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Contextualising Ritual Practice in Later Prehistoric and Roman Britain

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Abstract

For much of the twentieth century, Romano-Celtic syncretism has been considered an unproblematic fusion of polytheistic belief systems assumed to preserve prehistoric Celtic religion and yet also provide a key form of evidence for the assimilative process of Romanisation. However, given the abrupt disjunction in ritual practice and especially changes in material form, Chapter 1 proposes that the evidence from the Roman period and its relationship to pre-conquest religion needs to be re-evaluated, not assumed. A reconsideration of syncretic or 'native' religion in Roman Britain will be accomplished by focusing on the usual categories of Roman period artefactual evidence, including iconography, inscriptions, ritual sites and votive offerings. The wealth of religious material from the frontier zones of Central Britain will be repositioned within a discussion of ritualised practices, hybridised identities and contextualised landscapes.

Chapter 2 will outline how the study of the Roman conquest and colonisation of Britain has affected the study of religion and especially Romano-Celtic syncretism. Previous approaches will be reviewed, as well as the implications of post-colonial theory. Chapter 3 will develop a holistic methodology for studying ancient religion building on theoretical approaches of contextualisation, ritualisation and hybridisation. The general tendency in archaeological discourse to separate the evidence for ritual practice and religion from the wider socio-cultural background compounds the specific problems arising from imperial colonisation and ethnic dichotomies. Considering the socioeconomic, socio-political and landscape context of ritual practice provides an integrated methodology for interpretation that has the potential to over-ride dichotomies such as Roman and Native or ritual and practical.

Chapter 4 will begin with one of the timeless interpretations of ancient religion, which is a concern with fertility. This paramount ritual motivation is often framed in general terms, but this chapter will demonstrate that more specific interpretations can be offered by examining the socio-economic context of ritual practice. The relationship between sheep husbandry, pastoralist production and iconographic expression in Roman Britain will help contextualise the fertility interpretation of the *genii cucullati*, associated *matres*, and the divine couple of Mercury and a goddess with a vessel.

Chapter 5 considers the regionalised distribution of votive altars dedicated to the local deities of the Hadrian's Wall frontier zone. A case study of inscriptional practice on the 61 votive altars dedicated to the variously spelled theonym of Vitiris will explore identity and the socio-political context of ritual practice. Discussions of religion in Roman Britain barely consider Vitiris despite being the most popular local cult from the frontier zone and

in terms of inscriptional evidence second only to Jupiter for all of Roman Britain. A *floruit* in the late second and early third century AD and the multi-cultural milieu of the northern frontier provide the socio-political context for the local cult of Vitiris.

Chapter 6 considers the landscape context of ritual practice and evidence for votive deposition from both pre-and post conquest Central Britain. The landscape context of votive deposits, especially votive altars, and other 'stray' finds from non-military contexts, have not received great attention from Roman studies. A reliance on classical and early medieval texts has led to interpretations of Celtic religion as a natural religion with frequent emphasis on the essential sacred nature of water. A frequent focus on watery contexts in the archaeological study of hoarding and votive deposition has also created binary distinctions in interpretation between wet and dry contexts. However, there would have been considerably more complexity to the bodies of knowledge associated with these important ritualised practices. A variety of spatial scales will be used to contextualise material culture that has often been labelled as 'stray' finds. Examining this material through wider, regional, topographic and hydrographic analysis will allow more to be said about the context of deposition, and show the long-term ritualisation of the landscapes of Central Britain.

The final chapter will summarise the inter-dependence of, and interaction between, society, the economy, and the landscape, generating the holistic methodological approach of vernacular religion. As befits a wide-ranging study of religious material in an imperial context, Chapter 7 will shift to a British and western provincial scale in order to place the local and regional case studies into their wider context. The contextual categories allow analysis to shift from everyday socio-economic practices, to life-span concerns and identity construction of socio-political context, to the landscape and *longue durée*. Following these themes from prehistory into the post-conquest period will acknowledge not just continuity, abandonment and assimilation, but also adaptation, innovation, and renovation; renewal as the complex "reconciliation of tradition and innovation" (Woolf 2001a: 182). Through a careful critical evaluation of vernacular religion, Roman archaeology has a chance to move beyond the dichotomies of religious syncretism – not by using vernacular descriptively as a simple replacement of 'native', but by considering the context specific processes of hybridisation and ritualised practice.

Acknowledgements

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Chapter 6 – Ritualisation and the landscape context of ritual practice

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Contextualising Ritual Practice in Later Prehistoric and Roman Britain

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under a tree

Chapter 6 – Ritualisation and the landscape context of ritual practice

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 - Celtic religion

Popular works on 'Celtic Religion' traditionally use selective archaeological evidence for ritual practices, medieval insular literature from Britain and Ireland and ethnographic classical writings about the Celts (for example see Pennick 1996; sympathetically reviewed by Wells 1998b). The popular approach is derived from the more scholarly accounts of well-established figures in Celtic studies including John Rhys (1888), Anne Ross (1974) and the many modern works of Miranda Aldhouse-Green. Much of the archaeological evidence, in both popular and academic works, has been selected from the Roman period when religious material more comprehensible to modern scholars appears in the form of dedicated altars to named deities, temples, votive deposits and increased artefactual evidence of ritual paraphernalia. This Romano-Celtic syncretic material has frequently been used to supplement the falsely perceived dearth of Iron Age ritual evidence. Using Roman period evidence in this way removes the material evidence from its correct temporal and spatial context and has been rightly criticised, especially for back-projecting the later evidence into the Iron Age (Fitzpatrick 1991). Similar accusations have been levelled at the uncritical use of classical ethnographic literature, which have been used to supplement the archaeological record and reinforce an image of the 'timeless Celt' (Webster 1996b & 1997b).

A recent review of Celtic religion as an object for the comparative study of religion highlights five ways in which the scholarship of the last twenty years has changed the study of Celtic religion; (1) a more critical approach to the classical ethnographies, (2) the deconstruction of the Celtic paradigm, (3) the vast increase in data resulting from archaeological excavation, (4) the distrust of any approach based on the traditional phenomenology of religion, and (5) the improved understanding of medieval Irish literature (Maier 2006:57-61). Simplistic cross-cultural or structural analogies such as shamanism are to be viewed with suspicion (*contra* Aldhouse-Green 2004 & 2005), as should back-projection into the Iron Age, which has featured in much of the study of early medieval insular written sources. Much later mythological works may provide a vehicle for pre-Christian motifs, but modern folklore and medieval insular literature are unlikely to reflect a direct continuum of pre-Christian beliefs and ritual practices, just as they are unlikely to preserve a generalised Indo-European mythology and cosmology (Maier 2006:59). Most

authorities now consider the early medieval literature as products of a specific historical, political and cultural situation, and although they may preserve older material this is approached with much greater caution than previously (McCone 1990; Carey 1999). As archaeology has the potential to produce new data, it represents the area where most advances are likely to be made, with the various literary materials providing a cautiously applied and carefully contextualised adjunct (Maier 2006:60). Discussion in this thesis will centre on the archaeological evidence for various local deities and sacred places of Roman Britain and proceed by placing them in a contextual framework that integrates ritual practice with the broader socio-cultural background.

1.2 - Deconstructing Celtic Religion & Constructing Vernacular religion

The problems that emerged from using the various fragmentary categories of evidence to underpin studies of Celtic religion have been somewhat resolved by the more recent critical approach, which has been paralleled in many associated study areas. In the last 20 years the framework for numerous culture-history approaches in European archaeology have been slowly but steadily eroded as part of wider trends in post-modernism and the social sciences (Jones 1997). Both the Celtic and Romanisation paradigms that previously dominated studies of Later Prehistory and proto-history across northern and western Europe have been deconstructed with theories of cultural synthesis and particularly ethnic identifications based on material culture being questioned and critiqued (Merriman 1987; Hill 1989; Fitzpatrick 1996; Mattingly 1997). Post-colonial theory and colonial discourse analysis has been especially useful for reconsidering the textual evidence for Celtic religion (Webster 1991; Webster 1997b) as part of wider trends deconstructing notions of ethnicity, identity cultural imperialism and the Romanisation paradigm in Roman studies (Jones 1997; Mattingly 1997 & 2004). These separate but related deconstructive trends were bound to exert great influence on how both pre- and post-conquest religion should be examined.

The title of this thesis could have used the words 'Celtic' and 'Religion' as the popular reader might consider this the subject matter. However, there is no shortage of popular and academic works that incorporate these elements in their titles and the focus of this thesis will primarily be on the material culture and the archaeological evidence for ritual practice in post-conquest Roman Britain. Those well-versed in popular works on Celtic religion might think that this thesis should be called 'Deconstructing Celtic Religion', but that would not be an accurate description of the goals of this study, despite eschewing

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the popular formula for constructing Celtic religion. The critical advances of the last twenty years will be incorporated in this study, but with the aim of producing something from the ashes of deconstruction. Perhaps because of the disparate nature of any deconstructive trends, there has never been a systematic attempt at reconstruction. However, 'Reconstructing Celtic Religion' could not be the title of this thesis as reconstruction would mean revitalising the Celtic paradigm that contributed to the construction of all things Celtic, including a uniform pan-Celtic religion, and it is important to re-iterate that the main focus of this study will be Roman period material culture from central Britain.

Use of the term Celtic is certainly not meaningless for this thesis, as the evidence of place-names and personal names indicates that languages designated as Celtic by modern linguistic study were spoken throughout the British Isles before, during and after this time period. Although the boundaries are obviously blurred, Celtic will be used primarily in its linguistic sense, but as part of common parlance it must also denote the academic paradigm that previously dominated the study of Later Prehistory. This paradigm used descriptions of Northern Europe from classical ethnographies to inform the early modern study of language and cultural-historical approaches to the material culture of Iron Age Europe (Fitzpatrick 1996). Similar caution must be exercised over the use of other ethnic labels, especially when applied to material culture.

Roman is obviously an unavoidable term for this period and is often contrasted with native or indigenous, creating a dichotomous relationship. That dichotomy is still present in the fusion of those elements, in the Romano-Celtic syncretism that will be the focus of this study, or in the use of Romano-British to describe the post-conquest socio-cultural formation of Roman Britain. In this thesis, Roman will be used primarily in a geographical and historical sense, as with Roman Britain. Britons and Romans can be used in a socio-political sense, but they still give the impression of strict ethnic divisions that are problematic for defining material culture. Similarly, the terms 'Roman' and 'native' present particular difficulties when applied to the evidence for post-conquest syncretic ritual practice. The recognition that Roman identity was not static is important for tempering the dominance of this most pervasive political and cultural formation of the study period. Roman identity would have under-gone a constant process of definition and reconstitution through contact with the provincial Others coming under its rule (Beard 1996). The 'Romaness' of Roman religion represents idealisations of identity and ideology expressed through ritual practice. The panoply of influences at work on provincial ritual practice may encode similar idealisations and notions of self-identity, but unfortunately,

"the meticulousness of the professional theologian, and modern epigrapher, does not perhaps best lend itself to understanding the *confused[?]* religious beliefs of the ordinary worshipper of the western Roman provinces" [my emphasis] (Drinkwater 1992:345). While provincial religious expression might appear idiosyncratic to the modern observer, a lack of understanding and confusion is more likely a result of the rigid classifications of modern study than the meaningful action of the past practitioner.

In order to simplify interpretation, distinct ethnic traditions and their origins have frequently been sought through dissecting the scholarly artifice of Romano-Celtic syncretism. Attempts have been made to establish and separate examples of the component ethnic elements of pre-conquest identities within post-conquest ritual practice; so, for example, Romano-Celtic religion "became culturally Roman while remaining ethnically Celtic" (King 1990:237). Whether Roman and Celtic or Roman and native, this approach to syncretism and material culture only serves to reinforce ethnic divisions. Syncretic formulations have a tendency to perpetuate the dichotomous ethnic constructs presented in the classical ethnographies. In this equation Roman + Celtic = Romano-Celtic, but it is in that hyphenated space between ethnic constructs where new cultural formulations and religious traditions emerge. Studying the renewal of religious traditions and the production of new ritual practices in post-conquest Britain without resorting to binary ethnic oppositions will be one of the main challenges for this thesis.

In popular works, and many academic ones too, much of the evidence used to construct accounts of Celtic religion has been taken from the Roman period and back-projected onto the earlier prehistoric period. Such back-projection has been criticised for ignoring the chronological and geographic specificities of the archaeological evidence from the Roman provinces (Fitzpatrick 1991:126-127; Webster 1995a:153-54). The material evidence from Roman Britain has been used to supplement the falsely perceived dearth of prehistoric evidence, and the timeless view of Celtic religion has been further compounded by the conflation of select archaeological evidence with later medieval insular literature, and proto-historic classical ethnographies, largely referring to the conquest period on the continent. Later prehistoric ritual practice has often been misapprehended because reconstructing prehistoric religion from archaeological evidence alone is considered the hardest form of interpretation. Hawkes' (1954) Ladder of Inference is often misquoted as the archetype of this pessimistic approach to the archaeology of religion. The reliance on later mythologies and classical ethnographies as a proxy for first-hand testimony of Celtic religion is compounded by the unconscious use of Graeco-Roman paganism as a

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generalised model for non-Christian belief systems. The classically derived model for polytheism relies on evidence familiar to modern scholars; iconography with well-established symbolism, dedicatory inscriptions to named gods from a pantheon organised through mythology and literature, and clearly defined sacred space and temple structures. These characteristics of religion are comprehensible to modern scholars, but are not exhibited by the archaeological evidence for later prehistoric ritual practice (Webster 1991). Consequently, Celtic religion often focuses on the Roman period when these familiar forms of evidence appear through the fusion of Romano-Celtic syncretism. The later prehistoric evidence has often been interpreted through back-projection from later mythologies and a generalised construction from the secondary literature of classical ethnographies. These create a model of an oral tradition with primitivist tendencies, concerned with fertility, sacrifice, and tribal identity, conducted in natural places, and avoiding the anthropomorphic representation of deities (Lewis 1966:4, "essentially aniconic and atectonic"; see Ross 1974 for the classic exposition of *Pagan Celtic Britain*).

Paradoxically the same 'Celtic' elements in Romano-Celtic syncretism that are back-projected into later prehistory are also used to reveal the 'native' elements preserved in post-conquest religion, extending the timelessness of Celtic traditions and creating a circularity of reasoning. When considered within closer contextual study, this body of evidence from post-conquest Britain has the potential to reveal much more than the fossilisation of native/Celtic and Romanised elements in Romano-Celtic syncretism. Rather than simply contributing to the substantiation of generalised accounts of pan-European Celtic Religion, or the ethnic constructs of syncretism, the material culture associated with ritual practice will be used here to examine the multiplicity of identities and power relations that were being negotiated in post-conquest Britain.

Instead of being used to reconstruct a generalised pan-Celtic religion or dissect elements of Roman and native within syncretic constructions, the evidence of altars, iconography and votive deposits must be considered in their correct temporal and spatial context if they are to be re-formulated into a coherent subject for study (Fitzpatrick 1991). Beyond this basic contextualisation, the main methodological goal for this thesis will be accomplished by situating the evidence for ritual practice within a discussion of wider socio-cultural factors, including the socio-economic, socio-political and the landscape context of central Britain. Integrating the evidence for ritual practice within these three sub-systems of the socio-cultural background will increase interpretative potential, especially as traditional ethnic ascriptions and dichotomous interpretations are to be

avoided. The approach advocated here sharpens the focus on the specifics of time and place – central Britain after the Roman conquest, but the dynamic processes of development, transformation and re-constitution can only be discussed if due consideration is given to the evidence for later prehistoric ritual practice. Within each case study central themes (fertility, identity and sacred landscapes) relevant to the contextual framework will be traced from summaries of the later prehistoric evidence and pursued into the post-conquest period. The primary concerns of fertility, group or tribal identity and the worship of natural places are common interpretations of Celtic religion that have also become sedimented in studies of Romano-Celtic syncretism. The correspondence between these themes and the contextual categories situates previous interpretations of ritual practice within a new methodological framework, providing the necessary background for reconsidering and contextualising the Roman period evidence.

The study of religion itself is a monolithic construct and has caused many interpretative difficulties for archaeologists who, through necessity, must focus on the material remains of the past and the study of ritual practices, whenever there are no written texts to elaborate the underlying belief system. The study of religion also tests academic objectivity to the limit and interpretative problems frequently arise from scholarly ignorance of the reflexive acknowledgement of religious preconceptions (Insoll 2004:79-80). There is a widespread erroneous belief that the atheistic and scientistic tendencies of modern Western European and Anglophone academia make it more conducive to the objective study of religion, and yet opinion and bias about the relationship between religion and culture are as thoroughly entwined in the modern world as they were in the past. Such modern cultural baggage has inhibited the study of past religions by separating this important dataset from the wider study of human cultures (Brück 1999). However, the study of religion and ritual practice can be advanced through integrating this evidence with other aspects of the cultural system, not as the isolated topic that western rationalism would dictate for the role of religion. The contextualised approach advocated in this thesis increases the interpretative potential of the subject because it considers the archaeological evidence of ritual practice in conjunction with social and economic practices and wider processes of landscape enculturation as well as maintaining the integrity of the specific temporal and spatial context. Therefore the title of *Contextualising Ritual Practice* is justified as concisely explaining the goals of this study within the geographical and chronological parameters.

1.3 - Structure of the study

Chapter 2 will outline the general cultural and historical background of the Roman conquest as it pertains to syncretism, outlining the relevance of post-colonial theory, and reviewing previous approaches. Chapter 3 will flesh out the methodology outlined above by presenting contextualisation as a holistic approach to ritual and religion. Elaborating on ritualisation theory and *Annaliste* theories of cultural transformation will further integrate the theoretical basis with the contextual methodology. The wealth of religious material from the northern frontier zone of Roman Britain will form the most important body of evidence for this thesis, as it has for many previous studies (e.g. Ross 1974).

The first interpretative section (Chapter 4) focuses on probably the most commonly theorised inspiration behind ritual practice in prehistoric and Roman Britain, which is a concern with fertility. This paramount ritual motivation is quite often framed in generalised terms, but the case study will demonstrate that in some instances it is possible to build a more specific interpretation by examining the evidence for ritual practice in conjunction with the wider socio-economic context. Through necessity, it would be impossible to ignore the military context for much of this material evidence, especially for the second interpretative section (Chapter 5), which considers identity and the social-political context of ritual practice. However, there are wider social factors for life on the frontier than the military focus that has previously dominated the study of Roman Northern Britain, and these need to be integrated into the interpretation of altars, iconography, and votive offerings dedicated to the local gods of Northern Britain. Hybridisation as the active practices underlying cultural synthesis will form the basis for a discussion of cross-cultural translation and interpretation (or *interpretatio*) both as a product of ancient colonialism and as an object of modern study.

One aspect of ritual practice that has not received great attention from Roman studies is the landscape context of votive deposits (Chapter 6), especially votive altars, and other 'stray' finds from native or non-military contexts. A reliance on classical and early medieval texts has led to interpretations of Celtic religion as nature worship or animism with frequent emphasis on the essential sacred nature of water. Whilst this may be relevant, there would have been considerably more complexity to such bodies of knowledge with multiple metaphors and meanings associated with these important ritualised practices. The more detailed archaeological study of hoarding and votive deposition in European and British prehistory has produced greater insights into the range and nature of such activities (Bradley 1998 & 2000; Hunter 1997). However, the focus on

watery contexts has also created binary distinctions in interpretation between wet/dry and the recurrent dichotomy of utilitarian/ritual (Needham 2001). A discussion of this vital evidence for ritualised practices, which spans both the prehistoric and Roman periods, will show the long-term interaction between the inhabitants of Britain and their landscape. The final chapter (7) will tie together themes from the previous discussion and summarise the inter-dependence of, and interaction between, society, the economy, and the landscape, generating the holistic methodological approach of vernacular religion. A number of additional themes will emerge that cross-cut the contextual framework helping to further contextualise both prehistoric and Roman ritual practice; these include fertility, identity, memory, time, movement, place, knowledge, ideology, and hegemony. Following these themes from prehistory into the post-conquest period will acknowledge not just continuity, abandonment and assimilation, but also adaptation, innovation, and renewal. The integrated contextual relationship between the wider cultural background and ritual practice will be demonstrated through this final discussion of vernacular religion.
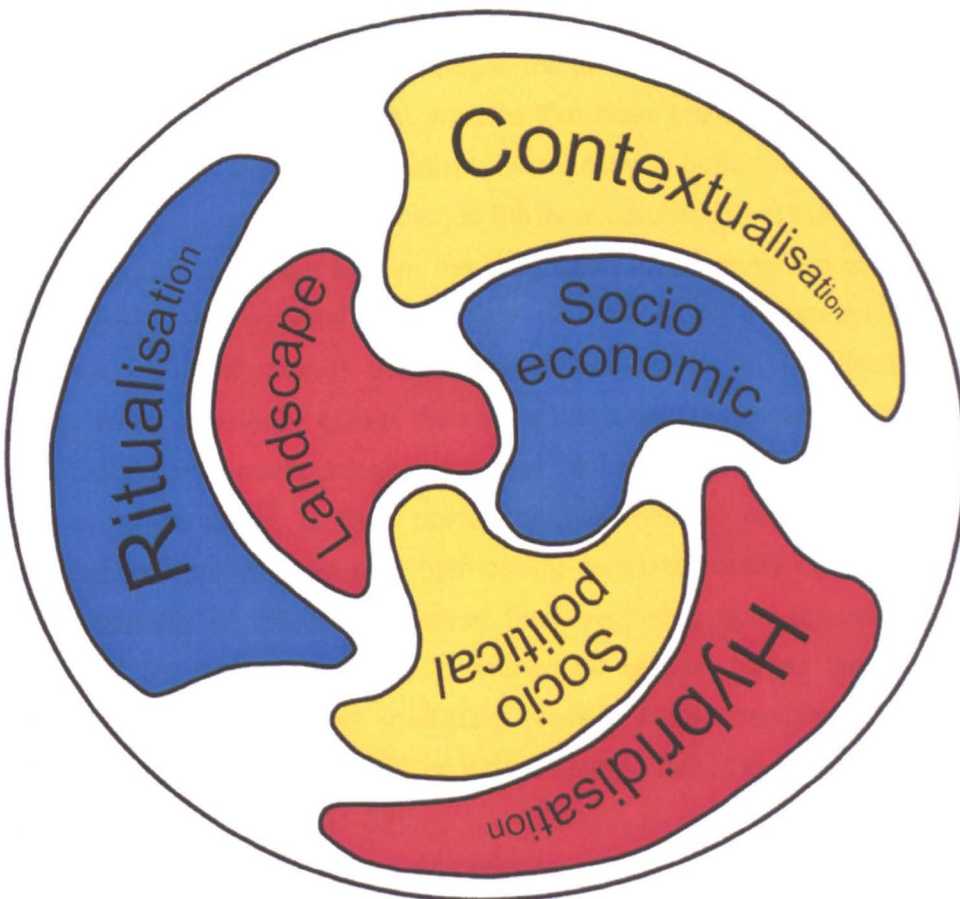
1.4 - Summary: Aims and objectives

The goals of this thesis are dual and interdependent: (1) to re-evaluate the traditional body of evidence for 'native' ritual practice in Roman Britain and (2) integrate that evidence into the wider socio-cultural background. Previously the study of syncretic religion in Roman Britain has proceeded from two related, but polarised standpoints; a nativist approach, which sees the 'Roman' material evidence as a veneer over existing Celtic traditions (King 1990), contrasted by a Romanist top-down approach (Henig 1984) with its origins in classical studies and a perennial focus on Roman military and urban sites (Hingley 2000). Both these approaches perpetuate an interpretative dichotomy between Roman and Native, and even the nativist approach focussing on elite emulation denies agency to the majority of other groups within society (Webster 2001). The categories of 'Roman' and 'native' have been called into question by post-colonial critiques (Barrett 1997a&b) and here will be assessed both as the basis of modern interpretative frameworks for ritual practice, but also with respect to the perceived and projected identities of those involved in ritual practices.

The material evidence for ritual practice will often be referred to as the product of vernacular religion. Vernacular acknowledges the processes of translation involved in the creation of new hybrid forms of ritual practice that have previously been understood as Romano-British syncretic religion. Rather than strictly a bottom-up approach (Webster 2001), vernacular religion draws attention to the local constitution of the multiple influences acting upon religion in Roman Britain; the integration and negotiation of local belief and ritual practice with new material, cultural and symbolic forms of expression. Using the term vernacular could harmonise the dichotomy between the essentialised categories of Roman and Native, but needs careful theorisation as a descriptive term. More importantly, vernacular religion as a methodological approach is compatible with contextualisation. The emphasis of interpretation is then placed on the material culture of ritual practice, examined through multi-layered and inter-locking contexts, locally constituted, but at the nexus of a panoply of influences. Rather than beginning from opposed interpretative dichotomies of Roman or Native/Celtic, vernacular religion forces the evidence to be considered in its specific context, mediating between ethnic identifiers in Bhabha's third space of colonial encounters (1990) or what Gosden calls the middle ground between colonizer and colonized (2004:31-32).

The paradigm of a timeless and traditional Celtic religion has been tailored to fit through the use of later insular medieval mythology, classical ethnographic accounts and

the appropriation of Romano-Celtic syncretic religion to supplement the archaeological record (Webster 1991; Fitzpatrick 1991). Unlike the later prehistoric evidence for ritual practice, the use of post-conquest evidence more closely conforms to generally unacknowledged expectations based on Graeco-Roman polytheism, with the attendant hope that it also preserves prehistoric 'timeless' traditions in new material forms (King 1990; Haussler & King 2007; Yeates 2006). Advances have been made in the last twenty years through accepting the possibility of different Iron Age societies (Hill 1989), and rejecting the models derived from classical literature. Ritualisation theory has emerged as a more suitable framework for interpreting the later prehistoric archaeological record (Hill 1995a&b; Bradley 2005) and this approach will be applied to the Roman period evidence. In this thesis, due consideration will be given to pre-conquest ritual practices, tracing numerous themes relevant to the contextual categories chosen for the case studies, and incorporated with an awareness of chronology and development through time. Rather than simplistically seeking direct continuity, central themes such as fertility (socio-economic), identity (socio-political) and the power of place (landscape) can be incorporated into the contextual categories and will be useful for tracing the inevitable socio-cultural transformation from later prehistory into the Roman period. Despite the oft-quoted conservative nature of religion, all religious traditions are subject to transformation through time and inevitably must adapt to changing social, economic, political and environmental conditions, but especially so in post-conquest colonial contexts such as Roman Britain.

In order to re-evaluate the categories of Roman and Native in Romano-Celtic syncretism, the material evidence for ritual practice will need to be studied through an integrated contextual approach that firmly places this evidence into the wider sphere of social action and social theory. Although contextualisation is a frequently cited goal, it usually refers to the integration of archaeological and historical or ethnographic evidence (see papers by Fogelin and Hastorf in Kyriakidis 2007). The methodology advocated here is certainly not unique, but equally it has not been commonly applied to the frequently ghettoised studies of ritual and religion. Ritual practices are a vital and dynamic part of any society and should not be studied in a vacuum, divorced from other aspects of the cultural system. Our conception of religion as a separate category of social behaviour is a product of western rationalism and a result of the decline of religion in our modern western scientistic society (see Chapter 3 and esp. Brück 1999). Conversely, anthropological study of many pre-modern and non-Westernized cultures has shown that beliefs, values

and fundamental cosmological conceptions of how the world is constituted can be embedded in the socio-cultural background, embodied in the landscape and subtly encoded in many everyday practices, as well as in more overt ritual practices (Bowie 2006; Klass 1995). Ritualisation theory and the practice approach to the study of ritual (Bell 1992), has proved popular with more recent prehistoric archaeological interpretation (Gosden 1998; Fogelin 2007). Ritualisation provides an extra emphasis to a range of practices through considering the context of that action within the overall flow of social practice. Examining ritualised practices in relation to wider social practices dictates that religion is not separated from our studies of the past, but integrated and contextualised. The three categories of socio-economic, socio-political and landscape context will be used to demonstrate that ritual practice was thoroughly incorporated into many other aspects of life in Later Prehistoric and Roman Britain and is best interpreted from this basis. A contextualised approach will highlight the locally constituted ritual practices that were integral parts of the lives, identities and landscapes of people dwelling in Britain.
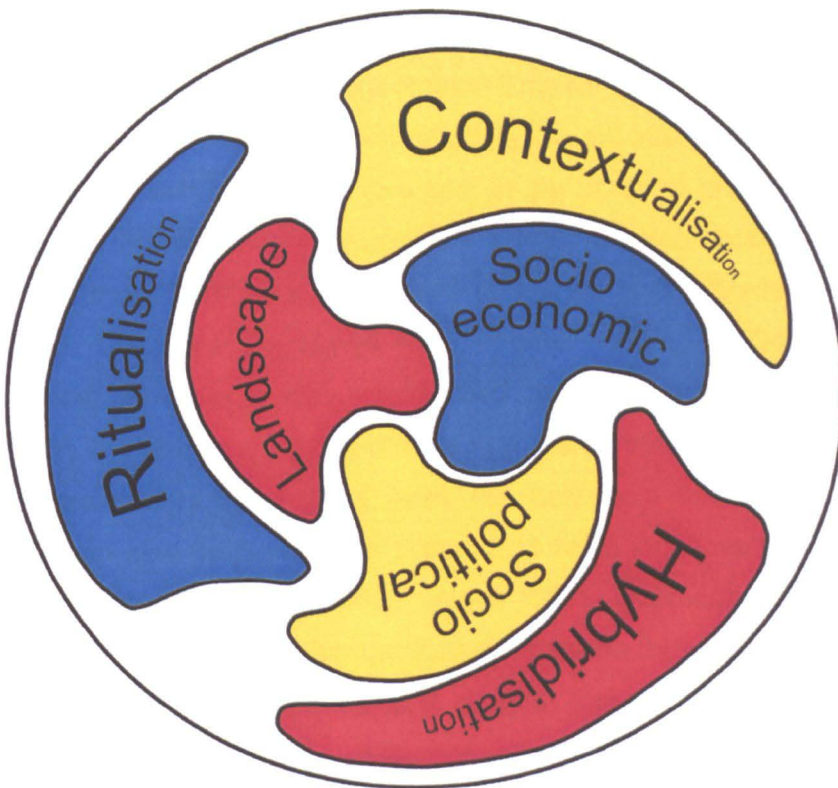
Chapter 2 - Religion, culture contact and Roman archaeology

2.1 - Introduction

Questions about the relationship between religion and culture are the concern of several academic disciplines (Bowie 2006:1-2). Is religion a reflection of cultural values transferred from the profane everyday world and expressed within a separate sacred sphere (Durkheim 1915)? How can scholars read and derive meaning from the symbols prevalent in other cultures (Geertz 1973)? Is religion an epiphenomenon produced by society's collective neuroses (Freud discussed in Bowie 2006:161-163) or a means for dealing with the type of societal stress caused by the Roman conquests (Malinowski discussed in King and Haussler 2007:10)? Theories of how both culture and religion transform and adapt through time are of related importance. The intersection of these concerns with Roman archaeology is additionally complicated by the specific issues of how culture-contact, conquest and colonisation impacted on the religious traditions of the Roman provinces. The processes of cultural translation and interpretation are central concerns for any understanding of how this period is studied in the present and also how people of that time understood the cultural amalgamation being formed through the growth of the Roman Empire.

A host of terminology has been employed to aid interpretation of the evidence for culture change, with syncretism foremost in the study of provincial religion in the Roman Empire. Identity theory is currently a topic of great interest in archaeology (Meskell 2001; Insoll 2007) and particularly in studies of the Roman provinces (Pitts 2007:693-702). The process of identification, whether defining the Self in relation to the Other or defining the Other in relation to the Self creates certain binary oppositions that permeate both the classical ethnographies and the terminology of our own modern studies. These binary oppositions have not only polarised the interpretation of identities, but can also perpetuate the biases and value judgements on which ancient stereotypes and ethnicities are based on (Jones 1997). The major trend in approaching evidence for ritual practice from Roman Britain has been through opposing dualities of Roman and native/Briton, or the barbaric *topoi* of Celtic culture described from the superior perspective of classical civilisation and based on contemporary Graeco-Roman literary sources (Webster 2001). Early modern scholarship focused on the dominance of classical culture as it survived in the forts and towns of Roman Britain (Haverfield 1923), while in the later twentieth century a 'nativist' reaction emerged that saw classical culture as a veneer over native culture (Reece 1988; King 1990). Both used the ambivalent evidence for Romano-Celtic syncretism to support their approach.

These opposing modes of study can be simplistically conceived as a top-down versus a bottom-up approach (Mattingly 2004:7). The fact that syncretism can support both is due to the inadequacy of such dichotomies and suggests that the dialectic between these opposed approaches could reveal something of the complexity of the practices, identities and cultural landscapes involved in provincial religion. The issues of Romanisation and acculturation will be examined first, as they deal with the broader background of cultural change, before focussing specifically on syncretism as the manifestation of those processes in the sphere of religious activity and belief systems.

2.2 - Romanisation

Hanson (1994) has succinctly outlined the issues of Romanisation as they relate to Roman Britain. The main features he identified are: the presence of the army, the role of urbanisation, the various forms of expression relating to imperial power from coinage to the promotion of the imperial cult, the extension of citizenship through service to the state, language shift and the use of Latin (1994:151-155). Modern use of the term is most frequently associated with Haverfield's (1923) *The Romanisation of Roman Britain,* often considered the classic example of the scholarly view of Rome bringing civilisation to the native population. It has been suggested that Haverfield's concept of Romanisation was influenced by the contemporary situation of British imperialism and the similar civilising rhetoric of other colonial enterprises (Hingley 1997:82-83). However, Haverfield was also influenced by traditions in wider European scholarship, especially the work of Mommsen, and did not make as much reference to the experiences of modern British imperialism and colonisation as most of his contemporary colleagues (Freeman 1997:42-43). Haverfield saw Romanisation manifested in the archaeological record through distinct changes in the form and use of material culture, especially through urbanisation, art, and religion (Hanson 1994:157).

Millett's (1990) *The Romanisation of Britain* examined similar archaeological manifestations of Roman rule over Britain, but the underlying process is imagined from a different perspective in that, since Haverfield's time, academia had subsequently attempted to disassociate itself from European imperialism. Millett placed greater emphasis on the active role of the indigenous elite and reflected the growing academic interest in the nativist influence on cultural change that had begun to filter into Roman studies (Reece 1988) from wider fields of socio-cultural analysis. Romanisation was re-formulated as the product of interaction between an opportunistic, but *laissez faire,* policy from the imperial centre that relied on native, elite emulation, and certain provincial elites' equally opportunistic attempts at asserting and maintaining their own status within the new hierarchical system (Hanson 1994:149). Thus, both Haverfield's

and Millett's conception of Romanisation reflected something of the wider contemporary situation of scholarship. The current fashionable application of globalisation theory to the study of the Roman Empire also reflects the contemporary situation and will be equally subject to the criticisms and vagaries of academic fashion (Hingley 2005).

The utility of the term Romanisation has been hotly debated over the last two decades (Barrett 1989; Webster 2001; papers in Mattingly 1997) and needs little rehearsing here. A plethora of alternative terminologies have been recently employed: identity, discrepant experience, elite negotiation and emulation strategies, resistance, integration, power discourse, cultural bricolage, and creolization (Mattingly 2002). Some of these new terms deserve further examination as they have been applied to examples that discuss evidence for religion and ritual practice in the Roman provinces. First, it will be necessary to discuss certain broader binary oppositions that Romanisation promotes and that are still resorted to in interpretations of material culture in the ancient world.

2.3 - Roman and Native

Perhaps the greatest criticism of the Romanisation paradigm is that it perpetuates a dichotomy between Roman and native/indigenous with all of the colonial baggage that accompanies those terms. Indigenous can be contrasted with foreign and so the Roman in the provinces might be understood as the foreigner, the coloniser, the merchant, or those in imperial service whether administration or army (Mattingly 2004). These professions and the multiplicity of social backgrounds and cultural identities that cross-cut them are ignominiously glossed over by the label of 'Roman'. A multiplicity of identities are also subsumed under the umbrella term of native, although this is frequently employed as a neutral alternative to even more problematic ethnic constructs such as Celt or German (Jones 1997; Wells 2001).

Using Roman seems unavoidable for the time period of this study, but the problems of ethnic identification (Jones 1997:129-30) extend equally to the Roman side of the dichotomy, and the concrete identification of 'Roman' material culture has been questioned, especially for the Principate (Freeman 1993:443-445). The culture of the city of Rome or of Italy was not universally or even directly transferred to the provinces, as the term Romanisation implies. Much of the other 'Roman' material culture in Britain was produced in the northern and western provinces rather than being of Italian or Mediterranean origin. The red-glossed tableware *terra sigillata* is often taken as an archaeological indication of 'Roman' material culture from excavations across Europe.

However, this pottery was of provincial manufacture and represents a fusion of Italian and Gaulish influences (Hanson 1994:152; Freeman 1993:444; Woolf 1998:187-205).

Aspects of material culture considered 'Roman' in the past are unlikely to match the many classes of material culture that modern study has designated as Roman. The categories of Roman, provincial or indigenous remain problematic for classifying material culture and it is important to realise that the concepts attached to these terms are modern constructs (Chadwick 2004:104). The designation of Roman or native is especially problematic for the material evidence of religion in the provinces as a host of cultural influences are usually at work. Derks' study of religion in Northern Gaul was criticised for only considering the native interaction with Roman deities and not taking into account the diversity of religious beliefs, especially as practiced by the military (Woolf 2000). There is such a dramatic change of appearance in the material culture of ritual practice as a result of Roman conquests, that some studies would see this as a manifestation of a much more broad-based Empire-wide Roman ethnic identity (Revell 2007:211), part of the ongoing process of becoming Roman (Woolf 1998).

The scholarly desire to label material culture or religious traditions as Roman or native attempts to assert a simple order and coherence on the data that may not tally with ancient perceptions. Such simplified etic constructs are unlikely to be consonant with the emic categories of the time. However, the terminology of the time provides the source for our modern notions of Roman and Briton and such circularity means that care must be taken about the objective and subjective use of these terms. This paradox suggests that the problems lie not with the terms themselves, but rather with how they are used in analysis (Mattingly 2004:10) and especially because, as ethnic terms under a Romanisation paradigm, they represent gross generalisations. Britons and Romans can still be used in a socio-political sense, and as a recognition of the emic value-laden contemporary terms best exemplified by the perjorative *Brittunculi* mentioned in the Vindolanda tablets (Bowman 1994:106), but caution is justified as they give the impression of monolithic entities and strict ethnic divisions that are always going to be problematic for defining material culture.

A new social and cultural order was legitimised through the conquest, and new power structures became naturalised through the active agency of the mediation of local elites (Millett 1990; Woolf 1998). This model of elite emulation has been criticised for maintaining focus on the provincial elite as an archaeologically visible, but narrow stratum of society (Mattingly 2004:6). The ideological trappings adopted by local elites and interpreted as markers of Romanisation include new styles of dress, art, architecture, accelerated adoption of new material culture, as well as different practices, including language change, increased Latin literacy and the epigraphic habit

that records so much religious evidence (Hanson 1994). Were these changes recognised as the adoption of 'Roman' culture only initially, and what of the more gradual adoption of material culture over time or beyond the frontiers? Who perceived material culture as Roman; provincial peers, social superiors or inferiors? Material culture would have been differently perceived by each of these groups according to their own set of values. The changes in social practices and consequent affect on social relations would have had more impact on the construction and perception of new and existing identities than simply adopting new material culture (Pitts 2007; Comaroff & Comaroff 2006).

Whilst the top-down approach of elite negotiation and emulation strategies shifts the emphasis of Romanisation and gives agency to one element of the native population, it still ignores the majority of the population (Mattingly 2004:6-7). Within the new hierarchical structure of society established after the conquest, there would have been a variety of strategies for the negotiation of social relations, rank and status, although the parameters would shift through extended inter-action over the course of time. This study will use Roman and native with great caution, especially for the classification of material culture (Woolf 2000). Instead, these terms are accepted as potential idealisations of diversely perceived and constructed identities. Material culture is not easily classified Roman or native, rather these idealisations were constructed through social practices and social relations structured according to certain sets of cultural values, which would in turn influence the future deployment of material culture. Roman and native are not necessarily diametrically opposed sets of values, and identity formation, perception and projection would use a variety of techniques including comparison, as well as contrast and stereotype. The evidence for religion and the formal and structuring nature of ritual practice are useful for exploring such idealised identities, but subtle ambiguities against the norm might also hint at contested values, resistance and sub-altern identities. The various sets of cultural values would not have altered simply as a result of the conquest, but would have continued to exhibit 'kaleidoscopic change over time' (Mattingly 2004:22).

2.4 - Classical and Celtic : Civilised and barbarian

Nineteenth and early twentieth century scholarship constructed two even broader dichotomous concepts of Classical culture and Celtic culture to characterise the differences between the Mediterranean world and Northern Europe. The origins of this dichotomy lie in the literary sources of the ancient world, which obviously privilege the Graeco-Roman world-view (Webster 1996). The classical literary sources reveal the cultural values of the Roman state, and provide ethnographic descriptions of the people

of Northern Europe. These were used to construct a picture of a uniform Celtic culture common to many of the peoples of northern and western Europe (Fitzpatrick 1996:241-244). Graeco-Roman cultural values are often presented in contrast if not direct opposition to the barbarian; an on-going process of defining and re-defining civilised culture through contrast and reference to the barbarian Other. Post-colonial theory proposes that the discourse between civilised and barbarian has consequently been the origin of many of the dichotomous views of modern scholarship (Webster 1996).

The classical ethnographies relate primarily to newly conquered territories of Provence and Gaul in the first centuries B.C. and A.D. Composed in a context of conflict with the people of Northern Europe, these sources are one-sided and Romano-centric. The response to Roman military and political aggression leads to an over-emphasis on the war-like nature of Celtic society in the classical literature (Webster 1991;1996). The over-reliance on these sources for describing Iron Age societies has been criticised, especially for Britain (Hill 1989). The blur of proto-history before the Claudian conquest of Britain largely refers to Continental ethnographic contexts temporally and spatially distant from Britain. Careful contextual analysis can still usefully incorporate some of this information for southern Britain (Webster 1991; Creighton 2000). The development of very different modes of study, from the purely archaeological focus of the prehistoric Iron Age, to the privileging of text in the historical framework for Roman Britain has compounded interpretative divisions between prehistory and (proto-)history.

The theoretical basis for the Celtic paradigm is well rehearsed (Fitzpatrick 1996) and its most vociferous opponents have called for it to be completely abandoned in British prehistoric archaeology (James 1999). Celtic is a term almost impossible to avoid and as with Romanisation its ubiquity dominated nineteenth and twentieth century study. Consequently both have become unwieldy due to the conceptual baggage that has accumulated around them. The concurrent deconstruction of both Romanisation and the nationalist and romanticist notions of Celtic ethnicity represent wider post-modern trends that argue against such grand narratives. These paradigm shifts were necessary to erode the assumptions that had built up through more than a century of use and romanticised misuse. The positive outcomes of deconstruction can be the new conceptualisation and redefining of existing terminology leading to a revitalisation of the subject. However, the tendency to deconstruct with no consequent reconstruction equally creates the danger of academic fragmentation and stagnation.

Celtic linguistics remains a vibrant and specialised academic discourse that has been forced to distance itself from Iron Age archaeology. People speaking what modern scholarship has chosen to define as Celtic languages did occupy Britain during

the prehistoric and Roman period, but archaeologists have rarely engaged with the linguistic evidence since the 1990's (Swift 2002). The study of language and especially place-names can provide avenues into the way that people perceived their world and archaeological evidence can, in turn, be used to inform linguistic interpretation. *Loch na Séad*, Loughnashade in Northern Ireland, is a case in point where the place-name meaning 'Lake of the Treasures' has been confirmed by the presence of a hoard of four La Tene-style decorated trumpets deposited in the lake as part of wider ritualised activity at the Navan fort complex; the Emain Macha of Early Irish literature, with all of its rich mythological associations (Koch 2006:691-693). Increased dialogue between archaeology and the study of Celtic languages can only benefit both subjects (see introduction).

At first glance 'Classical' seems less problematic and in this thesis will be used in relation to the broad cultural traditions of the Mediterranean world, particularly with reference to the Graeco-Roman literary sources that provide ethnographic accounts of Northern Europe. The resilience of this term is largely a result of the conservative tendencies of classical scholarship. However, the affects of post-modern critique on problematic topics such as the relationship between Late pagan philosophy, heresy and emerging orthodox Christianity, as well as the deconstruction of grand narratives such as Hellenism (Bowersock 1990), suggests that classical scholarship is also undergoing a deconstructive metamorphosis (Lyman 2003). The problem with any consideration of 'classical civilisation' arises from exactly the second part of the term with its inherent contrast with the barbarian Other. In nineteenth and early twentieth century academic discourse, the conception of Romanisation as a civilising model developing in tandem with the civilising mission of modern European empires is a testament to the parallelism of these ancient and modern colonial discourses and the classical foundations of western society (Webster 1997a; Hingley 2001). The colonial discourse of civilisation and barbarity suffuses classical ethnographies of the Celts because of the context of conflict and conquest (Webster 1996). The continued uncritical acceptance of classical sources that permeated through nineteenth and twentieth century Roman archaeology, classical and Celtic studies perpetuates that colonial discourse in modern study (Webster 1995a&b). Any conceptualisation of the Other is through reference to the Self; either through comparison as a version of the Self or contrastive means creating an inversion of the Self (Hall 2002). The construction of self-identity by the authors of classical ethnographies most often comes from opposition and through the glorification of difference. In defining the barbarian Other the classical sources were articulating a constant process of definition and re-

constitution of their own cultural values and identity (Beard 1994:187) which was brought under stress through integration with the huge variety of conquered cultures.

