchaeological remains. However, this is less than straightforward. Although animal bones are one of the commonest classes of find on archaeological sites, they are comparatively rare as articulated body parts or complete skeletons. Even where articulated remains have been recovered, the cause of death is almost always unknown, because practices such as throat-slitting tend to leave little or no trace on the skeleton (Allen 2017, 119). Therefore, it is difficult to be certain about what remains were the results of sacrifices. Coupled with this problem is the fact that a distinction between ‘ritual’ and ‘mundane’ or ‘everyday’ killing of animals is a modern concept (Symons 2002). In many modern, non-western societies, the slaughter and consumption of domestic livestock could, in most cases, be considered as sacrifice, involving a range of ritual connotations (e.g. Mooketsi 2001; Abbink 2003; Lokuruka 2006). A similar intimate relationship between meat-eating and sacrifice is found in ancient Greece (Detienne 1989, 3).

Animal burials have been discovered on archaeological sites since the late nineteenth century. However, the possibility that they may have represented ritual activities did not receive much attention until the 1980s and 1990s when zooarchaeology was developing as a discipline in its own right (Morris 2011, 1–11). Grant’s (1984; 1991) study of the animal bones at Danebury, Hampshire, highlighted a considerable number of whole and partial animal carcasses. These were described as ‘special animal deposits’, and, rather than simply being the remains of food detritus, they were thought to have formed an important part of the ritual framework of Iron Age society at Danebury. Hill (1995a) built upon Grant’s study by considering a wider range of Iron Age sites in southern England, though he was careful to use the term ‘Associated Bone Groups’ or ‘ABGs’ in order to remove the assumption that all articulated animal remains should be thought of as being ritual in nature. Importantly, Hill examined animal remains alongside other forms of material culture, with the co-occurrence of animal carcasses with particular artefacts sometimes termed ‘structured deposits’ (*ibid.*, 84–95; see above, p. 123). As archaeologists increasingly came to recognise the importance of animals in structured deposits it became clear that this was not an Iron Age phenomenon, but one that had continued from the early prehistoric to the later medieval period (Morris 2011, 149–66), and, as already discussed in this chapter, it was clearly an important form of

ritual expression during the Roman period (Fulford 2001; Smith 2016a).

While the study of animal remains in this context is useful for understanding belief systems and ritual practices, it is important to bear in mind that terms such as ‘ritual’ and ‘sacrifice’ may be too simplistic with regard to animal remains. The motivations that lay behind many of these deposits would have been wide-ranging (Morris 2012, 16–18). Some may have been interred as part of burial rites (see Allen in Ch. 6), while others may have been foundation deposits, signifying the importance of a new settlement or construction (Woodward and Woodward 2004; Maltby 2012), or were perhaps the remains of ritual feasting associated with festivals or gatherings (King 2005). Notwithstanding the difficulties of recognising and interpreting animal remains in structured deposits, the following section examines the evidence for the possible use of animals in ritual activities across rural Roman Britain.

#### **Animals in structured deposits**

As discussed above (p. 190, FIG. 5.60), animal remains are a common component of structured deposits, being found on between 60 and 70 per cent of most types of rural sites where such deposits have been found. The fact that overtly religious sites – temples and shrines – show little difference from domestic sites in terms of the proportion that include animal bones in structured deposits, reveals not only how endemic animal sacrifice was throughout society, but that it is a mistake to try and distinguish between ritual practices and mundane everyday behaviour.

In terms of species representation, horses, dogs and cattle are most commonly deposited in structured deposits at complex farmsteads, while cattle dominate at enclosed farmsteads (FIG. 5.61). These patterns appear to differ from those at villas and roadside settlements, where dogs are most frequently chosen for deposition. The overall patterns belie the typical structure of animal exploitation, where the remains of cattle and sheep, followed by pigs, tend to dominate most faunal assemblages (Allen 2017), although this may partly be explained by the preference not to eat horse and dog, hence the burial of complete/near complete animals. These patterns are, however, also influenced by regional differences, as shown in FIG. 5.62 (see also above discussion of regional differences during the late Iron Age, p. 129). Cattle tend to be most common in structured deposits on sites in the Central West and the North-East. Horses are most frequently encountered in the Central Belt, closely followed by cattle and dogs. Dogs are the commonest animal in the East, while the pattern from the

