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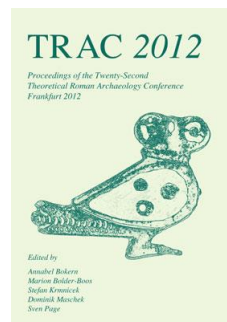## Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference

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Ritual Landscapes of Pre-Roman Britain:
The Margins of Practice on the Margins of the Empire

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Introduction

This paper examines the relationship between Pre-Roman Later Iron Age Britain and the margins of the Roman Empire through the consideration of sites of ritual and mortuary practise. The period under consideration is between the invasions of Britain by Caesar in 55 and 54 B.C. and Claudius in A.D. 43. This period has been considered particularly important in the formation of social, economic and political relationships between Britain and Rome (Mattingly 2008; Creighton 2006).

The Pre-Roman Later Iron Age in Britain has been examined in detail by two traditions of archaeologists; those who study Prehistory and those who study Roman Britain. This has led to divergent ideas for the causes of change in this period, with the emphasis normally based from a perspective of processes continuing form the Middle Iron Age or from external influences, either from Gaul or Rome (For the Iron Age period: Haselgrove *et al.* 2007; For the Roman period: Creighton 2000; Mattingly 2008). While these arguments appear clear, the archaeological evidence suggests a more indistinct picture. A consideration of influences from both prehistoric and continental sources will allow a more comprehensive and holistic picture of the stimulus for change in this period. In Britain this has been well considered in terms of the location of *oppida* and the resettling of these locations as Roman towns in the post-conquest period (Rogers 2008). This research considers both the relevance of the landscape in the prehistoric period and the establishment of towns in locations after the Claudian conquest. This paper attempts to examine internal and external influences by centring on mortuary and ritual actions in the Pre-Roman Late Iron Age; specifically what influences were present earlier in the Iron Age, how they were influenced by examples known from Gaul and what this can tell us about the reoccupation of the sites in the post conquest period. Ritual sites in south-east Britain have traditionally been linked to those on the continent in form but also material culture, as votive deposition e.g. coinage from Gaul and Rome. This has often been considered as a social process detached from the economics associated with trade between Britain and the continent. This paper shall examine how trade networks and movement across the channel is part of a larger social and ritual process and provide alternative explanations for the movement of these goods, rather than elite displays of power or emulation of Roman styles.

This paper will examine and compare six sites, three located on the Southern coast of Britain; at Hayling Island, Hampshire, Westhampnett and Lancing Down, West Sussex and three along river courses in Northern Gaul, at Gournay-sur-Aronde, Ribemont-sur-Ancre, Picardy and Acy Romance, Champagne-Ardenne. These sites have been chosen as they have been directly compared with one another in the form of the structures and material culture recovered and also provide an unusual cross section in relation to the

mortuary and ritual activities conducted on both sides of the channel. The examination of these sites will allow the comparison of these activities as they relate to the amalgamation of these areas into the Roman Empire, as well as their interrelationship in terms of trade and movement across the channel.
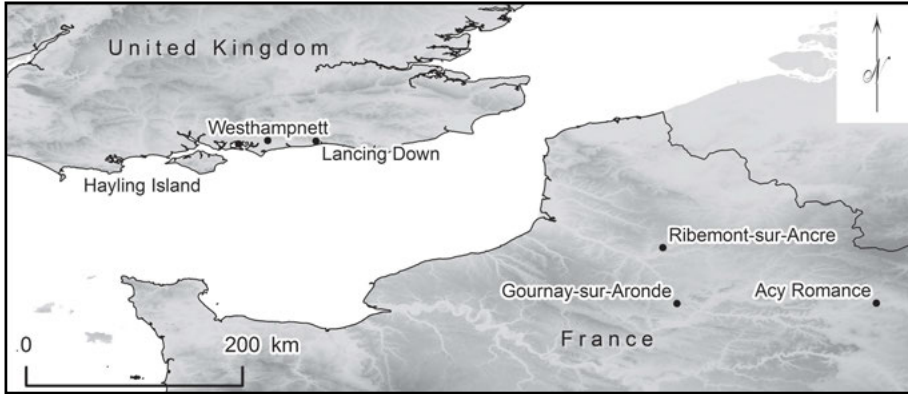

Figure 1: Location of sites mentioned in the text

This paper combines the examination of the form and construction of these sites with the study of socially constructed landscapes in order to explore these ideas. The details of the form and construction of these sites shall be taken directly from published sources of the excavations where applicable or from associated publications. The landscape context of the sites was analysed by constructing an ArcGIS database of the study area, including the creation of a digital elevation model using Satellite imagery. This database provides an overhead image as well as a contour model at 30 metre intervals.