2.5 - Acculturation

The processes by which change occurred in *both* Roman and provincial culture can be considered closer to acculturation, which was briefly preferred to Romanisation (Brandt and Slofstra 1983; Barrett et al 1989), but has been criticised for reifying the ethnic categories of the classical sources (Webster 2001). Conflict between separate cultures is tied to assumptions about the autonomy of cultural units (Woolf 1997a:340). Use of the term Romanisation privileges one side of the process and can be equated with assimilation as one extreme of acculturative processes (Hanson 1994:150). In wider sociological study, acculturation has mistakenly become synonymous with assimilation and reflects an uncritical, westernised or Euro-centric view of culture change implying the complete integration and adoption of the values of the dominant culture. This modern confusion between acculturation and assimilation has coloured its application in other contexts (Ferguson 1992). Much of the modern terminology and deconstruction of Romanisation can be considered as unacknowledged attempts at disentangling assimilation and acculturation.

There are obvious dangers when terminology is applied differentially across disciplines. These problems are compounded when terminology needs to be re-defined as a consequence of paradigm change in the study of different historical, geographical and political conditions. Misapplication and consequent criticism can then have repercussions back across disciplines. Within Roman studies, the lack of general acceptance of creolization (Webster 2001; see below) as an alternative to Romanisation may be an example of a legitimately cautious attitude to the use of terminology from comparative studies of culture-contact. Acculturation has not been "comprehensively trounced" in modern studies of culture contact (Webster 2001:210), but has been mistakenly equated with assimilation.

Acculturation and assimilation can be clearly differentiated and continued use is justified as long as those terms are clearly defined according to current parlance. Acculturation was originally taken to mean the simultaneous re-definition and re-constitution of cultural patterns as two cultures come into closer contact through time (Redfield *et al* 1936: 142-156), but this still works from a binary opposition. Continued use of Romanisation as a convenient shorthand for the initial post-conquest assimilative tendency of the elite sections of provincial society might be justified (Hanson 1994:150), although this has an obvious affinity with top-down approaches. With certain caveats in place acculturation acknowledges that all cultural systems are

in a constant state of flux and reconstitution and can be differentially experienced according to a host of factors including, but not limited to, age, gender, status, wealth and geographical location (Hanson 1994:150). Acculturation is often dependent on an essentialist ethno-cultural core from which degrees of ethnic identity are measured (Woolf 1997a:341; Pitts 2007). The cultural revolution (Woolf 2001) that generated imperial and provincial culture from the preceding republican and pre-conquest cultures were based on a similar set of structured differences ("region, class, social locale, age and gender among other dimensions of variability"; Hanson 1994:150; Mattingly 2004:6-7) that have been suggested as shaping acculturation. Ultimately the definition of culture shapes interpretation.

2.6 - Post-colonial theory, creolization and discrepant identities

The Roman Empire as a prime example of ancient colonialism can be favourably compared with modern Western European imperialism. Revision and deconstruction of the Romanisation model has been largely accomplished through the application of post-colonial theory, which works from the many points of comparison between ancient and modern cultural imperialism and the similar rhetoric used by the dominant culture to justify their conquests. It has been argued that European imperialism had modelled itself on Roman imperialism and therefore comparisons *must* be made in order to fully understand the discursive relationship between ancient and modern imperial projects (Webster 1997a:325). Common features of both modern and ancient imperialism facilitate comparison as well as achieving a reflexive understanding of the influence modern colonialism has had on the development of Roman archaeology. Post-colonial analysis is particularly appropriate to the study of the Roman world, as much of the early modern scholarship on Rome reflects the positive contemporary perception of modern European imperialism. Under these auspices Romanisation was conceived as a progressive civilising process, which post-colonial theory can criticise on the same basis as the discourse on modern imperialism. Romanisation cannot account for the implicit and explicit power relations within imperial society nor the subtle nuances of colonial experience (Webster 1996a:11; Mattingly 2004:6-7).

Webster has written extensively on the application of post-colonial discourse theory to the study of syncretic Romano-Celtic religion and in particular favours the creolization model (2001). The concept of creolization originated in the complex colonial situation of emerging Latin, Caribbean and African-American societies. Originally, creolization was a socio-linguistic term whereby a fully formed language develops from two parent languages. Creole languages are created from a structureless pidgin, often with the organising principles coming from rapid collective

structuration processes within a single generation, surprisingly through the active agency of children rather than adult-led socialisation or education (Roberts 1995;1998). Cultural creolisation has since developed a much wider application in social theory (Ferguson 1992) and is used to describe "processes of multi-cultural adjustment" (Webster & Scott 2003).   The linguistic analogy of creolization does not fully theorise active ongoing processes of culture change through time, as languages, even creole ones, gravitate towards structure and standardisation. Webster (2001: 209) has argued that, "a creole perspective offers insights into the negotiation of post-conquest identities from the 'bottom up' rather than − as is often the case in studies of Romanisation − from the perspective of provincial elites." While creolization provides a useful analogy for the colonial situation within the Roman provinces, it has not been widely acknowledged (Aldhouse-Green 2003b:39).   In wider social theory there is also a degree of discomfort with the wholesale application of a term appropriated from the study of a particular cultural and geo-historical situation (Palmie 2006). Syncretism has been preferred over creolization for the archaeological study of religion (Insoll 2004:131).

Re-dressing the imbalance inherent in the elite focus of Romanisation studies (Millett 1990) is imperative to studies of Roman imperialism. Ultimately the creolization approach still needs to be integrated with those top-down approaches of which it has been critical, in order to represent the full spectrum of Roman provincial and imperial society. Both emulation strategies and creolization contribute to the "complexities of multi-directional flow in inter-societal contacts" and the formation of a range of discrepant identities in the Roman provinces (Mattingly 2004:7).   Mattingly has attempted to develop the concept of 'discrepant identity' through combining Said's (1992:35-50) post-colonial analysis of imperial discourse as discrepant experience, with creolization theory and work on identity in Iron Age studies (Mattingly 1997a; 2004:9).   Through avoiding the extreme polarisation of Roman and native and acknowledging the dialectic between top-down and bottom up approaches, many of the subtle combinations and the contradictions of colonial experience can be accounted for, where identity and behaviour might be socially contingent and alter according to the context of action. The related dialectic between the interpretation of homogeneity and heterogeneity in Roman provincial religion (Revell 2007), discussed in Chapter 7, dictates that the scale of contextual analysis will affect the interpretation of ritual practice in its local context or as part of the wider provincial background. This thesis advocates an approach that focuses on local micro-histories and regionally specific study in order to avoid homogenising top-down representations (Van Dommelen & Terrenato 2007:9-10), but will still require integration between them. In order to

examine the variety of discrepant identities and experiences, the archaeological record must be thoroughly interrogated for subtle differences in the use of material culture in order to assess whether these can be consistently correlated with the "distinct expressions of identity in society" (Mattingly 2004:9). Those subtle differences must rely on a close contextual analysis, which will form the methodology for this study.

2.7 - Syncretism

Syncretism belongs with several other terms in the study of religion such as ritual, sacred and religion itself, which derive from Greek or Latin terms, but have a complex semantic history. The origin of syncretism is not as important as its current use and what is most important is its clear definition as part of modern scholarly discourse. Simply defined, syncretism is the blending or fusion of different religious traditions, but as with acculturation the complexities of the clash of world-views belies such a simple definition. Problems emerging from the criticism of Romanisation can be equally aimed at the study of syncretism. Roger Bastide defined syncretism as "uniting pieces of the mythical history of two different traditions in one that *continued to be ordered by a single system*" [my emphasis](quoted in Nederveen Pieterse 2001:223), highlighting how, in anthropological study, syncretism has often been presented as assimilative. Negative under-tones in the study of syncretism result from an underlying Judeao-Christian bias, which viewed monotheism as a superior development beyond polytheism (Shaw & Stewart 1994:4-5). From this monotheistic background, syncretism has appeared degenerate, with the colonial fusion of world and traditional religions being viewed as the dilution of orthodox faith by primitive belief systems (Bowie 2006:252). The Christianizing mission of European colonisation means that syncretism as a common feature of early anthropological study could equally be accused of a shared discourse with cultural imperialism, and was therefore ripe for post-colonial discourse analysis (Webster 1997a).

Dichotomous approaches to the study of religion in Roman Britain have been further accentuated by more recent debates regarding the utility and application of post-colonial theory to the evidence from the western provinces (Webster 1997a; Green 1998). The impact of socio-political factors has led to the suggestion that syncretism should be recast as "the politics of religious synthesis" (Shaw & Stewart 1994:7). Syncretism always involves politics of identity especially in the context of imperialism and power relations are intensified whenever religious traditions come in contact or are forcibly superimposed through conquest. The unequal power relations involved in religious syncretism can be explored through hybridisation theory, which integrates wider social, cultural, political and economic factors into holistic study. Post-

colonial discourse analysis has the potential to supersede the polarisation between the 'bottom-up' nativist perspective, and the 'top-down' Romanist one, integrating both through hybridisation theory (Van Dommelen and Terrenato 2007). Removing ethnic constructs and considering the diversity of identities expressed through ritual practice within provincial society will be one of the main challenges of this thesis.

A recent review of syncretism (Graf 2005:8934-8938) concluded that the term is obsolete, as there is no universally agreed definition or form of use.   However, syncretism as a term is intimately related to perceptions of the religious imperialism of the Roman Empire and for this reason alone should not be easily discarded. The first recorded use of syncretism in the modern history of religions described the Roman appropriation of foreign cults as a strategy for homogenizing the Empire; "all the varieties of mankind…restamped at the Caesarean mint" (Graf 2005:8934).   The Romanist view of Romano-Celtic syncretism reflects this conception of Roman provincial religion. The material form and especially the monumentality of 'Roman' worship, established after the conquest, is often assumed to represent homogenous cult practice throughout the Empire (Revell 2007:210). The perceived role of syncretism facilitating homogeneity has proved an amazingly long-lived interpretation of Roman provincial religion (Revell 2007).   The paradox of homogeneity and heterogeneity mediated through hybridisation will be reviewed in Chapter 7.

2.8 - Romano-Celtic Syncretism: Nativist and Romanist perspectives

Since the 1980's the interpretation of Romano-British syncretic religion has been studied from two opposing dichotomous perspectives that relate to the wider issues of Romanisation and the interpretation of archaeological evidence from Roman Britain. One sees Roman culture as a veneer over indigenous culture (Forcett 1997) and the other has its basis in classical studies, focusing on the recognisably Mediterranean aspects of Roman culture in Britain (Henig 1984;1995). The Romanisation paradigm was obviously influential on the colonial, civilising and evolutionary perspective of the Romanist, but the Celtic paradigm has probably been equally influential on the nativist interpretation of Romano-Celtic syncretism. Discrepancies in both approaches were deconstructed during the 1990's. Although not always explicitly stated, one of the main interpretative concerns for Romano-Celtic syncretism has been concerned with quantifying Celtic survival and Roman influence on religious material (King 1990:237; Revell 2007:221). In tandem with the general critique of Romanisation, syncretism can similarly be accused of promoting essentialist ethnic constructs through compound identifications such as Romano-Celtic or Romano-British. In attempting to simplify an incredibly complex process, the dichotomous relationship between the constitutive

elements is perpetuated, with the attendant danger of attempting to quantify degrees of Roman or native (Woolf 2000:173). The opposing modes of study simplistically conceived as a bottom-up versus a top-down approach can be integrated without privileging either one as the evidence for provincial religion is better positioned in the dialectic between them.

The Romanist attitude is especially noticeable in art-historical studies (see Scott 2006 for critical comment) seeking classical proto-types for the material culture of Roman Britain whilst viewing it as substandard imitations of the metropolitan ideal. Martin Henig's work represents the more classically orientated study of Roman Britain (1984;1995). However, his appreciation of sculpture from Roman Britain has grown through the preparation of the *CSIR* volume for the Cotswold region (1993). Although usually seen as slavish copies of metropolitan work, Henig sees the combination of 'classicism' with a distinctive feel for texture and pattern as the hallmarks of local artists in Britain and yet, the notion that "many of the sculptures and Bronzes from Britain are freer and in a sense better than their prototypes as works of art would be anathema to [classical archaeologists]" (Henig 2004: 142). Henig makes no apology for being an elitist (2004:144) and yet to his credit he has done much to bridge the gap between classical and provincial British archaeology.

2.9 - "Traditional and timeless" Celtic religion

The nativist approach to Romano-Celtic syncretism, which emerged in the last quarter of the twentieth century, attempted to accentuate the native or Celtic side of the equation, but this has done nothing to resolve the dichotomy between Roman and native. King's view that religion in Roman Britain "became culturally Roman but remained ethnically Celtic" (1991:237), succinctly summarises the 'nativist' position, but still perpetuates dichotomous ethnic categories. Graham Webster's (1986) *The British Celts and their Gods under Rome,* primarily focussed on the Roman period evidence, but presented from a 'British' perspective. The impact of Roman conquest is barely covered and the study is based on the foundation of "the extraordinary conservatism of religious practice, and its *continuity*" [my emphasis] (Webster 1986:141).

Webster's (1986) study featured in Fitzpatrick's (1991) influential review article *Celtic (Iron Age) religion: traditional and timeless?*, which also covered 3 other major publications of the late 1980's. Bruneux's (1988) *The Celtic Gauls: Gods, Rites and Sanctuaries* represents the continental approach, where La Tène material culture is indicative of Celts and using the classical sources can at least be justified as being more spatially and chronologically relevant to Iron Age Gaul (Webster 1991). Wait's (1985) *Ritual and religion in Iron Age Britain* attempted an ambitious study of evidence

from all of Britain, but has since been criticised for certain inaccuracies (Hunter 1997:108) and especially for being largely a study of Wessex, indicative of a well-known geographic bias in Iron Age studies (Fitzpatrick 1991:125). Two positives to emerge from Wait's study were some indications of changes in practice through time and consideration of the archaeology of ritual on settlements, which was to become a major research theme of the 1990's (Fitzpatrick 1997; Parker Pearson 1996).

Fitzpatrick's main criticisms of all four works he reviewed were that Celtic ethnicity and Celtic religion were often conceived as unproblematic and traditional, so that, for example, the insular medieval and the classical literary sources had been used in conjunction because of the "presumption of a common Celticness...flowing uninterrupted from the pre-Roman Iron Age to the medieval" (1991:127). The diversity of sources also creates a sense of timelessness, which conflates 'the Celtic religion of Iron Age *and* Roman Britain' (Fitzpatrick 1991:126). Miranda Green's (1986) *Gods of the Celts* was the fourth book included in Fitzpatrick's review and his criticisms were perhaps most pertinent to this author who has more published works in English on the subject of Celtic religion than any other modern scholar. Green's wide-ranging studies are generally based on the interpretation of symbolism and iconography from the La Tene Iron Age and provincial Roman periods of Britain and Gaul, with frequent reference to the literary sources. This conflation often leads to differences between the pre- and post-conquest evidence being glossed over and continuity being over-emphasised. Fitzpatrick's review (1991) and its critique of the paradigm of Celtic religion in the late 1980's heralded major changes (for some) in the approach to both prehistoric and Roman religion. The many insightful comments provided the impetus and theoretical foundation for the present study.

2.10 - Resistance to Romano-Celtic syncretism

Any assessment of how Celtic religion has been approached in the seventeen years since Fitzpatrick's review must centre on the divergent approaches towards Celtic religion and more particularly Romano-Celtic syncretism in the works of Jane Webster and Miranda Aldhouse-Green. Their opposed views were based on foundational issues about the nature of the continuum between Later prehistoric religion and Romano-Celtic syncretism. Webster has criticised syncretism as a key part of Romanisation, and its use by certain scholars as the unproblematic fusion of religious traditions almost out of convenience (1997a:331). Green's position is closer to the maximalist/positivist view of Romano-Celtic syncretism that "the Romanisation of Celtic religion could have acted as a means of protecting the underlying religious beliefs" (King 1990:237). While this hopeful view is attractive to the nativist perspective, the

post-colonial discourse analysis of Webster (1997b) suggests that the ideological issues of conquest, domination and translation would all have some sort of transformative effect.

Green, in a slew of popular works, represents the culmination of the long established popularity during the twentieth century of scholarship on Celtic religion (see Nagy 2005 for historiography which suggestively does not include Green). Her doctoral thesis was a corpus of religious objects from civilian contexts in Roman Britain (1976). This may explain, but does not justify, her focus on Roman period evidence that Fitzpatrick criticised. Jane Webster's (1991) doctoral thesis evaluated the textual evidence for Celtic/Iron Age religion in the contemporary classical sources and compared this with three categories of archaeological evidence (water sources, wells and shafts, and rectilinear enclosures). Detailed comparison demonstrated that the interpretation of archaeological evidence had been unduly influenced by the uncritical use of the classical sources. Webster's analysis showed that the classical sources were composed as a colonial discourse on the barbarian Other, with a common post-conquest feature being the demonisation of Celtic religion (1996a;1997b). Concluding that modern scholarship had not taken into account the inherent bias of such a colonial discourse, Webster argued that the over-reliance on classical ethnographies, combined with expectations derived from background knowledge of classical models of polytheism, severely limited interpretation and that both textual and archaeological evidence needed to be placed in its correct temporal and spatial context. A recent review of Celtic religion as an object for the comparative study of religion suggested that, whilst the critical study of the Greek and Roman ethnographies had produced an increased awareness of their limitations, it had also led to a more realistic notion of the value of these descriptions (Maier 2006:59).

Webster described the dominant paradigm in the archaeological interpretation of Romano-Celtic religion during the 1980's as the assumption of, "a politically neutral, *laissez-faire* syncretism, which was not imposed upon the provinces from the outside, but reflected the spontaneous desire of polytheistic peoples to accommodate each others gods" (Webster 1997a:328). This attitude to interaction between polytheistic systems can be ultimately traced back to the Christianising mission that permeated early work in the anthropology of religion. Due to underlying Christian bias and the inherent heterodoxy of polytheistic systems, western ethnographers judged pagan fidelity to be devotionally weaker than monotheism, and assumed non-Christians had a simple pragmatic attitude to other gods, shifting allegiances through necessity, expedience or attraction (Webster 1997a:331). There is also a commonly held opinion in Roman studies that all religions were tolerated in the Empire despite the obvious

episodes of persecution towards Jews, Christians and, most pertinently for this study, the Druids.

In Jane Webster's opinion the religious syncretism of Roman Britain had been simplistically conceived and uncritically used through the work of Graham Webster (1986) and the early popular works of Miranda Green (1986;1989). Webster (1995a:153-4) singled out Green's accounts of Celtic religion (esp.1986) as being predominantly based on post-conquest material removed from its correct temporal and spatial context, echoing Fitzpatrick's (1991) criticism of 'timeless' Celtic religion (see above). Most importantly for Webster, Green's approach also removed the material evidence from its socio-political context and does not consider the power discourse that would have existed within the colonial situation of syncretic Roman provincial religion.

The early work of Green (1986) from a 'nativist' perspective and Henig (1984) from a 'Romanist' perspective have since been criticised for using sweeping surveys to create a normative picture of pan-Celtic and Roman religion, which is then re-imposed onto the local context of Roman Britain (Revell 2007:214). Prehistoric religions should be regarded as potentially as heterodox as the socio-political structures or modes of economic production of the many ancient socio-cultural systems occupying the diverse landscapes of prehistoric Europe. Although there appears to have been a common repertoire of practices, these were formulated with endless variation (Woolf 1998 211-212). Assuming the prior static and bounded nature of any religious system would be foolhardy. A single timeless Celtic religion as the basis for Romano-Celtic syncretism is rejected for this thesis (Fitzpatrick 1991), but similarly Roman religion cannot be assumed to be a monolithic entity. Roman religion also underwent massive transformation as a result of socio-political shift from Republic to Principate and through increasing contact with other religious systems (Woolf 2000:616-621). In Beard's opinion "the Roman Empire had no single religious system, but a set of sometimes inter-locking, sometimes flagrantly inconsistent, sometimes openly hostile systems" (1996:167; Gordon 1990:240-245). As with other aspects of socio-cultural systems, all religions are open to external influence and might be thought of as having syncretic potential (Insoll 2004:132-9), although the specific dynamic of change will also be dictated by internal mechanisms and receptivity. While some cultures make more of a conscious effort to police the orthodoxy of their traditions, even the most missionary and orthodox of systems are rarely successful, as the modern colonial experiences of Christianity bear witness (Shaw & Stewart 1994). The dialogue in classical literature regarding foreign cultures and religions suggests that Rome did not have a completely open policy towards religion, but commented on the presence of foreign cults as a contrast with traditional Roman values (Beard 1996). The ritual of

evocatio whereby the tutelary deity of a conquered city were invited into Rome and housed in a temple is often cited as an example of Rome's open religious policy (Beard, North & Price 1998:132-134), but the context of conquest and domination should never be forgotten. Roman religious tolerance was "the tolerance of the victor" and was especially viable through military dominance with victory being seen as a sign that a foreign God had capitulated to Rome (Webster 1995a:158).

Green responded to some of these criticisms in a paper on the genesis of Romano-British cult imagery (1998). While acknowledging that there was "a fundamental shift in religious expression in Gaul and Britain in the post-conquest period" (1998: 18), Green still rejects what she terms Webster's 'Out of Rome' model. She then resorts to her own 'colonial' analogy by citing the syncretic belief systems of the Bahia region in Brazil that combines Portugese Catholicism with indigenous Amerindian practices and the Yoruba cults, which were originally introduced by West African slaves. According to Green, this multi-directional inter-action occurs "in a rich, dynamic and essentially non-heirarchical manner" (1998: 19) and provides a syncretic model that, "to my mind, better fits the situation in Roman Britain and Gaul than the subjugation model in which Roman influence in religion is viewed as involving oppression and obligation" (1998:19). Falling into the familiar trap for which much of her previous work has been criticised, Green's justificatory analogy was timeless, giving no indication of when these observations of Brazilian syncretic religion came from and therefore ignoring the specific, cultural, historical and political context that helped to create this complex religious system. There are no points of comparison and no detail of the basis for this analogy with Roman Britain, other than it appears from a basic appraisal to suit Green's interpretative assumptions. The colonial context that created this syncretic system in Brazil was doubtless subject to the same power discourse that all colonial situations create and given further complexity through the importation of both West African cults introduced by a slave population and an ideologically dominant world religion. The diachronic study of Candomble shows that the situation Green describes is just one phase in the historical development of this highly revealing example of syncretic religion that would be contingent on the changing political and geo-historical situation (Shaw & Stewart 1994). All in all, the Brazilian analogy would seem more likely to suit Webster's arguments for diachronic and contextual study. In the same paper, Green later expresses doubt about whether British or Gaulish religion had been "particularly targeted by Rome for conversion" (1998:23), and this despite imperial proscriptions by Augustus and Tiberius, forbidding the *religio Druidorum* to Roman citizens, suppression by Claudius (Suetonius *Claudius* 25) and the destruction of the Druidic sanctuary and centre of resistance at Anglesey

as described by Tacitus (*Ann*.13:40). The anti-Druidic legislation of the first century A.D. represents the struggle for religious power in the provinces that could only be gained at the expense of the Druids (King 1990: 233-4; Webster 1999). The broader context of this struggle for religious power is shaped by the consistent Empire-wide religious policy of the Augustan period and the promotion of the imperial cult (Whittaker 1997:158; Zanker 1988).

Green and Webster have opposing interpretations of the evidence relating to the Druids. Both agree that Caesar is pivotal in understanding the later prehistoric context of what he describes as a socio-religious section of elite society (Green 1997:10; Webster 1999:4). Green's reading of Caesar (possibly influenced by Creighton 1995 or earlier scholarship exemplified by DeWitt 1938) is that the Roman general was witnessing a clerical order that was already waning in power due to internal developments in Celtic society and not necessarily the direct influence of Roman power (1997:52). Through the close contextual reading of the classical sources that characterised her PhD work, Webster argued that the decline in status of the Druids was a direct consequence of conquest. Through examining the sources chronologically, Webster demonstrated that there is a subtle shift in the portrayal of the Druids between Caesar's first century B.C. eve of conquest account and the medico-magical accounts of the first century A.D. Caesar's powerful elites, who were central to Gaulish society of the mid first century B.C, are depicted a century later by Pomponius Mela and Lucan as teaching in remote secluded places (Webster 1999). Steady marginalisation occurred, documented in the various imperial edicts issued against the Druids between, until the breaking of Druidic power on Anglesey. The attack on Anglesey coinciding with significant acts of rebellion elsewhere in Britain is probably no coincidence. The fact that the Druids provided a focus for resistance over a century after the conquest of Gaul and occupied several legions while London and Colchester burned argues against Green's interpretation of their irrelevance to Gallo-Brittonic society. Webster also demonstrated that the Druids attempted various revitalisations and are associated with almost all of the other Gallic rebellions against Roman rule, specifically attempting to use millenarian or end-of-the-world prophecy as a vehicle for resistance (1999:14-18). During the Civilis revolt (A.D.70-71) Tacitus states (*Hist*.4.54) that the Druids prophesied the downfall of the Empire and formented revolt in Gaul, showing their persistence a decade after their supposed destruction on Anglesey. The imperial proscriptions argue for the religion of the Druids being of immediate concern for the Roman authorities and the changes in religious practice from this period must be considered within this context of domination and resistance. The Druids are thus one of the most obvious examples of resistance to Rome (Webster 1997b;1999) and

are also essential for any consideration of continuity during the transition to the provincial system and the formation of Romano-Celtic syncretism (King & Haussler 2007:8-9).

Webster has also suggested that the material culture of post-conquest ritual practice was used to express resistance and alternative identities well after the destruction of Anglesey (1997a&c). One of the first examples Webster challenged using post-colonial discourse analysis was *interpretatio Romana* or name pairing of classical and Celtic deities (1995 a&b). Her contention was that these equations were being made from a dominant position of power over a subjugated system whose religious practitioners had been subjected to a rigorous extermination policy. The name-pairing of classical and local deities in Britain were most often equations made by high-ranking officials and military personnel or other high-status dedicants. Conversely the majority of single dedications made simply to the local god were made on small crudely fashioned altars with little iconography, and poor epigraphy by obviously lower ranking or native worshipers whose names appear Celtic or non-roman if included at all (Webster 1995a:159-160). Webster presented the single Celtic theonym dedications as examples of resistance to name pairing from the native population, highlighting the elitist power discourse represented by the process of *interpretatio romana*. The complex inter-play between the dominant colonial power and those subjected to imperial rule can also be discerned in the classical ethnographic sources that refer to northern Europe, especially those from the conquest period (Webster 1996b). Subtle acts of resistance provide a counter-balance to the elite model of emulation (Millet 1990), and argue against the homogeneity of culture suggested by Romanisation and the simple fusion of polytheistic religions.

Romanisation and religion in the imperial provinces was by no means a simple syncretism and requires consideration of numerous adaptive processes, not just resistance and emulation, which represent the extreme dichotomy of motivation, but more importantly the subtler processes of appropriation and hybridisation. From the initial formation of post-conquest religious cults, the exercise of power and a host of socio-political factors must be taken into account. Religious change must not just be considered as a product of the traditional narrative of conquest or a *consequence* of the social and economic transformations emphasised by post-processual study. Religious change must be considered as an integral *component* of any transformation (Woolf 2000:616).

Both Green (now Aldhouse-Green) and Webster contributed to a book on Roman period iconography dedicated to Martin Henig (Scott and Webster 2003). Webster's article (2003) moved away from the more extreme position of domination

and resistance to examine the many strategies employed in iconography representing adaptation and negotiation within colonial contexts. Green has rarely ever referenced Webster's work except in brief refutation, denying what she referred to as Webster's 'Out of Rome thesis' (e.g. 1997). However, more recently Aldhouse-Green's book *An Archaeology of Images* (2004) contains a whole chapter on post-colonial analysis, although amazingly still with little reference to Webster, nearly 10 years after Webster first began promoting this theoretical shift.

2.11 - Recent approaches to native religion in the Roman provinces

The speed, quantity and frequency of publication can perhaps explain Aldhouse-Green's slow reaction to review and peer-criticism. Her approach has varied considerably especially with regard to the use of later medieval insular literature. In her PhD thesis (1978) Green does not utilise this mythological material and in her post-doctoral study on *The Wheel as a cult symbol in the Romano-Celtic world* she states that, "any attempt to link archaeological data of the post-Roman period with post-Roman historical material is at best suspect" (1984:10). In her next work, the popular *Gods of the Celts* (1986) Green does begin using this material, but cautiously. This publication appeared in Fitzpatrick's (1991) review and was criticised for its dependence on Roman evidence presented in a timeless fashion. Despite the paradigm shift in archaeology away from the timeless Celticism, from the late-1980's to the mid-1990's Green utilises the classical and medieval literature more frequently in her interpretations and her caveats about the temporal and spatial issues become less prominent. Criticism of this approach culminated in Webster's articles of the mid to late 1990's, which directly attacked Green's methodology (1995a).

The later work of Green (from 2001 Aldhouse-Green) has been equally prolific and the eventual response to criticism has been through re-invention. Re-instating an awareness of the problems with using the classical and medieval insular sources, she has also begun applying a variety of theoretical and wide-ranging anthropological approaches, which have focused on gender-bending, shape-shifting, zoomorphism and ambiguity and ambivalence in prehistoric/Celtic art (2000;2004) Her writing style in these later studies differs from earlier popular works and seems to aim for greater exclusivity with a predilection for obscure terminology and eclectic cross-cultural analogies (e.g. 2003 Cosmo-vision and shamanism). The accusation of a lack of theoretical rigour remains a problem for anyone attempting to strike a balance between the demands of popular communication and the frequently esoteric discourse of academia and is particularly problematic for the study of religion with the ever-present danger of cultural bias transferred through the cross-cultural application of terminology.

These recent research interests of Aldhouse-Green have culminated in an entire volume devoted to the cross-cultural application of shamanism in European prehistory (*The Quest for the Shaman* 2005). Aspects of shamanistic cosmology and altered states of consciousness are presented as a suitable interpretative framework for prehistoric ritual practice, iconography and artwork from across ancient Europe. The inspiration for the shamanistic approach lies in a larger body of work mostly relating to the interpretation of prehistoric rock art and the evolution of religious practice and belief (see numerous articles in Cambridge Archaeological Review e.g. Winkelman 2002 and comments; *The archaeology of shamanism* Price 2000; reviewed by Whitley & Keyser 2003). The problems inherent in Aldhouse-Green (2005) are immense and such a generalised approach was bound to slip into speculation, stereotype and the poor integration of ethnographic and archaeological data (Balzer 2006). General criticisms of the misapplication and misappropriation of shamanism as a 'primitive' *Ur*-religion are widespread throughout ethnology, anthropology, history of religions and archaeology (Bowie 2006: Ch.7; Insoll 2004:139-143).

Aldhouse-Green (2005) resurrects the old paradigm of Celtic religion; Later prehistoric archaeology, Roman period archaeology and classical sources, and early medieval mythological literature are reframed within the newly appropriated shamanic paradigm and discussed in consecutive chapters (Chapters 5, 6 and 7 of Aldhouse-Green 2005). Riding a popular wave of interest in New Age cross-cultural religious speculation Aldhouse-Green (2005) is back on familiar ground and satisfying the popular target audience at the expense of academic rigour. The use of the cross-cultural analogy of shamanism is also evident in *An Archaeology of Images* (2004), which deals more specifically with late prehistoric and Roman art and archaeology. In the index there are 28 separate page references to shamanism and only 2 for the more culturally appropriate Druids.

The shamanic analogy has several superficial attractions as it accounts for some of the ambiguity, ambivalence and abstraction of Celtic art. Limited space within this thesis does not allow full coverage of this problematic analogy (see Macdonald 2006 for comments on iconographic interpretation). Altered states of consciousness as the inspiration for certain aspects of Late prehistoric and Roman period art that display boundary and species crossing has been suggested by others (Creighton 2000), but artistic interpretation is virtually the only consistent basis for the shamanic analogy. The detailed ethnographies that other shamanistic studies can utilise are not available for Celtic art without again resorting to later medieval insular literature. Zoomorphic figures like the later prehistoric and Roman horned god Cernunnos have been suggested as being shaman-like depictions of religious practitioners whose

appearance is compared to 18th century A.D. ethnographic depictions of shamans and extreme popular speculation would trace these back as far as palaeolithic cave paintings (Aldhouse-Green 2005). Such pristine survival through millennia of ritual development is highly unlikely.

Aldhouse-Green (2005) attempts to negotiate an immense time-depth through radically different societies across Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age Europe, giving the shamanistic model a superficial character compared to the more detailed ethnographic studies (e.g. Lewis Williams 1981). The economic basis and social structure of most societies are intimately related to their cosmology and ritual expression and affect the role and status of any religious practioners within society. The wider socio-cultural background must be taken into account before universally applying the interpretation of trance-inspired imagery. Recent cognitive theories of religious transmission (Whitehouse 2002) use a broad scale distinction between complex societies with an organised priesthood, and small-scale societies typified by shaman-like practitioners. This is one of the most commonly held generalisations about religious practitioners (Klass 1995:65). Unlike Aldhouse-Green, the Whitehouse (2004a&b) edited volumes in AltaMira's *Cognitive Science of Religion* series qualify this generalised distinction with reference to many other aspects of socio-political structure and processes of cognitive transmission tested across a wide range of detailed socio-cultural examples.

In the popular view, the immensely productive output of Aldhouse-Green would position her as the current authority on most topics in the genre of Celtic religion and this is evident from the amount of self-referencing in her work. However, in the recent historiographical survey of the study of Celtic religion for the *MacMillan Encyclopedia of Religion* (Nagy 2005:1497-1501), Aldhouse-Green's works do not appear at all, perhaps because of her popularist approach. The author of the review, Joseph Falaky Nagy, is one of the original Celticists to utilise shamanic analogy for interpreting the Fenien tradition in Early Irish literature (1981&1982). Given this common research interest, Aldhouse-Green's omission from the recent survey seems even more noteworthy. Nagy's conclusion about the current state of study of Celtic religion is that, due to the increasing availability of data, Celtic scholars are more hesitant of approaching the sources 'as unambiguous time capsules' and making "blanket statements of the sort that used to characterize the study of Celtic religion and that still, alas, bedevil the seemingly endless stream of popular published treatments of the subject" (Nagy 2005:1500). While it is impossible to say whether this refers to Green, she is notable by her absence given her many popular published treatments of the subject.

Recent studies of religion in Roman Britain and the western provinces have focussed on regional studies (Watson 2007; Yeates 2006; Richert 2005) or particular aspects of ritual practice such as the surge in popularity of the deposition of dogs (Smith 2006). These have taken a variety of approaches. Yeates (2006) attempted to resolve the contradictions he perceived in two influential studies of religion and culture in northeast Gaul; the anthropological approach of Roymans (1990) and the ecological approach of Derks (1998), but fails in emulating either approach let alone synthesising. Yeates poorly disguises a ploy at questioning continuity (2006:90) in a thesis that throughout clearly assumes religious and social continuity (2006:57). Fitzpatrick's (1991) influential review does not feature in Yeates' bibliography, but more tellingly Yeates is unaware of Woolf's (2000) detailed review of Derks' approach. Woolf pointed out that Derks' focus on an ecological framework was always going to stress stability over change; 'if geography is allowed to determine economy and economy society, then if the environment is regarded as essentially intractable, human societies or cultures will be (analytically) trapped' (2000:627), resulting in an inevitable interpretation of continuity. Underlying Derks' and Yeates' study is an assumption of a structural core to religion and society in their study area that does not allow due consideration of contingent change in society, economy and religion (*Ibid* 628). Yeates suggests Derks' study is "environmentally deterministic" (2006:6), but could not be accused of the same as he uses virtually no environmental evidence and could instead be accused of onomastic determinism as much of his landscape reconstruction is based on the synchronic interpretation of Old English place-names, reliant on the proposition that "some type of continuity existed between the Iron Age and the Roman period or the medieval period, when some of these names were recorded" (2006:57).

The main criticism of Yeates' thesis would be familiar refrains of timeless and traditional religion (Fitzpatrick 1991) with little theoretical foundation for interpreting inter-related religious and cultural transformation through time i.e. diachronic study. Despite espousing a di-chronological approach (Yeates 2006:2-3; presumably a misappropriation of diachronic), continuity is constantly stressed, with cultural transformations resulting from the conquest subordinated to mere technological change (2006:62). Later prehistoric monuments (many of which are unexcavated and ambiguously interpreted crop-marks), are conflated with Roman period religious material, early historical data (Yeates 2006:95) later medieval evidence for mining (Ch.5) and two and a half pages of synchronic ahistorical fish data (2006:39-41). The mechanisms of social development or ritual continuity are never explicitly clarified, but tribal continuity from late Iron Age to the post-Roman period is assumed through a

tenuous combination of back-projection from post-Roman linguistic evidence (2006:56), to Roman period iconography and Late Iron Age burial practices (2006:86-89).

Yeates presents the theoretical basis for religion in less than a page with the most recent theory being a cursory nod at Geertz (1975) who along with the near century old Durkheim "represent the view current in modern thought that belief systems are a reflection of society" (Yeates 2006:5). Change and development are also under-theorised with long-term continuity justified through a brief outline of the historical approach of *Annales* school theory (2006:1-2). Yeates confusingly refers to a di-chronological approach where presumably he means diachronic, but is contradicted by the lack of reference to *Annales* theory and the glaring theoretical gaps through the rest of the thesis, which is based on the essentially synchronic interpretation of place-names and whatever palimpsest of archaeological features suits.

Yeates' (2006) and Richert's (2005) accounts are highly evocative of the landscapes of their study areas, reflecting the recent popularity of landscape archaeology and the perceived natural focus of Celtic religion (Webster 1995c). This culture-nature distinction will be covered in Chapter 6 by a more detailed interrogation of landscape context. Yeates (2006) uses a group of sculpture from the Cotswold region to propose the continuity of a Celtic tribal goddess for the *Dobunni* from the Iron Age into the Roman period. The same group of sculpture will be used in Chapter 4 relating them to the ritualisation of socio-economic practices, as essential concerns for the inhabitants of both the Cotswolds and sections of society on the northern frontier. The premise for the construction of tribal deities and tribal continuity will also be problematized in Chapter 5 through re-consideration of the archetypal eponymous tribal goddess, *Brigantia* of the Brigantes. Watson (2007:4) is highly critical of King's (1990) application of a core-periphery model to Romano-Celtic religion (cf Webster 1991:30) as primitivist and artificial. After comprehensively reviewing the usual mix of material relevant to his study regions in Gaul, Watson concludes that "use of the names of Gallic deities as epithets indicates...not acceptance of the Roman religion by the Gauls, but rather the acceptance of the Gallic religion by the Romans", inverting the polarity of interpretation in a fairly typical nativist reaction (2007:244). The use of epithets will be the particular focus of Chapter 5, while Chapter 7 proposes a contextualised, hybridised and ritualised vernacular approach to religion in the Roman provinces that moves away from the dichotomous ethnic basis of interpretation of syncretism in the Roman provinces.

The next chapter will outline the theoretical basis for this thesis and take into account the detailed criticism above, which highlighted the need for the general theorisation of religion and ritualisation and consideration of the mechanisms for both

cultural and cult continuity. The generalised models for pan-Celtic religion and the Romano-Celtic syncretism of the post-conquest period are rejected as models for interpretation in this thesis. Having considered how the evidence for ritual practice from Britain has been studied in the broader context of Roman imperialism a new methodology must be constructed that avoids back-projection, binary ethnic divisions and recognises ritual practice as an integral part of long-term socio-cultural transformation.

Chapter 3 – Theory & Methodology

3.1 - Context, Structure, Agency and Time

The methodology for this thesis begins where the review of previous literature left off, by exploring the benefits of the *Annales* conceptions of time (Braudel 1972) applied to the study of long-term cultural and religious transformation (Knapp 1992; Bintliff 1991). The *Annaliste* multi-scale theories of time are useful for studying both long-term and short-term processes spanning the prehistoric-protohistoric divide. Time is one of the key factors in ritual practice and religion is often concerned with ordering or regulating time as part of its knowledgeable and empowering repertoire (Renfrew 2007). Mythical, genealogical and cosmological time can influence ritual cycles of daily, weekly or seasonal observances, feasts, festivals and life cycle events, births, maturation, marriage and death. Concepts of time are intimately connected to being human and conceived in relation to the lifespan (Jones 2007:52).

In *Annaliste* terms, the *longue durée* is long-term history sometimes conceived as geographical time operating at the grand scale of environmental change, and in this thesis complements the landscape context of ritual practice. *Conjunctures* is the medium scale structural history of impersonal forces such as the economy or social history of particular groups of people and within this at the smallest scale *eventments*, individual time or the history of events (Bradley 1991; Bintliff 1991; Knapp 1992). This last is how history is conceived in linear chronologies as a string of events, battles, kings etc. The transition from prehistory to proto-history is problematic as archaeological data tends to get sucked into the historical narrative of events recorded in Roman sources. Some alteration of the *Annaliste* conceptions of time is necessary to complement the contextual structure of the study and give a temporal consistency that belies the dissonance between prehistoric and (proto-) historic study.

Criticism of *Annaliste* perspectives is that they do not effectively theorise the relationship between the different levels of time and especially between events, the actions of agency and the relationship to structure (McGlade 1999). The contrast between long-term processes and everyday processes can be compared with the theory of structuration and the constant inter-play between structure and agency necessary for social reproduction (Giddens 1984). Barrett argues that many prehistorians necessarily look at long-term processes, but without considering the moments when those processes become manifested in the material record as events (2004). Process has been understood in two senses that are regularly confused. Firstly, the sequence of events that leads to an outcome, for example, the

intensification of agriculture as a temporal process that can be mapped archaeologically through the growth of field systems or grain storage. Secondly, process is often used to explain why this development occurred; the conjunction of social, technological, and economic [and ritual!] factors that stimulated intensification. This second use as a generative process describing the multiple factors contributing to the development and materialisation of events complicates the issue of temporal process (Barrett 2004). If structural histories become confused with generative processes, long-term temporal process can be discussed as if impersonal forces have their own agency on a grand scale producing events and shaping history. Derks' ecological approach to the study of religion in northeast Gaul (1998) has been criticised for using the conjunction of environmental factors and economic strategies as structural processes, determining certain types of religious representation, which over the *longue durée* was bound to result in an interpretation of ritual continuity (Woolf 2000:627). Barrett argues that archaeologists must recognise agency as a generative process that in conjunction with multiple other factors gives motion to trajectories of events through time (2004:14-20). Generative processes, as forces of change, should not be confused with structural history as the recorded sequence of change.

Structures are generally seen as constraining, but do not completely determine history as "events are the moments of making things happen", are materially manifested and can be empirically studied (Barrett 2004:20 & 14). Structural histories link event and process, recording the pattern of events that are continually bringing other generative processes into being. Structures represent the range of possibilities that allow agency to contribute to history (Barrett 2004:21). Structuration theory helps to conceptualise social reproduction and the role of ritual practice (Giddens 1984), but with ritual practice there is always the danger of focusing on the structuring aspect of ritual, further accentuated through Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* (1977). Although ritual is frequently considered as prescribed and formulaic action, it must also be recognised as being adaptive through performance, with the potential for subversion, transformation and agency (Dietler 1999).

3.2 - *Annaliste* approaches

General criticism of the *Annales'* approach by McGlade states that the "pre-occupation with the structural scaffolding of history [*conjunctures*] means that the role of individual events and of human agency tend to assume an epiphenomenal role, consigned to the marginalia of history" (1999:146). Two of the sub-sections chosen to structure this study are technically from the medium term temporality of structural history (*conjunctures*), which includes the impersonal, collective forces shaping human life

such as economic practices and socio-political systems. These have previously been conceived as "largely beyond the perception of past individuals [forming] a constraining and enabling framework for human life, communal and individual" (Bintliff 1991:7). However, it is precisely the constraining and enabling framework of structure and agency that is necessary for the social reproduction of communal and individual life. Although the structures defined by modern analysis as *temporal process* may have been beyond the perception of past individuals, the lived conditions of life were all part of the *generative processes* of individual embodied experience. The consideration of cyclical time from quotidian to seasonal to annual, over the lifespan of individuals harmonises well with vernacular religion as lived practice and provides a counter-point to the *longue durée*.

The overlapping and oscillating temporalities desired for this study do not technically fit into the *Annales'* stricter divisions of historical time. However, the *Annales'* classic tri-partite division of time-scales is an idealised model and should be adaptable to different historical and spatial situations. The traditional *Annales* system when modified to incorporate structuration theory allows closer correlation with the contextual categories of this thesis, creating an inter-locking temporal and thematic structure through which ritual practices can be observed operating at a variety of scales. Concepts of time, history, and memory, and notions of durability and impermanence are produced and positioned in relation to the human lifespan (Jones 2007:50-52). This creates three major temporalities: the *longue durée* as the inter-locking lifespans of generational time, the duration of the human lifespan itself and within both of those the small-scale rhythms of cyclical time including quotidian, seasonal and annual cycles of lived experience.

The smallest scale *annaliste* category *(événements)* is largely discounted here because of the proto-historic nature of much of the study, but this is not to deny the role of agency in ritual practice. Agency in the choice and deliberation of religious expression in post-conquest Britain will be` considered throughout. The first case study in Chapter 4 will explore the relationship between economic and ritual practice over the *longue durée* of the later prehistoric-historic divide, but will be dependent on shorter temporalities of the everyday, seasonal and annual activities that were part of human experience and have the potential to shape mentalities, religious systems, and social reproduction (Bourdieu 1977). Discussion of the archaeologies of everyday life; the daily weekly, monthly seasonal and annual round of activities, which when integrated with ritual practice becomes the ritualisation of the everyday represented a major move away from generalised discussions of Celtic religion (Fitzpatrick 1997; Bradley 2005). The pivotal event of the invasion and conquest of most of Britain creates the division

between pre-history and history and has necessitated this evaluation of the radical change in the material record of ritual practice, but the customary small scale history of events with its focus on narrative and individualised political history is barely used in this thesis. Roman and Iron Age archaeology in Northern Britain has too frequently been sucked into pseudo-history and historical narratives (Hunter 1997: 109). Braudel himself shied away from the study of events, which the *Annales'* movement was largely a reaction to, and justified this neglect by stating that "resounding events are often only momentary outbursts, surface manifestations of larger movements and explicable only in terms of them" (1972:21).