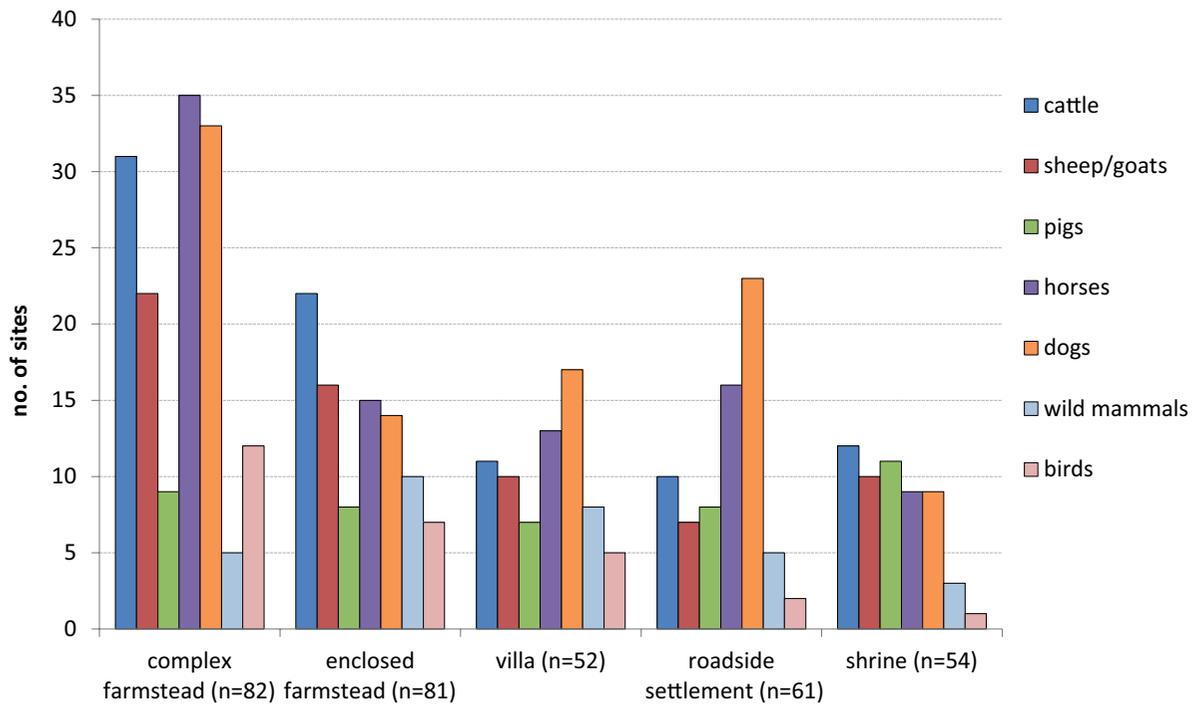


FIG. 5.61. Species representation in structured deposits at different site types

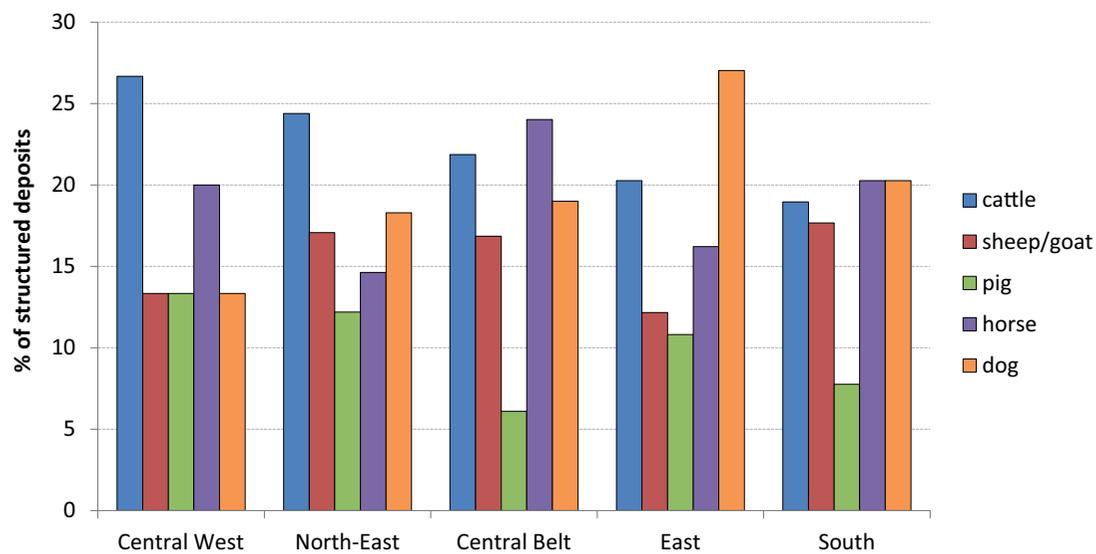


FIG. 5.62. Percentage of structured deposits with different animal species in different regions

South region shows a more equal distribution between cattle, horse, dog and sheep, with only pigs being less frequently found. While there is clearly a great deal of variation between different types of settlements and different regions, it is difficult to appreciate these data without considering the context of animal deposits.

#### *Shafts and wells*

The placement of animals in shafts and wells is a common trait associated with the Roman period. The excavation of the well at Oakridge, Hampshire, is perhaps one of the most notable examples

(Maltby 1993b). This feature was excavated to a considerable depth of over 26 m in the 1980s, showing that it began to backfill in the middle Iron Age and was almost completely filled by the end of the Roman period. The feature is distinctive for containing something in the region of 170 to 180 associated bone groups from a wide range of species, including both domestic and wild varieties of mammals and birds. This is the largest number of ABGs known from a single feature and is only surpassed by Owslebury, Hampshire, for having the greatest number from a single settlement (Morris 2011, 70). The total number of animals

buried in the well was difficult to estimate, largely due to post-depositional slumping of the fills which caused many of the skeletal remains to become mixed (Maltby 1993b, 55). Maltby was reluctant to interpret any of the faunal remains recovered from the Oakridge well as deriving from ritual practices. For example, large numbers of puppies were considered to have reflected attempts at controlling the dog population, a group of swallows were thought to have been nesting within the disused well, while a raven may have been deliberately killed if it represented a threat to livestock (*ibid.*, 59). Much of the domestic livestock remains found in the well had clearly been butchered and eaten. Despite this, several complete ceramic vessels dating from the first to the fourth century A.D. were also recovered, which were thought to have been deliberate offerings, alongside the disarticulated remains from at least 27 people (Oliver 1992, 74–6). Morris (2011, 95–7) highlighted the apparent difficulties the excavator had in reconciling ritual explanations for the human bones and the pottery with the more functional interpretations for the animal remains. Less prosaic explanations for some of the Oakridge faunal remains include the raven being killed and placed there because its wing feathers were utilised for headdresses (Serjeantson and Morris 2011).

Oakridge is by no means an isolated example as there are many other rural sites where animal carcasses have been deposited in wells, such as Brislington, Bristol (Branigan 1972), Rudston, East Riding of Yorkshire (Chaplin and Barnetson 1980), Barton Court Farm, Oxfordshire (Wilson 1986), and Bays Meadow, Droitwich, Worcestershire (Noddle 2006). The fact that animal carcasses were present in these features almost certainly shows that they had already ceased to function as clean water sources, and yet many remained open and used for other purposes for a considerable period of time; in the case of Oakridge, the well was filled over a period of several centuries (Oliver 1992). The question remains whether these provided convenient receptacles for the disposal of domestic waste or represented ritualised spaces where the placement of animals and other artefacts held more significant meanings. Such meanings are in most cases very unclear. The remains of large quantities of butchered livestock remains at Oakridge may not have had any overtly religious connotations, but they must represent the production of considerable quantities of meat, which may have been consumed by large numbers of people.

Other deposits from wells are equally difficult to explain. At Beddington, Greater London, a stone-lined well contained several complete and semi-complete third-century A.D. pots, numerous

leather shoes, and a horse skull from the lower fills. It was suggested that these remains reflected a ritualised response to the well running dry (Howell 2005).

At larger, nucleated settlements, denser populations required more wells to satisfy demand for fresh water. Here too, the placement of animal carcasses in disused features appears to have been relatively commonplace. At Baldock, Hertfordshire, the remains of four dogs were found in one early Roman well, while parts of at least thirteen horses were placed in two late Roman wells (Stead and Rigby 1986). Wild animals also appear in some of these features. One late fourth/early fifth century well contained the partial skeletons of two young (*c.* 6 months old) red deer, together with two hares and a fox. A large number of arrow and spearheads in several wells may indicate a symbolic importance of hunting, particularly when these are deliberately associated with horses, dogs and wild animals.