The landscape analysis includes both the study of the geographic position of these sites within the landscape as well as their relationship to it, in terms of the significance of social space and the natural environment (Bradley 2000). However, this will be supplemented with the attempt to use aspects of sensory experience (Tilley 1994; Thomas 2001) through bodily interaction with these locations in the landscape to aid in the understanding of past societies (Bruck 2005). While now considered part of the theoretical mainstream in studies of prehistory, there have been few attempts to use experiential methods by Roman archaeologists and are thus still considered 'marginal' (Except Eckardt *et al.* 2009; Launaro 2004; Ghey 2005; Smith 2001; Witcher 1998). This research attempts to test experiential method for the available evidence by comparing the sites visited in Britain to those which have not been visited in France. Where I have not been able to visit sites myself, I have attempted to supplement the information using freely available technologies, such as Google Streetview, with varying levels of success. The phenomenological observations have been supported with viewshed analysis using ArcGIS, which has been completed for each of the six sites. These examples of viewshed analysis provides a starting point from which a more detailed examination can be accomplished (Llobera 2007).

Hayling Island

The first phase of the Late Iron Age timber shrine on Hayling Island was constructed in the early first century B.C., represented by a square post and wattle fence enclosing a smaller square plank built fence (King *et al.* 2001, 111). These square enclosures had east facing entrances and were focused around a large central pit (King *et al.* 2001). The second phase, at some point in the early first century A.D., saw the reconstruction of the outer enclosure fence while the inner fence was replaced by a circular structure remarkably similar to a 'typical roundhouse' of the period, traditionally thought of as a domestic structure (King *et al.* 2001, 113). A large amount of votive offerings were present at Hayling Island including coinage from Britain, Gaul and Rome, military equipment, horse trappings, currency bars and human and animal bone (King *et al.* 2001, 116). Haselgrove's recent analysis of the coinage from Hayling Island suggests that continental coinage was predominate initially from its origins in the first century B.C. but that after the early first century A.D. these issues decreased while Roman issues increased. This suggests that initially there were strong ties with the regions bordering the Seine, but that the reconstruction of the shrine in the mid to first century heralded the start of relations with Rome (Haselgrove 2005, 386–387).
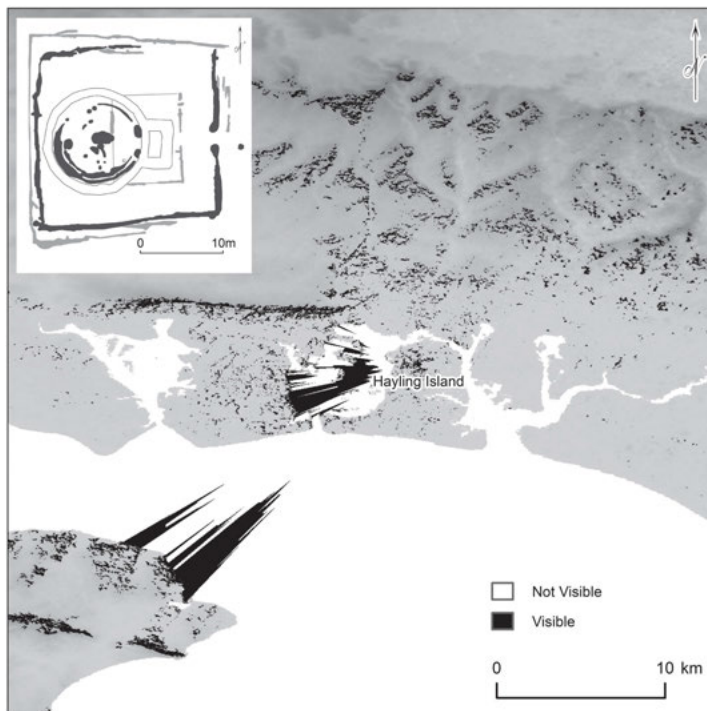

Figure 2: Hayling Island – Viewshed analysis and plan. Key: light grey – early first century B.C., dark grey – early first century A.D., white – mid first century A.D.

The site was reused in the Early Roman period (60s or 70s A.D.) as the earlier shrine was demolished and a Romano-Celtic Temple constructed in its place. This temple mirrored the Late Iron Age layout with a square enclosing element surrounding a circular stone tower (*cella*) with an eastern entrance. The central 'roundhouse' feature was reconstructed as a tower, possibly reaching 10 metres in height, similar to an example at Pirigueux, Dordogne. While the similarity of features between the Late Iron Age and Early Roman phases might also suggest that the Late Iron Age structure had a tower, there is little evidence to substantiate this and the size of the structure itself suggests a more modest building.