Chapter 5, the socio-political context of ritual practice, again uses a category of structural history from the medium scale of temporality, but focus does not shift immediately to de-personalised structural analysis. The case study of the cult of Vitiris considers practices that express identity within the lifespan of the individual and their relation to the longer-term structures of collective identity. The role of ritual practice in mediating between the individual and the communal is a generative process over the course of a human lifespan. Said puts a succinct case for awareness of social position: "On the one hand, the individual mind registers and is very much aware of the collective whole, context or situation in which it finds itself. On the other hand, precisely because of this awareness - a worldly, self-situating, sensitive response to the dominant culture - that the individual consciousness is not naturally and easily a mere child of the culture, but a historical and social actor in it." (1983: 15).

Moving between the lived experiences of the individual and the more formalised analytical structure of the medium temporal category, this study hopes to avoid criticism of the de-humanising tendency of the *Annales'* approach and retain the principles of structuration and agency theory. Focussing on the lifespan mediates between everyday and short-term temporalities and the medium term of structural history because "human actors react undeniably to scenarios encapsulated within our lived experience" (Bintliff 1991:16-17). The lifespan as a significant *durée* (Le Goff 1989:405) covers the interplay between structure and agency, the imminent role of transmission and memory and the ritual reflexes of identity formation and power relations that are essential for considering the socio-political context of ritual practice.

Chapter 6 of this study on the landscape context of ritual practice utilises the *longue durée* of the *Annales'* school. This has received much attention from archaeological studies as it corresponds to the extended chronologies and long-term processes of change. Especially popular in prehistoric studies, the *longue durée* allows the integration of medium term categories, which form the bulk of archaeological analysis, into grand narratives (Bradley 1991; Knapp 1991). The geo-historical

processes studied at this scale by the *Annales* school have been criticised for environmental determinism (McGlade 1999:146). Similar criticisms were aimed at Derks' (1998) study of long-term development in northeast Gaul (Drinkwater 2000:458-459; Woolf 2000:626-628). The contextual categories chosen for this study are supported by the revised *Annaliste* temporal framework, but should not be thought of as three distinct categories of analysis. Within the *longue durée* of landscape approaches human and environmental factors are operating and are manifest at a variety of scales. Chapter 7 will further integrate the contextual categories into a discussion of vernacular religion as everyday lived practice conducted through the lifespan of individuals who perceive themselves as acting within a network of social relations and in an environment that shapes and is in turn shaped by the actions of individuals and groups over the *longue durée*.

3.3 - Landscape approaches

Landscape has emerged as one of the key components of late twentieth century archaeology. Landscape approaches encompass the study of the relationship between people and their physical environment, but approaches have fractured along familiar lines giving differential weight to the role of human and environment, culture and nature (Anschuetz, Wilshusen & Scheick 2001:158). The scientific explanation of human adaptation to the environment follows functionalist, evolutionist and positivist processual reasoning, whereas the humanist and interpretative stance emphasises the role of people inhabiting and interacting with places as essential elements in defining landscapes (Layton and Ucko 1999; Ashmore 2004). As a common research interest Landscape studies have the potential to bridge such inter-disciplinary divides (Ashmore and Knapp 1999). The popularity of landscape studies has been assisted by the focus on regions as the common spatial scale for practicing archaeology. As well as space, landscapes also help actualize time as a palimpsest of activity (Bradley 1991). Barrett (1999) has pointed out that the recognition of previous monuments, and traditional lore about them, would have been a potent factor in landscape cognition during British prehistory (just as it has been for the modern scholar). The perception of 'the past in the past' (Bradley 2002) would have contributed to the formation of cosmologies, power relations, ideological constructs, local identities, social memory and social reproduction, and is therefore of primary interest to this study. Hingley (1997b) has highlighted interaction between Iron Age inhabitants of Scotland and various monuments of their Neolithic past, which shows that Iron Age people were intimately aware of the temporality of their own landscape (Ingold 2000). Landscape approaches have been under-utilised in Roman archaeology (Petts 1998:80; Taylor 2001), despite extensive

use for examining ritual practice in earlier prehistory. This potential will be realised in the study of hoarding and votive deposition in Chapter 6 as, "all interventions in the landscape are, through their location and the nature of any possible material remains, potentially indicative of attitudes towards the natural environment." (Young and Simmonds 1999). Evans (1985) criticised the assumption that 'places' must equate with activities and therefore 'sites', since this "ignores the temporal, cultural and cognitive recognition of places through which they may exist as loci of meaning and not necessarily as foci of activity". Landscapes are socially and symbolically constructed and should not be seen as a mere reflection of the subsistence organisation of society, but as a potential map of its cultural vision (Evans 1985).

However, the concept of a 'sacred landscape' is fundamentally flawed (Lane 1986) and based on rationalist divisions of sacred and profane, or ritual and practical (Brück 1999). Routine movements and interactions with the landscape shape perception and direct further interaction, building a symbiotic relationship between living beings and their environment, termed landscape enculturation. The landscape becomes enculturated through a variety of practices and can be ritualised at certain points of time and space accompanied by appropriate action, things and people (Jordan 2003). This thesis advocates studying sites and find-spots as places with histories enmeshed in networks of activity within the landscape, which Ingold calls the taskscape (1993), summarised as 'the ensemble of tasks carried out by individuals as they move around the landscape' (Jordan 2003:17). Memory, cultural knowledge and the formation and perception of enculturated landscapes are bound into a historically constructed, symbiotic relationship with the taskscape (Ingold 2000; Jordan 2003).

3.4 - Temporal & Spatial Considerations

This study is concerned with exploring ancient cosmologies and belief systems through contextualising ritual practices and ideotechnic devices from Roman Britain. Ultimately, whether consciously or unconsciously, these fundamental religious structures can influence almost every part of a person's world-view. The evidence for ritual practice must be considered on a variety of temporal and spatial scales from local to international, and everyday to *longue durée,* in order to demonstrate the full range of implications encompassed by cosmology, exhibited through both naturalised habitual behaviour and consciously overt ritualised action. The methodological approach from this thesis will provide a theoretical basis that can be tested against evidence from more focused regional studies, which have the potential to integrate ritual practice into a comprehensive and detailed discussion of society, environment and culture within stricter geographical and chronological frameworks.

Chapter 4 will begin with one of the 'timeless' interpretations of ancient religion, which is a concern with fertility. The art-historical approach to the Roman period iconography of the *genii cucullati* and associated 'native' imagery has often been based on interpretation of abstracted symbolism. The fertility aspect of these Roman period iconographic images will be contextualised through studying the conjunction of ritual practice with everyday social action and the agricultural and pastoral basis of society from both before and after the conquest. This case study has the least chronological and spatial coherence due to the nature of the fragmentary evidence for pastoralism, and especially the lack of faunal assemblages in Central Britain due to generally acidic soils. Hadrian's Wall shares the iconography of the *genii cucullati* and related imagery with southwest Britain, and the latter has the advantage of better faunal samples. The connections between the *genii cucullati*, associated *matres,* and a divine couple of Mercury and a goddess with a vessel will be contextualised with reference to pastoralist production, mixed farming strategies, economic specialisation and different methods of agricultural intensification reflecting different 'regimes of value' (Comaroff & Comaroff 2005) within Roman Britain. Although there are issues of chronological and spatial coherence, this case study begins to climb Hawkes' (1954) ladder of inference by considering how aspects of socioeconomic practices in Roman Britain were reflected in ritual practice and cult expression. Chapter 4 exemplifies the switch in interpretative focus advocated by this thesis, providing a more definite and specific interpretation for the fertility symbolism of the *genii cucullati* and associated 'native' imagery than has previously been attempted.

Chapter 5 is primarily concerned with the most popular (judging by number of inscriptions and dedicated altars) local cult from the Hadrian's Wall frontier zone. A total of 61 altars make the variously spelled Vitiris second only to Jupiter in popularity in all of Roman Britain and yet this deity barely figures in discussions of the northern frontier let alone wider Romano-British society. Interpretation of Roman provincial cults has frequently focussed on iconography, as with the *genii cucullati*, or where named in inscription, the etymology of the theonym provides the basis for an ethnic ascription of origin. The ambiguity of spelling Vitiris has made etymological and ethnic origin difficult to assign and so the cult has been largely ignored. Chapter 5 will move discussion onto wide ranging themes of identity in Central Britain, as an adjunct to the case study of inscriptional practice in the multi-cultural milieu of the northern frontier. The regionalised distribution of votive altars dedicated to the local deities of the frontier zone provides a good geographical basis for a detailed regional study. Although close dating is still problematic, recently excavated examples indicate a *floruit* in the late second and early third century AD that will help provide the socio-political context of the

local cult of Vitiris. Chapter 5's study of a regionalised distribution of votive altars in the vicinity of Hadrian's Wall is the most geographically specific case study, but will also rely on some aspects of topographic and hydrographic analysis.

Chapter 6 considers the evidence for the long-term ritual practice of votive deposition from both pre-and post conquest central Britain and considers examples from beyond, within and between the two Roman linear frontiers. Case will be taken from Southern Scotland and the three northern counties of England, defined by the Clyde-Forth Antonine frontier in the north and based largely on the river systems draining from the Southern Uplands of Scotland and the North Pennines. A variety of spatial scales will be used to contextualise material culture that has often been labelled as 'stray' finds, but in many instances may be examples of hoarding or votive deposition. The immediate context of artefact find-spots is frequently unknown due to methods of recovery during early modern agricultural improvements and consequent lack of detailed recording. Examining this material through wider, regional, topographic and hydrographic analysis will allow something to be said about the context of deposition, and the perception of the landscape affecting ritual practice.

As befits a wide-ranging study of religious material in an imperial context, Chapter 7's discussion will necessarily shift to a British and western provincial scale in order to place the local and regional case studies (Chapters 4, 5 & 6) into their wider context (van Dommelen & Terrenato 2007:9). The thematic discussion and contextual categories are complemented by the abstractions of time discussed above; from everyday socio-economic practices, to life-span concerns and identity construction of socio-political context, to the landscape and *longue durée* of the *Annalistes* school of historical study (Braudel 1972; Bintliff 1991).

3.5 – Central Britain: Highland-Lowland/Civilian-Military

The southeast and Wessex have tended to dominate study of Late Iron Age and Romano-British society (Bevan 1999) and so for this thesis case studies will largely focus on local and regional examples taken from the less well-studied area of central Britain (Fig.3.1). One advantage of this is that the spectre of pre-Romanisation with its attendant issues of external stimulus for change does not affect central Britain in the same way as it does southern Britain (Bevan 1999; Haselgrove 1984). Prolonged and closer contact between southern Britain and the continent obscures the distinction between pre- and post-conquest ritual practice. Uncritical use of pre-Romanisation suffers from similar criticisms of colonial discourse as the Romanisation paradigm it is based on. The issue of pre-Romanisation is thankfully avoidable for central Britain with only the *oppidum* of Stanwick notable for pre-Flavian imports and contacts (Haselgrove
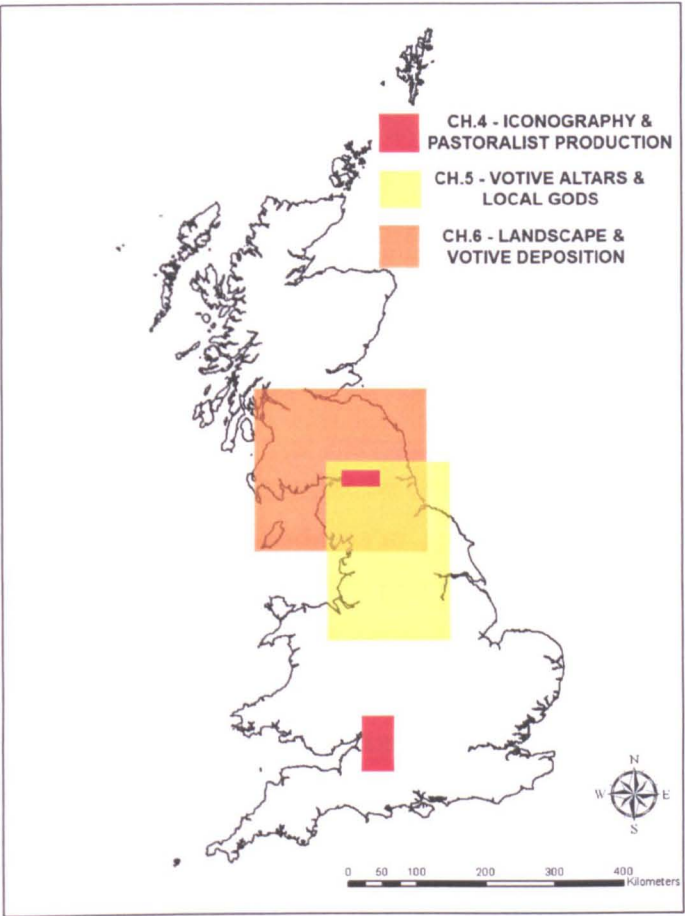
Fig.3.1 Case study areas

Fig.3.2   Military north with altars   vs.   Civilian south with temples

After Millett 1995
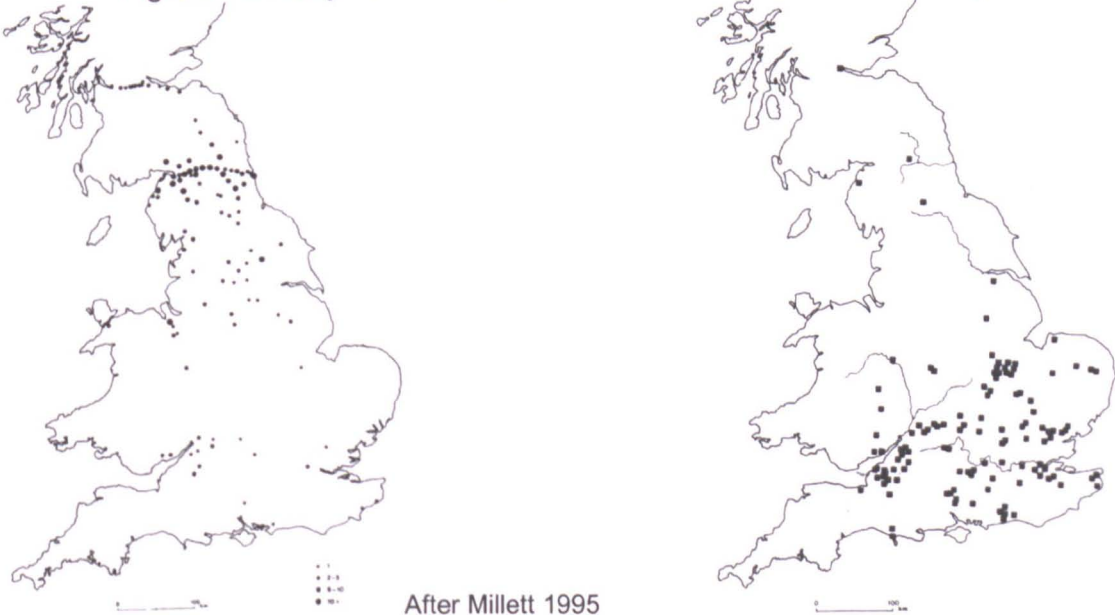
2002). Central Britain does not share the same cultural dynamic of change as Late Pre-Roman Iron Age southern Britain, but this does not support an equally problematic diffusionist view of the north as backward or peripheral to the southern 'core' (Haselgrove 1999). Ancient notions of a culturally advanced and more civilised southeast with degrees of barbarism or primitivism stretching northwards, tend to be reproduced by core-periphery models (Webster 1999b).

> "[Britain] has peoples and kings of peoples, but they are all uncivilised and the further they are from the continent the less they know of other kinds of wealth, being rich only in herds and lands..." (Pomponius Mela, *De Chorographia* II, 6, 85).

Regionally disproportionate perspectives and modes of study for Roman Britain complement core-periphery models from later prehistory. In modern Roman studies Britain is often divided into a civilian South and East and a military dominated North and West (Millett 1990). This simple division has numerous implications for the study of ritual practice, with the perennial military focus for Northern Britain limiting any consideration of non-military input. The focus of this thesis has been targeted to the wealth of material from Central Britain, and especially the evidence for interaction between Roman and native that is rarely developed in this military dominated zone (Hanson 2002; Hunter 2001). Key archaeological evidence used to illustrate this distinction between civilian and military zones is the occurrence of Romano-Celtic temples to the south and east and the distribution of votive altars to the north and west (Millett 1995; Fig. 3.2). Especially important for disturbing this neat division will be the two northernmost rural temples in Roman Britain, located in Gretadale, draining the Stainmore pass at the southern extremity of the Tees system (Chapter 6). These sites are useful for re-considering the geographic determinism of Fox's (1931) Highland and Lowland zones, with the related distinctions between civilian and military and other similar core-periphery constructions.

Central Britain was in a dynamic state of flux for much of the period under consideration and for Scotland, Roman military occupation has been termed 'brief interludes' (Hanson 2002). The boundaries of the Empire shifted with imperial policy and yet many common features of 'Iron Age' society such as the construction of roundhouses (Hingley 2004) or central British metalwork (Hunter 2007), persisted within, between and beyond these changing political boundaries. Other features of central Britain, such as the communication network, were transformed as a result of Roman occupation, while a massive agricultural reorganisation of the landscape

(Tipping 1994;1997) which had been sucked into the narrative of invasion is now firmly placed in the Later prehistoric period.

Clear parameters of what constitutes Roman, native and Iron Age are difficult to define, especially in central Britain where these categories might be conceived as fluctuating spatially and even temporally, between prehistory and proto-history. Overall, this study will highlight the dynamic nature of ritual practice from prehistoric to Roman Britain and how those practices were thoroughly integrated into the lives of the inhabitants. This should help to erode traditional academic distinctions that have divided Iron Age studies from Roman and consequently help to synthesize future research.

The chronological and consequent academic divisions that separate the title of the study into Later Prehistoric and Roman Britain have affected previous interpretation. Although these divisions have previously polarised discussion, in reality a continuum of religious and cultural development existed across the boundaries imposed by modern academic study. Continuity is a given; people will continue to live, propagate, die, practice their beliefs and transmit knowledge and skills across generations. However, socio-cultural change and continuity are frequently under-theorised in the prehistoric – proto-historic divide (Woolf 2000:627-8). Renewal is a key concept for this thesis as it encapsulates something new constructed from pre-existent material; renovation as the reconciliation of tradition and innovation (Woolf 2001:182).

3.6 - Chronological and geographical overview

This thesis will not be a comprehensive study of all aspects of ritual practice from within the study area, but an essay on interpretation and how to gain new insights from the evidence traditionally used in formulations of Celtic religion and Romano-Celtic syncretism. The range of topics and themes covered would have been constrained by modern national or county parameters. A small-scale regional analysis would have placed certain limitations on the thematic discussion and contextual structure of this study. A multi-scalar approach was considered more appropriate in order to contextualise the evidence from its local origin to its place in relation to wider imperial contexts.

This study will range widely around detailed case studies that trace themes from prehistory into the Roman period and illustrate the contextual categories. The major criticism of previous studies based on this same evidence has been the timelessness of the Celtic paradigm (Fitzpatrick 1991) and the de-politicized ethnic dichotomy of Romano-Celtic syncretism (Webster 1997a&b). Situating the evidence

within the contextual framework is given an added temporal dimension by considering ritual practice in relation to everyday and seasonal activities, the processes of identity formation developing through the lifespan of an individual and the longer-term processes of landscape enculturation over the *longue durée* that emerges from the concretion of everyday activities throughout inter-locking life-spans and across generations.   Further cohesion is provided by discussing ritual practice in relation to aspects of the wider cultural system; as an essential part of that system, rather than divorced from it by modern rational criteria.

The goal of re-assessing this body of routinely designated ritual evidence is to get beyond simplistic interpretations of syncretic Romano-British religion and look at the cultural complexities being expressed through ritual practice. The intricacies of the situation need not be a disadvantage nor does it necessarily mean interpretation is mystified, but rather complexity provides "a better guide to the territory" (Woolf 2000:620). Suspicion should be roused by any account that presents religion in the Roman provinces as a simple fusion of polytheistic beliefs. The religious ferment of the Empire contributed to both its dynamism and instability. Simplistic or polarised views of syncretism, whether with a nativist or Romanist slant, do not help to clarify the idiosyncratic evidence (Webster 2001). A variety of processes and themes can be traced from prehistory to proto-history and within the dynamic socio-cultural conditions of Rome's fluctuating northwest frontier. A more nuanced discussion of vernacular religion will emerge in Chapter 7 that moves beyond such dichotomies of interpretation. The lower rungs on Hawkes' (1954) ladder of inference will be used to aid interpretation, contextualising ritual practice by integrating the evidence into the socio-economic, socio-political and landscape context.

3.7 - Religion, ritual practice and ritualisation

A study of the inter-disciplinary debate regarding religion and culture would read like a potted historiography of several inter-related disciplines that practice Religious Studies and could not possibly do justice to the scope and depth of nearly two centuries of scholarship (see Bowie 2006 and Bell 1992). Bennett (1995) has reviewed the multiple relationships between anthropology, sociology and history of religions, while Insoll (2004) has selectively summarised how some of this scholarship has impacted on the archaeological study of religion. For much of the twentieth century, the study of ritual and religion within archaeology has been negatively affected by rationalist, positivist, and scientist views of religion as irrational or as an epiphenomenon, and therefore studied in isolation from other cultural elements or ghettoised to the lunatic fringe (Brück 1999). Hawkes' (1954) ladder of inference is frequently (mis)quoted in this

respect as the archetypal statement of the difficulties in interpreting religion as the highest rung on the ladder separated from the lower rungs of technology, economy and society (Evans 1998; Insoll 2004). Ritual has also been viewed negatively in wider socio-cultural study as thoughtless and dogmatic behaviour, and early European academic analyses of 'primitive' religion were often tainted by a Protestant hangover, which associated ceremony with Catholic rites (Douglas 1966:18-19). Recently a more balanced view of the archaeological potential of the study of ritual has emerged, which considers the formal and repetitive characteristics as eminently suitable for archaeological recognition and examination (Fogelin 2007:56; Kyriakidis 2007b:291-292; Insoll 2004). Rather than the ubiquitous processual/interpretative divisions, Fogelin (2007) has outlined the differences between structuralist and practice orientated approaches to religion as they have been studied in archaeology.

Religion is often seen as the product of thought, an abstract symbolic system that encodes belief and doctrine, while a practice approach emphasises the active performative aspects of ritual. Structuralist interpretations rely on the interpretation of abstract symbol and metaphor, which often must be aided by written sources, whereas the practice approach to ritual is more easily integrated with the material nature of archaeological evidence. As ritual denotes certain set human action that leaves material traces, this is then available for archaeological interpretation and by inference, past actions, experiences and perspectives can be studied (Fogelin 2007:56). Debates about the primacy of ritual or religion abound, but here it will be assumed that the two are in a dialectical relationship. Structuralist approaches assume that religion is a particularly stable cultural form and often use ethnographic and historical data in order to infer symbolic, mythic and doctrinal information. The 'timeless' studies of Celtic religion have been largely constructed in this structural way, stretching the boundaries of religious stability over a millennium and criticism largely rests on the archaeological, historical, ethnographic and mythological material all being widely separated form each other, both temporally and spatially (Fitzpatrick 1991). A practice approach emphasises that while symbols and rituals may be consistently used over long periods and across wide geographic areas, their meaning will be constantly recontextualised (Fogelin 2007:57-58). Even within discrete populations, different members of society may understand and use symbols in subtly different ways depending on class, status, gender, age etc., as will be demonstrated with the people living on the northern frontiers of Roman Britain.

The broadest definitions of ritual see it as any established, crystallised, formalised or institutionalised activity (Kyriakidis 2007). However, the broader the definition the more likely it will lose analytical rigour. In uncoupling ritual from

Durkheim's sacred sphere, the term becomes the equivalent of 'cultural', 'symbolic' or 'discursive' and runs the danger of being presented as significant but without stating what exactly it signifies (Comaroff & Comaroff 1993:xix). In archaeology, ritual is often misused as a catch-all for the unexplainable, the impractical and the irrational (Whitehouse 1995). Primarily, the focus of this study is material culture associated with *religious* ritual, but the more expansive considerations of ritual must also be taken into account if the material culture of post-conquest ritual practice is to be incorporated into the study of wider socio-cultural practice.

Ritual is based on Latin *ritus*, which can mean habit, tradition or custom (Kyriakidis 2007b:290). There is no universally agreed definition for ritual, as with syncretism, a vagueness compounded by the question of where the boundaries of ritual practice lie in relation to wider social practice. The recent compilation of essays *The Archaeology of Ritual* (Kyriakidis 2007), highlights the fact that there is little coherence in ritual studies either across disciplines or within archaeology. Indeed, while some bemoan this lack of consensus (Kyriakidis 2007a:1), others see it as part of a vibrant, multi-vocal discourse (Bell 2007). Despite many attempts to define ritual, cross-cultural coherence has proved impossible, largely because the concept of ritual is a westernized etic attempt at defining modes of practice that are perceived in vastly different emic ways across cultures (Kyriakidis 2007b:292-294). While individual studies can define how such an essential term will be used, a universal definition is unnecessary as ritual is culture specific and context dependent. Rituals often materialise and rearticulate key cultural values and this intimate relationship between culture and ritual makes them in some senses equally and similarly difficult to define. Culture has been considered as an "extrasomatic means of adaptation" (Binford 1962) covering the full range of activities between "the instrumental means of making a living and symbolic means for extending our minds" (Earle 2004:153). Ritual(ised) practice can be theorised as covering a similar range from widespread habitual activity to occasional significant and signifying practices that define society and authorize certain individuals to act (Comaroff & Comaroff 1993:xvi-xviii). Ritual studies have been hampered by attempts at strict, formal definitions and it has been deemed less important to attempt to say what ritual is, than to examine what ritual does (Bell 2007:277-279).

Catherine Bell's work has presented a practice approach for ritual studies exploring the dialectic between binary oppositions of theory and practice (see esp.1992). The related divisions between thought and action, or ritual and practical are at the root of much confusion regarding the study of ritual and religion. Ritual is the product of abstract thought and yet is also particular modes of action, sometimes

conceived as thoughtless action by rationalists because it is directed by beliefs (Bell 1992:19). The study of ritual in general and especially in archaeology perpetuates this paradox in that the material remains in the archaeological record interpreted as ritual represent meaningful practices performed by people in the past and yet for rationalist archaeologists, ritual is often synonymous with belief and therefore presented as irrational or the opposite of practical activity (Brück 1999). Thus, ritual has been used to denote everything from rare and inexplicable behaviour to repetitive quotidian practice. The underlying process of ritualisation comes to the fore as it highlights the context of action as being fundamental to interpretation. At certain times, in certain places, with the appropriate participants, gestures, words, objects and actions, the ordinary and the everyday can be transformed into differentially charged and emotionally heightened ritualised contexts. The meanings (re)created through ritualisation are then carried back with the participants into everyday life, embodied in ritualised objects and inscribed in memory, which then impacts on wider social action. The concept of ritualisation can help us understand much of the evidence for ritual practice from later prehistoric and Roman Britain. Contextual analysis and the holistic study of ritualised practices can reveal inter-locking semiotic information within the wider socio-cultural background, thoroughly integrated across different domains of social practice (Layton 2001).

Everyday lived practices provide numerous contexts for action, which often recreates the socio-cultural order under the aegis of a ritually buttressed cosmological world-view. These social realities are similar to Searle's (1995) 'institutional facts', which are both constitutive of and create the very possibility of certain activities taking place. Renfrew has used Searle's 'institutional facts' to inform both the re-formulation of his archaeology of cult (2007) as part of his broader programme of cognitive-processual archaeology, and his theory of material engagement (2004:23-31), which focuses upon the use and status of material objects as they mediate in the interactions between mind, body and environment. Ritual activity is sometimes considered to have more of a structuring effect on society, but as with any other type of activity in which humans engage, ritual can also act as an arena for social transformation (Dietler 1999). Through ritualisation, some activities are set apart from others, with decisions being made as to what is to be ritualised with the combination of when and where and by whom providing the details that help to define ritualised action within the flow of the quotidian. How this series of actions are to be accomplished is a vital part of the ongoing process of ritualisation and social reproduction. After the formal characteristics are established it is the strategies used during the performance of the ritual that allows the actors agency within a ritual framework, whether through adherence to previous

practice, implementing open innovation or more subtle manipulation. As both creative and constitutive practice, ritual becomes "a vital element in the processes that make and remake social facts and collective identities" (Comaroff & Comaroff 1993:xvi). The range and scope of ritual activity from the repetitive mundanity of the everyday through to the abstraction of a cosmological world-view can be studied using ritualisation theory, which works in tandem with the contextual approach advocated by this thesis. Ritualisation emphasises that ritual can only be understood within the context of other areas of social practice (Gosden 1999:129), demystifying it by encouraging holistic study and the goal of this thesis in contextualising ritual practice.

Gosden has succinctly summarised ritualisation as being concerned with, "the differentiation of action through its formalisation and special periodicity; the centrality of the body; the orchestration of schemes whereby the body defines a set of locales and is defined by those locales; physical and mental mastery of ritual and a negotiation of power through ritual so as to influence the overall hegemonic order of society" (Gosden 1999:130). Deft bodily movement is the central strategy for ritualising activity and shaping perception (Bell 1992:Ch.5 & esp.103-104). The body generates a series of oppositional schemes that structure the perception of the environment with front/back left/right the most obvious based on bodily movement through space and time. These oppositions form the basis for an evolving sequence of relational analogies inner/outer us/them pure/impure light/dark male/female with high/low or up/down being the primary relation based on the body in its perceived surroundings and the horizon as a potent conceptual marker. These homologous sets of oppositions are hierarchically organised into 'asymetrical relations of dominance and subordination' that create an illusion of a total system whilst still privileging certain elements (1992:102-104). The importance of ritualisation emerges as a practical process that mediates between such conceptual dichotomies (Bell 2005:405).

In ritualised situations the temporal orchestration of a "symbolically schemetised environment" is created through a set of physical actions prescribed, validated and extended by the simultaneous internalisation of previous schema of "effectively homologised oppositions" (Bell 1992:110). In responding to what are perceived as external forces, ritualisation interprets these self-generated schemes of "privileged opposition, hierarchisation and circular deferment" as originating "from a more authoritative source, usually from well beyond the immediate human community itself" (1992:110). An external, transcendental, superhuman or supernatural force has been considered as the essential characteristic for defining religion by many commentators (Klass 1995:18-21; Renfrew 2007:113). However, Klass rejects any application of supernaturalism as "invincibly ethnocentric", perpetuating a dichotomy

with what is natural based on our own scientistic society's view of what should be included and excluded from reality (1995:25-32). For similar reasons, the Durkheimian distinction between sacred and profane (Garwood *et al* 1991) and ritual and rationality (Brück 1999) can also be rejected from archaeological and anthropological analysis as they are westernised ethnocentric concepts that will negatively affect interpretation.

Ritualisation mediates between the practical and the symbolic, between mind and materiality (Jones 2007). Following Bourdieu's concept of the practical mastery of classificatory schemes that every socialised agent uses to order their world and, which are 'embedded in the very perceptions and dispositions of the body', Bell suggests that ritual mastery involves interactions between the embodied mind and the perception of the environment, a *habitus* structured according to cosmological principles appropriated and reconstituted through a lifetime of activities within a complex network of relationships (Bell 1992:107; Bourdieu 1977:87-95). However, recent theories of materiality would question whether the body is the locus for "all levels of physical, social and cosmological experience" (Gosden 1999:130). Cognition is decentralised and produced from combined and contingent interaction between brain-body-world with the manipulation of objects by the embodied mind central to theories of materiality (Jones 2007:10-11 & 38), and are an important addendum for the application of Bell's theories to the material remains of the past studied in archaeology. Bell's concept of ritual mastery provides a sense of cohesion between the main spheres of lived experience – body, community and cosmos (Bell 1992:109) to which archaeology can add theories of materiality (De Marrais et al 2004).

Through ritualisation a necessary illusion is created, a circular dynamic that sees ritualised action responding to places, objects, events, forces, problems and traditions and yet also actively recreating or redefining those circumstances in the process. Bell refers to this as an essential characteristic of seeing and not seeing (1992:108-110). "Ritualisation sees the evocation of a consensus on values, symbols and behaviour", but participants are not necessarily cognisant of how "the hegemonic social order is appropriated as a redemptive process and reproduced individually through communal participation" (1992:110). Practice refers to all human activity and two vital characteristics are that it is situational and strategic. The context of any action situates it in a particular time and space that are fundamental for understanding that action. Following Bourdieu, there is a practical logic to any activity, which is strategic and provides the "situationally effective schemes, tactics and strategies" that afford social action (Bell 1992 81-2; Bourdieu 1977:79&96). Bell links this dimension of practice to ritualisation theory through a concept of redemptive hegemony, which marries the Gramscian understanding of power to redemptive social action. The

redemptive process makes something acceptable despite inherent negative qualities. As an active conception of cosmology and culture, redemptive hegemony theorises that people perceive their own version of reality, with all of its constraints, social structures, and unequal power relations, in such a way that it still affords them their own sphere of action. The web of power relations that people find themselves entangled in on a daily basis, and that they must negotiate through the course of their lives, are frequently reproduced through the continuing combined actions of those same individuals. Despite being aware of how they might be constrained, people can still envision the efficacy of acting within their perceived system and often simultaneously reaffirm that social order (Bell 1992 83-4). This is not to deny the agency of the individual, but demonstrate how a "practical consciousness of the world" (Bell 1992:84), Gramsci's "common sense" (Ives 2004b 77-81), creates the possibility for social (and ritual) action, within a framework that acknowledges the everyday perception and experience of power relations. The range of evidence for ritual practice from Roman Britain should be considered as the actions of individuals fully aware of the power relations they are enmeshed in, but still capable of acting in a variety of ways appropriate to their own values and the motivations of whatever group or mode of cult worship they chose to identify themselves with.

Ritualisation does not attempt to define ritual just as it does not rely on modern academic distinctions of sacred or supernatural. Bell's work (1998:218) has always consciously avoided formulating a definition of ritual as she felt it was more important to "demonstrate the multiple ways in which activities integral to a performance can be intended or experienced" (Bell 2007:279). In general, ritual will be used throughout this thesis in the more formal sense of *religious* ritual although it is acknowledged that ritual can have a much wider applicability. Ritualised action achieves a potency when contextualised within the totality of social action and gives a privileged insight into core social meanings by using the symbolism and self-representation of that particular society. The effects of ritualisation are far-reaching and meanings derived from ritual practice are carried beyond the ritualised context into the wider world where they continue to evoke aspects of that original potency. This "lived system of meanings" is integral to the construction of a person's sense of reality and the projection of identity in any given context (Bell 1992:83).

3.8 - Anthropology and archaeology of religion

The nature of the relationship between religion and culture has been debated in modern western scholarship from the initial development of the disciplines of anthropology and sociology in the 19th century. Durkheim's definition of religion as "a

unified set of beliefs and practices related to sacred things, that is to say things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite, into one single moral community...all those who adhere to them" (1915:47), set the tenor for the modern debate throughout the twentieth century. Religion, for Durkheim, reflected social values, social facts and "the sacralisation of society itself, an expression of collective identity" (Bennett 1996:75). This functionalist approach saw culture and religion as a social construct and has remained popular and frequently quoted outside of religious studies. Fitzpatrick (1991:123) highlighted Durkheim's continued influence on continental approaches to Celtic religion through the example of Bruneux (1988) and he is surprisingly cited in Yeates' thesis (2006:5) as a "recent" authority. The distinction Durkheim created between sacred and profane is now considered to have constrained ritual theory for much of the twentieth century (*Brück* 1999; Garwood *et al* 1991) and reflects post-Enlightenment rationality. Through the work of Celticists (Hubert; Dillon), and comparative mythologists (Dumezil; Littleton), the influence of Durkheim and later theorists such as Levi-Strauss can be traced indirectly onto the broad subject matter of Celtic and Roman religion as it was studied in the mid-twentieth century (see for example Rees & Rees 1961 for a structuralist study of Celtic religion and culture). Whilst structuralism is interesting for the development of 'Celtic' religion, such studies have a tendency to be synchronic or ahistorical and have contributed to the timeless view of Celticity.

Anthropological and sociological theories regarding religion and culture had an obvious influence on post-processual archaeology, seen from early titles such as *Symbolic and Structural archaeology* (Hodder 1982) and in the legacy of structured deposition, which has proved a potent interpretation of prehistoric ritualised practices (Richards and Thomas 1984; Hill 1995a; Brudenell and Cooper 2008). Structuralism was particularly appealing as a grand narrative seeking the underlying mental structures that order particular societies and cultures, especially revealed through mythology and symbolic aspects of material culture. The initial interest in Levi-Strauss' structuralism did not complement the underlying post-modern trends in post-processual archaeologies and Hodder (1986) was instrumental in a shift to post-structuralism. Within the post-processual/post-structuralist focus on social theory are themes prominent in wider post-modernism: the role of agency and the active individual in relation to structures and institutions (Bourdieu 1977 and Giddens 1984); the consequent relationship between hidden and overt power and ideology (Miller and Tilley 1984); and issues of relativism and reflexivity in the study of the past. The symbolic attributes of material culture remained a particular focus through the ability of the archaeologist to 'read the past' (Hodder 1991). The 'linguistic turn' in archaeology

reflects wider trends in the social sciences and the concern with textuality can be closely associated with French post-modernism through the influence of Foucault, Derrida and Barthes (Bintliff 2008).

Clifford Geertz's symbolist approach to religion and culture has also proved popular across disciplinary boundaries (Bowie 2006; Klass 1995; Renfrew 2007:113) as it avoided both supernaturalism and any notion of a Durkheimian church or similar institution. Religion is defined as "a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (1966:4). Geertz theorised that culture could be interpreted through its symbols and therefore the study of religion potentially has much to reveal about human culture because religion most often employs material metaphors to express abstract but fundamental concepts through symbolism.

3.9 - Critique of processual and post-processual approaches to religion

The development of post-processual archaeology, and its critique of processualism would also read like a potted historiography of a subject way beyond the scope of this study and has been discussed elsewhere *ad nauseum* (Shanks 2008). More pertinent to this study is how these different approaches within archaeology have attempted the study of ritual and religion. As this topic has been recently summarised by Insoll (2004) it will only be treated synoptically here. Cognitive archaeology and Interpretative archaeology represent respectively the current formulations of the dichotomy between the positivism of natural science (processual) and the relativism of social science (post-processual) trends in archaeology. In relation to religion Cognitive (or cognitive-processual) archaeology has been seen by processualists to advance the study of belief systems through the application of science and empirical study alongside the incorporation of social theory, such as Bourdieu's (1977) *habitus* (Renfrew 1994;2004;2007)

Post-processual has coalesced into Interpretative archaeology (Thomas 2000), which Insoll (2004) regards as best equipped to formulate an archaeology of religion, whilst still being critical of the fragmentation of its approaches. Although it was Insoll's goal to construct a comprehensive theory of religion for use by archaeologists, he has failed to provide one and relies on an almost universal syncretism with what he sees as the extreme permeability of boundaries of all religions and all cultures (2004:131-9). The study of religions will always be culturally contingent with flexibility being an advantage in dealing with the multiplicity of religious and cultural manifestations.

Therefore a universal approach to religion within archaeology is unnecessary (*contra* Insoll 2004). Advocating the primacy of either cognitive-processual or interpretative archaeology has proved irrelevant in formulating the methodological approach of this thesis. Levi-Strauss coined the term *bricoleur* for one who combines a variety of sources to create mythologies and this term may well describe the activities of studying past religions by bringing a variety of approaches and inter-disciplinary skills to bear on the subject.

Processual archaeology has often been conceived in evolutionary terms with culture as "mans extra-somatic means of adaptation" (Binford 1962); part of the general alignment of archaeology with the natural sciences in the post-world war era. Systems analysis and middle range theory avoided religion, preferring ideological sub-systems and ideotechnic artefacts, which had "their primary functional context in the ideological component of the social system" (Binford 1962). This thesis will largely deal with ideotechnic artefacts, but attempt to show how they functioned in relation to the other components of the socio-cultural system, integrating ritual practice into a myriad of other contexts. Hawkes' (in)famous 'ladder of inference' (1954) is one of the most frequently cited opinions on the difficulties in the archaeological interpretation of religion (eg Fogelin 2007). Hawkes' paper has proved something of a straw man for theoreticians (Evans 1998:399), the half page describing the ladder taken out of context and often misrepresented through the interpretations of secondary sources (Hodder 1982:11-12). In general Hawkes' approaches were anti-evolutionist and provide a counter-point to the subsistence-economics and ecological determinism of much processual archaeology (Evans 1998:398-401). The 'ladder of inference' should be set in the context of Hawkes' wider discussion of text-free (prehistoric) and text-led (historic) archaeology (Evans 1998:401). Leading from technology to subsistence/economy to socio-political to 'spiritual life' at the "climax of four degrees of difficulty in reasoning", the ladder was applicable to what Hawkes considered purely prehistoric study i.e. earlier than secondary Neolithic and the appearance of written records in the Old World (Hawkes 1954:160). Yet, as an advocate of diffusionism, Hawkes was much more positive in relation to proto-historic study, with historical sources able to 'cast their light outwards from the classical world and backwards from the medieval' (1966:298). Hawkes would have approved of the Direct Historical approach of using later ethnography (Flannery and Marcus 1992) and the "timeless and traditional" construction of the Celtic religion. This thesis attempts to construct a new methodology for considering 'spiritual life' eschewing the pessimism of the 'ladder' and the back-projection of proto-history, proposing instead to climb 'the ladder of inference'.

New (processual) Archaeology organised culture into separate sub-systems of economy, social and political organisation, ecology/environment and belief systems, which could be studied in relation to each other as a fully functioning system (Clarke 1968). In reality the rationalist, empiricist and functionalist logic of processual archaeology marginalised the study of belief systems. This study will appropriate the sub-system categories of systems analysis as a necessary short-hand to demonstrate how religion and ritual practice were integrated within the wider socio-cultural background. Integrating ritual and religion with the other major contexts conceived as comprising the totality of archaeological enterprise will be essential for the holistic study of ritual practice. In a sense, rather than using mental gymnastics to leap directly onto the higher rungs of Hawkes' 'ladder of inference', this study will use the lower rungs in order to have a more secure footing for interpretation. This is obviously an ambitious exercise and any claim at a total archaeology is dependent on available space and the quality of surviving evidence. The success of this attempt at integrating religion into the wider study of the past will be assessed in conclusion (Chapter 7).

This study will take a body of artefacts that has been designated as evidence for ritual practice, including sculpture, altars, iconography, inscriptions and votive offerings and attempt to elucidate and infer meaning through contextualisation. Three contextual themes of Socioeconomic, Socio-political, and Landscape context have been chosen for the case studies to enable the integration of evidence for ritual practice within the wider cultural sphere and emphasise the dynamic process of ritualisation. These themes should not be taken as immutable categories, and while they are necessary for the purposes of this methodology they are also understood as interdependent and interconnected spheres of activity. While there may appear a slight idiosyncrasy in having to divide this study into the sub-categories of systems analysis, a holistic approach to religion and culture can only be achieved through attempting to unite the parts within a study that emphasises the semantic relationship of the 'holy' with the whole (see Insoll 2004 for etymological relationship between these terms).

3.10 - Rationalist and reflexive approaches to religion

The empirical tradition of the second half of the twentieth century, which assigned religion as an epiphenomenon that lacked efficacy, has proved one of the major problems in the archaeological study of religion (Klass 1995;eg.Wilson 1999). Broad trends in western rationalism still reject religion as irrational, superstitious and primitive (Brück 1999) and these deep-seated aversions only inhibit the study of the past. The particular mode of thought defined as western rationalism is itself a scientistic mode of *belief*, sharing many of the characteristics of any other belief system. Few scientistic

sceptics of religion recognise how their attitude reflects a severe lack of objectivity, and the problem of imposing personal attitudes about the value of religion onto the evidence from the present and the past bedevils students of anthropology and archaeology (Klass 1995). As the underlying philosophy of western scholarship, rationalism has the capacity to destroy the very objectivity that scientific study proclaims to promote (Bowie 2006).

The development of post-processual approaches strove to humanise archaeology through the interpretation of past cultures, using emic categories rather than simply recording empirical data. However, post-processual approaches rarely explicitly considered belief systems and ritual practice. Religion was often subsumed within ideology due to the influence of Marxist theory, which promotes religion as the political mask of ideology (Insoll 2004:78). Ritual becomes an ideological tool used to disguise the social inequalities that arise from the control of economic production. Ideology in these schemes represents the reification of both hidden and overt expressions of the power of the dominant classes, serving as a constraining structure enabling the reproduction of the social order in favour of the dominant (Shanks and Tilley 1992: 130). Insoll's criticism is worth repeating in full: "For something couched within a post-processual framework it is remarkable how this perspective upon ideology removes individual agency through somehow suggesting that everyone en masse is hoodwinked or deluded by the false ideology which is religion" (2004:79). Insoll suggests that modernity and rationalism have philosophically limited how many archaeologists have conceived of religion (cf Brück 1999). The notable absence of an archaeology of religion is a reflection of the agnostic, atheistic or scientistic beliefs of post-processual archaeologists themselves, with the result that religion has remained separated and abstracted from the wider study of the past as it did with earlier processual approaches (Insoll 2004:80). Given that post-processual archaeologies argue for self-reflection and an awareness of modern bias, the treatment of religion within their own paradigm has passed with little comment.