Numerous excavations and finds have identified the presence of a probable roadside settlement on Stane Street at Ewell, Surrey, though the size and character of this settlement is poorly understood (Bird 2004b, 60–2). It is, however, notable for the number of supposedly ritual shafts that have been discovered in the vicinity. These were first encountered in the mid-nineteenth century by Diamond (1847), though more have been found during more recent excavations. The nearby site at Hatch Furlong, situated on an elevated spur of the North Downs, included three shafts cut deep into the chalk (*c.* 12 feet deep) during the late second century A.D. (Cotton and Sheldon 2006). The shafts contained the remains of several young dogs, which were placed in the features between the second and the fourth centuries. Two of the shafts appeared to have been bounded to the north by a shallow linear ditch, the fill of which also contained a number of dog skulls. Further Roman shafts with whole and partial animal skeletons have been discovered at the King William IV and Reigate Road sites (Orton 1997; Cotton 2001). The animal bones were poorly reported at both of these sites though dog burials, pig burials, a horse burial, and an interesting deposit of several horse skulls were recorded at the former. The repeated nature of the evidence at Ewell suggests that the Roman settlement incorporated a significant ritual element, perhaps including one or more shrines used by the inhabitants or travellers along Stane Street.

#### **Animals at religious sites**

Animal remains are commonly encountered within Iron Age and Roman religious contexts, no doubt relating to a variety of different practices (Smith 2001, 29–30, 156–7; 2016a; King 2005). Many would have been associated with sacrifice and

feasting, though others could have been kept at the religious site for other reasons, such as the dogs from the temple at Lydney Park, Gloucestershire, who may have been brought to the site for the supposed healing properties of their saliva (Boon 1989, 214–15). Here, a broad distinction will be made between faunal remains from Romano-Celtic temples and other rural shrines, with, as discussed above (p. 132) the former being more likely to relate to larger religious complexes in the South, East and Central Belt regions.

*Rural shrines*

The relative frequency of the main animal taxa from selected late Iron Age and Roman shrines is shown in FIG. 5.63. The principal observation is that animal bone assemblages vary greatly at different shrines. Cattle remains dominate in all the phases at Ivy Chimneys, Witham, and at Bulls Lodge, Boreham, both in Essex. The exceptional assemblage of cattle bones deposited during the Roman period in the ditch surrounding an Iron Age chariot burial at Ferry Fryston, West Yorkshire, has been noted above (p. 128). At least 162 animals were represented, with clear evidence for body-part selection as the remains were mostly skulls and articulated right forelimbs (Brown *et al.* 2007). Ageing data also showed that most cattle were slaughtered at either one-and-a-half or

two-and-a-half years old, which suggested that culling was seasonal, occurring during the late summer/autumn months. Strontium isotope analysis, a scientific provenancing technique that examines isotopic ratios in teeth to identify geological sources of origin, showed that most cattle had not been raised on the Magnesian Limestone where the site is located. It is possible the cattle used in the rituals at the site had either been traded in from a wide range of sources, had been brought in by people travelling over long distances for gatherings/festivals, or that the cattle had already been slaughtered and were brought in from a distance as dressed carcasses. Despite the Roman date of most of the animal bones, the site is notable for the complete absence of Roman material culture, which may suggest that the patrons of the site were disconnected from Roman provincial culture (Hodgson 2012, 52).

In contrast to Ferry Fryston, the shrine at Hallaton, Leicestershire, produced a faunal assemblage completely dominated by pig, which were thought to represent the remains from feasting episodes during the later first century A.D. (Score 2011). Clear evidence for age selection was noted here, with the vast majority of the pigs being slaughtered within their first two years of age, and a significant number being killed around six months. This pattern may also suggest a seasonal pattern to the rituals. Spatial patterning of the

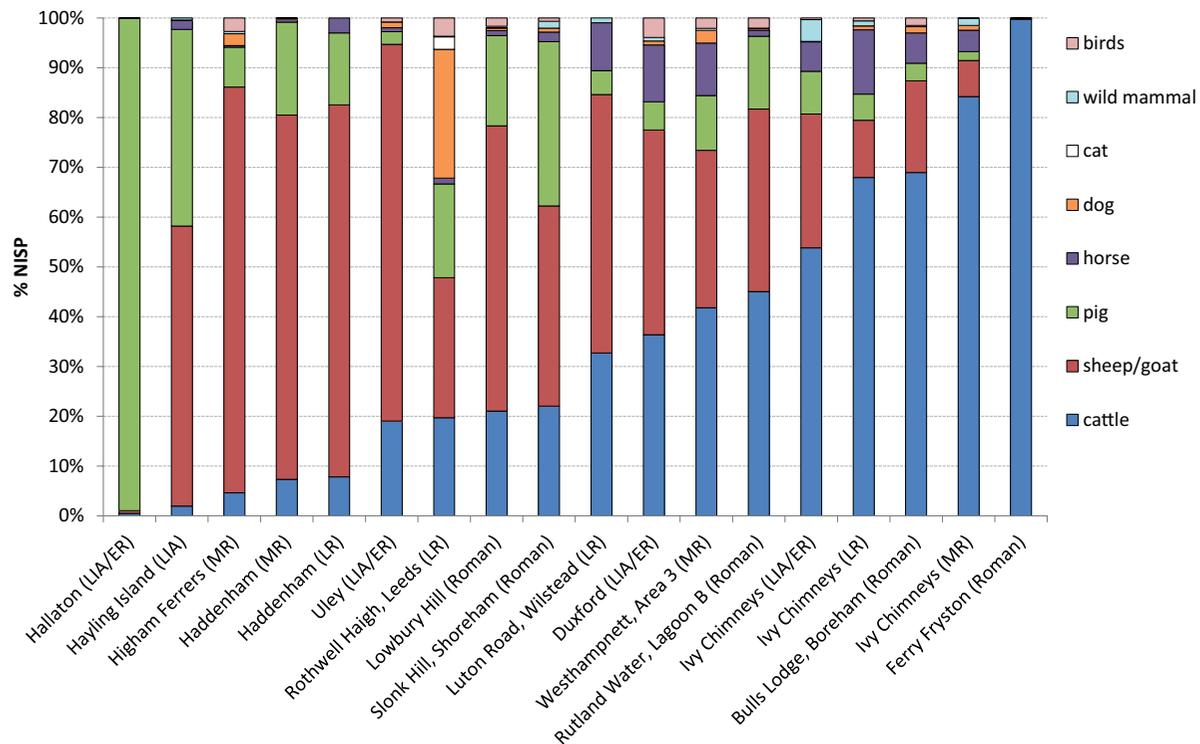


FIG. 5.63. Relative frequency of the main animal taxa found at late Iron Age and Romano-British rural shrines (assemblages with over 100 NISP)

bones showed strong evidence for not only species selection but also deposition within particular zones inside the main shrine area. These data show distinct similarities with the late Iron Age shrine at Hayling Island, Hampshire, where the faunal assemblage was more evenly divided between pig and sheep bones (King 2005). Evidence for the zonation of deposits, including coinage, metalwork and faunal remains, demonstrated the ritual character of the activities undertaken at the site. In particular, sheep were largely represented by upper limb bones and mandibles, while pig remains mostly consisted of mandibles and maxillae followed by upper limb bones. The Hayling Island shrine also had horse bones, found in association with horse equipment and vehicle fittings. Horse bones are fairly often found on shrine sites, though rarely in large quantities. They tend to be recovered in higher quantities on sites where cattle are better represented, though it is possible that this is due to differential preservation. Horse remains are notably better represented in late Roman contexts at Ivy Chimneys, Witham, with cranial bones being particularly common (Luff 1999). Numerous equid bones were also found with butchery marks, and it has been suggested that horse exploitation at Ivy Chimneys may have represented the presence of a local Trinovantian cult, though worship of the more widespread cult of Epona cannot be ruled out (cf. Green 1999, 255).