The shrine/temple is located on an island and is therefore intimately linked to the coastal regions. However, as the site is located on the northern half of the island, it could be suggested that this connection was stronger with the coastal inlets to the east and west. While the entrance of the temple faces east towards the Emsworth channel, viewshed analysis of the site tends to suggest a western facing predisposition towards the Langstone channel. The eastern entrance may be a reflection of domestic structures during this period, as seen in the comparable roundhouse plan, rather than representing the intended direction of visibility to and from the complex. The construction of the tall tower in the Early Roman period changed the relationship between this site and the surrounding landscape with visual predominance towards the urban centre to the east at *Noviomagus Reginorum*. As previously argued, the Roman town underneath modern day Chichester was connected by road networks to ritual centres dating from the Late Iron Age to the west, including St Pancras and Hayling Island temples (Garland 2012, 100). This follows the suggestion by Esmonde-Cleary (2005) that processional routes extended from public arenas within urban contexts, such as the forum or amphitheatre, to areas of ritual activity beyond the town. The visual prominence of the Early Roman tower at Hayling Island temple may have acted as a visual marker indicating the direction and destination of a processional route from the town.

Westhampnett

Westhampnett cemetery is one of the earliest datable Late Iron Age sites in Sussex, established at the beginning of the first century B.C. The Late Iron Age phase of this cemetery represents one of the largest found in NW Europe, with evidence for 161 cremation graves, possibly four shrines and evidence for pyres and pyre related features. The location of these different activities within the site suggests the division of mortuary and ritual activities and the 'zoning' of areas to perform certain tasks, with graves located to the west and pyre sites and shrines located to the east (Fitzpatrick *et al.* 1997, 14). An example of this is the circular area of open space apparent to the west that cremation burials have been placed around (Fitzpatrick *et al.* 1997, 234). While finds were limited across the site, the assemblages associated with these structures were domestic wares and suggest that offerings of food and drink perhaps formed a part of these rituals.

The Romano-British phase of the cemetery was established around A.D. 70, potentially after a period of abandonment of the site (Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2008, 279). This

phase was much more modest, with only thirty six cremated remains as well as pyre related features uncovered; however, certain consistencies were also present. In this period the burials were also located around a circular space, however, this was more than just 'conceptual' and was physically constructed as a ring ditch (Fitzpatrick *et al.* 1997, 279). The lower density of burials led the excavators to interpret the cemetery as representing the remains of a single family, some of which may have had generational links to individuals buried there in the Late Iron Age (Fitzpatrick *et al.* 1997, 279).

The location of the cemetery within the landscape is in close proximity to a collection of settlement sites that date to the Late Iron Age and Roman period, i.e. Copse Farm, Oving. The excavators suggest that the site of the cemetery is at the peak of a low lying hill that would have been prominent across the relatively flat area of the central Coastal Plain (Fitzpatrick *et al.* 1997, 3). However, visibility analysis suggests that while the cemetery would have been visible locally (up to 5 km) that it would not have been visible across the entire Coastal Plain, possibly due to the height of the shrine structures. The intervisibility of the site within the surrounding landscape is parallel to the location of a series of farmsteads and therefore suggests that it provided a central focus to people occupying this immediate area. Additionally, while the cemetery lies in close proximity to the coastline (approximately 8.5 km) suggesting a connection to the sea, the viewshed
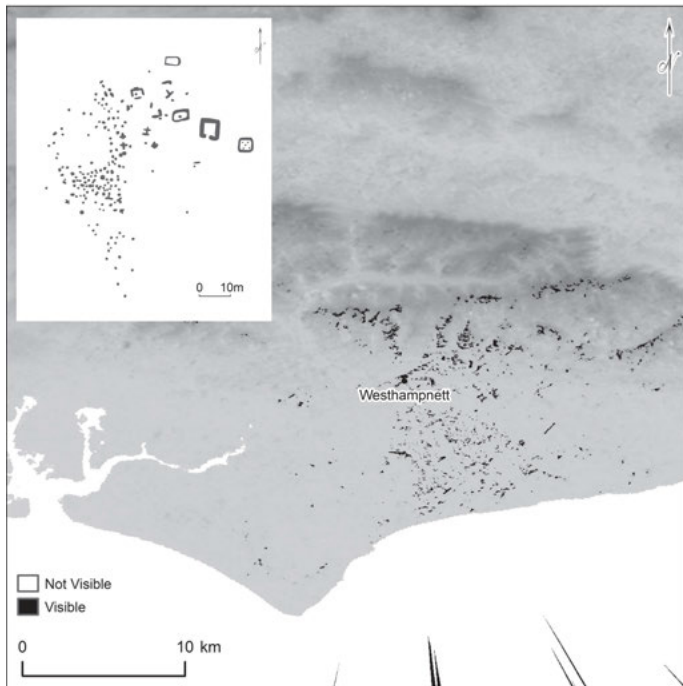