The theorist Antonio Gramsci did not view religion simply as ideological self-deception or false consciousness, but rather as 'a specific way of rationalising the world and real life' (1971:326-327). Gramsci's work on hegemony attempted to explain how the related economic, political and cultural strategies that dominant classes pursue can convince the majority of the population to consent to asymmetrical structure of power relations (Dietler 1999:136). Ritualisation theory incorporated Gramsci's concept of hegemony and Bourdieau's theory of practice (1977) in order to connect daily activities with wider socio-political structures and this approach has also proved

popular with postcolonial studies in order to connect "local practices with the wider colonial structure of domination and exploitation" (van Dommelen 2006:111).

Hegemony and ideology have been dubbed the 'terrible twins of social theory' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992:28) and are conceived as the two main forms in which power operates. In historical materialist and Marxist theory, ideology plays a key role in "establishing social position, centralising political authority and validating the politico-economic basis of that authority" (Knapp 1988:156). Ideology attempts to overtly legitimise asymmetrical power relations often through coercion, whereas hegemonic control involves the combination of both force and persuasion, but through naturalisation attempts to produce consent by making the socio-political order appear as the natural order. Both coercion and naturalised consent should not be simplistically reduced to economic exploitation or socio-cultural dominance, as both are equally part of colonial situations, although not necessarily diametrically opposed (Van Dommelen 2006:110). The processes of legitimization and naturalisation have a particular application to ritual practice as "an instrument of both domination and resistance, as an arena for the symbolic naturalisation, mystification or contestation of authority" (Dietler 1999:135). Focussing on the apparent homogeneity of 'Roman' material form (Revell 2007:227) is synonymous with top-down approaches like Romanisation and privileges elite ideology, re-legitimising the official representation of power relations and ignoring subtle variations in ritual practice (Mattingly 2004:9).

3.11 - What do I believe?

In order to counter-balance previous biases in the study of religion it has been suggested that the ideal position for the study of religion is as an agnostic or atheist (Bowie 2006:4-12), but this is bound to affect interpretation; as a theological and philosophical position under-pinned by western rationalism, it lacks objectivity on this particular subject. As an attempt at being self-reflexive, my own personal background and the current cultural, social, political and economic networks I am enmeshed in will undoubtedly affect the interpretations within this study. I was raised as a liberal Roman Catholic. As an adult I practice no particular faith although I welcome the experience of participating in or observing communal and ceremonial gatherings. My under-graduate Religious Studies program was completely inter-disciplinary and this has undoubtedly shaped my perception of religion being capable of integration into every aspect of human culture and knowledge. Globalisation and the politics of identity are obviously broad concerns in today's world and reflected in modern academia, influencing recent studies of the Roman Empire (Pitts 2008). Similarly, some of the themes of landscape perception and veneration in this thesis are bound to be influenced by the modern

world's ecological and environmental crises and on a personal level my own concerns for and appreciation of the landscapes of northern Britain. As a child I worked my summers grouse-beating on the broad expanses of the Pennine Moors and had cause to shelter from a sudden gale in the Roman period shrine of Vinotonus nestled in a steep-sided gulley on Scargill High Moor. My awareness of watershed boundaries can also be traced to these childhood episodes. If I became separated from the rest of the group by bog, fog and the vagaries of the weather and topography, I was advised to find a stream and follow it down its course, as it would always lead to human settlement. As we were frequently traversing the main east-west watershed boundary of northern Britain an unlucky choice of downward stream would lead me into Cumbria on the west instead of Durham on the east. Living in the central belt of Scotland has also emphasised in my mind the deeply felt differences between eastern and western Britain, at this, its narrowest point. These inter-locking personal, regional, and global influences provide part of the current cultural background that will undoubtedly affect the interpretation of the past religious traditions presented here. There will undoubtedly be other biases that my work unconsciously embodies as it originates from a westernised anglophone male, but I leave those for others to comment.

3.12 - The analytical jewel

Julian Thomas (2000:168) compares the multiple perspectives in archaeological discourse to different facets of a crystal and seeing different views of the overall structure. This analogy can be taken further with culture as the object of our analysis being likened to different types of crystal or gemstones, with different cultures classified analytically, just as gemstones are, into related types based on unique properties, formation and composition. The archaeological study of any culture might be presented metaphorically as fashioning a jewel from a rough gemstone. If the different ways of viewing that culture depend on which angle the jewel is held or perceived from, then certain spheres of vision could be equated with academic subdivisions of studying the past, whether technological, economic, socio-political or whatever (see Fig.3.3 for the cut of Grahame Clark's jewel). Individual facets of the jewel would represent the analytical categories that modern scholars use to classify different aspects of past cultures, for instance, gender, class and age as facets within the social sphere of perceiving the jewel of a culture. The facets sharing their edges with multiple others conceptualises the relationships between the different facets of culture and the integrated whole.
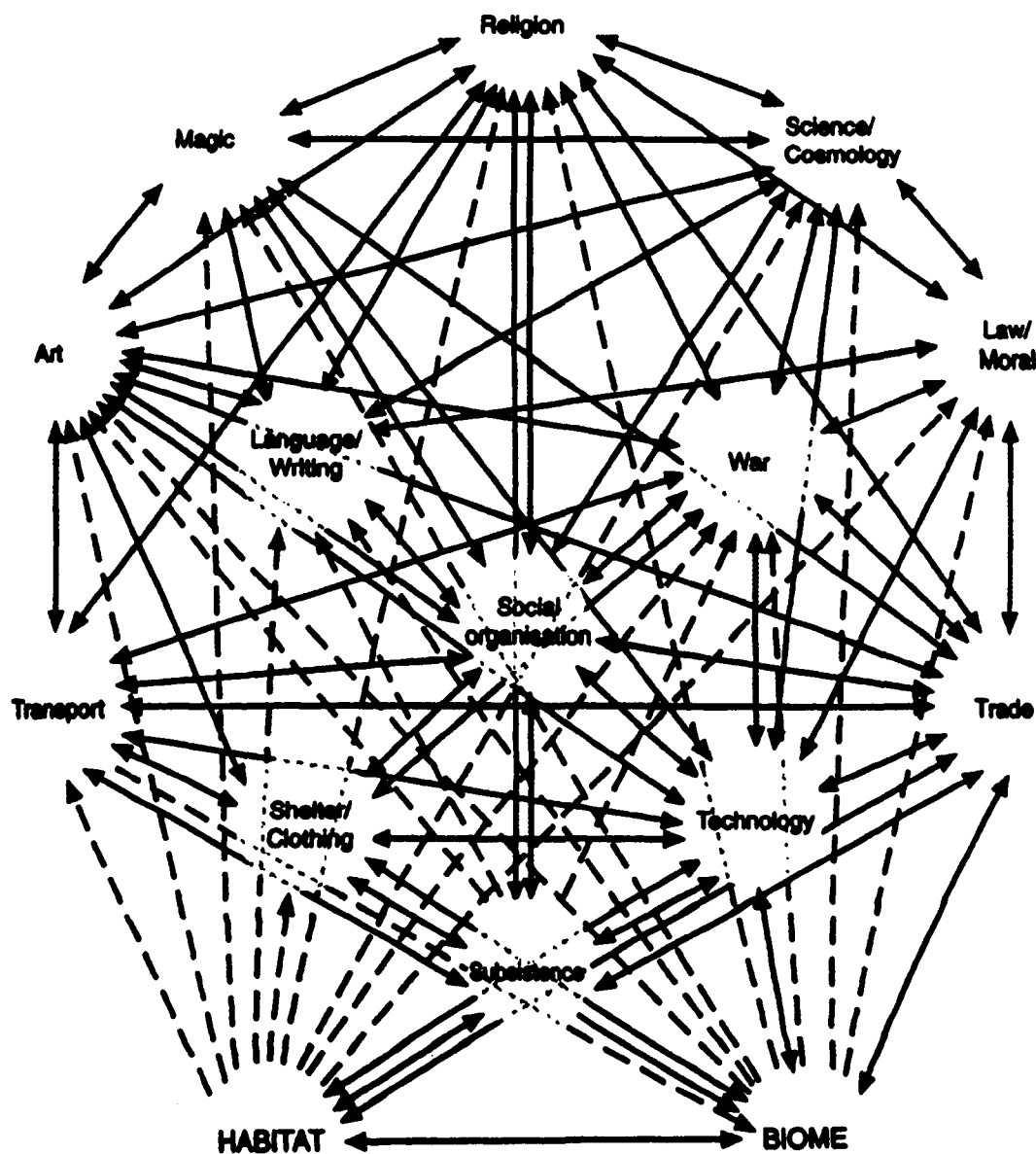
Fig.3.3 - The cut of Grahame Clark's jewel (1953:75; note religion at the pinnacle, but spatially distanced)

In reality these facets are analytical actions externally imposed from without and the cultural formation as an interacting, integrated totality lies in the very substance of culture, metaphorically the gemstone itself, the complete elemental or material substance of the jewel. From the perspective of the analyst, the facets act as windows allowing a clearer vision into the culture, an attempt at perceiving the substance and qualities of the jewel. Is religion then just another sphere or a facet, an academic construct, an outsiders view? If religion is the superstructure of culture (Insoll 2004:22), the structuring principle for the lives of past communities, then metaphorically Insoll might consider religion to be the structure of the jewel, the property of all of the edges and the given shape that connects all the facets. However, the role of framework or structure attributes too much to religion although it does help conceptualise religion as an integral part of the rest of culture.

The cut of the jewel is purely a construct of the dispassionate jeweller, the academic analyst, the outside interpreter, who in attempting to see a culture clearly also fashions the rough gemstone into something else. The facets represent the jeweller/academic's attempts at viewing a culture from the outside by creating a clear view into the interior through which the substance and qualities of the culture are hoped to be perceived. Only half the gem can ever be perceived at once despite the best efforts at holistic study. Through the cutting of facets, light can refract through the jewel from the other side and this may be the closest the metaphor can come to conceptualising holistic study as the totally integrated interaction between all the facets. The clarity of vision into the jewel of a culture from outside is only possible through light illuminating and religious beliefs have been considered as 'a light cast upon human life from somewhere outside it' (Geertz quoted in Insoll 2004:7). The refraction of light through the various facets gives hints at the unique qualities of the gem and subtle combination of its elemental substance. Religion might then be conceived as the light that allows the observer to glimpse certain qualities and ascertain values (Klass 1995). Although light is an analytical tool of the jeweller, its attraction lies in the potential to perceive the whole. The illumination provided by religion might be a concept imposed on culture from the outside, but it is also a tool for illuminating the jewel that is any culture, allowing its own lustre and qualities to shine from within. The etic category of religion is fundamental to the study of the past because it facilitates the self-expression of emic categories, cultural meanings and potent symbols (Bowie 2006).

Beliefs are founded on bodies of knowledge about the world and although they operate at the boundaries of knowledge they are usually based on the best reasoning available. I believe that religion can be a powerful analytical tool for holistic study of the past and I also believe that studying religion can provide examples of the self-

representation of past peoples, allowing them to communicate fundamental conceptions of how they lived their lives, expressed their identity, perceived their place in the universe and constructed their own bodies of knowledge and beliefs. I would like to say that I know this, but instead I must base my beliefs on the body of knowledge I have gathered on the subject and allow the reader to come to their own decision. I do not believe that religion is an all-encompassing structure or the superstructure into which all other aspects of life can be placed (*contra* Insoll 2004:12-13), rather religiosity has the *potential* to permeate into all other facets of life through processes such as ritualisation. There will always be a hierarchy of motivations that will affect the manifestation of religion; some people believe and practice their faith more profoundly than others. In any ritualised practice religious concerns will occupy numerous positions on a spectrum ranging from unconscious habit based on the cultural pre-dispositions of Bourdieu's (1977) *habitus* through to consciously highly ritualised and politically situated activity. Emotional investment in ritual practices will vary along similar lines from deep to superficial involvement, conscious and unconscious action (Insoll 2004:13).

Klass (1995) attempted to summarise the nature and scope of religion as proposed by 20th century scholarship in order to provide an operational definition that would allow cross-cultural study without the imposition of categories and assumptions from other belief systems. He concluded that religion constitutes the total set of beliefs, knowledge, values, practices, associated symbols, and interactions among and between humans and the other beings that humans recognise as capable of such interactions. The scope of religion is concerned with:

> Explanation, understanding, coherence; relief from psychological stress; release and channelling of emotions; social cohesiveness; sense of effectiveness and ability to cope with death, illness, and misfortune in general; maintenance of a sense of order by continual counteraction of powerlessness, randomness, meaninglessness,chaos (Klass 1995:38).

This substantive approach does not attempt to provide the ultimate definition, but rather hopes to offer a working (operational) definition of religion as a cultural category that avoids modern rational and scientistic bias and which will encompass other more formal and culture-specific definitions:

> Religion in a given society will be that instituted process of interaction among the members of that society – and between them and the universe at large as they conceive it to be constituted – which provides them with meaning, coherence, direction, unity, easement, and

whatever degree of control over events they perceive as possible (Klass 1995:38).

I do believe that religion and ritualised practices are generally thoroughly embedded within human cultures. The rationalist trend for partitioning religion into a separate category has proved unhelpful, not just for studying the material residue of ritual practice, but also for limiting the wider study of past cultures. Religion is useful as an analytical tool because the interpretation of ritualised practices allows something of the cosmology, cognition and cultural meaning to be communicated from the past using the symbols and metaphors that were of value at the time. Inferences made in the present can be informed through the contextual study of ritual practice and material culture inter-woven with the wider study of past societies.

3.13 - Summary

The theoretical basis of this thesis works from the premise that, in both late prehistoric and Roman Britain, ritual practices were thoroughly integrated with wider political and economic factors, and the combined effect of these processes through time would create the enculturated landscape (Jordan 2003). This thesis will not form a comprehensive study of ritual practice in Roman Britain. The goal is to promote a methodology for learning more about the motivations and consequences of ritualisation as an integral part of wider social and cultural practices, rather than separated, as modern rationalism would dictate. A re-assessment of the traditional corpus of material culture used as evidence for syncretic ritual practice in post-conquest Britain will be possible through the application of the contextual approach outlined above and detailed below in the case studies of Chapters 4,5 & 6.

Any assessment of the evidence from Roman Britain will obviously benefit from a discussion of the character of ritual practice in later prehistory in order to situate the data in an appropriate chronological framework and counter the previous tendency for back-projection. Using recent work on Iron Age and Roman Britain as a foundation, this study will focus on evidence for what has previously been considered as syncretic religion in Roman Britain, but will here be theorised as vernacular religion. Chapter 7 will use the three main case studies from Chapter's 4,5 & 6 to discuss the dialectic between the official ideological idealisation of religion and local popular practice, integrated through the redemptive hegemony of ritualisation and hybridisation theory. Vernacular religion will be presented as a new classificatory concept, but more importantly as a methodological approach that can re-juvenate the study of Romano-Celtic syncretism. Ritualisation and the conjunction of people, objects and places will

be considered through the landscape context of ritual practice, which will integrate many of the themes from previous chapters, tying together the oscillating conceptions of time within, between and beyond the fluctuating frontier zones of Roman Britain. The dichotomy of Roman and native as it has been applied to the material culture of iconography, altars, and other votive objects will be questioned throughout, but especially in Chapter 5 and the case study of the hybrid Vitiris. Subsistence and socio-economic practice are often considered furthest removed from religious concerns (e.g. two rungs separate on Hawkes' ladder of inference, and distanced on Clark's jewel Fig.3.3), but symbolism relating to pastoralist production can be contextualised (Ch.4)

A series of related dichotomies are perpetuated through Romano-Celtic syncretism. Binary oppositions are common in interpretative frameworks and semiotic approaches as they analytically create significance, giving the scholar something definite to say through a clear contrast (Rowlands 2004:201). Dichotomies are analytically opposed, but as with ritualisation it is more rewarding to explore the dialectical relationship between such oppositions. Examining dichotomies as in a state of tension, rather than as mutually exclusive categories, will allow consideration of the sliding scale, the shades of grey between scholarly black and white abstractions. Resolving dichotomies will be a persistent theme throughout this thesis ranging from the more general concepts of ritual and practical resolved through ritualisation theory to the case study specifics of Roman and Native and the related cultural issues of homogeneity, heterogeneity and hybridity as they impinge on provincial religion. The dynamic process of hybridisation will emerge in Chapter 5 as a viable alternative to syncretism with the advantage of a wider cultural applicability.

Instead of focusing on a strict definition of ritual, ritualisation allows ritual practices to be considered against the broader background of social action, not studied separately from other social practices, but as an integral part of them. The primary goal of this thesis is to situate the generally accepted evidence of ritualised expression within a more holistic framework for study. The sculpture, inscriptions, sacred sites and votive deposits that are the usual recourse for study of Celtic religion in Roman Britain can be contextualised through reference to aspects of the wider cultural context, producing more appropriate interpretative data about the motivations and practices involved in the use and deposition of material culture than the inferences based on abstracted symbolism or later mythological motifs. The parallel processes of ritualisation and the contextualisation of ritual practice work in tandem towards accomplishing that objective. Chapter 4 will begin this process.

Chapter 4 – Fertile Imaginations: Pastoralist production, vernacular iconography and the socioeconomic context of ritual practice.

Fig.4.1 – Housesteads *genii cucullati* CSIR 1.1:152

4.1 - Introduction

In general, studies of Celtic religion have focussed heavily on Roman period iconography and because of the artistic medium, interpretations have often been made from an art historical perspective, sometimes using comparative data from all over Western Europe. This type of interpretation tends to remove the deities from their local context. Many of the attributes of deities have been explained in broad basic terms as symbolising prosperity, protection or more frequently fertility, without going into any greater detail. The main question considered in this chapter is: beyond vague notions of fertility and well-being, can 'native' deities depicted on Roman period iconography be shown to reflect more specific concerns of the local population? Belief systems were a potent and influential factor in ancient societies and would have had both subtle and definite impacts on the way people conducted their everyday lives. This first case study deals with one of the best-known 'native' iconographic representations from Roman Britain, the *genii cucullati*. The relief plaque from Housesteads Roman fort is the classic example of this

type (fig.4.1). Previous study of these hooded supernatural figures has tended to separate them from the socio-cultural context that contributed to the production of these images. The generalisation that worship of the *genii cucullati* related to fertility has become a common interpretative trope and resulting discussion has considered them as abstracted symbolism, reducing the potential for specific and meaningful interpretation. The main part of the discussion will explain the inter-relationship between the *genii cucullati* and a group of associated vernacular iconographic images, theorising that their fertility aspects can be more specifically related to pastoralist production in Roman Britain.

The fertility of the earth, and the consequences of this for the humans that rely on it for sustenance and prosperity, has been considered a primary religious and ritual concern since the earliest anthropological studies of religion (Frazer [1890] 1924). Power in non-Western states, as conceived by more recent anthropologists, is not based in the control of material production, but rather as a form of ritualised pro-creativity - the work of the Gods embodied in the ruler (Rowlands 2004) with certain integral members of society holding 'the mystical means of production' (Granero 1986). These ideas are not dissimilar to interpretations of Celtic religion based on Irish mythological literature, which emphasise the role of the king in a sacred marriage (*hieros gamos*) with a goddess who embodied the earth and territory (MacCana 2005; Creighton 2005). Fertility has also featured in archaeological accounts of later prehistoric ritual practice (e.g. Hingley 1997b; Parker Pearson 1996, *Food, Fertility and Front Doors*). This discussion begins with a brief overview of how economic, social and ritual transformation can be linked to agricultural and pastoral intensification throughout Later Prehistoric Britain. Close attention to the context of material culture associated with socioeconomic practices has made it possible to theorise more about Later Prehistoric ritual practices through the process of ritualisation, rather than relying on generalisations about fertility based on the interpretation of abstract symbolism or temporally and spatially distant literary sources.

4.2 - Ritual Practice and Productive Intensification in Later Prehistoric Britain.

The socioeconomic context of ritual practice has traditionally been little theorised or ritualised, unlike landscape and socio-political contexts, which are often implicated with ritual practice through the popularity of studying ideology (Knapp 1988) and sacred landscapes (Jordan 2003; Ucko & Layton 1999). The Middle to Later Bronze Age in Britain saw a massive shift in the nature of the archaeological record from the communal, ritual and burial monuments of earlier prehistory to the settled, agricultural and domestic landscapes of later

prehistory (Bradley 1998b). Increasing productive intensification throughout later prehistory is the type of meta-narrative that generates divergent theories about the causal relationship between social and ritual complexity and economic developments. Primacy is difficult to assign to either social, economic, ritual or environmental factors, and all would have been in a state of tension contributing to cultural change from early to late prehistory. Despite the lack of absolute chronologies it is still possible to observe that transformation occurred at different rates across the British Isles making mono-causal explanations seem unlikely (Bradley 2008). Such a radical shift in the nature of the archaeological record must have been accompanied by simultaneous change and development across all spheres of activity, but still to some extent contingent on local conditions. Single stimulus theories regarding parallel changes in ritual practice and socioeconomic development are always problematic (as the debate about 'the Neolithic revolution' bears testament to – see Blanton & Taylor 1995, and Fuller & Grandjean 2001 for opposing views of this classic 'chicken and egg' argument). Holistic study hopes to produce an account of society operating as a complete entity, prioritizing the complexity of generative processes of interaction between multiple spheres of activity, not constrained by fitting the evidence into single rationalist categories that have been created for the purpose of modern analysis.

Widespread social changes that impacted recursively on all aspects of society are exhibited through the abandonment of communal ritual monuments, greater sedentism, the growth of settlement evidence and corresponding decline in burial evidence, the increase in settlement and landscape boundary formation, and the intensification of production (Bradley 2008). Massive change concurrent across ritual, economic and social practice should occasion no surprise and would have had fundamental effects on cognition, manifested in both material culture and the cultural landscape (Williams 2003:228-229). The cessation of activity at ritual monuments constructed of earth, stone and wood over previous millennia is most frequently commented on, accompanied by gradual changes in the treatment of the dead who no longer dominate the landscape through barrow construction (Bradley 1998b). Other types of ritual activity continue across this transition period, and even increase in scale with the deposition and hoarding of bronze metalwork peaking at the Late Bronze Age - Early Iron Age transition (Bradley 1998a; Needham 2007). Religion embedded in wider socio-cultural activity exhibiting simultaneous aspects of continuity, change and re-constitution, encourages the holistic and integrated approach advocated in this thesis.

The Middle to Late Bronze Age witnessed the beginning of many of these wide-reaching social and economic changes, including intensification in agro-pastoral production.

Cereal cultivation became more widespread with the naked barley better suited to brewing being replaced by the hardier hulled barley (Richmond 1999: 70-74; 110) and the later introduction of spelt (*Triticum spelta*) a type of wheat better suited to the colonisation of heavier and damper soils (van der Veen 1992:77). Sheep become increasingly important as livestock throughout later prehistory (Albarella 2007) and there some evidence of a growing focus on herd and flock management for secondary products of dairy and wool (Serjeantson 2007). The increased calorific potential and the availability of vital foodstuffs throughout the year are two positive outcomes of dairying and cheese-making (Serjeantson 2007). However, the intensification of dairy production, through practices associated with the exploitation of both sheep and cattle husbandry, should not be thought of as the result of economic forces in the modern sense (Richmond 1999: 110). Despite this caveat, prehistoric economies were also not just concerned with basic subsistence (Young and Symmonds 1999). Mixed farming strategies make self-sufficiency possible, but there would have also been the desire for the generation of limited surplus for displays of prestige linked to feasting, exchange, alliance and commensual politics (van der Veen 2007; Dietler 1999).

In *Understanding the British Iron Age: an Agenda for Action*, the authors called for the development of an agrarian sociology for the Iron Age because farming formed the basis of Iron Age societies (Haselgrove *et al* 2001:10). However, amongst the many questions arising, one not articulated was what might be the symbolic or religious expression of these integral aspects of Iron Age life? Williams has argued that agriculture came to dominate Later Prehistoric peoples' physical and cognitive worlds with the agricultural cycle providing an over-arching metaphor for understanding the world and their place within it (2003:229). Reference to this fundamental metaphor became widespread throughout Later Prehistoric Europe, building upon the ritualisation of the domestic arena, but with a gradual shift towards the potency of production as farming technology improved and land use intensified. Williams' thesis aptly demonstrates how social and economic factors can shape and in turn be shaped by conceptual, cosmological and ritual concerns. The dominance of the agricultural cycle as a metaphor in Later Prehistoric society allows objects that would normally be associated with agricultural production to become icons for those vital processes and reproduce meaning from their everyday use within ritualised contexts and vice versa. The entire agricultural cycle was metaphorically referenced through a range of ritualised activities. Clearing woodland would have been cited through the symbolism and deposition of axes throughout prehistory, but particularly culminating in the Late Bronze Age (Williams 2003:230). One potent location for axe deposition in the Scottish Lothians was at

the margins of the agricultural landscape (Roberts & Ottaway 2003:135). Preparing the ground may have been referenced through the morphological resemblance, material connections and similarity of practice between burial and clearance cairn (Johnson 2000). In Northern Britain, rare Iron Age burials such as that from the cairnfield at High Knowes, Northumberland, shows how difficult it can be to distinguish burial and clearance cairn without excavation (Jobey and Tait 1966).

The use and deposition of certain types of material culture in contexts that are more usually associated with the agricultural cycle has proved fertile ground for exploring ritualisation, Most of the evidence has been gathered from southern Britain (Cunliffe 1993) and Hill's (1995a) detailed study of structured deposition in the grain storage pits of Wessex stands out. Although northern Britain lacks structured deposits of comparable complexity, objects used in agricultural production such as ard-shares have been found deposited in a variety of contexts, from a foundation deposit under Milton Loch crannog (Guido 1974:54) to incorporation in burials at Quoycottie, Orkney (Williams 2003:231). The Late Iron Age ploughbeam from Whitereed Moss near Lochmaben (Rees 1984:461-3) shares a wet context of deposition similar to agricultural equipment from Scandinavia. The deposition of agricultural equipment and ironwork in bogs in Northern Britain has more generally been linked to the importance of fertility (Hingley 1992:23-4 & 1997)). Williams (2003) has refined this by suggesting that when such objects are utilised, deposited and excavated in different non-agrarian contexts they make indexical reference (Preucel and Bauer 2001) to the agricultural cycle and become symbols for further wider metaphoric associations. Divine influence on agriculture would not have been alien to the classical world and these concepts would carry to the interface with Roman religion after the conquest. Ritualised ploughing before temple construction was a common feature of Roman ritual practice and various deities including Mars and Ceres were linked to agrarian cults (Henig 1984). The term cult itself comes from its obvious connection to cultivation; deities were cultivated through cult worship (Beck 2004). Certain types of deposition linked to the agricultural cycle, such as quernstones in liminal settlement locations, continued into the Roman Iron Age (Pope 2003; Heslop 2008).

Rather than being a conscious ideology, the agricultural cycle as a metaphor was naturalised through everyday practice, with the evidence being widespread across northwest Europe, but in no way uniform or comprehensive. Above all, the metaphor expresses beliefs about the tenurial relationship between people and the land, permanence and cyclicity, death and regeneration, consumption and creation with seasonality linking

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everyday practice to the rhythms of annual and annular time (Williams 2003:242-243). The agricultural products themselves may have also acted as semiotic references, as with the grain added to a buried deposit at Wetwang Slack. This deposit contained metalworking tools rather than human remains (Bevan 1999a:127) establishing a connection which Hingley has argued relates to creative forces and regeneration i.e. fertility (1997b:9-10). Grain defies categorisation and embodies many of the idiosyncrasies of the metaphor (Williams 2003:243). Analogy with wider depositional practices across Northern Europe would suggest that a range of organic material such as agricultural and animal products were also being deposited in Later Prehistoric Britain (Levy 1982; Bradley 1998a; 2000). Although organic material, and especially bone, does not survive well in the acidic soils of Northern Britain, the bog butter from western and Atlantic Scotland represents the unusual preservation of deposits of animal derived produce (Hunter 1997: Appendix 4), although those that have been dated are not prehistoric. While the agricultural cycle has been theorised as a potent metaphor for organising Later Prehistoric life and belief, the preferred economy of much of Later Prehistoric Britain and especially Northern Britain was a mixed farming regime that required balanced management and a symbiotic relationship between agrarian and pastoralist production. The agricultural cycle as an over-arching metaphor ignores half of that equation.

4.3 - People and Animals in Later Prehistory

There is a wealth of evidence for the relationships between people and animals in Later Prehistoric Britain, although the data is usually approached from a functional perspective to assess subsistence and economic practices. The everyday activities of people, that so often would involve the animal world, would be encoded with culturally specific and symbolic factors (Parker Pearson 1996). Human interaction with animals is as representative of a society as any other form of material culture and any faunal material on sites has cultural implications (Albarella 2007:389-390). The treatment of animal bones and human bones in a very similar fashion in Later Prehistory suggests that distinctions between human and animal remains were not as rigid as in the modern world, or at least any such distinctions were dissolved once they were dead (Hill 1995a). Rather than the general term of special deposits, associated bone groups (ABG's) has been coined to describe ritual practices involving the manipulation and deposition of both human and animal bones. The use of human bones in particular is seen as having symbolic currency, but the importance of faunal material should not be underestimated. The use of animals in tribal names (Carvetii 'Stag

people' in Cumbria – Higham & Jones 1985), personal names (Cartimandua 'sleek pony' – Ross 1974:449) and as stylised symbols on artefacts hints at these wider social meanings and the close relationship between humans and animals. Although this thesis generally shies away from later insular mythology as it has been used by the previous paradigm to construct timeless accounts of Celtic religion, the semiotic links between people, animals and material culture can be illustrated by consideration of the word torc as it is used in the Early Historic mythological tale, *Culhwch and Olwen*. Semantically torc can be used to refer to a young boar, a young hero and also the iconic item of personal ornamentation so frequently associated with Celtic identity in classical literature and on sculpture (Bromwich and Evans 1992). These metaphorical links survive in literature recorded much later than the period under study, but it does illustrate how people, animals and material culture can encode relational meaning, conceptual links and embodied metaphor.

The lack of anthropomorphic imagery on prehistoric artefacts from Northern Europe has led to the suggestion that supernatural beings were represented by animal symbols (Green 1989; Megaw 1970). Later development of anthropomorphic imagery and realism in artistic representation is considered a product of contact with the Mediterranean world. The odd juxtaposition between supernatural and natural has been commented on by Klass (1995) who suggests that the theoretical basis for using the term supernatural is questionable as it relies on imposing the judgements of what modern rationalism has decided constitutes nature and reality. For Later Prehistoric Europe the boundaries between our modern conceptions of natural and supernatural appear to be blurred in a similar way to how the theorisation of ritualisation in Later Prehistoric Europe blurs the boundaries between ritual and practical. The use of wild and domesticated animals in ritualised practices would have embodied multiple cultural meanings and the depictions on material culture and artworks suggest extra symbolic value beyond the economic. It would be easy to overcompensate and talk about all nature being sacred in the Celtic world, but this would have more resonance with modern spiritual ecology than the evidence for Iron Age societies' relationship to their environment. One of the dominant features of the Later Prehistoric archaeological record is how the landscape became increasingly organised and tree clearance in parts of Northern Britain occurred on an unprecedented scale (Tipping 1997) accompanied by agricultural expansion in northeast England into heavier and damper soils (van der Veen 1992). Natural resources such as timber (Willis 1999) and salt (Morris 2007) were also being exploited on an unprecedented scale. Certain cultural meanings develop around concepts of wild and settled or domesticated, dependent on local societies

resource management. The integration of ritual and religion into these 'practical' concerns would lead to taboos and what the modern observer might consider irrational practices (e.g. Wilson 1999). Related themes will be pursued in subsequent chapters with Chapter 6 giving further consideration to the role of the wider and wilder landscape through votive deposition at 'natural' sites.

Hill's (1995a) study of *Ritual and Rubbish in the Iron Age of Wessex* suggests that wild species formed a limited part of faunal assemblages in grain storage pits and this is a general observation that can be made for Iron Age Britain (Hambleton 1999). Restrictions on hunting may indicate its social and symbolic importance in the Iron Age (Grant 1991). However, where the remains of wild species do occur in Wessex pits they are often deployed in a specific way, exhibiting a body of lore regarding natural species that contributed to the structured nature of the deposit. Deployment in these ritualised contexts is an expression of certain cultural values that were being expressed through these practices. The social values and cultural meanings associated with domesticated animals would have largely depended on the everyday human interaction with these species. Human-animal relations should not be mistaken as being any less potent because of familiarity and common practice. If anything, everyday interaction means that these crucial parts of human life and production would have also formed important categories of symbol and vital metaphors for generating social meaning. The widespread use of animals and their by-products in Later Prehistoric and Roman Britain are evident from the archaeological record, sometimes expressed in a variety of ritualised contexts including structured deposition in pits, boundary ditches and through feasting activities (Hill 1995a; van der Veen 2007;Ralph 2007). The formal deposition and disposal of material culture in later prehistory, including animal remains, should be linked to a variety of causal factors. Feasting provides an archaeological signature for some larger deposits of faunal remains, but even the remains of one animal may indicate communal activity or sacrifice. The slaughter of animals for sacrifice and subsequent feasting was common practice in the ancient world and would have marked noteworthy events in both the annual cycle and life cycle of individuals, households and wider communities. The scale of feasting may provide an indication of the aspirations of the actors in this potent arena for social relations (Dietler 1999).

Hill's (1995a) remarkably detailed study has been well referenced so far, although there is an obvious danger of uncritically applying its findings beyond Wessex rather than considering it as an interesting case study of the potential for interpreting prehistoric ritualised practices. Hill's thesis highlighted deposits of associated bone groups (ABG's),

which he suggests formed important elements of structured deposition through the manipulation of intact body parts. The non-economic use of body parts seems irrational to modern sensibilities and is therefore assigned a ritual function that has been linked to fertility (Wilson 1999). However, it is still possible that ABG's were used for feasting as well as sacrifice as Iron Age butchery techniques carefully disarticulated meat at joints or filleted parts such as lumber vertebrae which were difficult to disarticulate. Position on the body may have held a symbolic significance that contributed to different notions of value than modern qualities of meat. Later prehistoric butchery techniques seem to have operated without the intensive chopping through flesh and bone characteristic of Roman butchery (Knight 2003:25-34). These differences in simple everyday acts of butchery provide another indication of variations in cultural values that may reflect different attitudes to animals and the natural world. In a study that usefully highlighted the many cross-cultural analogies for practices involving the ritualisation of animal bone, Wilson (1999: 302) questions why ritual action involving depositing ABG's in the grain storage pits of Wessex was necessary when the practice of the underground storage in itself was effective. Separating ritual from practical in this way imposes modern rationalist logic on these activities and the very fact of the repeated occurrence of surviving evidence indicates that these practices were considered effective. The majority of grain deposits would have been reclaimed through practical necessity, but examples where grain appears to have been deliberately devoted should be considered as symbolic or ritualised deposits as with the grain deposit with metalworking tool at Wetwang Slack (Bevan1999b). Where grain storage pits were being re-used and socially re-constituted by a structured deposit they were being treated according to a different set of social values and a body of lore to which modern observers have little access, other than as removed witnesses, recording through careful excavation what can be discerned of the creation of these features (Hill 1995a).

In questioning the common sense of ritualised activities, Wilson (1999: 302) falls into the trap of applying his own cultural logic to past cultures. The practical farmers of Wilson's imagination would indeed have been capable of observing that grain could be successfully stored without animal deposits, and may have done so over the many seasons the pits were in use - periods of use that leave less of an archaeological signature than the final deposit. Even if they allowed themselves to be coerced or manipulated by their priests and chieftains as Wilson suggests (1999:302), the action would have still been meaningful to those involved (although that meaning and the experience may have varied according to status or involvement). Wilson's explanation follows Cunliffe (1983) in suggesting that, "perhaps the

priesthood and their people were mind bound into a culture imbued with ritual action, myth and belief which allowed little awareness of *common sense realities*" [my emphasis] (1999:302). Again, discussion is hindered by applying modern values of rationality onto what Wilson has chosen to interpret as irrational practices. Wilson's rationalist bias is particularly surprising considering the purpose of his paper was to show how widespread similar practices have been in many other cultures. The cross-cultural examples he marshalled demonstrate how many possible interpretations there are for this range of activities involving special animal deposits, although the over-arching conclusion is that such practices relate to "a widespread concern with the renewal and protection of fertility" (Wilson 1999:303).

Although the emphasis for Southern Britain is often agrarian, the context of animal deposits in grain storage pits in Iron Age Wessex suggests formal and symbolic links were being made between two major forms of economic resource produced by the mixed farming regimes of Later Prehistoric Britain. Perhaps a portion of surplus from one form of production was dedicated and sacrificed in order to encourage an increase in production of the other related sphere. The sacrifice of animals and incorporation of human ABG's in contexts that had ensured next years harvest or stored surplus produce may have been intended to transfer fertility from one domain to another, but whether from or to the agricultural sphere is impossible to say. Again, the main point is not to question whether the ritual was considered effective (Klass 1995) according to modern rationalist logic, but to offer suggestions of how prehistoric productive relations may have informed the contemporary cultural logic behind these practices. The symbiotic relationship between pastoral and arable production was vital to the mixed farming strategies that would have been prevalent throughout most of Britain during the Later and Roman Iron Ages. Storage of seed-crop and surplus grain and fodder was essential for the survival of human and livestock over winter, and the periodic manuring of the soil by livestock, especially sheep grazing on fallow land (Hambleton 1999:59), was essential for the maintenance of soil fertility, which would improve the harvest of future seasons. The combination of the seasonal context of grain storage and the age profile of the animals represented by ABG's or special animal deposits might give an insight into seasonality and the timing of these rituals. The spelt wheat that predominated in the Iron Age of Southern Britain did not need to be stored over-winter, but is best suited to an autumn sowing regime (van der Veen 2006:224). In later prehistory, yearlings were slaughtered in the autumn before they started to lose weight (Hambleton 1999:70) and at the temple-site at Harlow in Essex the

importance of sheep as sacrificial animal occurred in the autumn, showing the compatibility and practicality of economic and ritual practice (Albarella 2007:394).

Rather than focussing on the apparent irrationality of ritual practices according to modern criteria, a ritualisation approach has the advantage of linking religious activities to wider contemporary social practice. A consideration of the multi-layered context of any action is vital for a detailed ritualised interpretation. The previous weight of interpretation of the pit ritual tradition has been on fertility (Cunliffe 1992) and the agricultural cycle as a metaphor (Williams 2003). However, this denies the vital input of pastoralist production to Later Prehistoric economies and the symbiotic relationship between humans, animals and crops in mixed farming regimes. The essential co-operative relationship between pastoralism and arable farming would appear to have been referenced in the storage pit ritual tradition of southern Britain. This will not be the only example of the symbolic expression of pastoralism as a vital part of the mixed farming regimes. Other examples of the socioeconomic context of ritual practice should be expected. While fertility is undoubtedly a factor, it is sometimes possible to take interpretation further through ritualisation theory and a consideration of the multi-layered and thoroughly integrated context of ritual practice. The following case study will explore the possibility of the ritualised expression of pastoralism by considering some examples of Roman period iconography in their wider socio-cultural and socioeconomic context.

4.4 Case study: Roman period iconography and pastoralist production

The links between fertility and 'primitive' religion have a long history in archaeology, art-historical interpretation of prehistoric art and the anthropology of religion. While on a certain level a concern with fertility may be an appropriate interpretation, there is a danger that this becomes too generalised and where possible more specific interpretations should be sought, linking fertility, prosperity and success with the wider socio-cultural background and especially the socioeconomic context. Concerns with fertility and prosperity would obviously reflect upon the full suite of economic practices from basic subsistence to the more specialised economic concerns of resource control, production and craft specialisation. The use of the agricultural cycle as a metaphor and organising principle for structuring Later Prehistoric ritual practice would have been complemented by practices indexically referring to pastoralism, although associated material is mostly organic and less likely to survive. The previous discussion provides a suitable introduction to the main case study of certain iconographic groups from Roman Britain that have been interpreted as

fertility figures. By considering the symbolism of the *genii cucullati* and associated iconography in relation to the wider economic context, a more specific interpretation of their fertility aspects will be possible.

The corpus of iconography from Roman Britain, which forms one of the main types of evidence for vernacular ritual practice, is quite often removed from its context through a combination of poorly recorded antiquarian recovery and subsequent cataloguing (Webster 1997:334-335). Interpretations have often been made from an art historical perspective, sometimes using comparative data from all over Western Europe, with a tendency to remove the deities from their local context. Interpretation is also based on classical artistic values and places inappropriate value judgements on the quality of provincial art when compared with classical ideals (Scott 2006). The attributes of many iconographic images of deities from Northern Europe have been explained in broad generalised terms as symbolising prosperity, protection or more frequently fertility, without going into more specific detail. Again, the question considered here is: beyond vague notions of fertility and well-being, can the iconographic representations of the 'native' deities of Roman Britain be shown to reflect more specific concerns of the local population? This main case study will consider the inter-relationship between groups of vernacular iconographic images that include the *genii cucullati* and explain their particular relevance to sheep husbandry and pastoralist production in Roman Britain.

4.5 - A fascination with fertility

The name *genii cucullati,* applied to hooded figures relatively common in Roman provincial iconography, originates not from associated inscriptions, but from two altars found in a Roman period shrine at Walbelsdorf in Austria. The dedications on the altars were inscribed *'genio cucullato'-* to the hooded genius (Egger 1932:311–323 cited in Webster 1986:67). Although the altars were without any associated iconography, the term has since been employed to describe divine images from all across Europe where the main characteristic is a hooded cape or cloak (Green 1992:104). In Britain, they usually occur as a triad of figures with triplication seen as a common method for increasing the potency of the divine image. Triplication was thought to separate the British examples from their continental counterparts (Green 1991:100–109) although there are also occasional continental triads (Aldhouse-Green 2004:58). The *genii cucullati* are often perceived as being of diminutive status, as they appear in relation to a divine couple depicted on a relief from Bath (Fig. 4.2; *CSIR* 1.2:39).

Fig. 4.2 – (*CSIR* 1.2:39) A sculpted relief from Bath depicting a horned 'Mercury', a Goddess with a vessel, three *genii cucullati* and a ram (Copyright: Bath Museum)

The two main groups of *genii cucullati* images are from southwest Britain and the northern frontier. The significant difference between the northern and southern examples is that the latter often appear in tandem with other figures such as a seated goddess or the divine couple and ram from the Bath relief (*CSIR* 1.2:39). Six examples of *genii cucullati* unaccompanied have been found on the northern frontier of Roman Britain (*CSIR* 1.6: 152–156, 485; Coulston and Phillips 1988:61–63, 162). For the final discussion, it is worth noting that the distribution in the frontier region is west of the North Tyne, and extending from the North Pennines into Cumbria. Northeast England has not produced any examples despite a strong stone carving tradition east of the Pennines. The southwestern examples are mostly from the Cotswold region. Apart from the associations with other divine representations in the southwest group, the attributes of both groups are otherwise consistent. The relief carving from the fort of Netherby, beyond Hadrian's Wall, shows the triad of *genii* in one of their characteristic poses (*CSIR* 1.6:155), offering a rounded globular object, which is often referred to as an egg, interpreted as "a symbol of regeneration with obvious fertility implications" (Fig. 4.3; Webster 1986:68–69).

The fertility interpretation for the *genii cucullati* is often emphasised without specific elaboration. On three of four examples from Cirencester (*CSIR* 1.7: 101, 103, 104; Henig 1993:34–35), the *genii cucullati* are in the company of a female divinity frequently identified as a 'Mother-Goddess' (*Mater*) interpreted as representing the land or territory (Yeates 2007) and thus establishing their association with 'abundance and fecundity' (Green 1992:104). Even when two of the triad accompanying the *mater* are possibly armed, fertility remains paramount, and their role is seen as protecting her from barrenness, disease and famine (Green 1992:104). On the other Cirencester examples, the *genii* and the *mater* are often holding rounded or disc-like objects, similar to the Netherby example, often identified as cakes, fruit or eggs, again interpreted as symbolising fertility (Fig.4.4).

A relief sculpture, from Daglingworth Roman villa, near Gloucester, (*CSIR* vol.1.7:102). Is very similar to those from Cirencester, but uncharacteristically shows a dedicatory inscription that reads *'cudae'* (RIB 129). Green states that this potential theonym implies prosperity and wellbeing, but without detailing any supporting etymological evidence (Green 1992:74). The *mater* is again depicted with an ambiguous rounded object in her lap, and appears to be receiving a similar offering.