In general, dogs do not make up a significant proportion of the animal remains at most shrines, other than at Rothwell Haigh, West Yorkshire, where a stone-lined well was positioned within an enclosure. At this site, a well-preserved animal bone assemblage, including a high proportion of dogs and goats, was recovered alongside other objects, including complete pottery vessels and an adult human skull (Cool and Richardson 2013; see above p. 143). This is similar to the c. 80 m deep well near to the Roman shrine at Muntham Court, West Sussex, which contained at least sixteen dog skeletons (Burstow and Hollyman 1957). The association of dogs with wells/shafts may highlight a relationship with water. This has been previously suggested by Green (1992, 112) who proposed a possible chthonic aspect to dog symbolism. The watery location of Salt Hill Saltings in Kent may have been significant when a group of seven pots, each containing puppy bones from single individuals and quantities of charcoal, was placed in an exposed location within the Upchurch Marshes (Noel Hume 1956).

#### *Rural temples*

In some respects, the distinction between rural shrines and Romano-Celtic temples is an arbitrary

one. Several temples developed from earlier shrines, but evidence suggests that the pattern of animal exploitation continued much the same. Animals appear to have been an important element at the large religious complex at Springhead, Kent, from the late Iron Age to the start of the fourth century A.D. The late Iron Age phase witnessed a horse being buried in a pit close to the elevated platform, while early Roman deposits included the skeleton of a cockerel placed above that of a puppy, the nearly complete skeletons of an adult ewe, a piglet, and a raven (Grimm and Worley 2011). The mid-Roman phase saw the construction of several shafts and deep pits, similar to those found at Ewell (see above, p. 195). One particular shaft located in the Sanctuary area by the springs, dug 4.5 m deep, included the articulated remains of nineteen dogs (one recovered with an iron chain), along with a horse skull, the neck of a young cow, three cattle skulls, the skeletons of a calf, a pig, a chicken, a goose, and a raven, and an adult human skull and infant skeletons (*ibid.*; see FIG. 5.55).

The rural religious complex at Uley in Gloucestershire is another site that shows a long history of animal exploitation in religious rituals (Woodward and Leach 1993). A huge faunal assemblage of over 230,000 fragments was recovered from this site, dominated by sheep and goat bones, with clear evidence for the predominance of the latter (Levitan 1993). This pattern began during the late Iron Age, associated with a timber shrine and enclosure, and continued through into the Roman period, when the shrine was replaced by a substantial masonry Romano-Celtic temple complex during the early to mid-second century A.D. Bones of sheep and goat constituted over 70 per cent of the late Iron Age/early Roman assemblage, a proportion that rose steadily over time to nearly 95 per cent by the early to middle fourth century. Uley is also one of the few temples with a relatively high proportion of chicken bones, and the analysis of these remains showed that cockerels were far more common than hens (*ibid.*, 260, 300). The sacrifice of cockerels and goats at Uley has often been associated with the evidence for the worship of Mercury, signified by a statue that depicts both animals alongside the deity, as well as copper-alloy figurines and an altar (Woodward 1992, 79; Henig 1993, 88–95).

King's (2005, 357–62) survey of animal bone assemblages from temples in Roman Britain, which include those located at towns, identified five characteristic groups, though some sites may fall within more than one category. According to King's criteria, Group A sites include large faunal assemblages often with clear evidence for species

selection and seasonal slaughter patterns. These sites may have been locations for periodic gatherings at certain times of the year and may have focused on the worship of particular deities. Uley in Gloucestershire, Harlow and Great Chesterford in Essex, Hayling Island in Hampshire, and Chanctonbury in West Sussex are examples of Group A sites. Group B sites are similar to those of Group A but are distinguished by the specific deposition of partially or completely articulated skeletal remains, often within temple buildings. The remains, King (*ibid.*, 359) suggests, represent 'individual acts of votive deposition, presumably following personal offerings and sacrifices'. Group B sites include Bancroft in Milton Keynes, Brigstock in Northamptonshire, Springhead in Kent, and Henley Wood and Lamyatt Beacon in Somerset. Group C sites are characterised by high proportions of horse bones. King (*ibid.*, 360) discusses examples at Folly Lane, Hertfordshire, and Bancroft, where the remains were found at temple-mausolea. He suggests that the association of horses with dogs at both sites, and the presence of wild animal remains at the latter, may have been linked to hunting cults, perhaps with a chthonic element. The assemblage from Ivy Chimneys, Witham, Essex, was also included in this group. As discussed above, there is some debate over

whether these remains reflected worship of Epona or a local Trinovantian cult. Group D sites are ones where animal exploitation does not appear to have been a significant element of the site's rituals. These include Nettleton Scrubb in Wiltshire, Bath in north-east Somerset, and Lydney in Gloucestershire. The remains from Bath, for example, do not derive from the main period of temple activity. King (*ibid.*, 361) highlights the possibility that the healing cults associated with these sites were of more importance than animal sacrifice and feasting. Finally, Group E includes non-Romano-Celtic sites, most notably Mithraea and classical temples associated with towns and military sites.