Figure 3: Westhampnett – Viewshed analysis and plan. Key: dark grey – early first century B.C.

analysis does not support a view extending to that distance. While this does not definitely indicate that there was no connection between the cemetery and the coastline, it does suggest that the visibility was focused towards the areas of habitation which it served.

Lancing Down

Excavations at Lancing, West Sussex in the 1980s unveiled the remains of an area of ritual space, defined primarily in the Late Iron Age and then again in the early post conquest period (Bedwin 1981). The Late Iron Age phase was comprised of a small shrine, measuring approximately 2 metres across, with a central posthole, that was thought by the excavators to represent a small wooden structure (Bedwin 1981, 42). This was succeeded by a much larger masonry temple, constructed in the traditional Romano-Celtic style, although only a small part of the north-east corner was uncovered. A contemporary circular *temenos* enclosure, initially comprised of a fence and later a gully, surrounded the temple. The earlier phases of this enclosure may have dated to the Late Iron Age, however, there is no dating evidence to support this (Bedwin 1981, 41–2). While this phase of excavation revealed very little in the way of material remains, apart from Late Iron Age and Early Roman pottery, excavations on the site in the early 19th
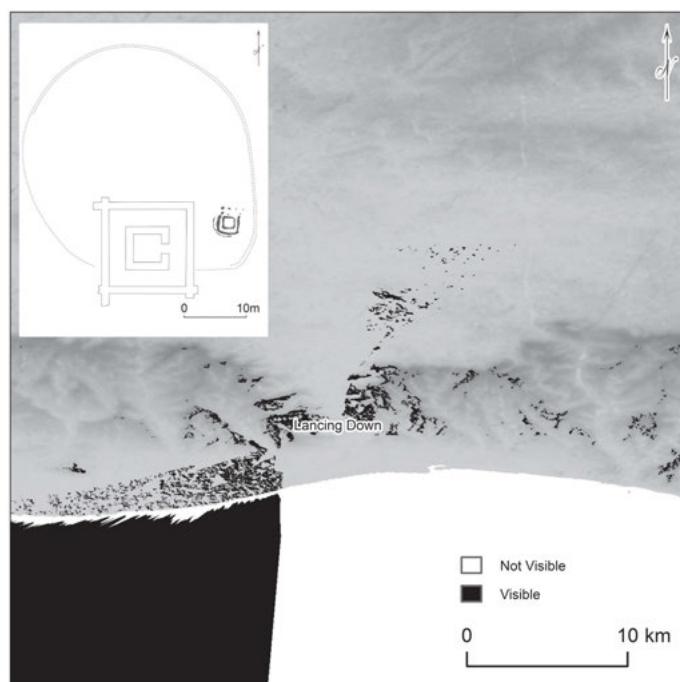

Figure 4: Lancing Down – Viewshed analysis and plan. Key: dark grey – late first century B.C., white – mid first century A.D.

century recovered Late Iron age and Roman pottery, coins, brooches, rings and combs (Bedwin 1981, 37). Interestingly the finds from the 1980s excavation suggest that these two phases were fairly continuous (Bedwin 1981, 46) suggesting a deliberate act of reconstructing the shrine shortly after the Roman invasion.

The location of the site within the surrounding landscape is unusual. While the site appears to overlook the Channel, direct visibility to the south from the archaeological remains is blocked. This is because the site is located beyond the crest of a hill on the South Downs ridge and instead only has strong views to the south-east and south-west, as confirmed by the viewshed analysis. As such the site still has strong views towards the coastline and its unusual positioning may be due to the location of settlement in this period, underneath the modern town of Lancing, although further investigation is required. The viewshed analysis also suggests some visibility eastwards towards the river valley of the River Adur. The views towards the coastline and the river may suggest a strong connection to watery contexts while maintaining an elevated position in the South Downs.