A clearer example is from stone by at Stratton, (Fig.4.5. Henig 1998, 58–59) where the mater too has .... is her .... a fruit and by analogy an app .... alone is, it would have to be a le ....
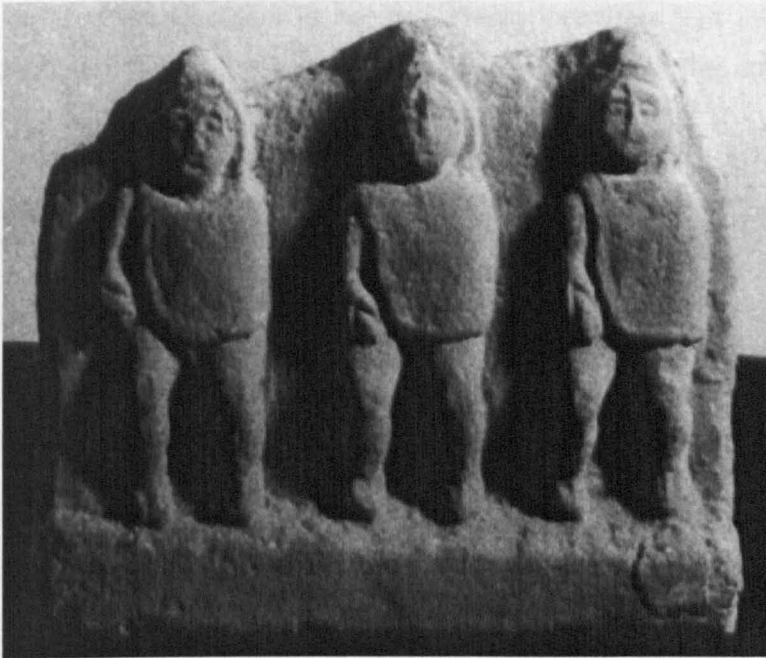
Fig. 4.3 – A triad of *genii cucullati* from Netherby (*CSIR* 1.6:155)

Fig. 4.4 – A typical triad of *genii cucullati* with *mater* from southwest Britain (*CSIR* 1.7:101)

A clearer example is from close by at Stratton, (Fig.4.5; Henig 1998:186–189) where this *mater* too has a large round object in her lap. Henig interprets this as a fruit and by analogy an apple, but notes that if it were to scale, as the rest of the image is, it would have to be a large melon (unlikely for Roman Britain).
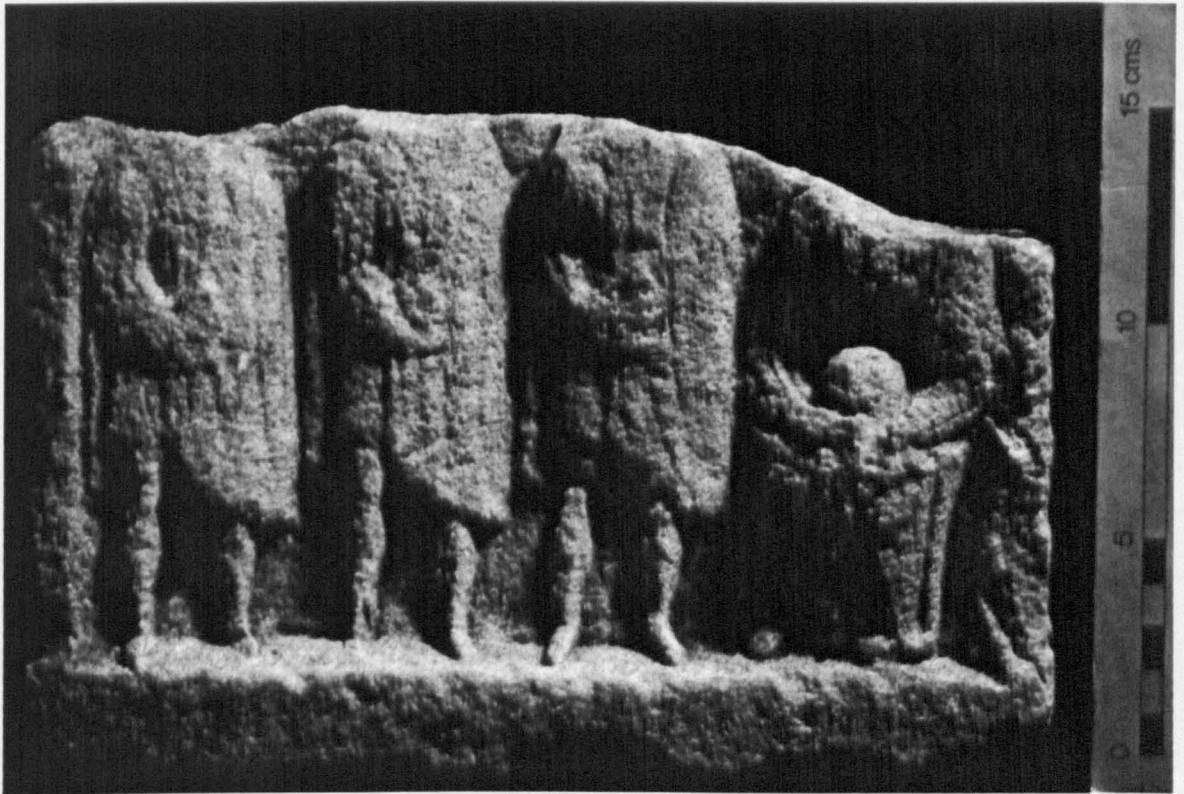
Fig 4.5 *Mater* and *genii cucullati* from Stratton, Glos. (Robert Wilkins FSA reproduced courtesy of Institute of Archaeology, Oxford).

So, the main interpretation of the function of the *mater* and her attendant *genii cucullati* has been a general association with fertility. In the quest to emphasis fertility, the hood has been seen as having phallic symbolism and has even been related to breast imagery (Green 1992:104). Webster provides a neat summary of previous scholarly opinion on the symbolism and attributes of the *genii cucullati* showing how generalised and compounded the fertility interpretation can become:

'It is possible, as M.W.Deonna in his major study has suggested, that the phallic shape of the cucullus and its all-enveloping quality symbolised mystery and darkness as well as the death-regeneration cycle. He concludes that, in Professor Toynbee's words, "they were deities of death and after-life, of life through death, of healing and of fertility, as well as acting as protection from all kinds of evil". Like many other deities, they obviously represent the whole cycle of birth, death and regeneration.' (Webster 1986:67)

This would seem quite a wide sphere of influence for what Webster then explains are minor spirits due to their classification as *genii*; a strange contradiction, given this is a modern designation based on an altar from Germany and none of the hooded figures from Britain are ever named or classified as such. The creators of the images might possibly have intended to communicate through symbolism some of what has been interpreted from the iconography of the *genii cucullati*. However, in many cases a concern with fertility would have had a specific focus. For example, in the wine producing regions of Gaul the iconography of certain deities show associations with viticulture that was, and still is, an important part of the local economy (Green 1992:226). The cult images testify that this major concern of the population came under the influence of the deities depicted in sculpture. As an example that Roman provincial religious expression can be intimately connected with local economy, this may seem rather obvious, but it is one of the few where a specific connection can be easily made. A more prosaic interpretation than generalised fertility can be suggested for linking the iconography of the *genii cucullati* with sheep husbandry as an important form of economic production in Roman Britain.

4.6 - Piggott and Later Prehistoric Pastoralism

When considering the native economy of northern Britain, Stuart Piggott suggested a connection between a wool industry in the region, the heavy cloaks of the *genii cucullati*

and the *byrrus britannicus*, the British hooded cloak listed in Diocletian's Edict of Prices (Piggott 1958:27). The only two British items to appear in the Emperor's price-list are both woollen products, which arguably would mean that textiles were Britain's primary industry. The *tapetia* were heavy woollen rugs with British first and second class ranked above all the rest at the top of its section and therefore considered the best in the Empire (Wild 2002). Of greater relevance for Piggott was the *byrrus*, the hooded wool cape that was also a high quality product, judging by its price (Wild 1982: 120). These two items demonstrate the importance of the British wool industry and Piggott suggested that the appearance of the *genii cucullati* symbolically represented one of those products. When the iconography of the *genii cucullati* are considered within the context of economic specialisation in Roman Britain, the fertility interpretation can be related more specifically to the pastoralist production of woollen textile industries. While Piggott's model of the economy of Northern Britain requires up-dating from its overwhelming pastoralist focus and his famous 'Celtic cowboys', his initial suggestion for the *genii cucullati* leads us into a more specific interpretation of the symbolism than generalised fertility. Considering ritual practice within the wider context of socioeconomic activity broadens out the interpretative potential, but also allows interpretation to focus in on a more precise motivation behind these particular examples of symbolic representation. The ritualisation of pastoral production, symbolically represented by the *cucullati* and their associated iconography, illustrates the socioeconomic context of ritual practice in Roman Britain.

Piggott commented on how British cloaks held their price into the eighth century AD, and the products of the wool industry continued to be a valuable export into the Middle Ages (Piggott 1958:27). Unfortunately, Piggott's study was heavily reliant on historical analogy, although subsequent study supports his inference that the textile industry was of great importance to the economy of Roman Britain (Wild 2002). Pre- and post-conquest classical writers, such as Strabo and Pomponius Mela, perpetuate the stereotype that Britain was rich in flocks of sheep (Wild 1982: 116). Caesar (*De Bello Gallico* V,14) states that coastal populations of Britain were far more civilised than those living inland who had a diet of milk and meat, but this is an example of colonial discourse that implies decreasing civilisation with increasing distance from the civilised Mediterranean world. The danger of generalising about the economies of Later Prehistoric and Roman Britain by differentiating between a predominantly pastoral north of 'Celtic cowboys' and an arable farming southern Britain perpetuates that colonial discourse and is tied in with the environmental determinism of Fox's division into the highland and lowland zones of Britain (Fox 1931).

Piggott's model for Later Prehistoric and Roman Northern Britain of a purely pastoral society has been refuted by more recent studies, which show that the hills and valleys formed a mosaic of upland and lowland resources with mixed farming strategies pre-dominating (Miles 1989:119). The environmentally determinist view that topography, soils and climate dictated Later Prehistoric subsistence strategies is now seen to be too simplistic (van der Veen 1992). There is evidence of regional variations between the eastern and western sides of the high Pennines, with pollen samples indicating a more forested landscape in the west in contrast to the pre-conquest deforestation and agricultural intensification of the northeast (Huntley 1999:49-55). For the Roman period, military supply in Fox's Highland zone, including grain, could have been largely derived from the taxation and procurement of local resources (Davies 2002; Hanson 2002). Although providing a stimulus to local economies, this would have been of debatable benefit to the local population and is reflected in the impoverished material record of rural settlement in the frontier zone. However, the importance of sheep husbandry to local economies should not be under-estimated as sheep are suited to seasonal grazing in a variety of topographic positions, utilising lowland and upland resources on a seasonal basis. Although the damper conditions of valley bottoms do not favour sheep husbandry, it may not have been the marginal upland activity of the early modern era (Grant 1984:104). Cattle, being more expensive to keep, have been suggested as indicators of wealth (Haselgove 1999:268) and in tandem with their reliance on water and use in traction would have kept them closer to settlements. Flocks of sheep are more mobile than cattle, not as reliant on water supply and generally require lower labour input, forming a low-maintenance foundation for pastoralist production and mixed farming.

Unfortunately faunal assemblages are unavailable for many areas of northern Britain because the mostly acidic soils hamper preservation (Hambleton 1999:16) and evidence for pastoralist production must still be gleaned from limited resources and wider analogy. Spindle whorls, loom weights, bone weaving combs and other tools associated with spinning and weaving are common in finds assemblages throughout Britain, although bone weaving combs do not survive as well in the northern acidic soils. These demonstrate the everyday importance of wool production in the archaeological record for both the Iron Age and Roman periods (Grant 1989:136). The processing of raw wool and weaving are tasks that are not seasonally determined, but can be carried out at any time of the year. Woollen textile production was most likely to have been organised on a small-scale during the Late Iron Age and Roman period, judging from the widespread distribution

of items associated with weaving (Wild 1982:119). However, excavations at the Roman fort and *vicus* at Vindolanda near Hadrian's Wall have produced numerous examples of woollen fabrics that support the suggestion of woollen manufacturing in this region (Wild 2002). Economic specialisation away from the military zone is also indicated by the founding of a *gynaecium* at one of the places named *Venta[?]*, probably Winchester, producing woollen garments for the Late Roman army (Wild 2002:29).

In general, during the Roman period, there was an increase in regionally specialised economic strategies (Hambleton 1999:60). Broad variations suggest that the growth of cattle-raising was linked to Roman urban and military areas, while many rural sites displayed continuity with Iron Age patterns and the predominance of sheep (Grant 1989:136). Although not a typical northern settlement site and relatively short-lived, indications from Stanwick, the large lowland enclosure or *oppida*-site in the Tees valley, suggest that proportions of sheep were higher in the earliest phases (late first century BC) with a gradual increase in the proportions of cattle bone during the later phases of the first century AD (Hambleton 1999: 111). Changes in the ratios of animal proportions, as at Stanwick, are often seen as precocious adoption of a 'Romanised' diet, but could equally represent the increasing wealth of the site according to Late Iron Age regimes of value or be linked to the intensification of arable production in the Durham lowlands. The generalised model for the rest of the country suggests that faunal assemblages shift in proportional emphasis from sheep to cattle during the Iron Age to Roman transition and this is often seen as an indicator of Romanisation (Albarella 2007). Butchery patterns characteristic of more intensive meat production are certainly a feature of military and urban sites (King 1984). However, the post-conquest growth in the economic importance of cattle are not simply dietary changes or Romanisation, but also indicate wider agricultural strategies and the need to increase arable productive output through intensive ploughing, using oxen as traction, and allowing expansion into heavier soils. The fact that cattle were slaughtered when adult at most early sites would support this suggestion as meat stock tend to be slaughtered on the verge of maturity, minimising input when muscle mass is at an optimum (Albarella 2007:397).

Piggott's model over-emphasised the pastoral nature of northern society, but sheep husbandry too is rarely mutually exclusive from the wider agricultural system. Sheep are vital to the maintenance of mixed farming regimes through their role in field rotation systems, grazing on fallow fields, keeping weed and shrub-growth down and fertilising the soil with manure (Cunliffe 1991:380; Hambleton 1999:59). Successful sheep husbandry

embodied 'fertility' on many levels and would have been a strategy for displays of social prestige, reciprocal exchange and ensuring fertility through crop rotation and managed grazing. The generalisation that sheep numbers increase relative to cattle in the British Late Iron Age may be a result of earlier pre-conquest strategies of mixed farming intensification with sheep playing an important role in maintaining cultivation and providing a low-maintenance, low-input resource (Albarella 2007:395). Different strategies for intensification would result from different regimes of value affecting the maintenance of traditional practices and the reception of innovations, with different cultural perceptions about certain animals influencing land-use, husbandry practices and diet, as well as the ritualisation of these everyday concerns (see Comaroff & Comaroff 2005 with comments by Creighton and Turgeon).

4.7 - Sheep husbandry and secondary products of dairy and wool

In general, studies have shown that meat production was not the focus for sheep husbandry in Later Prehistoric and Roman Britain. Sheep can be utilised for all of the potential resources they provide, which include dairy, blood, wool and manure whilst alive, and meat, fat, bone, skin, gut and horn after slaughter (Ryder 1983:713). Most ancient faunal assemblages indicate a balanced management strategy that sought to maximise the availability of all those resources according to their relative importance. If nutritional concerns are assumed to be paramount, then milk production is by far the most efficient way of utilising the energy potential of sheep husbandry (Ryder 1983:720). Where specific management strategies for sheep can be determined from the faunal assemblages of the first millennia BC and AD they seem to have been geared towards the secondary products of milk and wool (Wild 1982:113–114; Grant 1989:136). As late as the fourth century AD, British sheep were described as "distended with milk and loaded down with fleece" (*Panegyricus Constantino Augusto* VI, 9).

The milking of sheep was a common practice in the pre-modern era (Ryder 1983:720–725). Challinor (2004) has shown that dairy products from sheep continued to be used throughout the Medieval period and into the nineteenth century in remoter parts of the British Isles and has begun research on pottery assemblages from Shetland in order to show the importance of dairy produce in later prehistory. The analysis of residues from pottery vessels indicates that dairying was an important part of Iron Age farming practices, supplementing evidence for husbandry patterns that had previously relied on faunal analysis (Evershed *et al.* 2005). The intensification of sheep husbandry began as early as

the Middle Bronze Age, in tandem with other forms of agricultural intensification, and faunal assemblages indicate that some sheep flocks were closely managed for milk production (Serjeantson 2007). Agricultural intensification and population growth leads to pressure on communities to maximise output, and dairy production has been shown to be ten times more efficient in realising energy potential than meat production.

Cows obviously form an important part of dairy production, but are considered much more valuable than sheep for their meat. Roman writers considered cow's milk inferior to the milk of sheep and goats (Columella *Rust.* VII.2.1), and regarded ewe's milk as the most nourishing (Ryder 1983:721). Sheep's milk contains double the fat and protein content compared to cow's milk and is particularly suitable for cheese making. Cheeses are high-energy foodstuffs that require no cooking, are easily stored through winter, and are the most efficient way of utilising dairy products throughout the year. Modern society is used to all-year-round availability of dairy products, but dairy production was previously seasonally determined and features prominently in pre-modern calendars. The Irish festivals of Imbolc and Beltain are normally placed in the Gregorian calendar on February 1st and May 1st respectively, but in practice were signified by important moments in the pastoral cycle. Imbolc was heralded by the lactation of ewes at the beginning of spring and Beltain was at the beginning of summer when dairy production was at its peak. Many folkways and lore survive from Ireland concerned with dairy production, particularly around the festival of Beltain. These represent examples of the sort of taboos, ritualised practices and festivities that accompanied these crucial periods in the annual economic cycle (Lysaght 1994:208-229).

The beginning of summer was the best time for removing the winter growth of wool, and butter, milk and a host of other fresh dairy delicacies were in abundance. At this time of plenty, dairy products also needed to be preserved and stored so that they were available throughout the rest of the year. Butter production requires approximately 2.3 times more milk per unit than cheese, with butter more prone to contamination and ruin. Cheese making is a more viable, sustainable and stable option than other dairy products and would be an essential food resource for storage through the lean winter months (Challinor 2004:165–166). The upper roof spaces of British roundhouses would be ideal storage spaces for foodstuffs because of the drying and antiseptic qualities of the circulating smoke and smoked or aged cheese would seem a particularly plausible way of making seasonally determined nutritional resources available throughout the year. Regional cheese varieties were already recognised during the Roman period with the most

famous example being Roquefort, praised by Pliny the Elder in AD 79 (Ryder 1983:722). The round, oval or cake-like objects frequently displayed and offered by the *genii cucullati* and *mater* could just as easily be interpreted as cheeses in their many and varied traditional forms, (Fig.4.6 & 4.7). The classical proto-type of depicting cakes and fruits may have been adapted or intended for more culturally appropriate produce.

Fig.4.6 A small example of the many forms of traditional and artesian cheeses (A. Wilson)

Fig.4.7 Offering pastoral products?

The *genii cucullati* symbolically represent the other main by-product of sheep husbandry: wool. Green comments that 'a striking feature of the iconography of the *cucullati* is "the homogeneity of their dress" (1992:104). There is actually significant variation in the lengths and styles of garments, but Green is essentially correct in that the hooded cloak is a primary symbol intended for communication by these sculpted images. The popularity of the types of hooded garments and woollen cloaks worn by the *cucullati* is attested by numerous other images (e.g. hooded pilgrims in Aldhouse-Green 1999) and various literary references (Webster 1986:66), indicating how suitable and common this garb was for outdoor wear and travelling. A heavy woollen cloak would have afforded protection from the elements for the shepherds who were responsible for the care and protection of the flocks. The shepherds were not only an integral part of the process that produced the hooded cloaks, but would have been one of the primary users. Their appearance could have become intimately associated with their role and one of the most important by-products. The *cucullati* may be the symbolic equivalent, guardian spirits of the flocks, which would account for their hooded cloaks and the protective aspect of their iconography. Davidson suggested a similar function for the *cucullati* as antecedents to the later widespread folklore of pucks, brownies and other spirit helpers (1989:111–115). Curiously, this later folklore incorporates motifs of clothing and especially cloaks, as well as a frequent association with dairy production. In order to establish a closer association between the *genii cucullati* and sheep husbandry it will be necessary to examine the local context in southwest Britain, particularly rural sites where images of the *genii cucullati* have been found and where faunal assemblages from the Roman period are more informative than for northern rural sites.

4.8 - The *genii cucullati* in a local context

Care must always be taken when using evidence from southern Britain and applying it uncritically to other parts of the country, but the links in iconography and pastoralist production between upland regions in the north and southwest encourage a cautious analogy. Gloucestershire and the Cotswolds are historically major sheep rearing and wool producing areas of the country, as are the upland areas surrounding the northern frontier. As Piggott suggested, the importance of these local economies may provide a genuine connection between the two areas where the *genii cucullati* are found, but more than historical analogy is needed to support this. As with the north, generalisation glosses over what would have been a myriad of regional systems, even between regions on either side

of the Cotswolds (Moore 2006). However, the general pattern for central and western southern Britain shows that sheep predominated in animal husbandry regimes during the Iron Age (Grant 1989: 136; Hambleton 1999) and this pattern of the increasing importance of sheep in the Late Iron Age has been recently confirmed for central and eastern Britain (Albarella 2007). By the Roman period, samples from the southwest and south-central Britain show an emphasis on older animals indicating that some specialisation for wool production may have become more important (Grant 1984:107) and there is some evidence for selective breeding (Maltby 1998: 426–7). Sheep husbandry and a focus on secondary products seems to have retained its importance in areas that were best suited to this economic practice, where it was not only the most viable option, but also the traditional one.

The emphasis on cattle husbandry indicated by an increase in the proportion of cattle bones in faunal assemblages across Britain during the Roman period is largely linked to urban and military sites and the growth of nucleated settlements (King 1984), while rural sites retained the traditional focus on sheep husbandry (Albarella 2007). Changes in the proportion of species indicate a substantial reconfiguration of the farming economy, but within these generalisations numerous subtleties are lost. The expansion of arable land through the intensification of ploughing may explain the increased importance of cattle in the Roman period (Albarella 2007:397), while the earlier increase in sheep numbers in relation to pigs and cattle during the Iron Age (Cunliffe 1991: 173) may indicate the importance of sheep husbandry in mixed farming regimes. As alternative strategies for intensification, different animal husbandry regimes are rarely mutually exclusive from arable farming. The Roman period division between rural settlement with sheep dominated faunal assemblages and urban/military with cattle dominated assemblages may represent different scales of intensification or adherence to different strategies for increasing production, as much as different ethnic diets. Dividing this along rural and urban/military lines moves interpretation away from ethnicity, but caution should be exercised about creating another Roman-native dichotomy. Economic specialisation may have been regionally and resource dependent (Hambleton 1999:60). Different regimes of value would have been concurrent within Roman Britain and the practices associated with certain species would have been contingent on a host of other factors ranging from dietary preference, previous subsistence strategies, taxation, relationship with military and civilian authorities, environmental factors and even religious conventions.

Any attempted distinction between steak-eating Romans and mutton (or cheese) fed natives is a simplification and polarisation of what would have been much more complex interactions and adaptive strategies. The post-conquest focus on cattle husbandry may be a result of a need to feed the Roman army, including auxiliary units from all over the Empire, using improved cattle breeds imported from the continent (King 2001). This might be thought of as the importation of a continental diet, rather than assigning a strictly Roman ethnic origin. For the Roman period, the site at Wilcote, Oxfordshire, might be taken as a typical 'native' site in central southern Britain, with greater proportions of sheep bones in the faunal assemblage, and yet its origins are as a Roman military staging post. Even in this distinctly military initial stage, which had the much more variable assemblage characteristic of military sites, sheep bones predominated. This is probably due to the procurement and availability of local resources and suggests that sheep were the focus of local husbandry regimes. Consequently during the later de-militarised phases, Wilcote reverts even more to type, again reflecting local economic strategies. Several unusual deposits of articulated sheep and dogs from the later phases have even been interpreted as ritualised acts marking the revitalisation of traditional practices related to pastoralist production (Hamshaw-Thomas 1993: 176–177).

The two sites of Wycomb and Lower Slaughter in Gloucestershire have produced sculpted images of *genii cucullati* and stand out as rural religious centres, with Wycomb comparable to other rural temples from the Cotswolds, such as Uley. There were many problems in recovery, preservation and consequently interpretation of the faunal assemblages from these sites, but sheep/goat bones were generally better represented, especially from the Syreford Mill excavations, which have been interpreted as typical of traditional economies or in common academic parlance, Roman period 'native' rural settlement (Timby 1998:350; Maltby 1998:428). The ditched compounds and enclosures at Syreford Mill, Wycomb, Lower Slaughter and nearby Bourton-on-the-Water, indicate the importance of stock management, and these sites exhibit the continuation of roundhouses and other vernacular construction traditions (Timby 1998:350, 388–389). Textile manufacture is indicated by common finds of loom weights, spindle whorls and needles at all the sites, and iron shears have also been found at Springhill, Bourton and Lower Slaughter (Timby 1998:359, 382, 388–389). Mortaria and colanders are well represented at Lower Slaughter, and these are the type of vessels that would be particularly suitable for the other major pastoralist product, cheese-making. Examining the local context of Wycomb and Lower Slaughter shows the importance of sheep husbandry in the

archaeological record, with an economic focus on the secondary products of wool and dairy. A concern with pastoralist production can also be seen reflected in the religious iconography from the area.

Strong evidence for the cult of Minerva has been noted for the Cotswold region. Roman Minerva was, amongst other things, the craft-patron of weaving and spinning. The more classical depictions of Minerva may mask (or reveal) the cult of a local goddess. Yeates proposed that these, and the *mater* who appears with the *cucullati,* are examples of a tribal goddess of the Dobunni (2006). Two examples of 'native' depictions of Minerva were deposited in Well 5 at Lower Slaughter along with other sculptures depicting two triads of *genii cucullati*, a warrior triad and an altar depicting a local god and a ram. There is no better symbol than the ram for embodiment of the fertility of sheep flocks. The importance of pastoralist production within the local economy is reflected in the range of symbolic elements in the iconography recovered from Well 5. The combination of goddess, local god, ram and *genii cucullati* from Well 5 at Lower Slaughter invites comparison with other imagery from the southwest that can be used to highlight the relationship with pastoralist production, especially inferences made from a sculpted relief from Bath (*CSIR* 1.2:39).

4.9 - A relief sculpture from Bath, (*CSIR* 1.2:39).

The inter-relationship between the four iconographic images that appear on the relief carving from Bath confirm that the previously theorised concern with fertility can be more specifically related to pastoralist production in Roman Britain. During the excavations of 1878–1890 at the Roman religious complex of Bath, a small relief carving (Fig.4.2) was discovered (*CSIR* 1.2:39). Four image types are depicted: two main figures of a male and a female deity, representing Mercury and a divine consort, who has the attribute of a vessel and stirring implement. Beneath them are the three smaller cloaked figures referred to collectively as *genii cucullati*, and an animal identified as a ram (Cunliffe and Fulford 1982:11; Ross 1974:428). Ross favoured an interpretation of the male and female deities as Loucetius Mars and Nemetona because of an altar (RIB 140), also from Bath, dedicated by Peregrinus, who identifies himself as a Treveran. However, there is no information linking the sculpted relief to the altar. The altar is also the only British dedication to Loucetius Mars and Nemetona, who are more commonly found on the west bank of the Rhine, where Peregrinus claims to hail from. The images on the Bath relief can be shown to have parallels with many of the monuments already discussed and must

therefore be considered in their local context rather than as an imported phenomenon. As a caveat, Ross herself conceded that the symbolism of the Bath sculpted relief was essentially British, markedly regional and pointed to the *genii cucullati* as an especially insular feature (Ross 1974:271).

Toynbee suggested that the male god was Mercury (1964:158), which is supported by his usual caduceus attribute, but this in turn has led to a speculative designation of the couple as British equivalents of Mercury and Rosmerta, another divine couple with a very widespread continental distribution, but with no epigraphic evidence for their worship from Britain. A cluster of similar divine couple sculptures from the Cotswold region frequently come under the heading of Mercury and 'Rosmerta' (*CSIR* vol.1.7:78–82; Henig 1993:26–28). Just as with the *genii cucullati,* the Cotswold sculptures depicting a divine couple are never accompanied by epigraphy, and this seems to have largely hindered interpretation, hence the search for continental equations. The lack of epigraphy has the potential to be just as significant as any continental parallels and can be interpreted as resistance (c.f. Webster 2003:49), or at least characteristic of many local cult that did not adopt the epigraphic habit. The purpose of this discussion is not to completely deconstruct the labels that have been applied to the divine couple and the *genii cucullati*, but merely to point out the continental origin of many of the epigraphic labels assigned to them and create an awareness of how these can influence interpretation. In order to avoid the negative impact of deconstruction, the term *genii cucullati* is still employed here, as it is a fair, descriptive label.

4.10 - The Divine Couple in Britain: Mercury and Rosmerta?

There are several sculpted images of the divine couple from the south west of Britain that closely resemble the Bath relief (*CSIR* 1.7:78–80; Henig 1993:26–7). The best preserved is from Gloucester (Fig.4.8), but a scatter of others are known from Cirencester (*CSIR* 1.7:81), Wellow in Somerset and Nettleton, Wiltshire (*CSIR* 1.2:116–117). Although unnamed, these sculptures have been linked to the continental depictions of Mercury and the 'native' consort, Rosmerta, 'the Great Provider'. Several readings of this divine marriage using post-colonial theory and gender perspectives have recently been proposed (Webster 1997:325–327; Aldhouse-Green 2003a:97). Yet again, within the concept of the divine couple as it occurs in iconography throughout Northern Europe is a general acknowledgement that the partnership promoted fertility (Aldhouse-Green 2003a).

Fig 4.8. 'Mercury and Rosmerta'? The divine marriage from Gloucester (Gloucester museum)

In particular, the fertile imagery of the goddess is revealed through a variety of symbols such as cornucopia, vessels (Green 1992:66–67), and the rounded globular objects that were modelled on classical prototypes of fruits, but are here suggested as representing the 'fruits' of dairy production. Rosmerta's name means 'the Great Provider' and Mercury and Rosmerta as they appear on the continent epitomise this type of iconographic image, to which the British examples undoubtedly bear some resemblance. Rosmerta has sometimes been seen as simply a suitable feminine accompaniment to the cult of Mercury, but she is depicted independently and with consistent attributes in Burgundy. The identification of the British goddess as Rosmerta is tenuous, although she may be a related type of deity. The vessel attribute that the goddess consistently possesses in Britain suggests that, like Rosmerta, she was a divine entity in her own right, independent of her consort (Green 1992:180).

The goddess appears on numerous examples with what has been described as "a magic tub with its bands of binding" (Webster 1986: Plate 10), and what Green has perhaps more objectively described as a wooden iron-bound bucket, often with stirring implement (Green 1992:180). More recently, Aldhouse-Green has suggested they resemble the wooden buckets found in Late Iron Age burial contexts (2003b:41–42). Building on previous work suggesting that the 'cudae' inscription from Daglingworth contains an onomastic root for the Cotswolds (Yeates 2004:2–8), and considering the same group of sculpture as here, the most recent theory has used the 'burial buckets' to establish a material connection to the Iron Age as a precedent for the cult of a tribal goddess of the Dobunni (Yeates 2006). There is a recognisable regional grouping of inter-related imagery from the Cotswolds and surrounding areas, including the cucullati and mater, the goddess with the vessel, and the divine couple, but the material basis of Yeates' theory relies on assumptions about social and ritual continuity between later prehistoric tribal groups and Roman civitas, which has been questioned by other more empirical studies (Moore 2006). Images of both the cucullati and the goddess with the vessel are known from beyond the Cotswold region, and especially the examples from along the northern frontier suggests that these cult images may relate to wider practices and beliefs.

Hilda Ellis Davidson (1999:93) has provided the most convincing explanation for the bucket and stirring implement in a study of the relationship between goddesses and dairy production in Northern Europe. She has suggested that most examples of the 'magic tub' closely resemble a very functional and mundane item: the old-fashioned upright churn

variously known as a dash-, stand-, or plunger churn that was historically used for dairying throughout Britain and on isolated farms in the Pennines up until the nineteenth century. Unaccompanied images of this goddess with the upright churn have also been found at Lemington, Gloucestershire (*CSIR* 1.7:94; Henig 1993:32), Stitchcombe in Wiltshire (*CSIR* 1.2:119) Corbridge (Fig.4.9), and Newcastle (*CSIR* 1.1:115, 183; Phillips 1977:42, 59–60), and her appearance without her consort suggests that she is a vernacular goddess whose attributes indicate a sphere of influence encompassing dairy production. This interpretation of the symbolism of the goddess with the vessel cross-references with the *genii cucullati,* and the attributes of both indexically refer to the main by-products of pastoralist production. How might the goddess' proposed link to dairy production reflect on the divine marriage?

Details of Mercury on the Bath relief are ambiguous because the carving is worn. There also seems to have been a deliberate ambiguity in some of the British depictions of Mercury, with some showing the wings of the *petasus* directly attached to his head as a zoomorphic attribute rather than the classical standard of the winged helmet. The depiction of zoomorphic divine images has more in common with traditional pre-conquest imagery in Northern Europe than with the classical artistic canon (Webster 2003:40). Zoomorphic attributes are never given to Olympian gods, but these do feature on chaotic mythological characters such as Giants and Titans (Hinds 1995). The common symbolism of rams, horns and snakes in various combinations, may have served to establish connections between the northern European horned god and the classical Mercury, with examples from both Gaul and Britain (Ross 1974:172–221). A relief of a horned god from Cirencester shows the common attributes of a pair of ram-horned serpents, and on either side of the horns what has been interpreted as the open tops of purses filled with coins (Ross 1974: 185). A crude carving of a horned figure from Great Chesters on the northern frontier also holds Mercury's caduceus attribute (Fig.4.10). Ross suggested that the conflation of Mercury with 'the horned god of the North' was through the role of protector of the flocks, which fell under Mercury's jurisdiction in highland areas of the Mediterranean (1961:77).

In the iconography of the northwest provinces a ram or sheep usually replaced Mercury's goat as pastoralist cult animal, exemplified by the Bath relief. In Britain and Gaul, the ram was a more appropriate accompaniment for Mercury, representing sheep husbandry as a common economic practice. Surprisingly, the ram on the Bath monument is the only one of the images whose fertile symbolism has been superseded by focusing on its aggressive characteristics.

Fig.4.9 Goddess stirring a churn from Corbridge (English Heritage).

Fig.4.10 Horned Mercury from Great Chesters

Ross, relying on the abstracted symbolism of the altars from Lower Slaughter, interprets the ram as an "emblem of war" linked with native warrior gods and *genii cucullati*, (1974:243–244). This interpretation works from general assumptions about warlike Celtic societies rather than considering the sculpture in its local context. However, for the following interpretation of the Bath relief it is necessary to emphasise the pastoral role of Mercury and the fertility aspects of the ram as a primary factor in sheep husbandry.

The structuring of the Bath relief displays a conscious composition through the deliberate counterpoised balancing of imagery. Mercury is positioned diagonally opposite to the ram with which he would normally be associated and the goddess with the churn diagonally opposite the *genii cucullati*. The *Mater* who frequently appears with the *cucullati* elsewhere is not depicted with dairying apparatus, but the Bath relief appears to reference the relationship between goddess and *cucullati*, using it as an artistic balancing principle, emphasising the inter-connection of the various elements as they appear elsewhere, and the harmony of the piece as a whole. Rather than a vague or generalised notion of fertility, this relief provides multiple connections to specific socioeconomic practices associated with sheep husbandry. The milking of sheep formed a vital part of dairy production indicated by the churn and the symbolism of the divine marriage as expressed on the Bath relief could be meant to facilitate the productivity of the secondary products associated with vital socioeconomic practices. The globular offerings that the *genii cucullati* and accompanying goddess are depicted with elsewhere could represent cheeses in their traditional forms and the cloaks of the *cucullati* indicate textile production. The multiple cross-referencing between the ram as the embodiment of fertility, pastoral protector Mercury and the other two vernacular image-types are established through the symbolism and attributes of the goddess with the churn and the *genii cucullati* each representing the main secondary products of sheep husbandry: dairy and wool.

4.11 - Discussion

A religious revolution was made possible by the Roman conquests and the establishment of the imperial system. Cults became disembedded from their original cultural background and a plurality of belief became possible, separate from cultural and ethnic identity (Woolf 2005). This is especially apparent from a pan-European perspective when looking at military contexts or the higher social levels (Revell 2007), but the possibility of discrepant experiences and identities in the Roman provinces should also be expected (Mattingly 2004). In the context of Roman Britain these would be most apparent away from urban

and military areas, in rural settlements like Lower Slaughter. Traditional practices could be maintained, especially well-adapted economic systems and vibrant local cults, but this was not a timeless rural idyll. In rural Roman Britain local society interfaced with the wider cultural situation of the Empire and this is even more of a truism for the rural population of the northern frontier. The socioeconomic context of ritual practice was adapted, transformed and re-constituted in response to the needs and wants of the local population, but also under the influence of wider socio-cultural forces brought about by incorporation and participation in the imperial system. Substantial change could be stimulated across the socio-cultural sphere as demonstrated by the relative shift in importance of cattle and sheep in animal husbandry, and the adoption of what were initially foreign forms of cult worship.

Stone-carved representations of anthropomorphic divine beings are an importation into Britain of an ideo-technic device common within the Mediterranean world. This new religious art visually exemplified negotiation and adaptation with significant levels of variation, from close copies of metropolitan archetypes to highly idiosyncratic forms (Webster 2003). The British depictions of Mercury, the goddess with the churn and the *cucullati* represent the religious reflex of traditional, local economic practices expressed through the new medium of stone sculpture, and based on classical models, but usually without epigraphy. Webster has shown how classical artistic proto-types could be appropriated by local artists through mimesis or may be ambiguously treated (like Mercury's horns/wings) with the intention of depicting more locally appropriate imagery, as has been suggested for the fruits of dairy production held by the goddess and *cucullati* mimicking classical fruits of abundance (Webster 2003: 40). Post-colonial discourse analysis might consider these as subtle resistance strategies. The deposition of the sculpture in Well 5 at Lower Slaughter suggests ritual development through time and further adaptation through secondary rites or possible iconoclasm. Deposition in wells, pits and shafts has been seen by some as a revitalisation of Later Prehistoric ritual practice (Clark 1997 & 1999; Fulford 2001), while others see this type of deposition as an innovation of the Roman period (Webster 1997c). Deposition in wells and pits might be referencing older practices and beliefs, as the subjects depicted in iconography did, but should be considered as renovation; the reconciliation of tradition and innovation (Woolf 2001:182). Strategies of adoption and adaptation are inscribed on material culture through lived practices, and the context of use and deposition can reveal as much about the

perceived and projected identities of those involved in ritual practice as the origin of the object can (see Chapter 7).

Adaptation as a characteristic of hybridisation will be pursued in Chapter 5 as levels of variation in practice can also be seen on votive altars and linked to the identity of dedicants and cult-worship. Further examples are redolent in the more prosaic examples of the material culture of Roman Britain. Mortaria and colanders were well represented at Lower Slaughter, and were presented as the type of vessels that would be particularly suitable for cheese-making. Pottery forms of cheese press and strainer were produced in military kilns at Longthorpe and Holt, in civilian contexts in 2nd century Colchester and throughout the life of the South Yorkshire pottery industry. These examples remain a minority and most cheese in Roman Britain would have been made using organic implements continuing long-established traditions of pastoralist production (Cool 2006 96-7). However, Britain stands out as a particularly heavy consumer of coarse pottery mortaria forms and this type may have been adapted to suit local dairying practices. In the early days of mortaria studies the equation between mortaria and the adoption of Roman food preparation was questioned and one alternative suggestion was that the bowls were used in cheese-making with the grits providing a reservoir of bacteria for the curding process (Oswald 1943:45-63).

As one of the commonest pottery forms in Roman Britain it would be easy to associate mortaria with Roman foodways and 'Romanised' food preparation. However, as with Samian ware, using material culture as an ethnic indicator is fraught with difficulty in colonial situations and such distinctions become blurred through practice and the juxtaposition of alternative regimes of value (Turgeon 2005). Different uses of some forms of material culture points towards imitation and appropriation in the construction and co-existence of alternative regimes of value (Comaroff & Comaroff 2005). The circulation of some objects is more exclusive in colonial situations, while others, such as mortaria, operate across cultural boundaries being appropriated and converted to traditional practices (Turgeon 2005: 136). The unusual popularity of mortaria in Roman Britain is emphasised by the fact that this pottery form is actually much more rare in Italy (Cool 2006:43-45). Not only do mortaria occur on remote British sites far from towns, forts and distribution points, but there was a disproportionate interest in the acquisition of them for rural sites, where from an early date they form a higher percentage within assemblages than in urban areas (Cool 2004 Table 2). The frequency of mortaria on rural sites, that seem to have little use for other types of material culture common to the Roman provinces, is striking. The translation of this

popular form of material culture into vernacular contexts may have led to a variety of uses, but cheese-making seems particularly appropriate. Popularity and alternative production of a range of specialised forms suggests the development of a vernacular cuisine or vernacular practices associated with this particular example of material culture.

Similarly, the embedded beliefs of provincial populations and dis-embedded classical Graeco-Roman religion (North 1992) need not remain polarised once the generative process of the conquest quickens the mechanisms of exchange between them. Considering the iconography in this study as Romano-British is only useful in a temporal-spatial sense in that it is located in Britain after the Roman conquest. The traditional approach of Romano-Celtic syncretism would encourage trying to establish an ethnic origin for the cult, dissecting and measuring Roman and native elements. What should be clear from this discussion is that the cult iconography of the *genii cucullati* and associated deities is something new to post-conquest Britain. There are no pre-conquest examples of these images, but they do reflect traditional forms of socioeconomic practice that emphasised sheep husbandry. The classical role of Mercury as pastoralist guardian struck a resonance with the local population's continuing concerns with pastoralist production. While this encouraged vernacular cult expression through the divine marriage of pastoral Mercury and the British dairy goddess, this is not the simple fusion of Roman and 'native'. This cult iconography signifies multiple inter-related influences, dependent on time and place, but also especially the socioeconomic context of ritual practice.

The approach taken in this thesis is similar to the method that Ton Derks (1998) employed in *Gods, Temples and Ritual Practices*. One of his aims was to investigate how religious concepts and practices were interwoven with the social and political order and other aspects of everyday life in Late Iron Age and Roman Northern Gaul. Derks considers his study area to be "a single interacting whole" (1998, 10-11). He reasoned that the different spheres of economics, politics and religion were inextricably linked, because the means of production, the administration of the community and the leadership of cult worship were usually all under the control of the same small group of people. Derks takes what he calls an 'ecological approach' where landscape, soil and climate in Northern Europe dictate methods of subsistence, and the values and ideas of a group are intimately related to these environmental and social realities. Societies represent and reproduce their values and ideas through their material culture, but many anthropologists have argued that it is through ritual symbolism and religious life that these vital concepts are most often revealed (Derks 1998:18-24).

One of the most interesting conclusions of Derks' research was to show the relationship between socioeconomic practices and the type of classical deity chosen for worship or affiliation with the tribal deity after the Roman conquest. Derks noted a correspondence between the type of soil and geology, the subsistence strategy and the classical deity who was adopted for worship. Subsistence strategy was divided into two broad categories based on two broad landscape distinctions. Firstly, a villa landscape based on loess soils where arable farming and viticulture predominated, and secondly in the lower Rhineland a largely pastoralist economy represented in the settlement record by *Wohnstallhaus,* a vernacular building style that showed significant continuity from the pre-Roman period and had notable stalling areas for livestock inside the household structure (Derks 1998, 55-66). Within these two different regions epigraphic dedications to Mars predominate in the villa economy zone and the adoption of Hercules can be seen in areas where cattle-breeding was employed. Derks suggests that the reasoning behind these choices of deity relates to the local interpretation of the myths and associations of these two deities. He cites Mars as a guardian of arable land, and Hercules as a patron of herdsmen due to his mythical labours, several of which involved cattle (1998:91-118). Derks' (1998) valuable ecological study of religious expression in Northern Gaul has been unfairly criticised for environmental determinism (Yeates 2006:6), but it is true that a focus on a landscape level of analysis can become detached from the social and political complexities of the imperial provinces and can create a false impression of continuity (Woolf 2000:627-8).

While sheep husbandry formed an essential part of productive intensification in late prehistory, evidence for economic specialisation comes from after the conquest (Hambleton 1999:60). Wild has argued that textile production in Roman Britain was "embedded in an agricultural matrix", and organised through villa estates (2002:28), while on the northern frontier, the textile fragments from Vindolanda and Corbridge demonstrate that the military would have provided a stimulus and market for local textile production from an early date. Diocletian's Edict of Prices and the contemporary founding of a *gynaeceum* at Venta[?] probably Winchester, supplying woollen garments for the late Roman army are testament to the development of the textile industry (Wild 2002:29). Perhaps then, the association between pastoral Mercury, dairy goddess and *cucullati* could indicate a growing awareness of the economic potential and focused exploitation of these products, with the cult iconography reflecting an acknowledgement of the continued and burgeoning relevance of sheep husbandry. The material forms of ideologically infused

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religious iconography new to post-conquest Britain expressed the potency of traditional socioeconomic practices using naturalised symbolism.

One factor in the distribution of sculpture in the southwest and along the northern frontier may have been the availability of suitable stone for carving (Mann 1985). However, there are plenty of areas in Roman Britain where sheep husbandry and stone carving would have been practiced concurrently and no such images have been found. The iconography of Mercury, goddess, and *genii cucullati* demonstrates the continuing relevance of sheep husbandry in two regions of post-conquest Britain with very different experiences of Empire (Mattingly 2006). Simplistically, these can be divided into civilian and military, but the question begs to be asked of why both these areas with their different socio-political organisation share this form of religious expression? What do these areas have in common other than enthusiastic participation in stone-carved representations of anthropomorphic deities? One similarity is that these two core areas of *genii cucullati* distribution show less emphasis on arable farming in both the pre- and post conquest periods. The downland of the southwest has the best evidence in Britain for the predominance of sheep husbandry from both pre- and post-conquest periods judging from faunal remains (Hambleton 1999) and material evidence such as the distribution of wool-combs (Wild 2002:4). The distribution of *genii cucullati* is in the west and central Pennines and does not spread into northeast England where there was a boom in agrarian production in later prehistory (van der Veen 1992).