King's assessment clearly shows the variation in animal remains found at temples in Roman Britain. This variation is highlighted again in FIG. 5.64, though it should be pointed out that King's data included sites that have been classified here as shrines. In comparison with shrines, assemblages from temples tend to lack cattle remains, while chickens appear to be more common. These differences may reflect cultural decisions regarding which animals were more appropriate for sacrifice and ritual consumption. In many cases, the rituals associated with the animal remains are unclear, and the different contexts in which they were

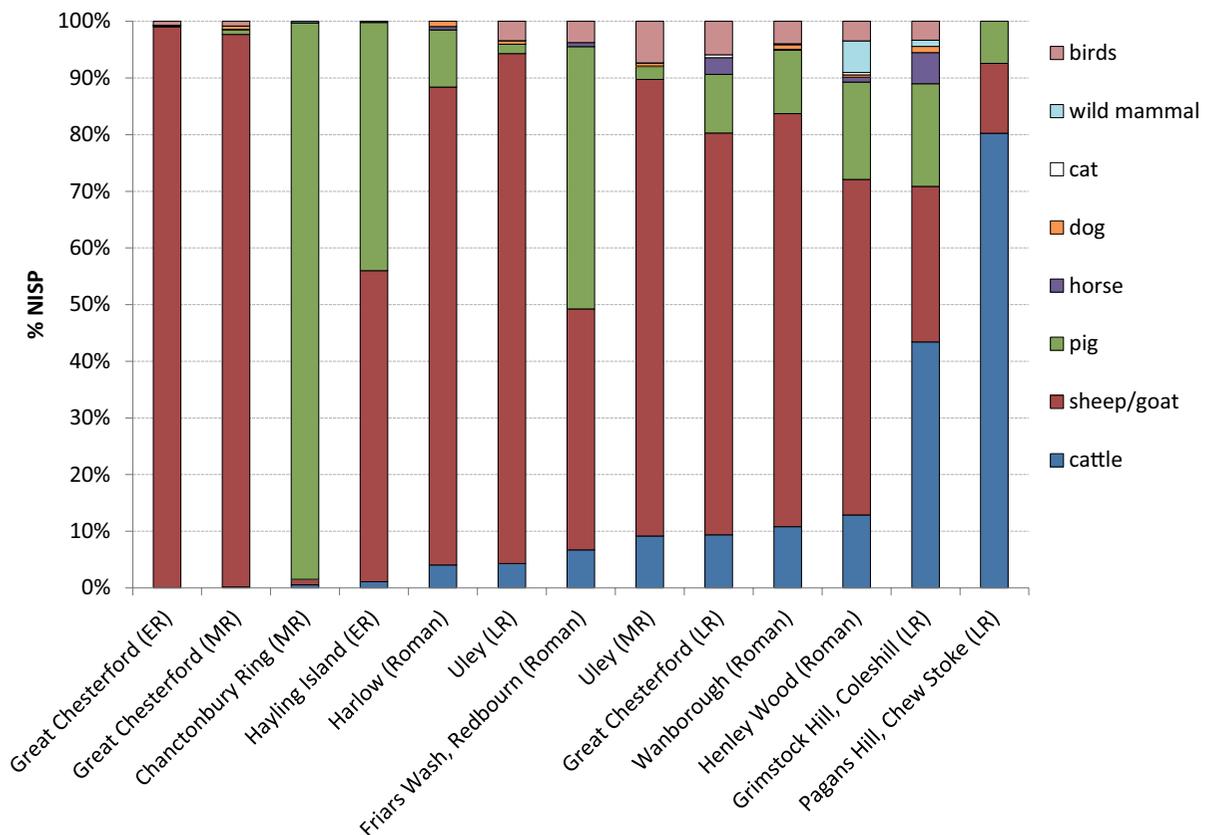


FIG. 5.64. Relative frequency of the main animal taxa found at rural Romano-Celtic temples (assemblages with over 100 NISP)

deposited and the character of their deposition (i.e. whether they were articulated or focused upon particular body parts) need to be considered on a site-by-site basis. This is true of faunal remains in ritual contexts from temples, shrines, and rural settlements.

### The exploitation of animals

The animal remains found on religious sites or in structured deposits represent the final act of the ritual activities they were involved in. Yet we know very little about how these animals were managed and sourced for ritual events. King (2005, 334) highlights the identification of hay and coprolites at Uley as evidence that livestock were being kept at the site, at least periodically. This might suggest that many of the goats and sheep that were slaughtered were locally managed, though whether they were husbanded specifically for sacrifices is uncertain. Iconographic and historical evidence from other provinces clearly show that livestock destined for sacrifice were very carefully managed and specifically selected (MacKinnon 2004).

The question of whether 'ritual flocks' were managed on site or were imported from rural settlements is open to question. As mentioned above, strontium isotope analysis of cattle teeth recovered from the ritual ditch at Ferry Fryston shows that the majority were raised some distance from the site (Orton 2006). The selection of specific cattle limb-bones and skulls for deposition suggests that the animals were brought in as livestock which were slaughtered and butchered at the site, with the rest of the carcass removed afterwards, or that body parts were brought to the site as dressed carcasses. Orton (*ibid.*) even suggests that the remains may have been curated for some time prior to being deposited in a single episode.

A similar pattern where specific body parts were deposited was found at Hayling Island. It is not known whether pigs and sheep were kept on the island or ferried across at particular times of the year for festivals. It is also possible that the animals entered the site as dressed carcasses. Future work on animal remains from religious sites needs to focus on geochemical provenancing techniques, such as strontium isotope analysis, alongside dental microwear analysis, which can be compared with remains from local rural settlements to demonstrate variations in feeding patterns (e.g. Mainland and Halstead 2004).

### RITUAL USE OF PLANTS

By Lisa Lodwick

Plants have often been overlooked in studies of Roman ritual and religion in Britain, both in terms of structured deposition, and offerings within

temples and shrines (Lodwick 2015). In part, this is due to the limited consideration of plant offerings in Roman literary evidence (e.g. North 2000, 44–5), although it is now recognised that there was a greater diversity in the range of materials included in Roman religious sacrifice beyond animals, including incense, libations and plant foods (Elsner 2012; Schultz 2016). The lack of recognition of the role of plants in ritual is also linked to preservation. Generally, plants will only survive if they become charred, and they would only be recovered by archaeologists if sampling was undertaken during excavation. Many temples and shrines were excavated in rural Roman Britain before the advent of sampling in the late 1970s. Hence, sites where the ritual use of animals is well attested do not have any evidence for the use of plants, although this may be because of a lack of sampling. The role of plants in ritualised deposition has, however, been recognised where large imported plant foods, primarily *Pinus pinea* (stone pine) cones, were recovered by hand collection, at sites such as the Triangular Temple, Verulamium (Wheeler and Wheeler 1936, 119), the Carrawburgh Mithraeum (Richmond and Gillam 1951) and the London Mithraeum (Grimes 1968). More recently, the recognition of structured deposition at Roman sites has occasionally included the plant remains present, such as the poisonous plant *Atropa belladonna* in wells at Silchester (Fulford 2001, 206). Plant foods have also been recorded from cremations and inhumation burials, and will be discussed in Chapter 6.