Gournay-sur-Aronde

The temple at Gournay-sur-Aronde is a well cited example of ritual architecture in Northern Gaul. Located in Picardy, the site has a long period of occupation from its origins in the fourth to first century B.C. The initial phase of the site, in the fourth century B.C., consisted of a rectilinear enclosure, measuring approximately 45 by 38 metres (Webster 1995, 455). A second enclosure ditch was added in the late third to early second century, approximately at the same time as a wooden structure, which was subsequently reconstructed up until 30 B.C. (Webster 1996, 455). These wooden structures were square in shape and were located within the centre of the enclosure ditch. A Roman shrine, described by the excavators as a *fanum*, was installed overlying the first century B.C. shrine, but at a much later date, by the fourth century A.D. Considering the lengthy period of time between these phases, the form and location of each was unusually similar (Brunaux 1988, 16). This may suggest that this space retained its importance, and that possibly its general layout was still visible, despite the large gap in the archaeological record. The deposition of material on the site forms a large, complex and spatially distinct group, including 3000 animal bones, which were spatially designated between certain areas of the enclosure ditch and 2000 broken weapons. These were presumably votive deposits placed in the enclosure ditch between the fourth century and 30 B.C. (Webster 1996, 455).

The site lies in close proximity to the River Aronde, 500 metres to the south, along the south facing slope of the river valley. The viewshed analysis of the site indicates a limited visibility to the surrounding area, with predominance of views to the south-west towards the flow of the river, as well as general areas to the west. This again suggests a close connection between the site and watery contexts but also importantly travel along the river itself. Attempts to visualise the site using Google street view met with poor results. The agricultural field in which the site is located is bounded on the site by tree
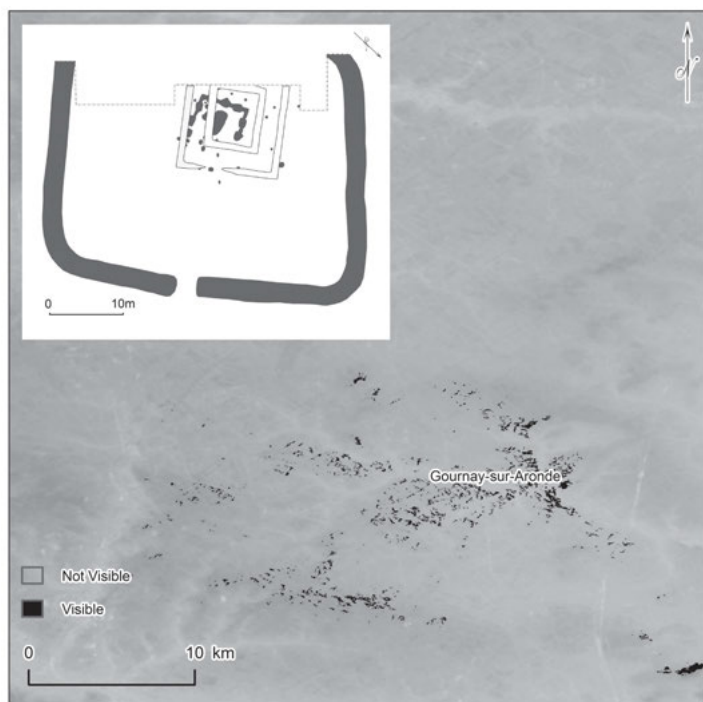
Figure 5: Gournay-sur-Aronde – Viewshed analysis and plan. Key: dark grey – fourth/third century B.C., white – fourth century A.D.

lines and makes visibility and experience difficult to comprehend, apart from to suggest the sloping nature of the terrain to the south.

Ribemont-sur-Ancre

The ritual complex at Ribemont-sur-Ancre, Picardy forms one of the largest and most complex in Northern Gaul. The Iron Age phase of the complex includes a massive enclosure ditch and bank, which by 200 B.C. was supplemented by two structures built into the corners of the enclosure. These structures each measured approximately 1.65 m square and were constructed using 2000 human bones around a central posthole filled with cremated remains (Brunaux 1988, 16). They have each been interpreted as an ossuary, however, they represent a unique mortuary tradition not comparable to other known Iron Age sites (Webster 1996, 458). A consistent feature of this site is the votive deposition of metal work along the edges of the enclosure ditch up to the period of the Gallic wars (Webster 1996, 456). These finds are of a similar type to those deposited at Gournay, including swords, shield bosses, belt chains and spear heads. This site was succeeded by a massive Gallo-Roman cult complex, originated by the establishment of

a single temple by 30 B.C. and added upon until its destruction at the end of the third century A.D. This shows the continual importance of the site after the Roman invasion of Gaul but also possibly its increasing importance, influenced and contributed to by the construction of further ritual elements.