Despite promoting the importance of sheep husbandry to mixed farming regimes as a counter-balance to the agrarian focus of later prehistoric ritual practice, and arguing against environmental determinism, this discussion has ultimately arrived back by a circuitous route to what Piggott (1958) intuitively surmised; both areas where the *genii cucullati* have been found are eminently suited to sheep husbandry. However, this advancement of Piggott's theory is not based on generalised and related determinist distinctions of civilian-lowland-agricultural versus military-highland-pastoral. Recent research on later prehistoric and Roman period farming and husbandry practices has given a more nuanced account that moves beyond simple dichotomisation, and emphasises regional variability, alternative regimes of value, and complex processes of adaptation. Perhaps surprisingly, the more detailed accounts of socioeconomic practice serve to support Piggott's thesis regarding the *genii cucullati*. Dichotomisation has been avoided in this iconographic interpretation. The cult images that have been the subject of this chapter cannot be labelled as either Roman or native, but are vernacular in the sense

that they are locally constituted material culture in a form familiar to most people in the Roman provinces, the details of which were adapted from the interface between local and imperial context. Above all, this example of vernacular religion was thoroughly intertwined within the socioeconomic context of certain regions of Roman Britain.

The small chalk relief from Rushall Down, Wiltshire may be instructive because it represents the *cucullati* in a medium that was less likely to survive the test of time, but common on the chalk downs of Wiltshire (*CSIR* 1.2:103). Regardless of how the distribution patterns are interpreted, stone sculpture may not have been the most common way of representing or propitiating the divine forces that the people of Roman Britain believed influenced dairying and the wool industry. Smaller cult objects such as the terracotta model of a bale of wool from Dun Iadhard on the Isle of Skye (Curle 1932) or the pipe-clay figurine of a ram from Arrington Cambridgeshire (Wild 2002: fig.2) may also indicate the ritualisation of sheep husbandry. The recognition of ritualised deposits of animals for both the Iron Age and Roman period hints at broadly related practices and beliefs, albeit with many localised variations (Grant 1991; Scott 1991). The distribution of mortaria, storage pots, spindle whorls, loom weights and the other accoutrements of pastoralist production from all over Britain indicate that such everyday practices and associated beliefs may be equally widespread, but expressed in less overt ways, without the ideotechnic device of sculpture. The depositional contexts of those items may show interesting patterns from late prehistory into the Roman period and await further investigation.

Material expression of beliefs associated with sheep husbandry may also have been through practices that are not generally archaeologically visible, perhaps through the products themselves. There may be rare organic artefactual survivals in the finds of 'bog butter' from Ireland and Scotland. These had been suggested as votive offerings of dairy produce or surplus contained in a variety of vessels and deposited in bogs and marshes (Cunliffe 1993:16). Recent analysis has shown that two thirds of the examples from Scotland derived from dairy fats (Evershed *et al* 2004: 270–275). Hunter has considered them in relation to other vessel deposits in Scotland, as they seem to fit into a distributional gap for the Atlantic seaboard (Hunter 1997:119). Several kegs of bog butter from Kyleakin, Skye (NMS: ME167) were found with a heavily patched bronze cauldron (NMS: DU5), linking them with wider votive practices. This and another sample from Morvern, Argyll (NMS: ME174) have been dated to between the second and fourth centuries AD making them roughly contemporaneous with the iconography considered in this chapter (Earwood

1991). Other dated examples show the practice continuing into the medieval period. Bog butter has been found mostly in the north and west of Scotland and perhaps represent examples of the growing importance of pastoralist production where agrarian resources are limited.   Although stretching the bounds of coincidence, it is interesting to note that Ptolemy records a tribal name *Caereni* in this region, that has been translated as 'sheep worshippers' (Rivet and Smith 1979, 286). Bog butter seems likely to be another manifestation of the ritualisation of pastoralist production. There are bound to be many other examples of socioeconomic practices receiving ritualised expression in Later Prehistoric and Roman Britain (e.g. mining at Lydney Park and temples in the East Midlands; Schüfer-Kolb 2004). Further examples of traditional religious beliefs adapting and being expressed by a rapidly changing and radically altered material culture are to be expected as part of the renovation of existing practices within the new social order introduced to Britain by the Romans.

4.12 - Conclusion

The disparate and widespread nature of the evidence for 'Celtic' religion is often based on abstracted symbolism from Roman period iconography encouraging broad analogies and comparative interpretation, sometimes spanning the breadth of Europe. Fertility has often been emphasised without any specific explanation. The aim of this chapter has been to show that informative conclusions can be made about certain vernacular sculpted images from Roman Britain by examining them in relation to the socioeconomic context that contributed to their production. The importance of sheep husbandry in the mixed farming regimes that predominated in Later Prehistoric and Roman Britain provided the necessary background for a reconsideration of the socioeconomic context of ritual practice. Previously the over-riding interpretation linking the divine couple, goddesses and the *genii cucullati* has been the notion of fertility. A definite message was intended by the person/s who commissioned these examples of religious sculpture, which may have had much to do with fertility and its attendants of well-being, protection and prosperity, but could also be much more specific and intimately related to their own lives. A more explicit link between these representations of divine forces has been suggested, relating the elements of symbolism to pastoralist production. The relief sculpture from Bath is particularly informative as it shows the relationship between sheep husbandry and its by-products of dairy and wool, expressed through a variety of religious imagery that appear in combination elsewhere: Mercury; the goddess with her churn; the three *genii cucullati* and

below the goddess the primary element in the fertility of sheep flocks, the ram. Surprisingly the only figure that has not been regularly associated with fertility is the ram and yet his primary role in husbandry relates directly to the fertility of the flock. These cult images are a result of human beings interacting with forces they perceived as affecting their lives on a daily basis, and influencing the success or failure of their productive capacity, economic ventures and even their basic means of subsistence. I imagine that the fertility aspects of 'Mercury', the *genii cucullati* and the associated goddess reflect the concerns of those involved in sheep-husbandry and its by-products: the shepherds tending the flocks, who would have worn the heavy woollen cloaks woven in the settlements during the quiet periods of the year, when the butter-churning and cheese-making were completed.

Goddess with churn

Mercury

Ram

Genii Cucullati

Fig.4.11 – A vernacular bricolage representing pastoral production

Chapter 5 - The socio-political context of ritual practice: hybridisation and identity in the local cults of the northern frontier

Introduction

The socio-political context of ritual practice has an incredibly wide scope, but any discussion of religion in the Roman provinces will be intimately concerned with identity (Pitts 2007; Roymans 2004). Post-colonial theory, syncretism, romanisation, resistance, discrepant identities and especially hybridisation introduced in Chapter 2, provide the necessary background for the following discussion. Studies of religion in the ancient world often focus on the ethnic origins of cults, and the religious sphere of discourse employed by modern scholarship is often presented as embedded in the dialectic between kinship and political structures (Malina 1986:92-101; North 1992). In the northwest provinces of the Roman Empire, social identity presented through the lens of religion has often been conceived through the related dichotomies of Roman and native or classical and Celtic. Romano-Celtic syncretism represents the fusion of those identities often conceived as a simple equation of Roman + Celtic = Romano-Celtic (Webster 1997a;1997b). Ethnic characteristics then become determinants for interpretation in syncretic formulations. Previous interpretations based on binary ethnic oppositions have difficulty dealing with the complexities of religious synthesis and have rarely acknowledged the associated value judgements of civilised and barbarian, sophisticated and primitive that are common to colonial situations (Millett 1995). Syncretism is always more than a simple marriage of convenience between dichotomous elements. The intensely complex processes syncretism attempts to theorise can be recast as the politics of religious synthesis (Shaw and Stewart 1994).

Examining the socio-political context of ritual practice will show that a consideration of the complexities of identity-formation is essential for understanding the evidence for religion in Roman Britain. The post-colonial critique of Romano-Celtic syncretism acknowledges that power relations and identity are important issues for the interpretation of religion in colonial contexts (Webster 1997a; 1997b), but revision has sometimes been reactionary, stressing resistance in order to counter-balance domination and assimilation. A de-colonised analysis proposes to test the assumptions on which both Romanisation and its revisions are based (Woolf 1997a). Bottom-up processes still need to be integrated with the top-down processes they reacted to (Mattingly 2004) in order to demonstrate both

the unity and diversity of the Empire (Woolf 1992). The northwest provinces and the numerous social groups it comprised differentially experienced the benefits and obligations of the imperial system depending on numerous factors of politics, identity, circumstance and context. There was also great potential for dialogue between diverse traditional backgrounds and the creation of many new forms of knowledge in the numerous local circumstances of provincial society (Woolf 2001:178). The Roman Empire created the circumstances whereby cults flourished beyond the societies where they originated and could spread with the movement of people, from Asia Minor to the northern frontier of Britain, in a relatively short space of time (e.g. Mithraism - Beck 2006). In their travels, those people also encountered deities that remained tenaciously embedded within, or at least intimately associated with, certain regions and specific cult-places.

The previous paradigm for the interpretation of provincial cults relies on three main mechanisms: firstly, the ancient process of *interpretatio Romana* whereby native cults were name-paired with Roman deities whose attributes and character are better known to modern scholars; secondly, the etymology of the theonym allows an ethnic origin to be assigned and gives clues to the character of the non-Roman deity; thirdly the interpretation of any iconography allows reference to wider bodies of knowledge preserved in classical or later vernacular mythology. Ethnic origin established through etymological analysis quite often shapes the interpretation of the iconography with reference to the relevant later vernacular mythologies (Ross 1974). The problems of interpretations based on later mythologies are well established, especially through reliance on back-projection (Webster 1991; Maier 2006:57-60). *Interpretatio Romana* is a complex process, but accounts for less than 5% of inscriptions in the Rhineland and on Hadrian's Wall and is therefore over-represented in modern interpretation (Zoll 1995; Derks 1991; Haynes 1997). Art-historical analysis of provincial art often drifts towards subjectivity through comparison with metropolitan artistic ideals and skews interpretation of provincial cults towards denigration as slavish copying or 'confused' syncretic beliefs (Drinkwater 1992), ignoring the politics of mimicry and appropriation (Webster 2003; Scott 2006). There has been much recent focus on the potential distortion of colonial discourse within these acts of translation and interpretation (Webster 1995a; Webster and Cooper 1996). The processes of both modern and ancient translation and interpretation will be central to the main case study of the cult of Vitiris.

5.1.1 – Naming and transcription

The majority of this chapter will re-consider the epigraphic evidence for the most popular cult local to the frontier zone of northern England, the variously spelt Vitiris. The popularity of this god's cult is in inverse proportion to how it features in modern academic studies of religion in Roman Britain (e.g. Green 1983; Henig 1984). With no *interpretatio romana*, little iconography, 'confusion' in the variety of spellings and assumed illiteracy in the epigraphic evidence this most pertinent example of a vernacular cult has defied interpretation. To mask these inadequacies, the low social status of the worshippers has often been emphasised and they have been adjudged to be "relatively unimportant socially" (Breeze and Dobson 2000:282). Mattingly has argued that the influence of evidence from military communities on studies of Romano-British syncretism is too dominant and potentially distorting (2006:214-216). While this may be true in many instances, the cult of Vitiris has not received the same attention as other aspects of religious life on the frontier. This case study has the potential to reveal much about the interface between local and alien cosmologies, emulation and adaptation of the ideotechnic device of the votive altar and the construction of new identities through cult worship, while under the domineering presence of military occupation. The decision to focus on this most frequently ignored frontier cult, is not an attempt at speculating on the survival of a primal native or 'Celtic' cult in the hinterland of Hadrian's Wall, but rather the active stimulation of a local cult; renewal as the reconciliation of tradition and innovation (Woolf 2001:182). The evidence for the cult of Vitiris is primarily epigraphic in the form of Roman period votive altars and it is important to recognise that the cult and its associated rituals are known to modern scholars through this specific medium (Woolf 2000:628).

The transition from later prehistoric polity to Roman *civitas* suffers from the same difficulties as the evidence for cult continuity. The tribal political structures of Late Iron Age Britain have often been assumed to be preserved in the *civitates* recorded in historical sources such as Ptolemy's *Geography* of the second century AD (Haselgrove and Moore 2007:10; Fig.5.1). Regional identities and tribal names from historical sources are often applied to later prehistoric evidence (e.g. Hartley and Fitts 1988; Yeates 2006) and even material culture (e.g. Kilbride-Jones 1980 dividing dragonesque brooch typology into Brigantian and Parisian). The tribal structure of later prehistoric Britain assumed from Roman geographies is often difficult to reconcile with the pre-conquest archaeological record (Moore 2006; forthcoming).
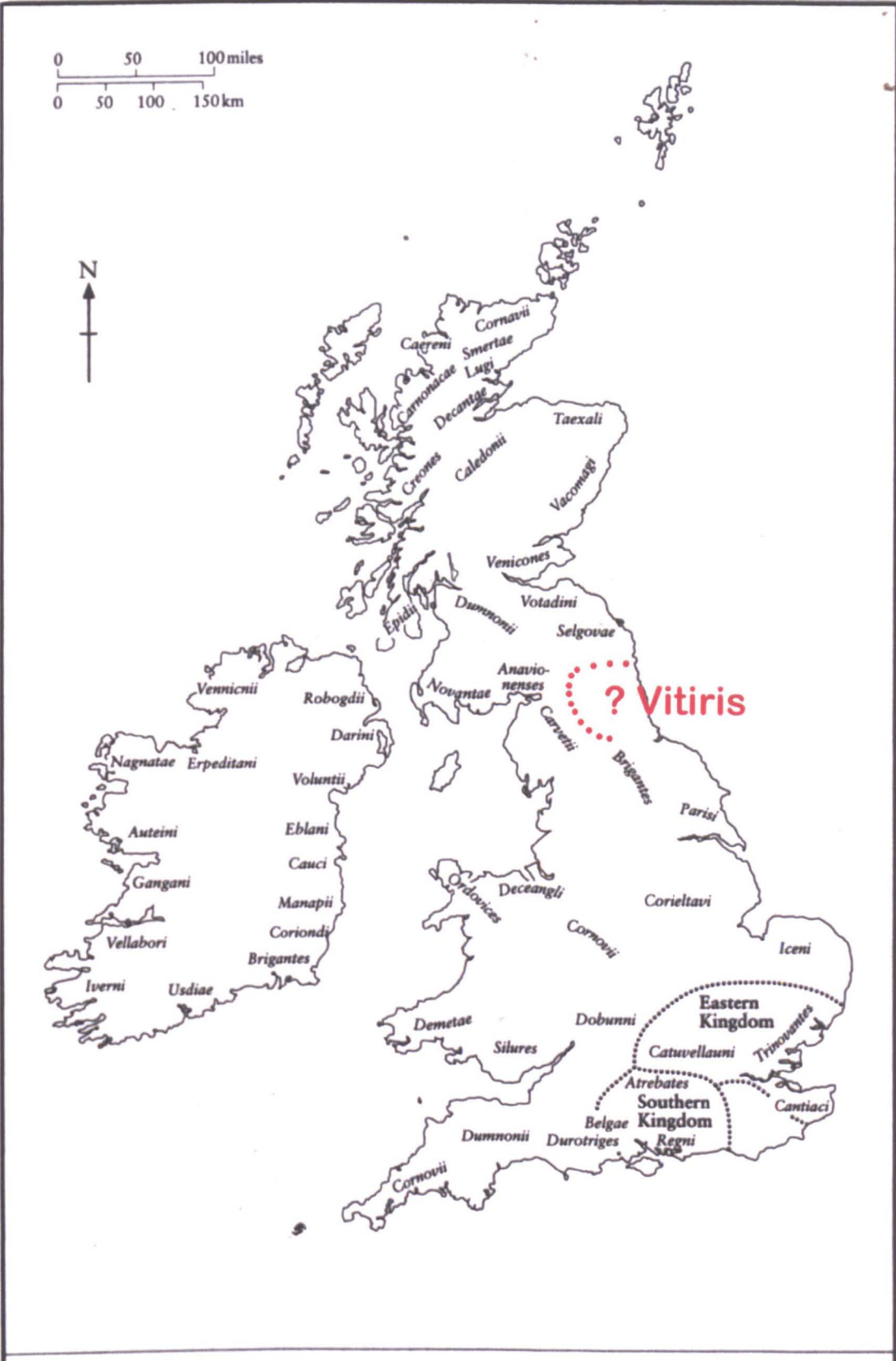
Fig.5.1 - Peoples of Britain and Ireland based on Ptolemy (After Mattingly 2006, Fig.3)
The later distribution of Vitiris altars fits into one of the many gaps.

Similar logic governs the preservation of 'Celtic' religion in Romano-Celtic syncretism and similar questions about the nature of continuity should be asked. New forms of social organisation undoubtedly appear along with new forms of religious practice in this transitional period, but what relationship does these have to the conquest as generative process and to existing dynamics of change within later prehistoric society? There is no clear-cut answer because of dating imprecision and the different forms of evidence from prehistoric and (proto)historic periods.

The quest for pre-roman deities will always be frustrated by the lack of comparable evidence from the pre-conquest period. However, theories about the political structure of northern England can be more easily inferred from archaeological evidence (Hawkes 1954; Ferrell 1997), and these will serve as an adjunct for assisting the interpretation of the socio-political context of ritual practice in Roman Britain. Naming can be considered as either a powerful act of creation or as the reification of a pre-existent concept. Tribal names and theonyms would have been mediated through British informants and existed orally and conceptually prior to being written down, but subsequent translation and transcription would have fundamentally altered the way both operated in the socio-political context of Roman Britain. The emergence of new post-conquest collective identities depended on the relationship each polity had with the Roman authorities, the staccato conquest and the coercive or consensual nature of initial occupation often dictated a range of discrepant experiences for the peoples of *Britannia* (Mattingly 2004; 2006).

5.1.2 - The Brigantes

The distribution of altars dedicated to Vitiris falls into catchment of the Tyne river system, which provided a concentrated area of Later Prehistoric settlement (Fig.5.2). This area has been considered as part of the territory of the Brigantes, based on late-second to early third century dedications to the goddess Brigantia. The Brigantes are well accounted for in inscriptions and historical documents that can suck the Late Iron Age and early Roman archaeology of the region into pseudo-historical narrative. Excavations at the massive enclosures at Stanwick dating to the mid-first century AD have been variously interpreted as the centre of resistance to the Romans, based on the account of Tacitus, (Wheeler 1954) or more recently as the power-centre of Brigantian territory, with the range of imported Roman goods suggesting an early and close relationship with Rome perhaps through clientage (Haselgrove 2002; Hanson and Campbell 1986). The massive enclosures at Stanwick reflect the construction of a collective identity.
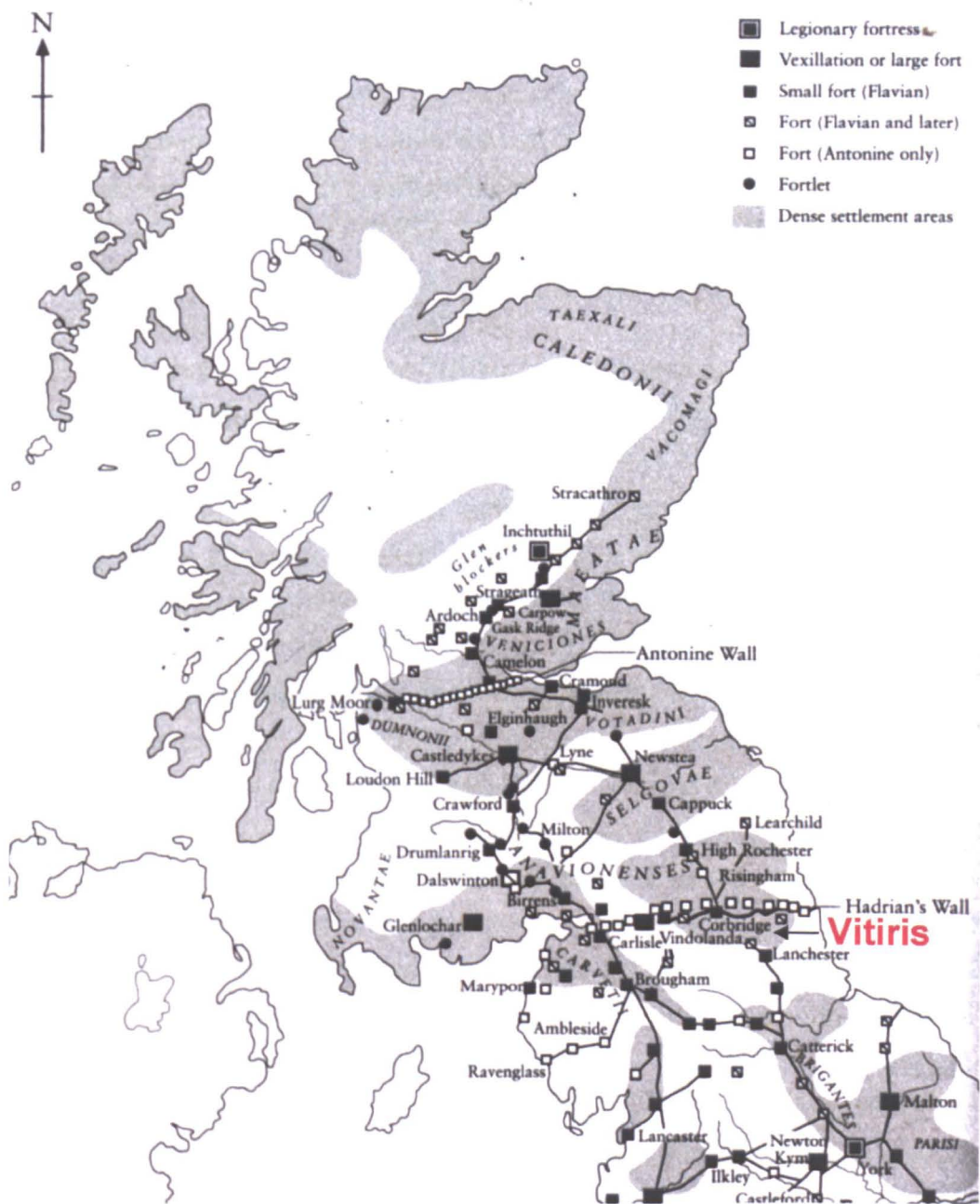
Fig.5.2 – Military sites and native settlement in Northern Britain (after Mattingly 2006 Fig.7).

Brigantian territory stretched from sea to sea and Tacitus states that they are the most numerous of people (Hartley and Fitts 1988:5). The vale of York is often considered the Brigantian heartland and it is assumed that the group occupying this prime agricultural land exerted hegemonic control over other sub-groups to the north and west (Breeze 2008:64-7; Hartley and Fitts 1988). Of the nine place-names Ptolemy links to the civitas two–thirds have been placed in Yorkshire, within the river systems draining to the Humber. Only *Vinovia*/Binchester can be confidently placed outside Yorkshire with Epiacum and Calacum unknown (Rivet and Smith 1979).

On the eve of the conquest the territory of the Brigantes, may have encompassed most of the old six northern counties of Yorkshire, Lancashire, Westmorland, Cumberland, Durham and Northumbria, but this cannot represent a timeless continuum from prehistory (Ross 1974:180). In the numerous river valleys and upland landscapes surrounding the central chain of the Pennines the archaeological evidence points to significant regional differences in settlement structure and organisation. The massive enclosure at Stanwick and the surrounding open settlements of North Yorkshire and the lower Tees valley revealed through geo-physical survey can be contrasted with the many upstanding small enclosed settlements in the uplands and the rectangular enclosures common to the east of the Pennines noted from aerial photography contrast with the fugitive record of Iron Age settlement in Cumbria (Higham 1986; Haselgrove 2002; Hoaen & Loney 2005). Issues of taphonomy and modern development stimulating different modes of discovery affect the interpretation of this diverse record, but it is a diversity that appears to reflect the myriad of localities and sub-regional geographies created by the numerous river valleys radiating out from the uplands of Northern England (Haselgrove 2002; Welfare 2002). From this multiplicity of evidence inferences can be made about different social formations and different settlement hierarchies within Iron Age society in Northern England (Ferrell 1997). Pre-Roman settlement in Northumberland, Cumberland and Westmorland is sparser with more isolated smaller units, but assuming that these represent primitive pastoral communities, risks perpetuating the tropes of ethnographic colonial discourse found in the classical sources (Bevan 1999). The upland zone of northern England appears more autonomous with isolated and independent groups whereas the open settlements, greater range of site sizes and regular site spacing in lowland Durham have been linked to higher population densities and a more complex settlement hierarchy, associated with the rise of Stanwick as a seat of power in the first century AD (Ferrell 1997: 233-4: Haselgrove 2002).

Corresponding environmental and economic evidence suggests related developments in imported pottery procurement, salt production (Willis 1999), animal husbandry (Huntley and Stallibrass 1995) and crop regimes (van der Veen 1992). There was more intensive cereal cultivation in the rain-shadow of the Pennines, in the Yorkshire dales, the upper vale of York and the Durham lowlands. Pollen samples indicate differences in the areas east and west of the high Pennines, with a more forested landscape in the west in contrast to the pre-conquest deforestation and agricultural intensification of the northeast (Huntley 1999:49-55). For the Roman period, there has been a suggestion that greater acculturation in the northeast, including the presence of villa's in Yorkshire and the Durham lowlands, may have contributed to changes in breeding stock (Stallibrass 1998: 53-59). However, the influence of Rome should not be seen as the arbiter of all change in Northern Britain though (Haselgrove and Moore 2007:10-11). Later prehistoric social practices either side of the Pennines varied on a number of levels and numerous factors will have contributed to differences between northeast and northwest regions before the arrival of the legions.

The massive ditch and rampart enclosure constructed at Stanwick provided a locus of power and focus for ritualised socio-political expression in the early first century AD. Sometimes styled the northernmost *oppidum* it was perfectly situated for controlling access and communication north-south up the east coast from the vale of York and east-west across the Stainmore pass, as well as being at the boundary between the fertile agricultural lowlands of the lower Tees valley and the pastureland of the eastern Pennine foothills (Vyner 2001, 75). Oppida often function as nodal points at boundaries to territories (O'Rian 1972), and Stanwick would seem to be suited for this role. Stanwick was ideally situated to extend control from the Brigantian heartland of Yorkshire, into the territories to the north and west, being surrounded by three later Roman routeways fossilised as the modern A1 and the trans-Pennine routeway of the Stainmore pass. The Late Iron Age evidence indicates the importance of this region as a potential power centre for the proposed confederacy of the Brigantes, but these were late developments and do not reflect some timeless tribal continuum from the depths of prehistory (Haselgrove 2002; Willis 1999).

Some of the smaller regional groups under Brigantian hegemony may be revealed through Roman period inscriptions. Communities such as the *curia Textoverdorum* (RIB 1695), located in the vicinity of Beltingham, either in the South Tyne valley or perhaps one of the tributaries such as the River Allen, whose confluence with the South Tyne is below

where this inscription was found. The *Carvetii* (RIB 933) of the Eden valley who formed their own *civitas* in the later Roman period may be another sub-group who had fallen under the hegemonic control of the Brigantes (Higham and Jones 1985; Edwards 2006; Breeze 2008), but whose re-emergence reflects the diversity so prevalent in the prehistoric record for northern England. The *Setantii* named by Ptolemy may represent another sub-group in Lancashire (Matthews 1999 fig.11.6). The regionalised distribution of votive altars dedicated to the local cults of northern England suggests alternative regional identities within what is often thought to be the *civitas Brigantum*.

5.1.3 - Dea Brigantia: tribe, *civitas* and goddess

The tutelary deity Brigantia is often presented as the stereotypical example of a Celtic tribal goddess (Yeates 2007:62) with wider etymological links to the goddess Brigit of Irish mythology and Rhiannon/Rigantona of Welsh mythology (Ross 1974). This theonym has also been discerned in several place-names and river-names across Britain (Green 1992). A powerful goddess for a powerful Iron Age confederacy perhaps, but as Joliffe so long ago remarked "the character of Brigantia must be discovered first from the Romano-British evidence...rather than Celtic myth" (1941:37).

The Roman period dedications to *Dea Brigantia* are often used to establish the southern heartland of the *civitas* in southwest Yorkshire (RIB 623 & 627-9; Breeze 2008:66). Dedications to Brigantia from South Shields (RIB1053), Corbridge (RIB1131) and Birrens in Dumfriesshire (RIB2091) by a centurion and an *architectus* of the sixth legion respecively, and a high-ranking imperial procurator (RIB2066) from somewhere in Cumbria, have also been used as evidence for the northern limits of Brigantian territory (Fig.5.3). The inscriptions from forts on and beyond the northern frontier of Hadrian's Wall may bear little relation to later prehistoric tribal boundaries and relate more to the socio-political circumstances of the Roman occupation when the inscriptions date from.

The cult of Brigantia as it appears through the medium of Roman altars is often taken as the materialisation of a pre-existing cult of an eponymous territorial goddess and it is assumed that this reveals the extent of Iron Age tribal territory. However, back-projecting Iron Age deities from Roman period evidence (Fitzparick 1991;Webster 1991) has similar difficulties to Iron Age tribal precedents for Roman *civitates* (Moore 2006;Haselgrove and Moore 2007:10-11; *contra* Hartley and Fitts 1988) and the conflation of both in the case of Brigantia creates a circular argument.

Fig.5.3 – Elements of religious geography in Central Britain. The Vitiris distribution is defined by the main east-west watershed (in Pink). The Brigantia distribution has been used to define the northern boundary of the Brigantes (Hartley and Fitts 1988).

Vitiris dedications

1   2   3–4   5–9   10+

● main E-W watershed

■ Brigantia dedications

UNLOCATED:
(Hadrian's Wall)
2 dedications

Locus Maponi

Fanum Cocidii

Votadini

Veteribus / Vitiris

Coria?

Belatucadros

Vinovia

Brigantes

0   50   100   150

kilometres
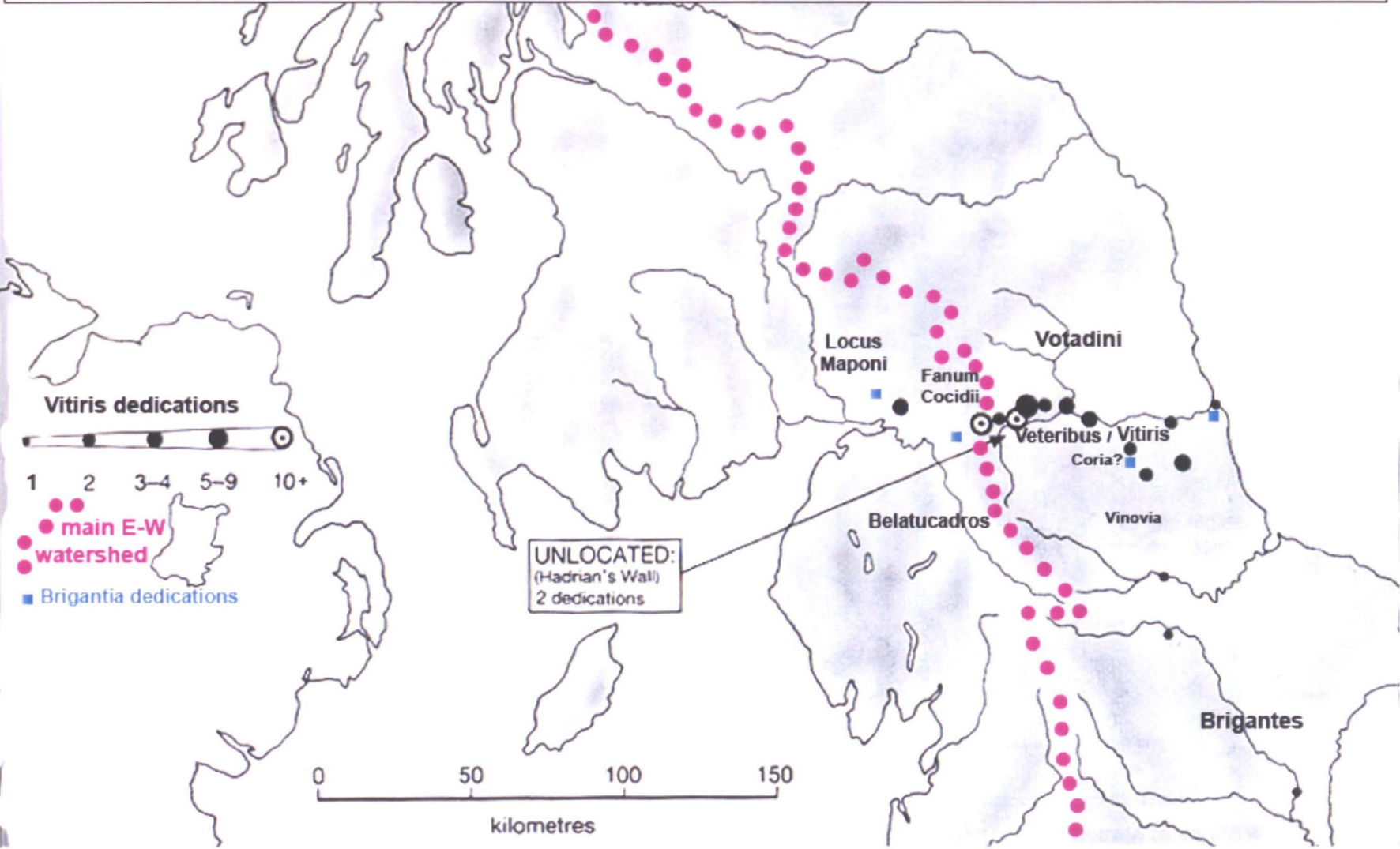
The events of the first century AD, the Roman support for the client ruler Cartimandua and the delayed conquest of northern Britain may have given the Brigantian hegemony a greater cohesion than it had ever previously possessed. The fluctuating imperial boundaries from first century AD Stanegate, Agricolan conquest and retreat, second century AD construction of Hadrian's Wall and the short-lived Antonine frontier to third century AD Severan consolidation between Tyne and Solway suggest rapidly changing contexts for social organisation (Mattingly 2006; Fig.5.4).

Corbridge has been suggested as a *civitas* capital comparable with Carlisle (McCarthy 2005; Breeze 2008). Ptolemy as the earliest source for Northern Britain presents *Bremenium*, *Alauna* and *Coria* as *polis* of the *Votadini*. *Bremenium* is undoubtedly High Rochester in the North Tyne valley (RIB 1262 & 1270), but if Corbridge is the *Coria* of the *Votadini* then the first century boundary of *civitas Brigantum* must have been between Tyne and Wear, between Corbridge and Binchester and very different to the boundary constructed using Brigantia dedications. There is a corresponding break in the distribution of Vitiris altars between Lanchester and Piercebridge with the main spread in northeast England separated from the small, dispersed group of southern outliers. Archaeological evidence for social and economic differences north and south of the Tyne noted by Ferrell (1997) and van der Veen (1992) would support the notion that the Tyne valley had a separate social organisation and perhaps a different cultural identity from the Durham lowlands before the construction of Hadrian's Wall.

Specific socio-political circumstances at the beginning of the third century AD may have resulted in the cult of Brigantia being officially promoted during the Severan re-organisation of the frontier (Joliffe 1941). Three of the Yorkshire dedicants being named Aurelius indicates that they were made citizens by either one of the last two Antonines or one of the Severi (Joliffe 1941:39). The promotion of the cult of Brigantia may have been a deliberate policy of the Severan dynasty aimed at repairing the fractures that appeared in the social make-up of the region, disturbances exacerbated by wider political turmoil of the late Antonine period. The depiction of Brigantia with the attributes of Minerva Victrix at Birrens (RIB 2091;Fig.5.5) would be the appropriate form for celebrating the military successes of the Severan emperors and the re-establishment of authority in the frontier zone.
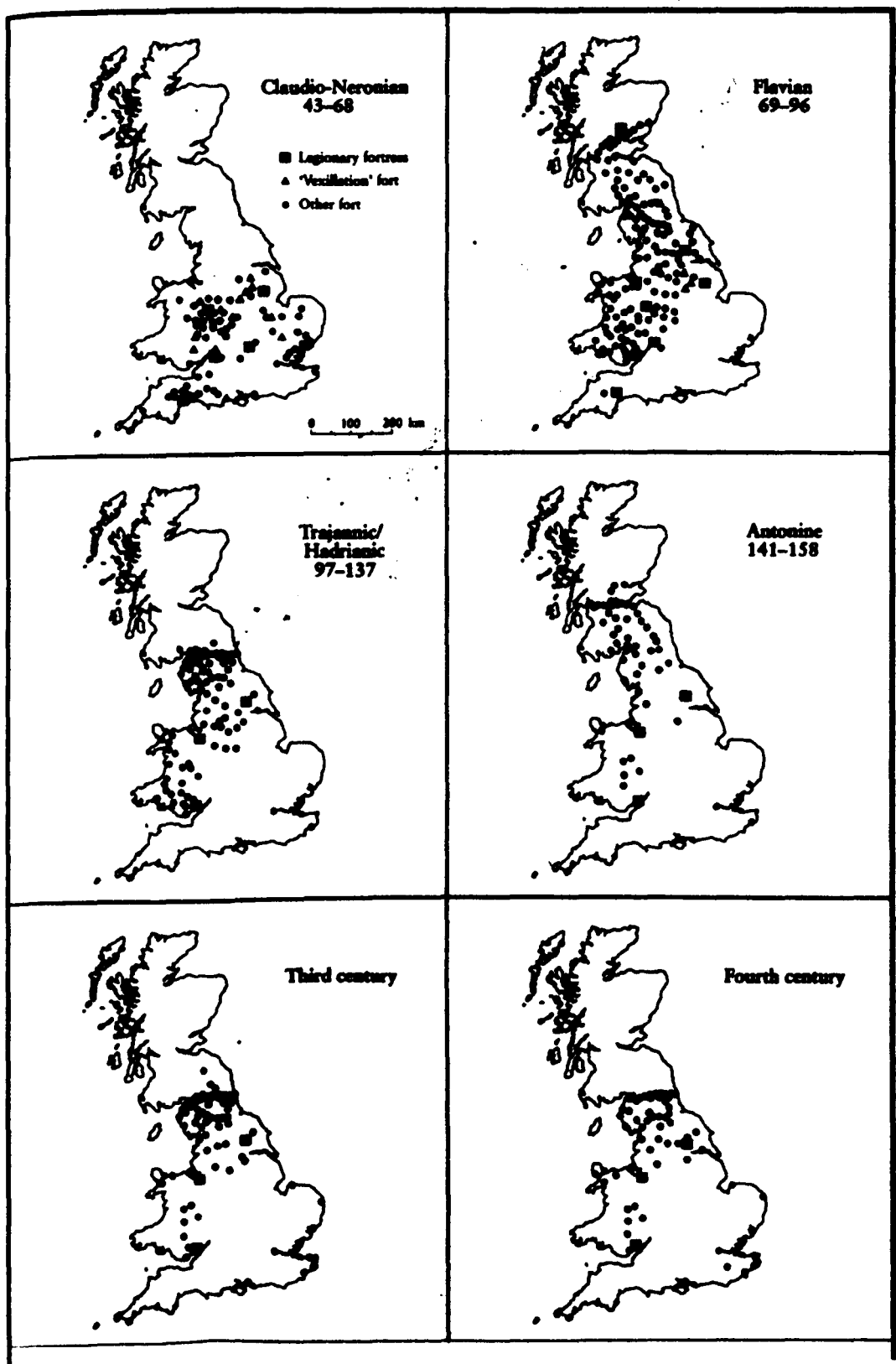
Fig.5.4 – Fluctuating boundaries provide the changing social context for the cult of Vitiris, particularly during the Antonine period and into the third century AD (after Mattingly 2006 Fig.5)

PLATE 15

51 *front*   51 *left*   51 *right*
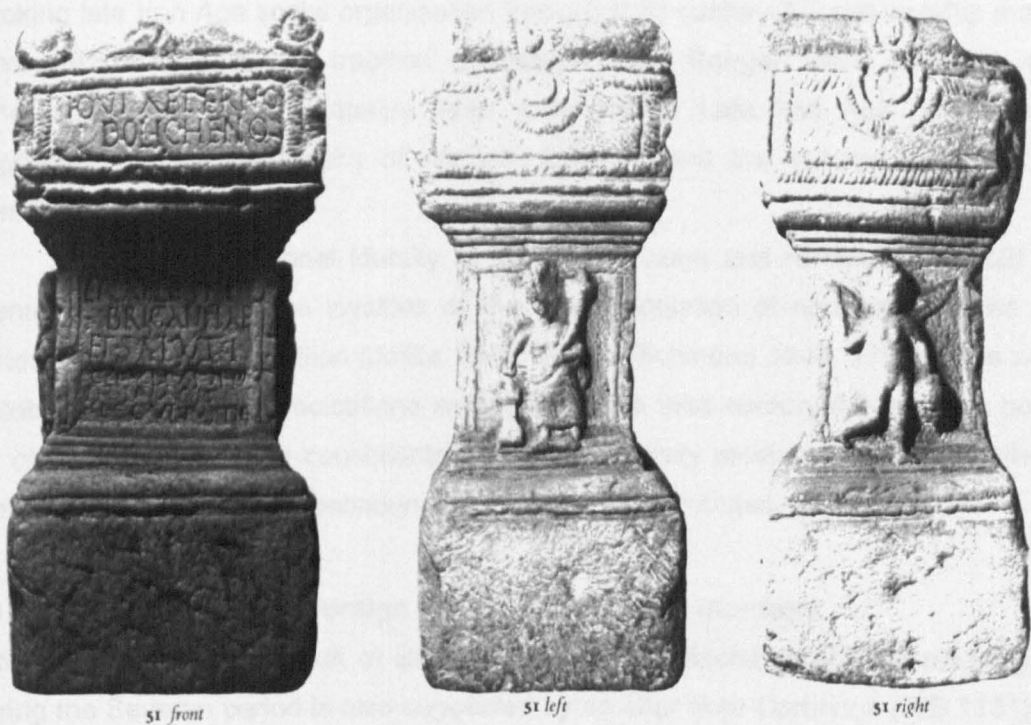
Figure 5.5 - Brigantia – the dual dedication with Jupiter Dolichenus from Corbridge (top: RIB 1131) the dedication from Birrens (bottom:RIB 2091)

Invoking late Iron Age social organisation through third century AD cult worship may have been the (re-)invention of tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1981) providing a false coherence to what had probably been a short-lived Late Iron Age polity otherwise fragmented by the geography of northern England and the substantial barrier of the Pennines.

Promoting a regional identity in the frontier zone and re-establishing old ties of clientage might renew the loyalties of the local population of northern England after a period of unrest and rebellion (Jollife 1941, 36-61; Richmond 1943, 179ff). The northern distribution of Brigantia dedications served to reify a third century AD northern boundary for *civitas Brigantum* that consolidated the contemporary provincial boundary rather than representing the timeless continuum of Iron Age tribal territories.

5.1.4 - East meets west – foreign and local in a divine marriage

Official promotion of the cult of Brigantia and the manipulation of local religious affairs during the Severan period is also suggested by an altar from Corbridge (RIB 1131), which name-pairs the regional goddess with the north African goddess Caelestis, in a divine marriage with Jupiter Dolichenus. Both of these deities were popular with the Severan imperial household. The African born Severus introduced the cult of Caelestis into Roman State religion and his wife Julia Domna was worshipped as *Dea Caelestis* on the Rhineland (Joliffe 1941:44). The Empress' origins in Asia Minor also favoured the promotion of eastern gods such as Jupiter Dolichenus.

Jupiter Dolichenus originated as a Hittite storm deity associated with a particular mountain, Doliche in Commagene. His cult was widely worshipped throughout the empire by high-status individuals and especially along the military frontiers, although the designation as a semi-official military deity (Spiedel 1978) has been questioned (Haynes 1993:149). Dolichenus was celebrated and worshiped for two functions. He was the eternal preserver of the firmament who evolved into an all-powerful celestial deity through his conflation with Jupiter. He was also known as 'the god from where the iron grows' and Mount Doliche has a strong association with metalworking and especially iron working (Speidel 1978). Irby-Massie sees the distribution of dedications to Jupiter Dolichenus in Britain as being related to ore deposits and metalworking centres like Corbridge (Irby-Massie 1999:67). The official appropriation of the cult of Brigantia is emphasised by divine marriage with the officially promoted eastern cult of Jupiter Dolichenus at Corbridge. This pairing of eastern god and local goddess is remarkable for both. Dolichenus normally

appears with Juno Caelestis and it is unusual for him to appear with a local consort (Speidel 1978). RIB1131 is the only example of a native goddess undergoing epigraphic *interpretatio* on the northern frontier and the extraordinary nature of this occurrence is confirmed by data from the Rhineland where native goddesses are never name-paired (Zoll 1995a:135; Derks 1991).

This unusual act of *interpretatio* for the regional goddess makes the appropriation of Brigantia a notable socio-political act. The attempt to stimulate a regional Brigantian identity through ideological manipulation may not have been a benign process, but then the formation of the later prehistoric polity may not have been either. The divine marriage and *interpretatio* of Brigantia Caelestis could be taken as examples of a colonial discourse (Webster 1997a), with Severan promotion of Jupiter Dolichenus an example of official manipulation of religious practices and identity formation on the Northern frontier.

Dolichenus and Caelestis had previously been assimilated through Roman conquest. The marriage between Brigantia and the supreme deity of the Roman pantheon should perhaps be understood with all of its legal, sexual and political connotations (Webster 1997a; 1997b; Ferris 2000). However, appropriation can work both ways and the divine marriage also represents unusual localisation for the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus.