It is considered here that the ritual use of plant remains can be identified using similar methods by which ritualised deposition of any material culture or animals is recognised, that is through taphonomic indications of specific use (charring, fragmentation), a high density of plant items and spatial co-occurrences or avoidances with artefacts (Lodwick 2015, 59–60). Certain categories of plant remains will be under-represented or absent from such assemblages, namely delicate remains such as flowers and leaves. Given the relatively late onset of sampling, and the hesitation of archaeologists to incorporate plant remains within studies of structured deposition and religious offerings, the instances discussed here can be considered as just a small representation of the ritual uses of plants in rural Roman Britain. Plant remains were identified as components of structured deposits at thirteen sites in the project database, and are complemented by further sites previously collated by the author (Lodwick 2015). The ritual use of plants is first discussed by the type of plant items used, before the context in which these offerings have been recorded is considered.

The first category of plants are imported plant foods, mainly intact or fragmented cones of *Pinus pinea* – Mediterranean stone pine (Kislev 1988; Lodwick 2015) and *Phoenix dactylifera* – date (Livarda 2013). Stone pine nut-shell fragments were recovered from early to mid-Roman contexts at Westhawk Farm shrine and the Springhead religious complex in Kent, with a bract also being found at the latter site. The small number of items, present at low densities, most likely indicates remnants of offerings (Pelling 2008; Stevens 2011). At Great Holts Farm villa, cone fragments and nutshells were recorded from a late Roman well, possibly in an instance of structured deposition (Murphy *et al.* 2000), while waterlogged nuts and bracts were recovered from a late second-century A.D. well at Lullingstone villa (Doherty 1987). Intact stone-pine cones have also occasionally been recorded from cut features, for example from a waterhole at the complex, mid-late Roman farmstead at Claydon Pike (Robinson 2007), and the later third-century Clatterford villa on the Isle of Wight (Busby *et al.* 2001). A possible domestic offering of stone pine, burnt pottery and jewellery was also recorded from a Flavian deposit in the west wing of Fishbourne Palace (Reynolds 1996), while charred remains of pine cones, dates and grapes were recovered alongside lamps and intact pots from an enclosure at a military annexe at Orton's Pasture, Rocester, Staffordshire (Ferris *et al.* 2000, 77). Imported cherry/plum/bullace fruits have also been suggested as elements of a structured deposit within a tannage pit at Lullingstone villa, alongside suckling pig and sandals (Meates 1979, 107).

The second major category of plant offerings is charred cereal grain, occurring in ditches or buried pots. Many charred grains were recovered from an enclosure ditch alongside a horse skull and quernstone within a mid- to late Roman complex farmstead at the proposed Abingdon Reservoir, Oxfordshire (Hall 1994). At an industrial site at Grendon Underwood, Bucks, a Black-Burnished ware vessel containing charred grains, chaff and pea was placed next to a wall (Thatcher *et al.* 2014), while spelt and barley grains (density 13.3 items/L) were interpreted as part of a ritual deposit alongside an iron anvil, spindlewhorl and vessel glass, all recovered from a ditch terminal in a late Roman farmstead at Hillyfields, Taunton, Somerset (Leach 2003).

Deposits of cereal chaff have also been recorded among distinctive material culture assemblages. At Thurnham villa, Kent, a storage jar in a pit contained charred spelt wheat chaff (Booth and Lawrence 2006), and likewise at Wilcote roadside settlement, a pot containing a large amount of spelt chaff was recovered from a second-century

A.D. quarry pit, alongside copper-alloy and iron objects (Hands 2004). Other plant-derived substances that appear to have been involved in ritualised deposition include three strips of birch bark, found in a fourth-century A.D. well at Bretton Way, Peterborough. These were suggested as a form of curse tablet, although preservation was not sufficient to reveal details (Cartwright 2013). The pollen spectrum from a late Roman well at nearby Love's Farm, St Neots, was suggested as containing taxa with culinary or medicinal use (Green and Boreham forthcoming), although as observed in Volume 2 (Lodwick 2017c), the majority of plant taxa have some form of medicinal use, and a ritual origin cannot be substantiated. The presence of mistletoe pollen is rarer, however, and perhaps significant (Hinman and Zant forthcoming). Further indications of mistletoe occurring alongside holly in wells have been highlighted within certain late Iron Age/early Roman sites in Cheshire (Chadwick 2015, 41).

The contexts associated with the ritual deposition of plants in rural Roman Britain are much broader than has previously been realised. Taking into account the limited dataset available, these include wells, pits, cesspits and enclosure ditches, and both religious and wider settlement/landscape sites. Stone pines often occur in watery contexts, with representations of the stone-pine tree being associated with water and regeneration, occurring, for instance, at fountains and on fountain jets in Rome and Pompeii (Lodwick 2017b). Although deposits of charred cereal grain are recorded as buried in the ground, within pots, pits or ditches, such small deposits would of course have become dispersed and perhaps unrecognisable in watery contexts. The burnt offering of imported stone pine is limited to shrines and villas, although there are indications that deposition in watery contexts at farmsteads and villas may also be significant.

Acknowledging the limitations of this dataset, we can make two observations. First, that the deposition of charred cereals in the Roman period may be a continuation of Iron Age practices, as charred grain in storage pits has been suggested as having ritual associations (Williams 2003; Thurston 2009). Definitive evidence for the structured deposition of charred cereals derives from a number of Iron Age sites, including Alfred's Castle, Oxon, where the charred remains of whole sheaves of cereals were recorded from six early Iron Age pits (Pelling 2013). Second, the spatial distribution of plant offerings is limited to the Central Belt and the South regions. Doubtless, this is a result of the higher intensity of fieldwork in these regions, although the possibility must be raised that cereal offerings were made by social

groups where arable farming was vitally important, signalling the continued centrality of the agricultural cycle from later prehistory (Williams 2003). Furthermore, the instance of structured deposition in corndryers (see above, p. 187) also indicates the significance of arable farming in society. In contrast, the majority of plants used in ritual within towns and military sites are imported plant foods, such as stone pine, lentil and date (Livarda 2013; Lodwick 2015).

### CONCLUSIONS

It seems quite likely that all aspects of rural life in Roman Britain were intimately connected with a belief in the supernatural. From the ploughing of the fields and the building of houses to merely travelling through the landscape, all areas of existence may have involved some level of dialogue with the otherworld, though the articulation of this dialogue appears to have varied markedly across time and space. With an almost complete lack of contemporary written accounts concerning religious matters, archaeological evidence, patchy as it is, provides our primary insight into this world of multifarious gods and spirits. This chapter has focused upon analyses of sacred space – those places with a particular cosmological significance – alongside the material culture, plant and animal remains that either formed part of ritual practices, or else had some other connections with religious spheres. The problems and limitations of the data have been duly acknowledged, though they have clearly demonstrated the wide variety and complexity of religious expression in the countryside of late Iron Age and Roman Britain.