The location of this site within the landscape mirrors some of the examples discussed above. It was located on the south facing slope of a river valley overlooking the River Ancre. The viewshed analysis suggests the site has a generally clear view along the river valley to the east and west, as well as a strong visibility of a route from the site immediately to the south to the river. Google Streetview images also indicate good views to the south, however, it also illustrates that the site overlooks the modern town. Perhaps the location of this settlement mirrored Iron Age settlement patterns, however, further analysis is required. The archaeological evidence of the temple complex created in the Roman period was orientated in this general direction suggesting a strong connection to possible settlement contexts.
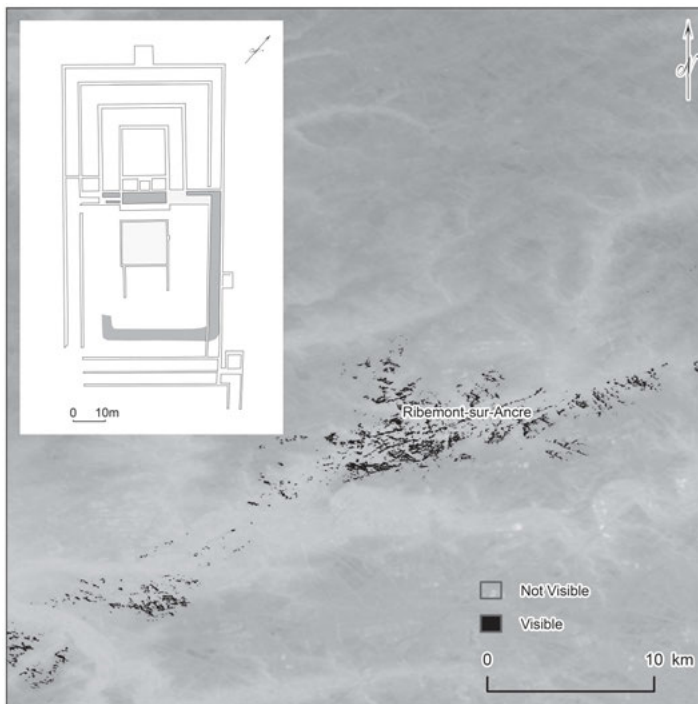

Figure 6: Ribemont-sur-Ancre – Viewshed analysis and plan. Key: light grey – second century B.C., white – late first century B.C.

Acy Romance

The mortuary and ritual complex at Acy Romance is represented by two cemeteries, each of which flank and overlook the contemporary settlement at La Warde (Fitzpatrick 2000, 20). One of these cemeteries, 'La Croizetter' was located on a limestone ridge overlooking the settlement and consisted of a rectangular enclosure associated with twenty eight cremation burials. The majority of these burials (twenty one) lay inside the enclosure, as well as a large rectangular structure consisting of twelve postholes, measuring approximately 9 metres in square. The structure was located around a central pit containing cremated bone. Some of the earliest burials in this group originated in the middle of the second century B.C., but over half dated between 120–110 and 70–60 B.C., at which time the enclosure and the shrine were constructed (Fitzpatrick 2000). Evidence of brooches, belt chains and glass bracelets and anklets, as well as a significant quantity of animal bone was recovered from within the burials. It has been suggested was this material was placed within the body on the cremation pyre rather than being deliberately deposited (Fitzpatrick 2000, 21). Additional to this complex, excarnated remains have been found at the settlement of La Warde, as well as evidence of cremated remains, from the first century A.D.
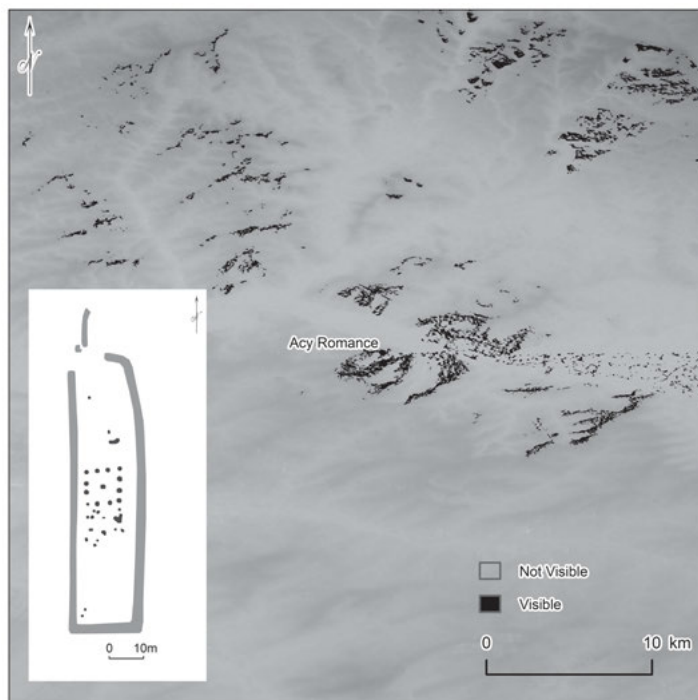

Figure 7: Acy Romance – Viewshed analysis and plan. Key: dark grey – second century B.C.