5.1.5 - The local pairing of Smith and Celestial Gods in Roman Britain

Distinctly non-classical representations of an unnamed 'native' smith-god have been recognized on appliquéd pottery from Corbridge (Fig.5.6; Leach 1962, 35-45). These have been considered in tandem with clay moulds from the same site, that produce pottery images of a 'native' celestial god (Fig.5.7) who has been variously equated with both Jupiter Dolichenus (Richmond 1943) or a local deity, due to the distinctly non-classical attributes (Leach 1962). The ambiguous characteristics of this deity are signified by a crooked club representing a thunderbolt and the wheel symbol which was a widespread Northern European symbol for a celestial deity (Green 1984). Post-colonial theory would support Leach's interpretation and reject simple emulation as an example of a problem-free syncretism, instead invoking mimicry as a suitable tool for contestation and appropriation of potent symbolic imagery (Webster 2003: 28-29).

Interpretation of as simple a symbol as a cap can be pivotal for further interpretation. Richmond saw the headgear of the celestial and smith god as a Phrygian cap and therefore thought that it signified eastern origin and hence the identification with Jupiter Dolichenus.
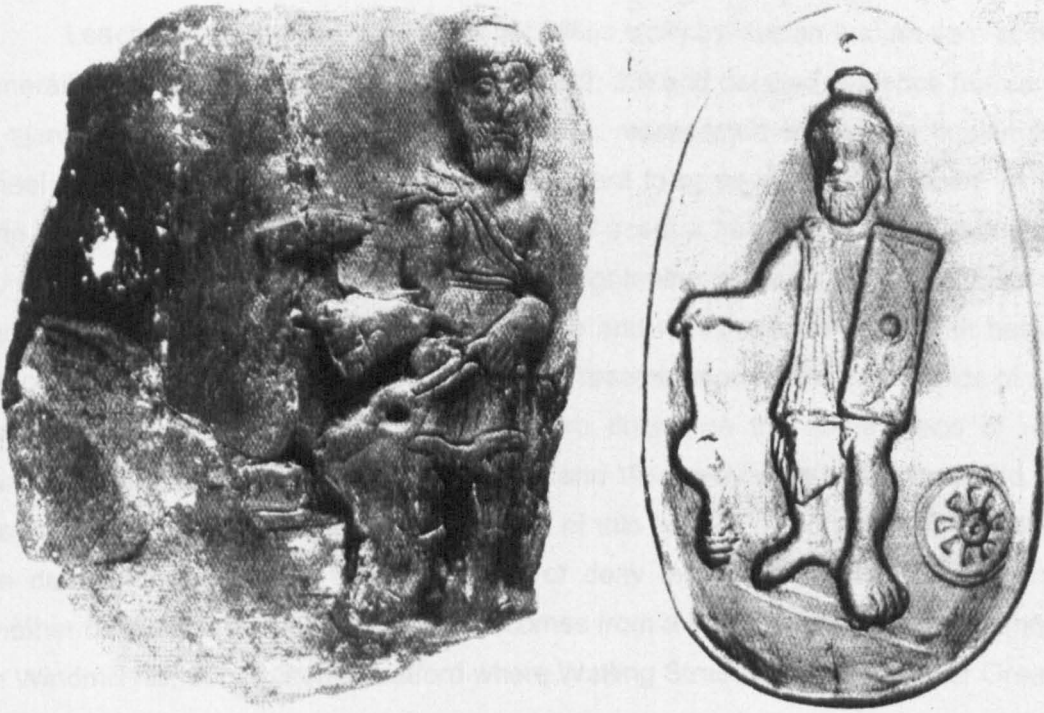
Fig.5.6 & 5.7 – Pottery relief of a Smith god & a ceramic mould of a Celestial god from Corbridge: emulation, mimicry or appropriation of Jupiter Dolichenus?

Fig.5.8 - Celestial wheel god from Vindolanda

352 (¼)

Leach interpreted the cap as the felt *pileus* worn by Vulcan and an item of clothing generally associated with smithcraft (Leach 1962: 39) and detailed evidence from a variety of symbolic media that paired a celestial deity, represented by striking implement and wheel symbol, with a 'native' Smith god equivalent to or equated with Vulcan. A bronze strip that probably would have decorated a ritual sceptre from the Farley Heath temple in Surrey depicts a helmeted head with a trident/lightening bolt and a wheel symbol below, and also a phallic figure wearing a conical cap and with the tools of a smith beside him (Goodchild 1938:391-6). These bear a striking resemblance to the clay moulds of sky-god and smith from Corbridge, but show the two linked on the same piece of religious paraphernalia. The dual dedication to Jupiter and Vulcan by a councillor from Old Carlisle may represent a similar official interpretation of this type of cult conflation (RIB 899) with the dedicant representing this conception of deity through the classical counter-parts. Another dedication to Jupiter and Vulcan comes from a silver plaque found at a shrine-site on Windmill hill, above Stony Stratford where Watling Street crosses the River Great Ouse (RIB 215).

When the civilian inhabitants of Vindolanda, the *vicani vindolandesses,* chose to make a corporate dedication it was a dual dedication to Vulcan and the divine house (RIB 1700; Irby Massie 1999, 275) emphasising the importance of the divine craftsman to their community. There is also a syncretic image of a celestial deity at Vindolanda whose appearance has suggested a link to Jupiter Dolichenus (Fig.5.8; *CSIR* 1.6: 352). This deity epitomises the ambivalent artistic representations of deities in provincial art and the ambiguous relationship between official and local cult worship. The main figure of the small relief is bearded, wears a conical cap and a long garment that is probably a *himation,* and holds a rounded object over an altar. Ross (1974) identified the main figure as Maponus, but his beard would seem at odds with 'the Divine Youth'. The celestial character of the deity is confirmed by the accompaniment of small busts of Sol and Luna. Coulston and Philips (1988:129) point out that these would be appropriate to a variety of oriental deities including Mithras, Sabazius, the Danubian Rider Gods, Mên and Attis, but most likely Jupiter Dolichenus in his non-military guise. They comment further on several unusual features that led to them assigning this figure to the sub-section of the corpus for unidentified anthropomorphic figures. If the god is Jupiter Dolichenus it would be "most unusual for him to wear both a himation and a Phrygian cap" (Coulston and Philips1988:129). Alternatively a "Celtic cap" would cause Coulston and Phillips to identify the main figure as the syncretic 'Celtic sky god, Jupiter Taranis' (*ibid* 1988:129); an oft-

repeated pan-Celtic trope is that the wheel represents Taranis even though there is no evidence linking dedications to Taranis and the symbol of the wheel (Green 1984).

Again much of the interpretation for this relief from Vindolanda pivots on the ethnic interpretation of the head-gear. The ambiguous representation of the smith's cap or the head-gear of the celestial deity from the Corbridge pottery moulds is a common interpretative problem in provincial art and frequently the identification of a Phrygian cap signifying an oriental deity is used by default. By the main figure's side is a small armour-clad figure carrying a shield and spear. The interpretation of the accompanying armed figure is also to some extent dependent on the identification of the main figure and his hat. An armed worshipper would be unusual, but in the context of discussing the localisation of Jupiter Dolichenus, an association with Brigantia should also be considered in her familiar guise as Minerva Victrix. The shield and spear would be appropriate for the Minerva Victrix form of Brigantia as represented on the statuette from Birrens (RIB 2091; *CSIR* 1.4.12). Whether this highly ambiguous relief represents the divine marriage with Jupiter Dolichenus, as with RIB1131, or an association between regional goddess and a hybrid vernacular deity is open to interpretation.

The final idiosyncratic element of the Vindolanda relief is that the main capped figure is in a familiar sacrificial pose, making a libation sacrifice over an altar, but there is a further local ambiguity. Coulston and Philips (1988:129) suggest that the circular object the deity holds over the altar is not the customary *patera*, but rather the celestial symbol of the wheel. This subversion of the classical depiction of sacrifice emphasise the tensions embodied in the vernacular character of this iconography and the interface between local and foreign conceptualisations of deity. The emotive and enigmatic image from Vindolanda is paralleled by two similar relief carvings from Netherby (*CSIR* 1.6:375-6), which will be discussed later in relation to Vitiris, through common background imagery of the boar and the tree.

5.1.6 - Cult diversity on the Roman frontiers

The British manifestations of Smith and celestial god emphasise how appropriation can work both ways. Accommodation could involve both the adaptation of existing beliefs through the enthusiastic incorporation of foreign concepts (Woolf 2001:176-178) and reverse processes, resulting in the renewal of both local and exotic forms of cult worship. Romano-Celtic syncretism should be considered as renovation rather than just one-way traffic: renewal as the reconciliation of tradition and innovation (Woolf 2001:182). When

reviewing Ton Derks' (1998) study of *Gods, Temples, and Ritual Practices in Northern Gaul*, Woolf (2000) argued that with a focus restricted to native cults, too little account was made of the impact of military communities on 'native' religion and especially the diversity of the cults they brought with them. Derks' study, like many before it, focussed on the juxtaposition between Roman and native. The multivariate processes of forming provincial society were manifested in different ways in numerous local contexts. This involved not just the incorporation of local communities into an imperial context, but also, especially on the military frontiers, required the incorporation of multicultural communities into a local context.

The divine marriage of Brigantia Caelestis and Jupiter Dolichenus raise numerous issues about name-pairing, *interpretatio*, the translation of cult concepts and the importance of the socio-political context for ritual practice. The divine marriage of RIB1131 represents the broadest possible geographical range of cult influence in the context of the Roman provinces with a dual local and African goddess married to a paired Asiatic and Roman god. The Asiatic god had already undergone centuries of previous development into a dual celestial and craftsman deity through translation into Roman cult, *interpretatio* with the supreme Roman celestial god and finding popular accommodation within military contexts throughout the Empire. The localisation of the cult through marriage with the local goddess Brigantia is an unusual occurrence, as is the name-pairing of a local and foreign goddess (Zoll 1995a).

The specific socio-political conditions of the consolidation of the frontier at the beginning of the third century provide the context for RIB1131. These circumstances necessitated unusual and direct interference in local cult practice through the use of the favoured deities of the Severan dynasty and the appropriation of a regional goddess who promoted a regional identity that had ancient ties of clientage. The influence of the Severan dynasty situates this religio-political act in a specific temporal context that allows further inference about the domineering motivations behind this extremely syncretic altar and belies the *laissez faire* attitude to syncretism. The fluctuating boundary of the Empire from its position on the Clyde-Forth isthmus in the mid second century and the widespread disruptions of the late Antonine period, followed by Severan campaigns in Scotland and the re-consolidation of the frontier on Hadrian's Wall in the third century provide the political background that saw the florescence of the cult of Vitiris.

5.2.1 – The Cult of Vitiris in Roman Britain

The 61 Roman period votive altars dedicated to the god(s) Vitiris, make this the most popular local cult in all of Roman Britain with a distribution regionalised in Northern England, along Hadrian's Wall and to the east of the Pennines (Fig.5.2). The distribution supports the suggestion of an alternative regional identity beyond the Brigantian heartland of Yorkshire and north of the Durham lowlands, emerging sometime in the second century AD in a region subject to significant social disturbance through various stages of military occupation and the fluctuation of the provincial boundaries. Despite its obvious importance for understanding the nature of religion and ritual practice on the northern frontier of the Roman Empire, the evidence for worship of this deity has largely defied categorisation. Previous interpretations of the characteristics and functions of Romano-Celtic deities have worked from a paradigm that largely relied on the etymology of the theonym, supplemented by comparative iconography, comparative mythology and, where applicable, analysis of any cult sites. The cult of Vitiris has consistently frustrated attempted interpretation and even Anne Ross, whose magisterial *Pagan Celtic Britain* epitomises this traditional approach, was forced to concede to "the mysterious single or multiple god Vitiris, invoked so frequently in the north and yet of such an elusive nature" (1974, 470).

The mystery surrounding Vitiris is a result of certain ambiguities in the evidence. A central question has been whether Vitiris represents a local deity or a foreign import. Previous methodologies of synchronic study worked on the basis that an ethnic origin for non-Roman cults could be ascribed based on etymological analysis of the theonym. The extreme variability in the spelling of the theonym, with 17 variations over 61 altars, has frustrated any firm conclusions about Vitiris. The letter pattern V*T*R is taken here as the defining characteristic, with numerous variations in vowel use presumably representing pronunciation as well as spelling differences. The initial letter of the theonym is also affected, possibly by a pre-aspirated element (Ross 1974:470), with eight examples beginning with HV- and one with VH-. These have been theorised as a Germanic intrusive element (Haverfield 1918; Heichelheim 1961), resulting in a speculated Germanic origin with the cult being introduced by auxiliary units stationed on the Northern frontier (Webster 1986:78-9; Clay 2006). The most popular variation is a homonym of Latin *vetus* 'old', with the form *deo Veteri* – the old god (Henig 1984). Across all spelling variables the deity is usually referred to as a singular male God, but is also frequently referred to as a plurality,

the gods, *dibus Veteribus/Vitiribus/Hvitiribus* etc., and in two instances even as pluralized feminine deities.

The form Vitiris has been settled on after much agonising about which of the many spelling variations would be most appropriate for general discussion. A hypothesised *V*T*R could have been used as these three elements link all of the spelling variations. The VET-variants are most likely an attempt at standardisation and Latinisation of the theonym, while the principle of *difficilior lectio* suggests the complex HV-variants are closest to an original form. However, this analysis does not wish to prioritize synchronic origin, as the previous etymological basis of interpretation has done. Instead Vitiris is preferred as a median option, the middle ground between complex and standardised forms, with less ethnic associations than VET- or HV- forms. Through the following analysis the reasons for taking this approach and choosing the form Vitiris should become clear to the reader.

The limited iconography on only six Vitiris altars depicts mostly wild animals and most consistently a boar. The etymology of the theonym (Heichelheim 1961), and the resulting perception of the ethnic origin of the cult, in turn affects interpretation of the limited iconography on the altars (Webster 1986:78-9). For instance, RIB 973 from Netherby depicts the evocative imagery of a boar under a tree on one side and a serpent wrapped around a tree on the other side, which can be interpreted from a Roman, Celtic or Germanic perspective based on whatever ethnic origin is ascribed to the cult (Coulston and Phillips 1988:189; Webster 1986:79; Green 1992:220). With this level of ambiguity the added dimension of comparative mythology based on the limited characteristics inferred from etymological analysis and the symbolism of the iconography can do little to clarify the situation. Previous discussion has linked Vitiris with a type of native horned god whose images frequently appear without dedication throughout the region (Birley 1986:64; Irby-Massey 1999, 107 Heichelheim 1961, Aldhouse-Green & Raybould 1999: 117). There is no evidence linking the 'horned god' with Vitiris, or with any of the other local deities epigraphically attested in Northern England (Edwards 2006:225-6).

Suitably ambiguous time spans have been offered for the *floruit* of the cult, with ethnic interpretation even influencing dating. The 4th and 5th centuries A.D have been proposed in order to suit Germanic interpretations (Clay 2006), while a more realistic 2nd and 3rd century AD (Irby-Massie 1999) is confirmed by the more recently excavated finds (esp. Vindolanda; Birley 2002). Although the altars are generally found in the communities attached to the forts most of the Vitiris altars are poorly contextualised finds. RIB 1606 was

found on the roadway through the *vici* south of Housesteads south gate. RIB 1457 was found near the Roman bridge over the North Tyne. Most of the Vitiris altars are found in debris layers or re-used for building stone. Many of those from Vindolanda are from secondary contexts in the second phase of the *vicus* – in rubble (*Britannia* 1977: 432; *Britannia* 1975:285), as a fallen stone from the north-west angle of the 3rd century fort (*Britannia* 1979:346), and two from a fourth century storehouse site LXXVII (*Britannia* 1973: 329). This places the secondary deposition of altars roughly in the third century AD and the *floruit* of the cult presumably slightly earlier, at least between the mid-second to mid-third centuries AD (Andrew Birley pers. comm.) Therefore, the extension of military occupation north to the Antonine Wall provides the context for the earliest known phase of the cult of Vitiris and is typified by the beginnings of "increasing maturity in the local [military] communities" of northern England (McCarthy 2005:59). One of the more recent finds from Vindolanda has been from a Severan well (Birley 2003: 75-76), providing the closest chronological indicator and suggesting the changing social conditions brought about by the Severan re-organisation of the frontier may provide the context for the altars being removed from normal use.

The small, personal and simply inscribed altars (Fig.5.9) that form the bulk of the evidence for Vitiris have been taken to indicate low-status worshippers and have frequently been ignored. The high level of spelling variation has been disparaged as symptomatic of illiteracy (Breeze and Dobson 2000:281). Vitiris was never subjected to *interpretatio romana*, which has limited the interest and comments of Roman scholars. Miranda Green's (1983) *The Gods of Roman Britain*, does not even mention Vitiris. This scholarly disregard for Vitiris is also apparent from the etymological study of *Gods of the Celts and Indo-Europeans* by Garret Olmstead (1994), which mysteriously omits Vitiris despite considering deities from nearly every other Roman period inscription. Henig's treatment of Vitiris is symptomatic of the classically influenced study of Romano-British syncretism. He devotes less than a paragraph to Vitiris despite this being the most frequently invoked vernacular cult in the province. Henig acknowledges the significance of the frontier cults especially because they are invoked "by those low on the social scale" (1984:62), but neatly side-steps further discussion by stating "We would like to know more about these cults which may have remained more primitive and less affected by Roman ways than others, but for that very reason their worshippers lacked the means of communicating theology or ritual to future ages" [my emphasis] (1984:63), and so dispenses with Vitiris.

Fig.5.9 – A series of altars from Carvoran (Group 5) demonstrate the variable spelling of the theonym.(taken from the *Roman inscriptions of Britain* vol.1)

5.2.2 - Problems: etymology, ethnicity & Germanic HV-

The earliest comments by Hodgson (1840:140) linked Vitiris with *Vithrir,* a weather/sky god epithet of Odin. Haverfield (1918, 36-37) considered the HV- an intrusive Germanic element, and is frequently quoted as the basis for a Germanic origin (Clay 2006). Heichelheim (1961) based his etymological reasoning on the standard principle of *difficilior lectio,* a method of enquiry borrowed from textual analysis, which works from the hypothesis that the most complex or difficult form of text is probably closest to the original and must be explained before all others. Heichelheim's etymological proposals based on the HV- variants were also to Germanic concepts, particularly favouring a linguistic link to Old Norse *hvethr-ung,* an epithet of the god Loki (Heichelheim 1961; Webster 1986, 78-79) meaning 'son of a giantess'. A further relationship with Old Norse *hvitr,* which means 'white' or 'shining', was also suggested (Heichelheim; 1961; Birley 1979: 108).

The first supporting literary attestations for the Old Norse etymologies are nearly a millennium later than the Vitiris altars. While the Old Norse terms may highlight possible etymological connections to Germanic forms, there is still a distinct possibility that the HV-variants were a translation of a pre-existent title that had only existed in oral form. If Germanic HV- is represented in the dedications to Vitiris, then these would be the earliest attested examples in Europe and it is curious that this precocious development did not occur in Roman Germany with its wealth of inscriptions. However, *difficilior lectio* is not appropriate to all texts and the etymology of a single name or divine title can be complicated by pronunciation, creolization, literacy and translation factors especially in polyglot situations such as the northern frontier.

5.2.3 - Natives and naming

The most significant 'nativist' objection to the Germanic origin hypothesis is that there is absolutely no continental evidence for the cult and the exclusively British distribution indicates a deity native to northern England (Birley 1986, 63). Anne Ross thought that the cult was British and the HV- could result from an attempt to record a pre-aspiration characteristic of Old Irish phonology (1974:470). Irby-Massie (1999: 107) also refuted an exclusively German origin for Vitiris because the majority of dedicants have native British, not Germanic names. The majority of Vitiris altars are dedicated by people with single names, sometimes clearly Latinate others possibly Latinised Brittonic, as many of the names on British curse tablets were (Tomlin 2002:171). From 37 named dedicants 27 are single names; 15 single and non-latin, but often difficult to designate a Celtic or German

ethnic origin to (Birley 2003: 80); 11 are single and Latinate; 5 have twin Latin names *gentilicum+cognomen*; one dedication was possibly by paired Greek worshippers, Milus and Aurides (RIB 1800); 5 are incomplete and unidentifiable; (Appendix 1; Birley 2003).

There is no link between the HV- spelling and obviously Germanic dedicators. Of the six HV-variant altars with named dedicators, most have obviously Romanised names (Aureli Muciani RIB727; Fortunatus RIB969; Ael(iu)s RIB971; Superstes and Regulus RIB1602) while two dedicators have non-Latin names (RIB1603 – Aspuanis; and Nob...vegus – Birley 2003). Amongst the total group of Vitiris altars, none of the three dedicants considered to have Germanic names by Birley (2003) use the putative Germanic HV- spelling; Uccus at Carrawburgh (RIB1548) worships *deo Veteri*; Unthaus at Lanchester dedicated his altar to *deo Vitir(i)* (RIB1088); as did Duihno at Chester-le-Street (RIB1046).

5.2.4 - Complexity and epigraphic consciousness

The HV-variant does not contradict the essential defining feature of the V*T*R structure. In general, the theonyms beginning HV- show the most significant amount of variability and complexity in vowel use (Birley 2003). 7 of the 9 altars using HV-variants are amongst the more elaborated altars, with 6 having fuller inscriptions (named dedicants or formulaic closing vows) and the seventh being the peculiarly well-sculpted Netherby altar (RIB 973), which has been described by the authors of *CSIR* vol.1.6 as "the most exquisitely carved altar in Roman Britain" (Coulston and Phillips 1988: 189). The two altars dedicated to the pluralized *Hviteribus* (RIB 1549) and *Hvitiribus votum* (RIB 2069) are the least elaborated inscriptions in this HV- group and serve to highlight one of the general characteristics of the total sample, which is that the simpler inscriptions tend to be from altars dedicated to the pluralized concept of deity.

These two HV- plural dedications were included in Raybould's (1999) study of literacy in Roman Britain along with three other of the HV- variants and 41 other Vitiris inscriptions. Two of the three singular HV- variants RIB 973 (*Deo Hvetiri*) and RIB 1602 (*Deo Hveteri Superstes [et] Regulus V S L M*) were ranked the highest of the Vitiris altars according to Raybould's criteria for literacy with 'A' characteristics as opposed to the more common D/E rating of the majority of Vitiris inscriptions (Raybould 1999: 234-240 Table R2). More care was being taken to represent the non-Latin form of the theonym by the skilled hand involved in the production of HV- inscriptions, indicating that epigraphic consciousness (Cooley 2002) was more of a factor in the form of the theonym than

supposed etymology indicating ethnic origin. Questions about the mind guiding that skilled hand and the conception of cultural identity being expressed through worship of the cult of Vitiris will be examined later through further analysis of inscriptional practice.

5.2.5 - Latinisation and standardisation: *Dibus Veteribus* – the old gods?

Heichelheim (1961) thought that some of the spelling variations represented an attempt to identify the theonym with the latin word *vetus*, 'old'. If a non-specific Latin title 'the old gods' was intended, greater standardisation might be expected, regardless of the supposed illiteracy of the low-status dedicants. 'The old gods' seems unlikely when so many other 'native' deities have distinctive names, and a general title the 'old gods' would surely have had a much wider and more varied distribution throughout Roman Britain than the regionalisation that can be demonstrated for Vitiris. Martin Henig (1984:62) comments that at first sight the name appears to be Latin, 'the old gods' but qualifies this with Anthony Birley's (1979:107) argument that the number of variants, and especially those with HV-, indicate that the theonym could not be easily expressed in the Latin alphabet.

To a high-ranking literate observer, the form *Dibus Veteribus* may have appeared as an illiterate attempt at honouring the 'old gods'. Raybould's (1999) analysis of the quality of inscriptions ranked these lowest. Although the VET-variants may represent deliberate latinisation, this is not an indication of greater literacy, but a simplification of more complex non-latinate forms. Eric Birley (1986:63) thought that Vitiris had been equated with the old god(s) by some worshippers, but qualified this by stating that the VET-variants may have differed from the original form and significance of the name. Aldhouse-Green & Raybould (1999, 117) also toyed with the idea of 'the old gods', and similar to Birley explain this phenomenon as part of the evolution of the cult, although not necessarily the original concept. The possibility of diachronic development for Vitiris is as important as the synchronic question of origin.

5.2.6 - Translation

Focusing on the linguistic origin of the theonym cannot be as important as what its existence tells us about religious experience on the Roman frontier of Northern England (Beard 1987:2; Woolf 2001b:119). Inscribing the theonym onto a votive altar was part of a new form of cult practice and was itself a process of transformation and translation. Once translation has occurred there is then an ongoing process of maintaining that original identification over time or further processes of translation and development can occur.

Issues of literacy aside, the variations in the form of spelling Vitiris suggests that the original translation was not standardised from the beginning, but had the capacity to develop through time without compromising the popularity of the deity. Thus translation can be, "revealed as but one moment in a complex nebula of personal accommodation and cross-cultural dialogue whose implications reach far beyond the merely lexical" (Ando 2005, 47).

Magusanus, intimately involved in the construction of Batavian identity in the Lower Rhineland (Roymans 2004), is often presented as ethnically Germanic, name-paired with Hercules and transported around the Empire including to Mumrills on the Antonine Wall (RIB 2140). The cult-centre at Empel had a pre-Roman open-air sanctuary, and a Flavian temple built AD 69-96 produced one of the oldest inscriptions to Hercules Magusen[us]. The *sen* element demonstrates that the theonym was originally Celtic and had been Germanicised by the Batavians when they were moved into the Rhineland by the Romans (Toorians 2003). The theonym can be related to the Llanboidy stone from Wales inscribed with the name *Mavohenos* (< *magusenos*), which Jackson (1953:521) translated as 'the old lad' or because it is a compound of two adjectives 'the youthful old one' implying vigour with age, an ambivalent meaning appropriate for a deity and compatible with the ambivalent representation of the Gallic Hercules provided by Lucian of Samosota (Toorians 2003:19-20)

Due to common Indo-European roots, the name Magusenos makes sense in both Celtic and Germanic. Toorians (2003) proposes a complex linguistic scenario of multiple changes from Celtic Eburones to mixed Celto-Germanic Batavians (although probably with elite emphasis on Germanic) and then rapid Latinisation with orthographic adaptation of local names. The situation of germanicised Celtic has proved a helpful tool for understanding the linguistic situation of the Lower Rhine and for interpreting other theonyms (*Dea Sandraudiga,* Toorians 1995). Transferring groups of people from the Rhineland and elsewhere, and then stationing them in Northern England in another polyglot situation where Latin was the prestige language, can perhaps explain the complexities of translating the theonym Vitiris and the many variations inscribed on the votive altars. This situation could be considered an example of creolization in its original linguistic sense (Webster 2001).

Conceptual connections between the Latinate *Veteri* 'old' and the proposed Germanic etymologies seem plausible. The HV- variants are phonetically similar and, if they are Germanic, have the added dimension of introducing the translated concepts

relating to Old Norse *hvitr* 'white' and possibly *vitir* 'knowledge', which are cognate terms throughout Indo-European languages; Old Irish *fios* 'knowledge' and *finn* 'white'; Old English wit and white; **weid* 'to see' is frequently the root of potent religious concepts; Celtic **wid* 'seer' or *uid* 'knowledge' as an element in Druid; Apollo Vindonnus 'god of clear sight' or white god' from a healing spring shrine in Essarois, France (Green 1992); Sanskrit *Veda* 'knowledge' the Hindu sacred texts; in the suffixed form **wid-tor* gives Greek *histor* 'wise, learned man' passed into English as history (*American Heritage Dictionary*). Linguistic links between white and knowledge are easily formulated throughout Indo-European languages and the putative Old Norse etymologies are also compatible with general notions of age and time, providing clues to contemporary processes of translation. Perhaps the most curious and specific proposal is the gigantic or primordial *hvethr*, the preferred etymology of Heichelheim (1961), referring to Loki, an ambiguous mythological figure declared in later saga's as both young and old.

To theorise a local conceptualisation and hypothetical Brittonic etymology of Vitiris would require a homonym of the suggested Old Norse etymologies or Latin *Veteri* with slightly different articulation. Other Indo-European languages contain related words to Latin *vetus,* and *veteris,* and the broad concept of time links all these words. In most languages the root-word **wet-* had a different development from Latin into terms relating to annular time e.g. *on hurid* Old Irish for last year or terms relating to young animals or yearlings, as with the Old English wether. This opens interpretation towards conceptual links ranging from cosmic concepts of genealogical and mythical concepts of time, to more immediate concerns relating to seasonality and cyclical time essential to the biological reproduction of plant, man and beast. These temporal cycles of pastoral and mixed farming regimes were explored in Chapter 4 as potent influences on ritual practice, often invoking fertility. A link to the iconography of Vitiris may be that a universal feature of swine is that they reproduce at any time of the year and are not tied to the seasonal breeding patterns of other wild and domesticated mammals. A nativist might invoke the gestation period of three months, three weeks and three days as a prime example of 'Celtic' triplication, but the ability to provide a year-round source of meat is what makes swine appropriate for sacrifice and feasting activities in many societies. Signalling an ability to supersede annual fertility cycles may have made the boar the appropriate symbol for a god whose epithet suggests varying concepts relating to time and knowledge. Any of these associations could have been disguised, or added to, through translation. In the case of Vitiris, the connotations of the theonym when recorded on inscribed votive altars

may have already gone through a variety of translations into related Latin and Germanic terms (Fig.5.10).
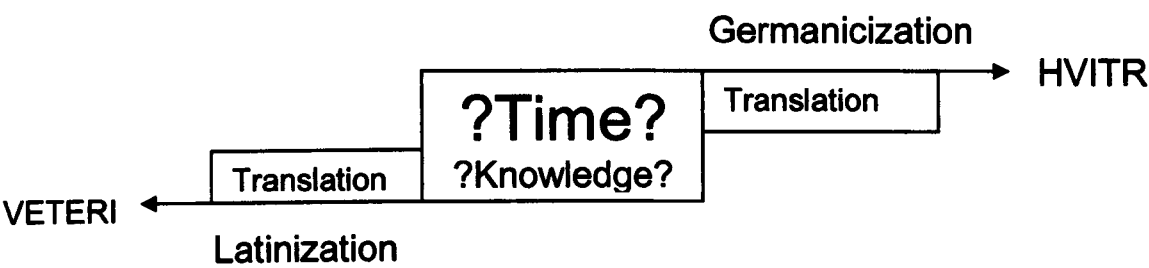
Fig.5.10 – A theonym of unclear origin will produce a range of related concepts through translation processes, especially within a polyglot frontier context.

Regardless of subjective judgements about the low-status of the cult, the spelling variations suggest processes of translation, and the singular and plural forms indicate that there were multiple conceptualisations of Vitiris. These are equally important to the lived experience of worshiping this deity as any theory of origin might be. The paradigm of basing interpretation on ethnic origin derived from etymological analysis is rejected for Vitiris, especially because of the context of the polyglot military communities of the northern frontier and its hinterland. Recent commentaries have promoted the deconstruction of Northern European ethnic identities (Jones 1997), particularly those based on classical ethnographies, in favour of an archaeological and material culture approach (Wells 2002). Although there was obviously significant regional variability, there were also many points of similarity in belief and practice that facilitated translation between peoples of Northern Europe (Woolf 1998:206-213).

Hybridisation

Hybridisation is a continuously generative process revealed through the practices underlying cultural synthesis. The concept of hybridity has been used in the anthropology of religion as part of the post-colonial critique of syncretism and cultural imperialism. Hybridity acknowledges the production of something new in the 'middle ground' (Gosden 2004:32-34) or "third space" (Bhabha 1990) between coloniser and colonised, and demands radical reconsideration of ethnic labels or identifications based on essentialist opposition. Hybridity can be misused and loses analytical force when simplistically

conceived as the blending of two previously autonomous cultural formations (e.g. Revell 2007:221) or a mixture of objects of diverse origin in the same assemblage (van Dommelen 2006:118-119) and has similar failings as unpoliticized syncretism. Under a Romanisation paradigm, the Vitiris altars might be taken as an example of the materialisation of "Roman" votive practice (Revell 2007), or to a nativist approach the mostly Latin inscription could be taken as a hybrid form through the non-Latin name of the deity. Studying the underlying practices materialised in the inscriptions to Vitiris (Ch.5.5) will be essential for the successful application of hybridisation theory into the multi-cultural situation of the northern frontier and for appreciating the diverse methods by which the worshippers of the local cult of Vitiris could "construct a distinct identity within the colonial context and situate themselves with respect to the dominant i.e. colonial culture' (van Dommelen 1997:309; 2006).

The development of the theatre in Roman Italy is considered a classic example of cultural hybridisation (Wallace-Hadrill 2007:361-363) and demonstrates the complexities of this approach. Republican Italy initially rejected the theatre as a place of sedition (literally sitting down) whereas in the Greek world they were fundamental social venues for the expression of local identities, community, ritual performance and riotous public assembly. Republican resistance against the building of permanent theatres gave way to the construction of temporary wooden ones, which became a focus for extravagant elite display of patronage and prestige. The first stone theatre eventually constructed by Pompey, required special pleading and was presented as a 'temple with steps'. The archaeological evidence for theatres in the republican period creates a picture of theatres being restricted to Southern Italy and could lead to an ethnic correlation with the cities that had previous Greek influence. Construction in stone in central Italy appears to be an innovation of the imperial period, but the literary evidence allows a completely different story of political nuance, Roman cultural identity struggling with pervasive Greek influence and massive social constructions that have left little archaeological trace (Wallace-Hadrill 2007). The example of theatres presents a salutary warning about the dangers of taphonomic bias and arbitrary nature of the archaeological record. Accounts of 'Celtic' religion have often focussed on the durability and monumentality of Roman period evidence, but an awareness of how the archaeological record might bias interpretation is essential.

This study will work from the premise that the practices inscribed in the details of votive altars have the potential to reveal more about processes of hybridisation and the

projected identities of those involved in this highly popular and vibrant cult, than any of the dubious theories of ethnic origin (Woolf 2001b:119; Beard 1987:2). The use of votive altars is an innovation in cult practice that accompanied the Roman conquest of Britain and it is through this medium that the cult of Vitiris materialises in the archaeological record. The distribution of altars suggests a regionally distinct localised cult and although there is no evidence for the theonym in pre-literate, pre-conquest Northern England, absence of evidence is not necessarily evidence of absence. Local people and the local context undoubtedly contributed to the development of the cult of Vitiris.

Just as the traditional practices of pastoralism contributed to the development of hybridised cult expression in Chapter 4, and reflected the socioeconomic context of ritual practice, so this chapter will aim to place the cult of Vitiris in its socio-political context. The local situation and the experience of military occupation would have influenced the development of the cult, but Vitiris cannot be strictly defined ethnically as Roman or native, and syncretic combinations remains questionable (Mattingly 2004:13; see Chapter 7). Hybridisation theory (van Dommelen 2006) and the practices underpinning religious synthesis will assist in interpreting the cult of Vitiris as a product of the diverse influences at work within the communities of the northern frontier of Roman Britain. As the most popular (at least in terms of numbers of inscriptions) non-classical deity in Roman Britain, the cult of Vitiris provides a perfect example for further consideration of vernacular religion.

5.2.8 - Problems of iconographic interpretation with the cult of Vitiris

The limited iconography associated with Vitiris supports equally ambiguous theories on the perception and conception of this popular cult. Of only eight altars with any iconographic decoration, the boar is the most consistent symbol associated with Vitiris from its relatively limited iconography. Clear on at least three altars (RIB1103, 1805, 973) the boar appears in tandem with other animal motifs and is possibly represented by a quadruped on a fourth (RIB1793). Two altars are decorated with celestial motifs, a star above the text on RIB 1730 and a crescent on RIB1602. Whether these represent a specific cosmic function for Vitiris or are generic decoration remains unknown.

From Ebchester, Maximus dedicated an altar to *Deo Vitiri*, decorated with an eagle and a boar (RIB1103; Phillips 1977: 244); what has been variously interpreted as a dolphin or snake appears with a boar on an altar from Carvoran dedicated by Deccius to *Dibus Vitiribus* (RIB 1805; *CSIR* 1.6.188; Coulston and Phillips 1988: 75; Fig.5.11); and from Netherby, a definite serpent curled around a tree and a boar with a tree in the background

188 *left side* (⅓)   188 *front* (⅓)   188 *right side* (⅓)

Fig. 5.11 – RIB 1805; *CSIR* 1.6.188; Boar and Serpentine (?) iconography on an altar to *Dibus Vitiribus* from Carvoran

189 *left side* (⅓)   189 *front* (⅓)   189 *right side* (⅓)

Fig.5.12 – RIB 973; *CSIR*1.6.189; Boar beneath a tree and a definite serpent wrapped around a tree from Netherby dedicated to *Deo Hvetiri*.

dedicated in fine lettering to *Deo Hvetiri* by an un-named dedicant (RIB 973; *CSIR* 1.6.189; Coulston and Phillips 1988: 76; Fig.5.12). Two uninscribed altars from Great Chesters may possibly have been intended for Vitiris. One is decorated with a boar and a horned or collared serpent (*CSIR* 1:6, 281) and the other with eagle and serpent (*CSIR* 1.6:280). Both are of similar size and appearance to other Vitiris altars, but the suggestion must remain conjectural without the specific dedications (Ross 1974: 430). However, the shared iconography would make them likely candidates from a site where the cult of Vitiris is well attested.

The altar from Carvoran, dedicated to *Deo Veteri* by the unusually named Necalames has a knife and an axe on one side and a quadruped on the other, which would seem most likely a boar (RIB 1793; *CSIR* 1.6.186; Coulston and Phillips 1988: 75), signifying the rites of animal sacrifice that accompanied the ritual of the vow that the altar commemorates (Derks 1995). Perhaps the boar was the favoured offering. An altar from Benwell (RIB1335) also confirms animal sacrifice through axe and knife decoration and the second *Viti(r)bus* altar from that site (RIB1336) depicts a faint long-tailed quadruped, which has been suggested as a hare (Heichelheim 1961). Iron Age silver coins found during excavation of the temple at Thistleton, in Rutland, have a boar motif and several pits dug into later floor levels contained a votive plaque dedicated to *Deo Vete(ri)* and a small votive figurine of a hare (Smith 2001). These common symbols serve to link the southern temple with the otherwise northern distribution of votive altars, with shared iconographic motifs on different media, appropriate to the respective military and civilian contexts. A boar and hare also appeared amongst the symbols on the Farley Heath Sceptre that depicted the vernacular pairing of smith and celestial gods (Goodchild 1938).

The most elaborate of the Vitiris altars from Netherby and dedicated to *Deo Hvetiri* (RIB 973 & *CSIR* 1:6, 189) is also the most puzzling. The classical interpretation for the imagery on RIB973 refers to the mythical labours of Hercules: the fourth labour of the Erymanthian boar and the serpent around the tree from the eleventh labour seeking the Golden apples in the garden of the Hesperides (Birley 1954:26 & 37). The danger in using RIB 973 as the foundation for interpreting the cult of Vitiris is that it gives undue privilege to this remarkable altar. The interpretative possibilities become a surfeit through the ambivalence of the imagery shaped by the competing etymological theories of ethnic origin.

Webster (1986:79) suggested that from a Nordic/Germanic perspective the scenes could be interpreted as the Norse *axis mundi* and tree of life, Yggrdrasil, with the world

serpent coiled around it, and the boar as an important symbol of warrior cults sometimes associated with Freyr or Odin. A 'Celtic' interpretation is also easily formulated with parallel motifs traced through wider Gallo-Brittonic iconography and with reference to medieval vernacular mythological literature (Green 1989:133-41; Green 1992: 44-45). The boar frequently occurs as an icon throughout ancient Europe and has been called the cult animal *par excellance* of the Celts (Ross 1974:430; Aldhouse-Green 2004: 132). The serpent and tree have parallels on the continent with a statue from Vaison, France, depicting a figure holding a wheel in one hand, an eagle standing at his feet and a serpent emerging from a tree and an altar from the same site depicts similar imagery of a god standing up holding a lightening symbol, a wheel with a serpent just below it and an eagle standing at his feet. The occurrence of eagle and wheel as symbols of a Celtic sky god associated with Jupiter is reasonably common in Gaulish iconography and Maximus of Tyre states that the Celts represented Zeus/Jupiter by a high oak tree (Ross 1974, 347-349). The wheel is thought to indicate a pan-Celtic sky god (Green 1984). Does this common symbolism justify considering Vitiris as a celestial deity?

5.2.9 - Jupiter Dolichenus – Sky and Smith god

In her study of *Military religion in Roman Britain*, Irby-Massie stated that little new light has been shed on the cult of Vitiris since Haverfield's initial study in 1918 (1999:106). However, she did make the novel suggestion that Vitiris could be linked to the metalworking aspect of Jupiter Dolichenus (1999:107). Irby-Massie used Heichelheim's (1961) preferred etymology for Vitiris as *hvetr-*, the epithet of Loki, interpreted as a multi-faceted fire God symbolising both the masculine role of the Smith and the feminine associations of the hearth. Irby-Massie presented Loki as the equivalent of the Roman Vulcan and leap-frogs through comparative mythology to connect the cult of Vitiris with Jupiter Dolichenus. More detailed study finds a closer comparison for the ambiguous Loki in the Titan Prometheus as a craftsman and culture hero associated with fire (De Vries 1933:265-275; Kerenyi 1997). Loki is a multi-faceted character in later Norse mythology whose characteristics would have undergone centuries of development. His title *hvetr-ung* 'son of a giant' indicates an ambiguous semi-divine figure and an outsider to the legitimate pantheon of Norse gods; quite different to Dolichenus who had been assimilated with Jupiter the supreme God of the Roman pantheon.

The chronological disjunction between the evidence for Jupiter Dolichenus and Loki argues against the methodology Irby-Massie uses. However, she pursued her theory

based on the observation that evidence for the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus coincides with Vitiris at nine sites out of a total of 14. Further support was provided by Eric Birley's (1986: 63) interpretation of one of the altars from Netherby, initially dedicated to Dolichenus, but re-assigned to Hvet[]r possibly by the same dedicant (RIB 969; Irby Massie 1999, 107). Despite disagreeing with the etymological basis for this theory, the proposed link with Jupiter Dolichenus has the virtue of presenting intriguing possibilities for cross-cultural translation and influence on the cult of Vitiris.

5.2.10 - The tyranny of *interpretatio* and the mythological roundabout

Celtic religion has always suffered from the tyranny of Caesar's initial comments on Gallic gods and the consequent focus on *interpretatio* leads inevitably to the cross-cultural speculation of comparative mythology. The fruits of these speculations are frequently uncritically reproduced. Lugus is often cited as the Mercury that Caesar mentioned, casting a 'native' shadow on the provincial worship of the classical deity (cf. Richert 2005:14 for a recent example; Irby-Massie 1999:99 usefully summarises the trope, "Lug, corresponding to Caesar's Mercury, was commemorated in place names throughout Europe...and survived as the Irish Lugh and Welsh Lleu"). These equations are never so simple, as non-classical deities could be equated with aspects of several of their classical counterparts. The Berne scholiasts commentary on Lucan's *Pharsalia* is confusingly inconsistent in classical equivalences for the Gallic gods Teutates, Esus and Taranis (Woolf 1998:212). On the northern frontier of Roman Britain, Cocidius was name-paired with both Silvanus (e.g.RIB1578) and more commonly Mars (e.g.RIB2025) (Irby-Massie 1999:111&158n.2). The situation is complicated by another dedication from Risingham being a joint one to Cocidius and Silvanus (RIB 1207) accompanied by iconography almost identical to the British Hunter-god of the southwest. This hybridised deity is represented as a complex amalgram of influences from the cults of classical Apollo, Roman Silvanus, and Phrygian Attis (Merrifield 1996: 110). Such syncretic formulations are best considered as British vernacular manifestations of diverse cult imagery; the interface of foreign and local in an imperial context. The perils of translation were apparent to many classical writers (Ando 2005) and there were no 'rules' for dealing with these problems, especially in iconography.

The mythological connections between pagan deities of ancient Europe are manifold and went through numerous processes of translation and interpretation before being recorded in early medieval literature. Prior to this we have the confusion and

profusion of iconography from the Roman period. According to the previous paradigm of interpretation, linguistic etymology can provide conceptual clues from the mists of pre- and proto-history that help to link these diverse sources together. The use of these diverse sources presents obvious difficulties and contributes to the 'timeless' quality of studies of Celtic religion (Fitzpatrick 1991). This comparative methodology often features in the interpretation of Celtic and other ancient religions and is best exemplified through structuralist studies (e.g Rees & Rees 1966) Anne Ross' *Pagan Celtic Britain* (1974) or the work of Miranda Green (1986; 1989; 1992; 2004). Once stepping onto the mythological roundabout, a bewildering array of tentative associations can lead through the entire gamut of northern European mythology and their classical *comparanda*.

The serpent and boar that figure in the iconography of Vitiris, also appear on the Gundestrup cauldron with the horned god that has become the archetypal image of a pan-Celtic deity (Irby-Massie 1999:102-3). There could be no better decoration for the mythological roundabout than the panels from the Gundestrup cauldron. Vitiris along with other local deities is often linked to various stone horned heads and images of horned male deities from the northern frontier zone (esp. Irby-Massie 1999 Chapter 3; see map and plan in Aldhouse-Green and Raybould 1999: 108-9). Images of horned anthropomorphic figures from Northern Britain (Fig 4.10) formed a significant body of evidence for Ross' study of *the Horned God of the Brigantes* (1961), although she saw no link to Vitiris. Some authorities argue that few 'Celtic' horned heads come from secure contexts in Britain and disregard them (Johns 2003:20). No images of horned figures in Northern England are ever accompanied by an inscription and although there is some overlap in distribution it is an unreasonable assumption to suggest that stone-carved horned heads represent the epigraphically attested local deities (Edwards 2006). In Gallic iconography, the horned god, once referred to as Cernunnos, has numerous associations with an age-differenciated triple-faced deity and appears with iconography associated with Mercury and Apollo (Green 1992:59-61). The horned god in Gaul is rarely accompanied by epigraphy, is never directly name-paired and due to the use of pre-conquest imagery has been presented as a highly resistant creolised deity (Webster 2003).