Analyses of religion in this chapter have centred upon variations in geographic patterning and social context, based around a chronological framework in order to assess changes over time. The emergence of specialised shrines, for example, was shown to have been a late Iron Age phenomenon in parts of southern Britain, probably linked with significant upheavals in the socio-political system. Yet this was far from uniform, and there were still clear local and regional traditions in terms of the types of sacred site. Similar regional distinctions were noted with the form and content of so called ‘structured deposits’, the unusual or patterned placement of artefacts and ecofacts in features, which may have been governed by superstitious and/or religious beliefs. Although there were clearly major changes in the quantity, form and nature of structured deposits and particularly sacred space during the Roman period, many of the pre-conquest regional traditions persisted or at least had some influence on later patterns, such as the distribution of

Romano-Celtic temples, which generally followed that of late Iron Age sacred space.

The eight regions outlined in Volume 1 (Smith *et al.* 2016; see Ch. 1, FIG. 1.1), which were largely based upon settlement patterns, have been used here to assess the regional diversity of religious practice. In broad terms, these regions do appear to correlate with differences in religious expression, most strikingly between those regions to the north and west (North, Wales and the Marches, South-West), and those to the south and east (South, East, North-East and Central Belt). In the former areas, there are very few places or structures that have been interpreted as shrines or have evidence for religious objects, apart from military contexts, though there is far more evidence for structured deposition. On the face of it, this suggests fundamental differences in the ways that people interacted with their gods, which matches similar differences in settlements, buildings, farming practices and use of material culture (Smith *et al.* 2016; Allen *et al.* 2017). However, this was not just a simple divide between the north/west and south/east, as there is still significant variation within the much greater body of evidence from the central, southern and eastern regions. In the East, for example, there appears to have been a preference for religious enclosures without architectural embellishment, particularly in rural ‘non-settlement’ locations, while there is also a relative lack of large rural religious sanctuaries compared with parts of the South and Central Belt. Instead there are higher numbers of shrines and particularly Romano-Celtic temples within or immediately outside the many nucleated settlements in this region, which may have fulfilled the larger-scale, ‘public’ religious requirements of the local populations. In the Central Belt, there is more evidence for sacred space within farmsteads, mostly complex farmsteads of the river valleys, while this is also the area where most rural sanctuary complexes developed. A few of these grew to a considerable size and no doubt attracted worshippers from some distance, some people perhaps undergoing sacralised journeys, or pilgrimages, perhaps to seek cures for an illness, as suggested for the Gallo-Roman religious complex at Fontes Sequana by the source of the River Seine (Aldhouse-Green 1999). Many of these large rural sanctuaries were located on or close to the main road system, and effectively became nucleated settlements in their own right, possibly under some level of *civitas* control or even operating as independent cult communities.

Ultimately, the religious experiences of the peoples of Roman Britain were not only governed by local and regional traditions, but also by variations in their social context. Even within a

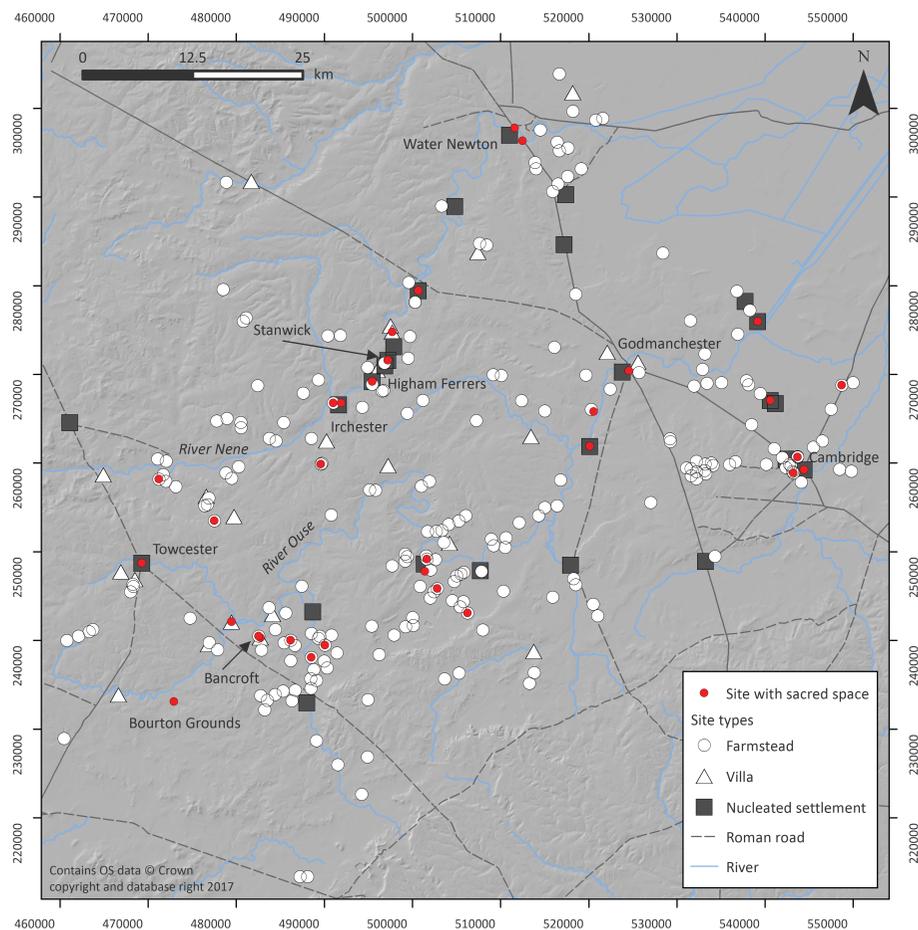


FIG. 5.65. Distribution of Roman period settlements in the West Anglian Plain, highlighting those sites with sacred space

single landscape, at least some aspects of the religious lives of peoples living in simple enclosed farmsteads, larger complex farmsteads, high-status villas and nucleated roadside settlements could have been quite different. This can be illustrated within the West Anglian Plain, a landscape in the east of the Central Belt region incorporating the Nene and Ouse Valleys and an intervening area of boulder clay plateau, where there has been much recent excavation (Smith 2016d, 142–4; FIG. 5.65). Of the 212 excavated farmsteads from this landscape, just 11 (*c.* 5 per cent) had any evidence for sacred space, these being a mixture of enclosures, masonry structures (mostly circular) and timber structures. Almost all of these were complex farmsteads such as at Little Paxton Quarry, Cambridgeshire (see FIG. 5.25), suggesting that the provision of sacred space within or close to the settlement was more important to the inhabitants of such sites than at other, generally smaller, farmsteads. Likewise, of the seventeen farmsteads in this landscape to have evidence for religious objects (pipeclay and metal figurines, miniature objects and various other ‘personal’ artefacts), nine were complex, just one enclosed

and the remainder unclassified. This all suggests a far greater emphasis on certain visual aspects of religious expression at complex farmsteads, in both the creation of dedicated shrines and use of specific religious objects. However, this is not to say that enclosed farmsteads were lacking any trace of ritual activity, as the distribution of structured deposits is much more evenly spread between different farmstead types. Enclosed farmsteads in this landscape zone tend to be more common on the higher boulder claylands, rather than in the river valleys (Smith 2016d, 175), which seem to have formed the major communications routes. It is this lack of connectivity, together with a chronological bias towards the earlier Roman period, which has probably influenced the differences in religious expression between these farming settlements.