The location of the site overlooks the modern settlement of Acy Romance, which mirrors the location of the Iron Age settlement and is additionally confirmed by the viewshed analysis. The location of the site along the River Aisne, mirrors the close relationship of the sites described above to water bodies, however, the predominance of vision is towards the south. This is illustrated by the images taken from Google Streetview, although somewhat limited, which suggests the site slopes downwards to the south. The vision to the north appears to illustrate that the site was not visible to the settlement.

Form and Structure

Through the discussion of the six examples above, it is evident that each site illustrates a unique combination of ritual and mortuary structure, which changed over time and led to a variability of rites. For example, the Late Iron Age shrine at Haying Island also contained evidence of mortuary rituals evident by the discovery of excarnated human remains. The Early Roman reconstruction of the site saw the addition of a large tower, massively altering the relationship, particularly visually, of the site to the surrounding landscape. Conversely the site at Acy Romance was initially a place of burial, a rite which continued, but was re-ordered within an enclosure and shrine complex.

Each of these sites had a complex and unique chronological development, constructed and restructured, possibly in the reflection of changing ideas of mortuary and ritual rites from the Iron Age to Later Roman periods. However, significantly the locations of these sites in the landscape were consistent. This indicates that perhaps while certain aspects of the structure and form of these sites became less important over time, the location was continually significant.

Votive deposits

The discussion of the votive deposition of material on these sites has traditionally been viewed within the ritual or mortuary context which they were found, assuming a similar value between the two despite its previous use or association. For example, the votive deposition of animal bones or pottery are usually attributed as a grave good or as a part of ritual consumption related to structured deposition. Alternatively the deposition of disarticulated human remains suggests excarnation, and possibly cremation, as parallel mortuary practises occurring as part of the ritual activities occurring on these sites. Additionally the evidence for the deposition of human remains in nearby settlement contexts, such as La Warde, possibly suggests a much wider reaching practise.

Coinage is of a particular interest as a representation of a votive deposit as well as a product of value during its 'lifetime', particularly in building evidence for networks of trade. The inclusion of coinage in the archaeological record at places of ritual significance, both natural or humanly constructed, is well attested in the Late Iron Age, including locations such as springs, bogs or boundaries (Haselgrove *et al*. 2005, 10). A large quantity, as much as 27%, of coinage deposited in Gaul has ended up in a ritual

context (Haselgrove *et al*. 2005, 10). As such coinage recovered from these contexts can inform much about the ritual action that was undertaken there. For example the deposition of Republican and Gallo-Belgic issues recovered from Hayling Island have been described as 'extreme' by some and has led to the suggestion that distinctive cults originating from the continent were practised there (Creighton 2000, 191–197). Despite this, it has been suggested that it is difficult to ascertain the function and significance of these coins during their 'life spans'. While some coinage may have been restricted to a ritual function during its lifetime, the analysis of the distribution of issues has determined, to a certain extent, the circulation of various issues at a regional and inter-regional level (Haselgrove *et al*. 2005, 22). However, it is still uncertain what other 'spheres of activity apart from ritual' these coins were used for and by whom *(Haselgrove et al.* 2005, 22). A greater analysis of these two factors in conjunction may help to ascertain how votive deposits became a part of ritual and mortuary contexts, potentially through the functional networks of trade that were present during these periods.

Landscape location

The relationship between these sites and their location within the landscape has provided some interesting consistencies. Each was related to a nearby settlement, whether due to proximity, or through routeways or road networks, i.e. Hayling Island. Also many of these sites, especially the examples in Gaul, were in prominent positions possibly overlooking the surrounding landscape. Similarly each of the sites was closely associated with 'watery contexts', such as the rivers or the sea, illustrated by their proximity to these water bodies and the visual preference towards these locations. The sites in Gaul predominantly overlooked rivers, while the British examples were closely related to the channel. Recent research undertaken into the relationship between people and the coastline in the British Iron Age, suggests that limited exploitation of marine resources were undertaken and that instead these places were where 'people evaluated the world' through ritual action e.g. votive deposition (Willis 2007b, 123). The variance in the proximity of these sites to water bodies potentially mirrors the variance in how these relationships were structured, and further demonstrates the individual nature of these sites.

   The relationship of these sites to watery contexts should also be considered in connection with the 'reinvigoration' of trading routes between Britain and the continent in the first century B.C. by Roman entrepreneurs in Gaul (Cunliffe 1988, 147). These routes represent functional networks of trade, however, recent research has highlighted the 'concept of trade as a fundamentality social activity' which is grounded the interactions between people (Bauer *et al*. 2010, 13). Trade can act as a method for the exchange of goods as well as the facilitation of 'information, ideas and values' (Bauer *et al*. 2010, 19). For example, Van de Noort argues for the ritualization of processes that involve sea faring, including the wrecking of boats in meaningful locations such as areas of votive deposition or river crossings. He suggests that boats were operated to transport the functional, such as goods or people, or the ideological, such as ideas, including those

of ritual practise (Van de Noort 2012, 528). Considering the crossing of the channel as a ritual action connects the ritual sites of Britain and Gaul both through the trade of physical material used as votive deposits, and the transfer of ideas and values, by the interaction of people as they move through the landscape (Bauer *et al*. 2010, 22)

Relationship to the Roman Empire

So how does this analysis of Late Iron Age ritual sites expand our knowledge of Britain as a province in the Roman Empire? Research has suggested that the importance of watery contexts was just as relevant in the Roman period, in terms of the location of votive deposition and the siting of Roman towns. Rogers has argued the importance of watery and symbolic locations in the Late Iron Age influenced the location of the towns of Roman Britain, in parallel to functional reasons, such as defensibility and the pre-existing importance of these sites as areas of central control (2008, 53). Towns were situated as part of 'meaning laden' landscapes, in which phenomenological aspects, such as the position of these sites in the landscape, were considered as important as in the Late Iron Age (Rogers 2012, 646). The reasoning for this continuity has been suggested was to integrate towns within the existing cultural landscape which could have given them 'a claim to legitimacy' while equally plugging them into 'the power of the place' (Willis 2007a, 162).

The siting of elements of ritual or mortuary practise could equally be ascribed. The location of these sites remained constant from the Late Iron Age to the Early Roman period and as such the varying ritual and mortuary practises remained part of their own 'meaning laden' landscapes. Furthermore, the connection between ritual sites and networks of trade suggest that these landscapes were connected to areas further afield through physical objects, as well as ideas and belief structures. The connection to watery contexts for both ritual and urban contexts further ascribes the importance of, and the close relationship between the two.

Previous interpretation has suggested the consistency in the location of these sites was a deliberate strategy by the Roman Empire, whether directly or by local elites, to reoccupy indigenous locations to illustrate the dominance of the Empire and imprint their authority on areas that held meaning to conquered peoples. However, these interpretations fail to appreciate the complexity of the evidence. The examination of the six sites discussed above has illustrated not only the alteration in form of each over time but also the complex differentiation, or even contradiction, of the reconstruction of each of the sites in the Roman period. For example, the ossuary and enclosure site at Ribemont-sur-Ancre formed the precursor for a massive Gallo-Roman complex while at Westhampnett the Late Iron Age cemetery became smaller although sharing the consistency of circular space.

A 'middle ground' interpretation of the evidence seeks to examine the role of both Britain and the Empire in the changes occurring in this period (Gosden 2004). Gosden (2004, 31) has argued that the south-east of Britain was exposed to Roman and Gallo-Roman values through trade with the continent and vice versa, well before its integration

as a Roman province. To what extent people in Britain had adopted aspects of Roman living by the Claudian invasion is debatable, however, connections between Britain and the continent are evident within the examination of ritual and mortuary sites i.e. the movement of material used for votive deposits. While each of the sites discussed above is unique in its form and structure, especially as they were reconstructed in the Roman period, there are also striking similarities in the situation of these sites. This suggests that ritual and mortuary activities were undertaken within their own meaning laden landscapes which integrally involved the exchange of ritual and mortuary concepts across the Channel.

This paper forms an initial stage of analysis that could be further explored through the consideration of a larger selection of sites both in Southern Britain and Northern Gaul and a more detailed analysis of the relationship between these sites and associated settlements. Similarly through tracing patterns of the movements of artefacts from ritual and mortuary sites, a greater understanding of the movement of ideas could begin to emerge.

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