Most of the twenty villas from this landscape have seen very little excavation beyond the main domestic building and so our knowledge of the religious lives of their inhabitants remains quite poor. The best example is Bancroft in Milton Keynes, which, as noted above (p. 154), had two probable shrines, possibly intended for different

social uses, along with a Romano-Celtic temple-mausoleum. Religious objects came from eight villas, including stone sculpture, metal figurines and copper-alloy leaves/plaques, but just four sites had evidence for structured deposits, including a near-complete Nene Valley beaker, goose bone and waterlogged wood placed beneath limestone slabs close to a spring by the villa at Manton Lane, Bedford (Luke *et al.* 2015).

For the inhabitants of the landscape's 23 nucleated settlements there was much more likelihood of there being a religious focus on-site, from the enclosure shrines at Higham Ferrers and Stanwick to the Romano-Celtic temples at the defended 'small towns' of Irchester and Godmanchester. Equally, religious objects are much more common in such contexts, from figurines and monumental sculpture, to the occasional altar, curse tablets, and items of priestly regalia. As with villas, there is slightly less evidence for structured deposition, though these do include the thirteen deep ritual shafts with infant burials, dogs and other items from the walled 'small town' at Cambridge (Alexander and Pullinger 2000, 53). Overall, the archaeological evidence from many of these nucleated settlements demonstrates a fairly active and organised religious element, with some of the larger shrines and temples possibly under some level of civic patronage. These sacred sites may not only have been used by the settlement's inhabitants, but also, on occasion, by those from the outlying farmsteads and villas, nearly all of which lay within 20 km (an approximate day's walk) of such sites. Religious festivals held at these sacred sites, and possibly at the single rural religious complex in the south-western part of the landscape zone at Bourton Grounds, might even have been used to help create and maintain some level of community identity.

Yet this was not a single, organised religion. The evidence from the West Anglian Plain and elsewhere in the province indicates a huge amount of individual variation in matters of religious expression. It all suggests that persons and local groups could take control of their own religious lives, or at least most aspects of it, perhaps just occasionally congregating at certain special places for larger scale ritual activities designed to ensure the welfare of the wider community. At the highest level this could have included rituals designed to foster a sense of 'Roman-ness', for example through the imperial cult (cf. Fishwick 1961; 1995), though it is debateable how widespread or common this would have been, with the exception of some military and urban contexts.

Of course one religion that did eventually come to be defined by the Roman state, and which has not yet been discussed, is that of Christianity.

Christianity spread throughout much of the Roman Empire during the first to third century A.D., though it was not until the Edict of Milan in A.D. 313 that it was fully recognised by the State, and only in A.D. 380 did it become the official state religion. Evidence for Christianity in Roman Britain has been discussed at length by various authors, notably Petts (2003; 2016), who argued that in this province it was in the small towns and among rural communities where the religion was strongest (Petts 2003, 163–5). It is not the intention here to assess the evidence for Christianity in any depth, though the data collected for this project does suggest that the Christian faith was never particularly widespread in the late Roman countryside. That rural Christian communities existed, however, is not in doubt, with evidence in the form of chi-rho symbols (the first two letters of the Greek word for Christ, *Christos*), lead tanks (ostensibly used for baptism), and other Christian imagery on objects, mosaics and wall-paintings, coming from over 40 different sites (see also discussion of possible evidence for Christianity from cemeteries in Chapter 6, p. 279). These sites were nearly all located across parts of the East, South and Central Belt regions, though with different regional expressions, such as the concentrations of lead tanks and chi-rho symbols in parts of the east and mosaic imagery further west (cf. Petts 2016, 675). In terms of settlement context, most of these were villas and nucleated roadside settlements (including defended 'small towns'), with just one farmstead, at Heathrow Terminal 5, where a lead tank was recovered from a waterhole to the west of the settlement (Lewis *et al.* 2010, 311–12). A few other Christian objects did come from 'isolated' rural locations, such as the inscribed lead tank from Flawborough in Nottinghamshire, though stone scatters and Romano-British pottery and metalwork found in the vicinity suggest that there was a settlement in the area (Elliott and Malone 2005).

Christianity can therefore be viewed as just one of a number of religious cults in existence within the late Roman countryside in Britain, one that was seemingly more readily adopted by those higher up the social scale as well as in some of the larger nucleated settlements of the south and east (Petts 2016, 676). The adoption of Christianity by certain individuals of rank may have been useful in maintaining political advantages within upper social circles, with the developing church framework becoming increasingly important in the imperial administration, though this is not necessarily to doubt the sincerity of their religious piety. Despite its increased adoption by people of power and status, there were still clearly people of great wealth who held pagan beliefs, as shown by

the Thetford treasure (Johns and Potter 1983), and it is very likely that the vast majority of the rural population of Roman Britain continued to worship and respect the large pantheon of pagan deities and spirits. It has been shown in this chapter (p. 134, FIG. 5.11) that the late Roman period was when most shrines and temples were in use, and there were new sacred sites being constructed even in urban contexts, such as the (admittedly short-lived) mid-fourth century timber polygonal shrine set within a ditched temenos outside the walls of Canterbury at Augustine House. This was positioned upon a late Iron Age burial, and thought to commemorate a remembered ancestor (Helm 2014, 140). However, the decline of some religious sites during the fourth century has sometimes been taken as indicating increased competition from Christianity,

and even a destructive zeal in destroying certain shrines, albeit with a 'pagan revival' from A.D. 361, following the two-year reign of the pagan emperor Julian (Watts 1998). A more contextual approach indicates that the fortunes of most sacred sites were closely entwined with that of their associated settlement or with those in the surrounding landscape, with many built temples and shrines falling into decay at approximately the same time as surrounding buildings; there is certainly little conclusive evidence for any widespread friction between paganism and Christianity (Smith 2008). The basis of the Church's structure and organisation in Britain may have remained largely intact at the start of the fifth century (Petts 2003), but it would take some time before it would become the dominant faith of those inhabiting the countryside.