5.2.11 - Iconographic resistance

The horned god is one of several representations from the repertoire of Roman period iconography from Gaul that offer a creolized alternative to the Roman classical gods (Webster 2001;2003). Through the use of pre-conquest imagery, zoomorphism and the

disregard of classical verism, the iconography of certain Gaulish deities, like the horse goddess Epona, the horned god Cernunnos and the hammer god Sucellus, show characteristics of resistant adaptation (Webster 2003:47). More subtle processes of intercultural negotiation involved in religious syncretism are manifest through deliberate visual ambiguity, mimicry or the appropriation of symbolic power (Webster 2003:37). Can the boar as primary symbol on the Vitiris altars be read in a similar way through closer attention to the British context?

Several boar statuettes occur in ritual contexts from Iron Age Britain (Foster 1977) and in one instance a hoard from Hounslow also occurred with wheel symbols and Bronze Age metalwork in an accumulated hoard whose contents represented over a thousand years of prehistoric metalwork (Bradley 2002: 54). Boars feature on many Iron Age coins and quite often figure with the ancient celestial symbol of the wheel especially on the silver coinage of the *Corieltauvi* (Van Ardsell 1989; Leins 2008), examples of which were found at the Thistleton temple. Using pre-conquest imagery has been suggested as a strategy of iconographic resistance (Webster 2003, 40), but the boar seems a far too ubiquitous image to serve as a definitive example. The occurrence of Roman period sculptured images of boars in northeast England is often attributed to the insignia of the Twentieth legion, but some examples are figured against the background of a tree (Fig.5.13; *CSIR* 1.1.300) similar to RIB 973. Should these sculptures be linked to the cult of Vitiris or did the common motif assist military toleration and the widespread appeal of the cult? Perhaps this very iconic pervasiveness of the boar and its many cross-cultural associations served as a strategy for the promotion of the cult of Vitiris. This may have either encouraged or itself been symptomatic of other conceptual and linguistic associations being established for this frontier cult.
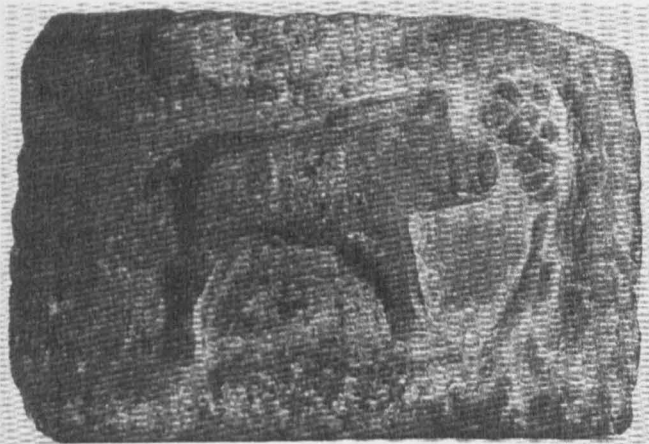
Fig.5.13 – *CSIR* 1.6:278

Boar of the 20th legion, symbol of Vitiris or compatible with both?

Rather than clear instances of resistant adaptation, Vitiris iconography may have played on the ubiquity and ambivalence of its imagery using subtle strategies to ensure accommodation within the range of cult worship in the frontier region of Roman Britain. Fig.5.13 – The boar as the symbol of the 20th legion and

The boar and tree on RIB 973 has a close match in shared iconography on two relief carvings of *genii* from the same site of Netherby (Fig.5.14 & 5.15). The deities are dressed in *himation* and in the same pose of sacrificing over an altar, but using the celestial wheel symbol instead of the more usual *patera* (*CSIR* 1:6, 375-6; Coulston and Phillips 1988). The more complete relief has a boar and a tree in the background. Is this simply artistic influence from one monument to the other or could the Netherby deities be previously unrecognised depictions of Vitiris? The substitution of the wheel and the addition of a boar under a tree make this, "a local deity of the countryside represented in a largely romanized form" (Coulston and Philips 1988:134); a description that would be appropriate for a sculptural representation of Vitiris. The identical imagery in a close contextual relationship makes this a stronger possibility than any connection to a horned god (*contra* Irby-Massie 1999:101-105).

The combination of celestial wheel and boar in woodland setting seems to reference pre-conquest symbolism (Webster 2003, 40), whose potency would have received widespread recognition and multiple meanings by diverse people from across Northern Europe. The Netherby relief sculptures of the *genius* with the wheel do not have an inscription to link them definitively to Vitiris, but the common iconography shared with RIB 973 at the same site suggests a vernacular representation of Vitiris.

The Netherby *genii* has a direct parallel in the pose of the celestial deity from Vindolanda (*CSIR* 1.6.352; Leach 1962; Fig.5.6), with the vernacular character of both deities emphasised by replacing the *patera*, with the non-classical symbol of the celestial wheel, but still used by the local deities in classical fashion as if performing a libation sacrifice. The subversion of the usual sacrificial pose complements the earlier discussion of the British appropriation of aspects of the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus. The dual dedication to Jupiter Dolichenus and Brigantia Caelestis (RIB1131) from Corbridge has this sacrificial pose depicted on one side of the altar. Along with the celestial wheel god and smith on pottery from Corbridge, the undesignated depictions of vernacular deities (*CSIR* 1.6.352; 375-6) are all from sites where Vitiris is the most popular local deity.

376 (⅕)

Figs. 5.15 & 5.15 -Vernacular gods
wearing a *himation* and sacrificing with celestial wheel from Netherby (*CSIR* 1.6:375-6)

375 (⅙)

The Vindolanda and Netherby deities are also matched in appearance by them both wearing a *himation* robe, which potentially makes a statement about non-Roman identity and Hellenistic influence. Choice of dress carried with it important implications and the *himation* is often used in Roman art to represent Greek philosophy or the excesses of non-Roman values for which the Greeks were denigrated. Unfortunately the heads of the Netherby *genii* are missing, although given the identical pose and attributes, it seems likely that a cap was worn. Ancient artists often depicted Prometheus wearing the pointed cap of the craftsman or artisan, and it is as clear an indicator of the craftsman Titan as it is of the smith god Hephaistos/Vulcan. The connections between these two mythological figures go beyond the roles of craftsman and they had been syncretically associated in mystery cults such as the Kabeiroi of Samothrace. A hierarchical relationship of powerful elder Prometheus and reverent Hephaistos was depicted on a relief carving from the entrance of the Athenian Academy (Kerenyi, 1997:50-51&58). An obvious objection is that Prometheus is never a celestial god in Greek myth, but such direct parallels fail for this kind of syncretic imagery (Drinkwater 1992). The deity depicted at Vindolanda and Netherby is not Prometheus or Dolichenus, but rather a local adaptation that references the range of influences considered appropriate for these vernacular *bricolages*.

Webster used the Netherby relief as an example of mimesis, where indigenous artists appropriated classical divine attributes such as *cornucopiae*, bringing the function represented under the domain of the local god (2003:34). Webster would argue that the Netherby *genius* is neither Celtic nor Roman, but a creole deity. This thesis prefers to classify such images as vernacular; multi-cultural innovations renewing local tradition in the specific socio-political context of the northern frontier.

5.2.12 - Seizing the club from Hercules

Returning to RIB 973, Vitiris is never directly equated with Hercules through name pairing, although there is other iconographic evidence for the Greek hero's cult in Northern Britain. Localised appropriation on *CSIR* 1.6.317 from Castlesteads shows Hercules wearing a torc, and with his club depicted as a separate attribute (also *CSIR* 1.6.479). The many travels of the classical hero Hercules were used as a means to incorporate non-Mediterranean peoples into classical mythology and cosmology and intellectually justify colonisation and conquest (Rankin 1995). Hercules was thus conceived as the progenitor of many barbarian peoples including the Celts. Lucian of Samosota describes how Hercules was appropriated in Gaul and iconographically adapted (*Hercules* 1-6; Freeman

2002 30-32). Hercules' main attribute of strength was allegorically linked to the power of eloquence, appropriate to Gallic values, but the tangential points of comparison in the translation process from Greek myth to syncretic art meant that the depiction of the Gallic Hercules as an old man with silver chains attached from his tongue to the ears of devotees caused confusion for the classical observer in Lucien's account (Ando 2005). Hercules also featured in acts of self-determination, most notably by the Batavians in the Rhineland who linked this semi-divine hero-ancestor to their god Magusenus appropriating a classically approved origin myth, creating a shared history within the framework of Roman power and in the process creating a distinct ethnic identity (Roymans 2004).

The boar and serpentine imagery on RIB973 are iconographically associated with Vitiris from other sites and so a random choice of images seems unlikely. The standard of workmanship would argue for a high status dedicator and yet there is no other text except the name of the deity, whose form is distinctly non-Latin and appears without any Latin formulaic dedication. The worshipper was making a dedication to a local deity, but could afford to use a sculptor of the highest calibre who was familiar with classical iconography. RIB 973 never explicitly links *Hvetiri* with the *person* of Hercules. The abilities of the sculptor were used to dramatic effect, leaving a tantalising glimpse of potentially allegorical meaning through mythological motifs paralleled on other Vitiris altars. Hercules Magusenus provides a precedent for the allegorical use of Herculean myth. The tenth labour of stealing the cattle of Geryon has been suggested as the basis for identification with Magusenus in the Lower Rhineland, linked to the predominance of cattle-herding economies in local societies (Derks 1998). The two labours depicted on RIB973 have a common allegorical sub-plot relating to immortality and the release of the Titan Prometheus from his eternal punishment (Robertson 1951:150-155). In the fourth labour, Hercules accidentally shoots the immortal centaur Chiron with an arrow dipped in the hydra's poison. This presages the later incident in the eleventh labour when Hercules frees Prometheus from his eternal torment and takes on the centaur's immortality whilst Chiron replaces Prometheus in Hades. These sub-plots specifically link the fourth and eleventh labours and depicted together on RIB 973 suggests deliberate choice and allegorical meaning. What relevance this might have to Vitiris remains elusive. RIB 973 is a fascinating example of the tensions and interactions between local and foreign forms of knowledge and belief.

Prometheus was involved in various Greek cosmogonic myths, particularly as a craftsman, creator of mankind and stealer of lightening. Through his trickery he was also

responsible for determining that the sacrifice offered to the gods did not include the edible parts of animals thus ensuring that humans could feast. He suffered eternal punishment by the Olympian pantheon for stealing fire from heaven for the good of mankind. There is no more potent resistance figure to Olympian order than Prometheus. Atlas, Prometheus' Titanic brother, was seen as a natural philosopher, teacher and instructor of Hercules and the eleventh labour also involved temporary release from his eternal punishment. In classical mythology Atlas represents transcendence, linking the earthly and the celestial spheres as the *axis mundi* (Putnam 1974:215-217). The punishment of the two Titans is frequently depicted on Attic pottery where Prometheus and Atlas are shown together with the eagle and serpent associated with them respectively. Eagle and serpent symbolism are associated with other classical chaotic beings in the iconography of Roman Britain, and have been suggested as the inspiration for the 'gorgon' on the Bath temple pediment (Hinds 1995). The eagle and serpent are the other symbols that figure in tandem with the boar in Vitiris' limited iconography. Celtic identity had been associated with Titanic metaphors since the Galatian migrations (Rankin 1995) and the Giant Polyphemus, was another mythical propagator of the Celts through the nymph Galatos. These mythological mechanisms for the classical world to cosmologically incorporate barbarian peoples could be appropriated in Northern Europe and re-worked in acts of self-determination, as the Batavians did with the Hercules myths.

The subtle choice of allegory on the part of the dedicant of RIB 973 requires a willingness to accept the possibility that a local cult could manifest influence from the entirety of the imperial context it was enmeshed in. This titanic allegorical interpretation of RIB 973 also requires that people on the northern frontier had sufficient knowledge of classical mythology. There are potentially Greek names (Miles and Aurides RIB973) from amongst Vitiris worshippers. The contemporary use of classical mythology is no more speculative than using later Norse or Celtic mythology whose written forms do not appear for centuries. RIB 973 dedicated to *DEO HVETIRI* undoubtedly incorporates Herculean mythological imagery, but whether the etymology with the Promethean Loki as *hvetr-ung* is thrown into the equation is another matter (Heichelheim 1961; Irby-Massie 1999:108).

Prometheus and Atlas between them provide alternative examples of the craftsman and the celestial axis, which mirror the dual roles of Jupiter Dolichenus (Kerenyi 1997:58). Dolichenus had been assimilated with the supreme god of the Olympian pantheon, whereas Prometheus and Atlas offer ambivalent associations for Vitiris as resistance figures to the Olympian order. However, these need not be competing theories as the

common themes support the possibility of multiple allusions to the same themes. Unusual processes of translation and the only *interpretatio* of *Mogunti Vitire* (RIB 971) occurred at Netherby, way to the west of the normal distribution for Vitiris altars. The inter-change of imagery between Herculean mythology (RIB 973), vernacular celestial deities, and the re-dedication of RIB 969 from Dolichenus to *Hvet[]er* all occur at the same site. The Titans Prometheus and Atlas were essential to classical cosmogony and cosmology and connected the extreme east and west of the classical world. Whether through titanic allegory or appropriation from the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus, the range of eclectic influences on the cult of Vitiris encompasses similar extremes.

Taken to its ultimate conclusion, pursuing an allegorical meaning from the fourth and eleventh Herculean labours and relating them to the cult of Vitiris supports a thesis of appropriation from the wide variety of sources available on the northern frontier of the Roman Empire. Unfortunately this requires stepping onto the mythological roundabout, with symbols of celestial wheel, boar, eagle and serpent flashing by, and the features of titanic brothers, Norse trickster, Greek hero, Rome's supreme sky-father and Asiatic storm and smith god blurring into a hybrid composite of mythical eclecticism to rival the panels of the Gundestrup cauldron. Although the nature of the evidence for the cult of Vitiris makes this re-evaluation of previous theories highly speculative, once free of the etymological and ethnic paradigm of interpretation, the potential for re-considering local cults as part of the wider religious dynamism of the Roman Empire can be realised. Pigeon-holing the cult of Vitiris as primitive, native, resistant or as a Germanic import does not do justice to this vibrant hybridised frontier cult. Considering the range of available influences, whether from the Tyne valley, the east Midlands, the Rhineland or Asia Minor, helps to place the cult of Vitiris into the wider context of religious synthesis occurring on the northern frontier of Roman Britain.

5.3.1 – The temple at Thistleton Dyer, Rutland

The varying opinions on the ethnic origin of Vitiris are based on a paradigm that has accomplished little with the evidence for the cult. Yet, a large sample of 61 altars with a reasonably tight distribution in northeast England and even a dedication on a votive plaque from a temple at Thistleton in Rutland represents a relative abundance of evidence for a vernacular cult in Roman Britain. Having speculated on exotic influences, the local manifestation of those influences needs to be more firmly established. The landscape context of the Thistleton temple will provide fresh stimulus for studying the cult of Vitiris.

Landscape approaches have been most successfully applied to prehistoric ritual practices, but are still underused in studies of Roman religion (Petts 2002). The landscape context of the temple-site at Thistleton, can be compared with characteristics of the regional distribution of votive altars in the frontier zone, and both related to the watershed boundaries of river systems.

The Thistleton temple with its votive plaque dedicated to *deo Vete(ri)*, generated considerable interest at the time of excavation (see notes in Ross 1974 and pictures in Piggott 1968), but a full site report was never published and it has received little consideration in discussions of Vitiris. Thistleton has been included in various compilations of temple sites (Rodwell 1980:572; Smith 2001), but the usual treatment is brief due to the lack of a formal report. The temple is situated on the north of the Cottesmore plateau and is part of a ridge of high ground that runs up through Northamptonshire and Lincolnshire and is notably rich as a source of ironstone (Schrüfer-Kolb 2004). Evidence for both Iron Age and Roman metalworking has been found along this ridge and from the immediate surroundings of the temple. The ritualisation of important mineral sources has been highlighted in other areas of Britain (Yeates 2006), and has its closest parallel in the temple complex of Lydney Park and its proximity to the Forest of Dean ores. The association between religious activity and control of production and important resources can have major ideological and socio-political implications (Knapp 1988). Iron Age coin distributions have led to the suggestion that the ironstone-rich ridge also formed part of a prehistoric north-south trade route, known as the Jurassic way, which operated throughout prehistory. Incorporating the boundaries of Lincolnshire, Leicestersire and Rutland, a drove road called Sewstern Drift continued this pattern of use into the 18th and 19th centuries (NMR monument report: Linear 77 #1035203). The Thistleton temple is also situated near an east-west Roman connector road between the Fosse way and Ermine Street and can therefore be perceived as a meeting point or cross-roads of route-ways.

The excavation revealed a series of structures dating from the first to the fourth centuries AD. A multi-phase circular building with its origins in Later Prehistory was the focus for deposits of a small number of brooches, considerable quantities of ceramics and 13 coins of the Corieltauvi, including variants of the silver half stater decorated on one side with a boar and the symbol of the celestial wheel (Van Arsdell 1989; type 887-1). The sequence is unclear from the secondary sources, but the earliest floor appears to have been composed of crushed ironstone, the local metalliferous ore, and the initial timber

phases were replaced with a circular stone foundation in the second century A.D. The ironstone floor was replaced by a mosaic with the remains of a base for an altar or cult figure in the centre. In the third century A.D. a large rectangular basilica-type hall was constructed over the circular structures. Two pits were found cut into the floor of the western half of the building, one of which contained a silver/white metal votive plaque dedicated to *deo Vete(ri)* and in the second pit was a silver votive feather with a small cast bronze hare (Smith 2001:257; Ross 1974, 91-92). There have been further metal-detecting finds in the vicinity and four other structures within a *temenos* enclosure have been revealed through aerial photography.

The boar has been suggested as a totemic device of the Corieltauvi (Van Ardsell 1989) because it is unusually prominent on their silver coin series, in tandem with the wheel or other celestial symbols. These two symbols in common encourage further consideration of the Netherby *genius* and the possibility of symbolic transference from later prehistory into the Roman period. The transference of the cult in either direction suggests an ability to transcend territorial boundaries, perhaps through the recognition of a functional correspondence. Landscape analysis will help cement the relationship between the northern distribution of Vitiris altars and the southern dedication from the temple.

5.3.2 - The main east-west watershed of Britain and the distribution of Vitiris altars

The fort of *Magnis* (modern Carvoran) has produced 13 altars dedicated to Vitiris, (more than 20% of the total sample) and has been suggested as a cult 'centre'. Taphonomic factors and biases of antiquarian research have undoubtedly had their effect on the distribution of Vitiris altars, but the absence of altars from excavated forts to the west of Carvoran (except for the distant outliers at the outpost fort of Netherby) seems to be a real characteristic of the distribution pattern. Rather than being a cult 'centre' necessarily, this concentration at the western limit of the core area of the distribution serves to reinforce the boundary with the local deities of Cumbria, Belatucadros and Cocidius. The limiting factor for the area of influence of Vitiris can be related to a specific characteristic of the wider geographic setting; the main east-west watershed of Britain. Carvoran is situated on the low-lying but strategically prominent piece of land at the Tyne-Irthing gap where a combination of fluvial, topographic and geological factors have caused the separation of the westward flowing river Irthing and the eastward flowing Tyne by just a few miles (Fig.5.16).
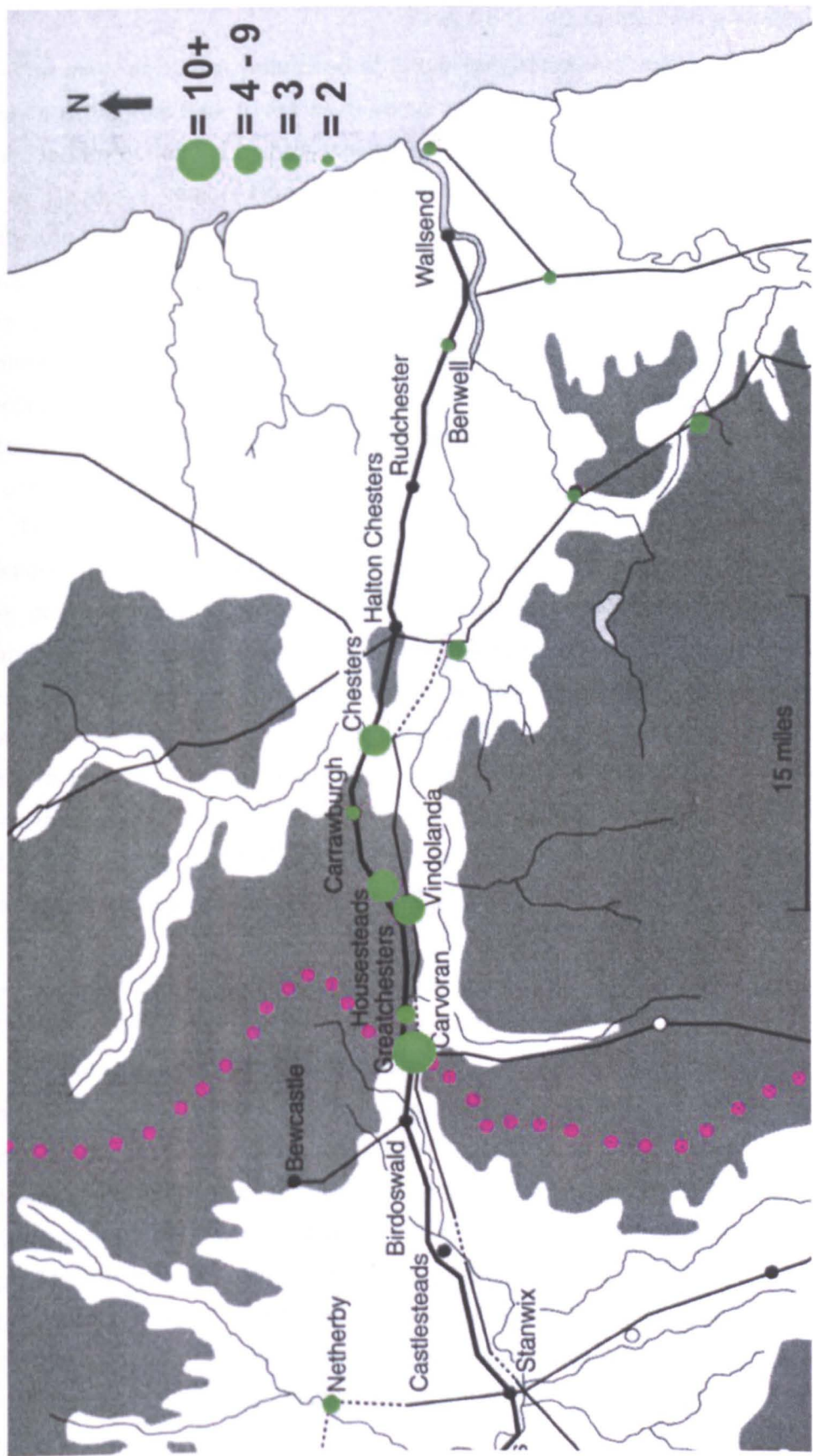
Fig.5.16 – Distribution of Vitiris altars in relation to the main East-West watershed of Britain

The main east-west watershed of Britain separates river systems whose ultimate destination is the Irish Sea, to the west, from those rivers that flow eastwards to the North Sea, and is mostly defined by high topographic regions such as the Pennine ridge to the south of Hadrian's Wall. However, in the relatively low-lying Tyne-Irthing gap the watershed is not clearly defined and consequently this area provides a convenient trans-Pennine communication route. This relatively low-lying corridor between the eastern flowing and westward flowing rivers of Britain was, of course, a strategic factor in the placement of the Hadrian's Wall and serves to emphasise the importance of this connecting point between the areas west and east of the Pennines. The strategic importance is only usually discussed from a military perspective reflecting the primary focus of Roman frontier studies.

The major east-west watershed of Britain can have much wider socio-cultural implications, as demonstrated in the immediate post-Roman period by the linguistic and cultural divisions between Anglian Northumbria and Brittonic Cumbria (Jackson 1963; Higham 1986). There is an inherent ambiguity to these relatively low-lying transition points between river systems that can act as both boundary and conduit. Watersheds are one type of liminal landscape feature that were the focus for ritual activity throughout prehistory and the relevance of this particular type of landscape feature to ritual practice will be further explored in Chapter 6. The correspondence between the Tyne-Irthing watershed boundary limiting the distribution of the Vitiris altars is given further significance when compared to the landscape context of the temple at Thistleton.

5.3.3 - Thistleton as a triple watershed nodal point

The Thistleton temple occupied a highly symbolic and liminal position at a nodal point where the watershed boundaries of three major river systems, the Witham, the Welland and the Trent meet. These river systems have been suggested as defining features of a large-scale Late Iron Age social unit (usually referred to as a tribe) that in the Roman period was formalised as the *civitas* of the Corieltauvi (Todd 1991). This group name has been translated as, 'the host of the assembly of many rivers' (Breeze 2002, 307-309) and Late pre-Roman Iron Age coin distributions indicate their occupation of the Trent basin with its many tributaries, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and the northern part of the Midland plain (Todd 1991, 13; Fig.5.17). Immediately to the south of the Thistleton temple are upper tributaries of the Welland, which enters the North Sea through the fenlands around the Wash.
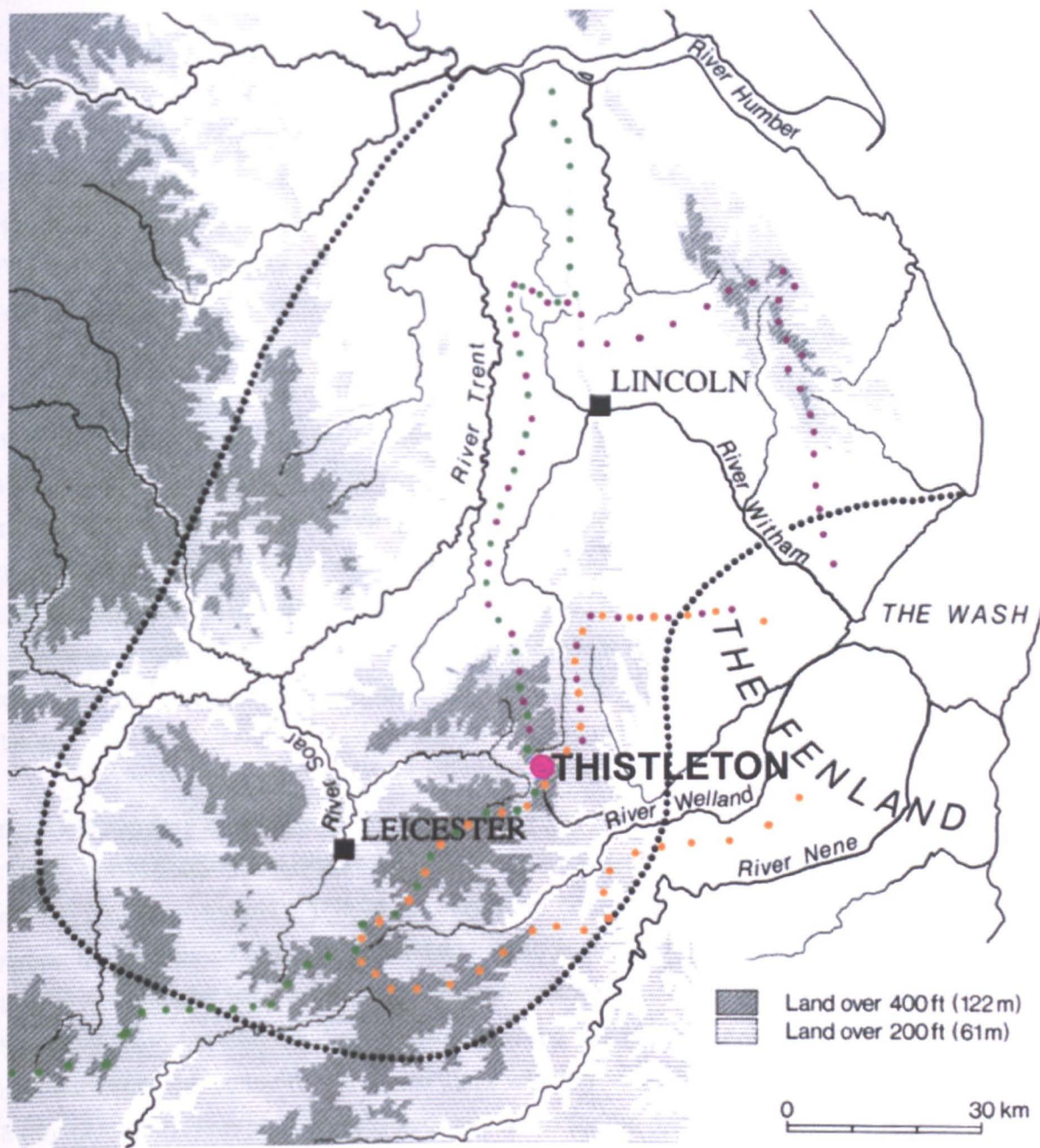
Fig.5.17 – The temple at Thistleton, Rutland is on the Cottesmore plateau, which forms a triple watershed nodal point for the fluvial systems of the Trent (green dots), the Welland (orange dots) and the Witham (purple dots), each with its own separate sea outlet. This location would have served as an *axis mundi* at the centre of the proposed territory of the Corieltauvi, whose name translates as 'the assembly of many rivers' (after Todd 1991).

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From the distribution of late prehistoric coins the watershed between the rivers Nene and Welland has been considered a possible boundary between the Iceni and Corieltauvi (Todd 1991,13). Forming to the west of the Thistleton temple are headwaters of the River Eye, which is part of the massive Trent drainage system that enters the North Sea at the Humber. Thirdly, to the north of the Thistleton temple is the source of the River Witham. The Witham has produced large amounts of prehistoric prestige metalwork and other votive material and was an important focus for prehistoric ritual activity.

The positioning of the Thistleton temple on the Cottesmore upland plateau shows that the sacred significance of river systems could extend even to their boundaries. A drainage basin shares its topographic boundary with only a limited number of other fluvial systems and the recognition of nodal points where three systems connect reveals a striking example of extra-regional geographical awareness. The use of this specialised geographical knowledge takes on a cultural and religious significance through the consequent ritualisation of these types of landscape feature. The Cottesmore plateau as a triple watershed nodal point is a highly specific geographical location and was also the location of the largest Late Bronze Age hoard in the east Midlands (Crowther Benyon 1908).

5.3.4 - Boundary and Centre

There are various inter-locking themes that can be interpreted from the landscape position of the Thistleton temple. This triple watershed nodal point was not only the source of rivers, but also metal ores. Carvoran also has an association with routeways and proximity to the rich mineral resources of the North Pennines. Carvoran is at the junction of the Stanegate and the Maiden Way, the Roman road that crosses the ridge of the Pennines and connects the valley of the South Tyne with the forts in the Eden valley (Jones and Mattingly 2002). This junction provided the means for the movement of troops and mineral resources out of the North Pennines and both routes traverse the main east-west watershed of Britain.

As a defining characteristic of the landscape, the watershed can serve several important functions. In the case of the Vitiris altars, the watershed can be conceived as a boundary feature, imposing a limit on the distribution that appears to conform to local cultural geography rather than the deployment of military units. The position of the Thistleton temple as a nodal point for three river systems shows how certain specific points on the watershed boundary can also act as centralising foci for wider territorial

concerns. The characteristics of the topographic location suggest that the site may have been perceived as an *axis mundi*, a cosmological focal point where heaven, earth and underworld meet, associated with cosmogenic myths and a supreme supernatural being (Eliade 1987). This cosmological hub or axis is often conceived as a sacred tree or manifested in the highest or most prominent point in a region as a sacred mountain linking celestial, earthly and chthonic planes and a source of heavenly waters. The inferences from the landscape analysis may represent the vernacular ethos at the heart of the cult of Vitiris. The Thistleton temple as an *axis mundi* and more practically a hub of routeways, situated on a metal rich ridge that was the source of rivers, and utilised as a source of iron during prehistory and into the Roman period bears close resemblance to the two primary characteristics of Jupiter Dolichenus (Spiedel 1978).

Irby-Massie's proposed equation between Vitiris and Jupiter Dolichenus (1999:107) is given added credence through the iron source and *axis mundi* inferences from the landscape analysis of the Thistleton temple. In light of this, the altar from Netherby, (RIB969) re-dedicated from Jupiter Dolichenus to *Hveter*, would appear more than just convenient re-use of an already dressed stone. What are the implications of a functional equivalence between Vitiris and Jupiter Dolichenus? Interaction and influence between local and foreign cults is perfectly plausible, but it is difficult to decipher whether there was a functional comparison, appropriation or indeed competition. The connections between the popular, but low-status vernacular Vitiris and the semi-official status of the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus hint at tensions between officially promoted and unofficial cult worship. Were the inferences from the landscape analysis of Thistleton pre-existent features of Vitiris that aided comparison with the eastern god or is the dedication on a bronze plaque far to the south of the distribution of altars a contempoary equivalence from the third century AD?

The relationship with watershed boundaries and the boar that had been a potent symbol on the coinage from the east midlands provide connections between northern altars and southern temple that are independent from any association with Jupiter Dolichenus. The pre-conquest component to the cult-site at Thistleton and further evidence presented in Chapter 6 suggests that the later prehistoric use of watersheds for ritualised practices and defining regional identities was well established in Britain. Acknowledging watersheds as potent features of the landscape is a defining characteristic of the cult of Vitiris. The third century dedication to Vitiris deposited in a pit at Thistleton fits the *floruit* of the cult, but also represents radical architectural re-configuration of the site,

from successive circular structures to a basilica style rectangular building (Smith 2001). While this signifies locational continuity and the significance of place, the architectural changes also herald pit deposition of cult paraphernalia. Whether the craft component interpreted from the metal-source and metal-working context of Thistleton is an existing characteristic of Vitiris, a contemporary equivalence or an acknowledgement of appropriation from the cult of Dolichenus is impossible to state with confidence. All that can be done is to highlight the potential connections between the two cults, and acknowledge the potential for wide-ranging influences upon the development of 'native' cults.

While it would be unwise to place too much emphasis on the re-dedication of RIB 969 from Dolichenus to *Hvet[]r*, this could be a politicised act of appropriation in the same spirit as the iconographic mimesis of the vernacular celestial deity with wheel and cap. Whilst not strictly iconoclasm as there is no icon involved, the *Hvet[]r* altar from the Severan well at Vindolanda demonstrates that at least one of the better contextualised Vitiris altars was deliberately taken out of circulation in this period. The context is matched by RIB 1047 from Chester-le-Street, to the unusual goddesses *Daeabus Vitiribus*, which was also found in a well, perhaps as a secondary rite. The evidence for structured and structural deposits in wells during the Roman period has been argued as the persistence of "native traditions" of deposition in watery contexts (Fulford 2001; Woodward & Woodward 2004) and a new Roman period adaptation of previous depositional practice (Webster 1997c). The altar from the Severan well at Vindolanda is interesting as it provides both a dateable context and potential links to alternative ritual practices associated with votive altars.

The semi-official promotion of Jupiter Dolichenus in the Severan period could have had a negative impact on the popular vernacular cult of Vitiris, especially if they had over-lapping roles and functions. RIB 1131 represents unusual localisation of Jupiter Dolichenus with the divine marriage to the regional goddess, Brigantia. Appropriation as a two-way process can be seen in the reworking of religious symbolism provided by the Vindolanda and Netherby gods with the celestial wheel and also the Corbridge pottery and clay moulds depicting the vernacular interpretation of the dual roles of Dolichenus. Post-colonial theory would see characteristics of resistant adaptation in these images through mimesis, the subversion of depictions of sacrifice and the substitution of non-Roman imagery. The local reception and appropriation of Jupiter Dolichenus (Leach 1960; Coulston and Philips 1988) were all from sites where Vitiris is the most popular local god.

This dual conceptualisation of craftsman and cosmic deity could provide an alternative explanation for the plural gods so frequently evoked on Vitiris altars and provides a plausible alternative to the assumed Celtic triad (Ross 1974:479).

5.4.1 – Post-colonial theory: resistance and *interpretatio*

Syncretic systems formed in colonial situations are always subject to a power discourse (Stewart and Shaw 1994) with domination, hegemony and counter-hegemonic resistance essential themes for consideration (Forcey 1997; Gramsci 1971). A creolization perspective for reading material culture in a colonial context has been used to explore the tensions between the elite dominated culture of the Roman Empire and the processes of maintaining local traditions through negotiation and resistance (Webster 2001). Webster has cogently argued that the synthesis of Roman and Celtic religious systems was not passive, but part of a colonial discourse, with religious syncretism an arena for contestation and negotiation within the social hierarchy of the Roman Empire (Webster 1997a). A primary example is *interpretatio Romana*, the name pairing of classical and Celtic deities (1995 a&b). Webster's contention is that these equations were being made from a dominant position of power over a subjugated system whose religious practitioners had been subjected to a rigorous extermination policy. Amongst Webster's examples of resistance was Belatucadros, the deity local to northwest England, whose inscriptions are of similar quality and variable spelling to Vitiris, but is also occasionally name-paired with Mars by Romanised dedicants e.g. (RIB 918). The majority of dedications without *interpretatio* are similar in style to Vitiris inscriptions, made on small crudely fashioned altars with little iconography, and poor epigraphy. Dedicants names where they are included are usually single, Celtic or Latinised Brittonic. Webster (1995b:179) used single Belatucadros dedications as examples of resistance to name pairing from the native population, highlighting the colonial discourse represented in the process of *interpretatio romana* when compared to the high-status dedicants who name-paired a variety of Celtic deities with Apollo. Aldhouse-Green and Raybould (1999:113) disagree that Mars Belatucadros has higher-status dedicants than the single theonyms, but Webster's underlying criticism that Romano-British syncretism had been under-theorised remains valid.

The cult of Vitiris does not have examples of *interpretatio Romana*. Vitiris is only ever name-paired once with Mogons (RIB971), a deity who is also non-Roman and possibly of continental origin from the Rhineland. This hints at alternative strategies of

appropriation, translation and hybridisation and a more complex situation than the Roman-Native dichotomy perpetuated by Romanisation and syncretism. Mogons, as a divine title was interpreted by Anne Ross as Celtic (1974: 471; following Jackson), meaning 'the great/powerful one'. *Dea Mogontia* occurs on an altar from Metz and as a place-name element in the Rhineland, Mogons is present in the ancient name for Mainz, Mogontiacum, which was in the territory of the Vangiones. Mogons occurs independently with variations in spelling on several altars from Northern England. The scattered distribution throughout the frontier zone and the continental evidence suggests that Mogons is a divine title of foreign origin (Aldhouse-Green & Raybould 1999: 126). As with Magusenos/Magusanus, there is no definitive Germanic or Celtic etymological origin of the theonym Mogons. The first cohort of Vangiones were stationed at Risingham in the third and fourth century and the fort has produced a Mogons dedication and a variant Mounus which supports the connection with the Vangiones and an origin in the Rhineland (Aldhouse-Green & Raybould 1999:126).The *interpretatio* of *Deo Mogonti Vitire* (RIB 971) leads to the inference that Mogons, a deity of probable continental origin, was being equated with a local divinity, Vitiris.

Although not directly applicable to Vitiris, Webster's theories (1995a&b) about the power discourse in name-pairing provides a relevant background to the interpretation of local cults in Northern England. The quality and small size of the Vitiris altars, allied with very few examples of iconography, and the poor epigraphy of the inscriptions have all led to the interpretation of Vitiris as having a low-status cult worship similar to that of Belatucadros (Irby-Massie 1999, 113). This could suggest that Vitiris was an almost exclusively 'native' deity whose local popularity was not compromised by *interpretatio romana.* However, the cult of Vitiris survives through the material form of the altars that are a Graeco-Roman votive practice, as is the epigraphic habit that records the name of the deity. Seeking a purely 'native' resistant cult would ignore the socio-political conditions of the frontier (Woolf 2000:628) that required subtler strategies of negotiation, adaptation accommodation and translation. These are harder to draw out from the evidence than more extreme examples of Romanised assimilation and native resistance. Through the appropriation of the ideotechnic device of the votive altar, the complex interaction between foreign and local and the reconciliation of continuity and innovation (Woolf 2001) is exhibited within the hybridised cult of Vitiris.

Regardless of the legitimacy of Irby-Massie's (1999) proposed link to Jupiter Dolichenus or the titanic allegory, the landscape analysis has demonstrated the validity of

considering the cult of Vitiris in its local context. Woolf's criticism of the use of abstracted ecological zones and static landscapes leading to a pervasive focus on continuity has been heeded and the possibility of radical change, multiple conceptualisations and social tension between different social strata of provincial communities has been considered (2000:627-628). Further detailed analysis of the substantial data-set of Vitiris altars will allow a re-evaluation that explores those discrepant identities and social tensions further (Mattingly 2004; 2006). Local and regional modes of social organisation will be suggested as having greater influential on the geographical distribution of votive altars than the military conditions that are normally assumed to dictate life on the frontier.

5.4.2 - Local cults disembedded through *Interpretatio Romana*

The cults of the local gods of the frontier, were embedded within their respective regions (North 1992; Malina 1986). Votive altars dedicated to local gods on the northern frontier have previously been understood as the happy marriage of unpoliticized syncretism or a reflection of foreign soldiers honouring the *genius loci* (Breeze and Dobson 2000:277-290). Applying post-colonial discourse analysis to the process of *interpretatio Romana*, demonstrated how the name-pairing of Roman and local deities represented the politics of religious synthesis (Webster1995a&b). In this scheme, altars to single named deities are seen as local resistance to Roman hegemony and instances of name-pairing become acts of colonial domination, subverting the cultural background of embedded cults. *Interpretatio Romana* appropriates the frontier gods, dis-embedding them from their local context. Altars dedicated to single named deities give a better indication of the local territories of Vitiris, Belatucadros, Cocidius and Maponus. Many examples of name-pairing appear to be outliers to the core distribution areas and the cults of Maponos and Cocidius, from beyond the frontier, are more actively appropriated through name-pairing than Belatucadros and Vitiris.

Cocidius received more instances of *interpretatio* than either Vitiris or Belatucadros, and his distribution is likely to be the most altered by removing the double-named dedications (Fig.5.18). Bewcastle, as the proposed *fanum Cocidii* of the Ravenna Cosmography (Rivet and Smith 1979), has produced six dedications to Cocidius and only one is name paired with Mars (RIB993), by a suitably high-ranking dedicant, possibly a provincial governor (Irby-Massie 1999:306). This serves to confirm Bewcastle's status as a cult-centre and support Webster's thesis that name-pairing is more prominent amongst high-ranking dedicants, with appropriation an act of colonial domination.
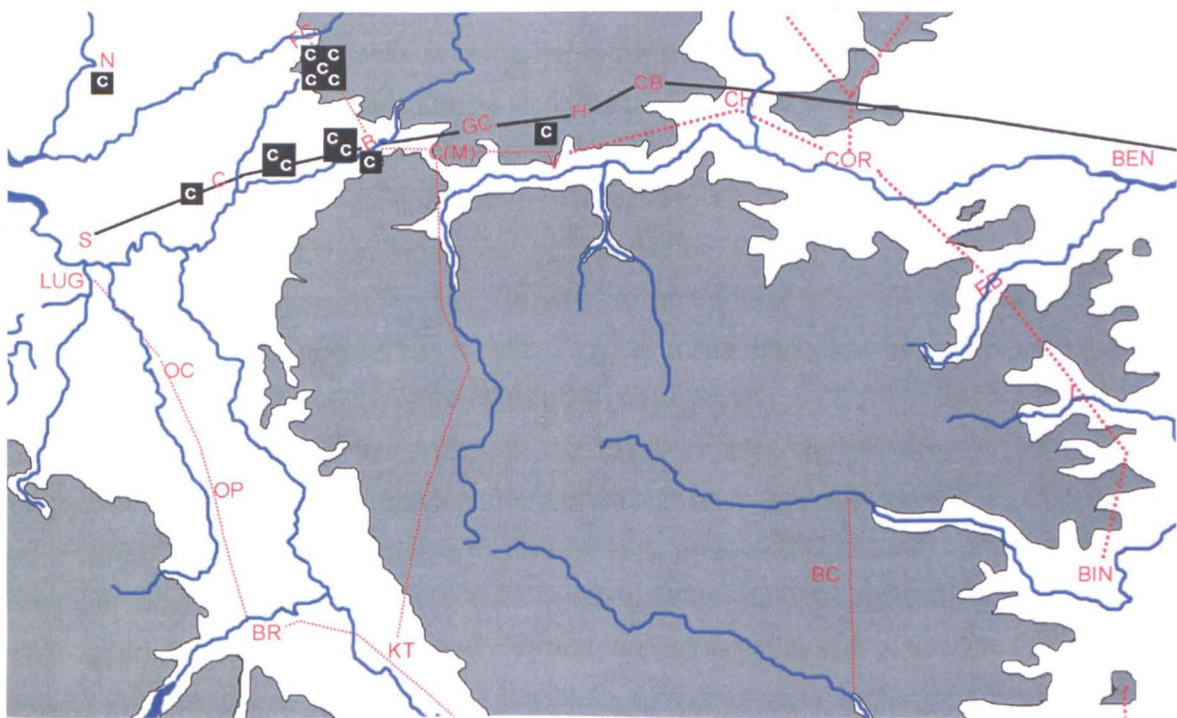
Fig.5.18 – Dedications to Cocidius only (above) have a greater regional coherency in Northern Cumbria than the name-paired examples, which are dis-embedded from the regional context (below)

C = Cocidius only;
m = Mars Cocidius; +s = joint dedication with Silvanus; SIL = Cocidius Silvanus
IOM = joint dedication with Jupiter Optimus Maximus; v = Vernostonus Cocidius
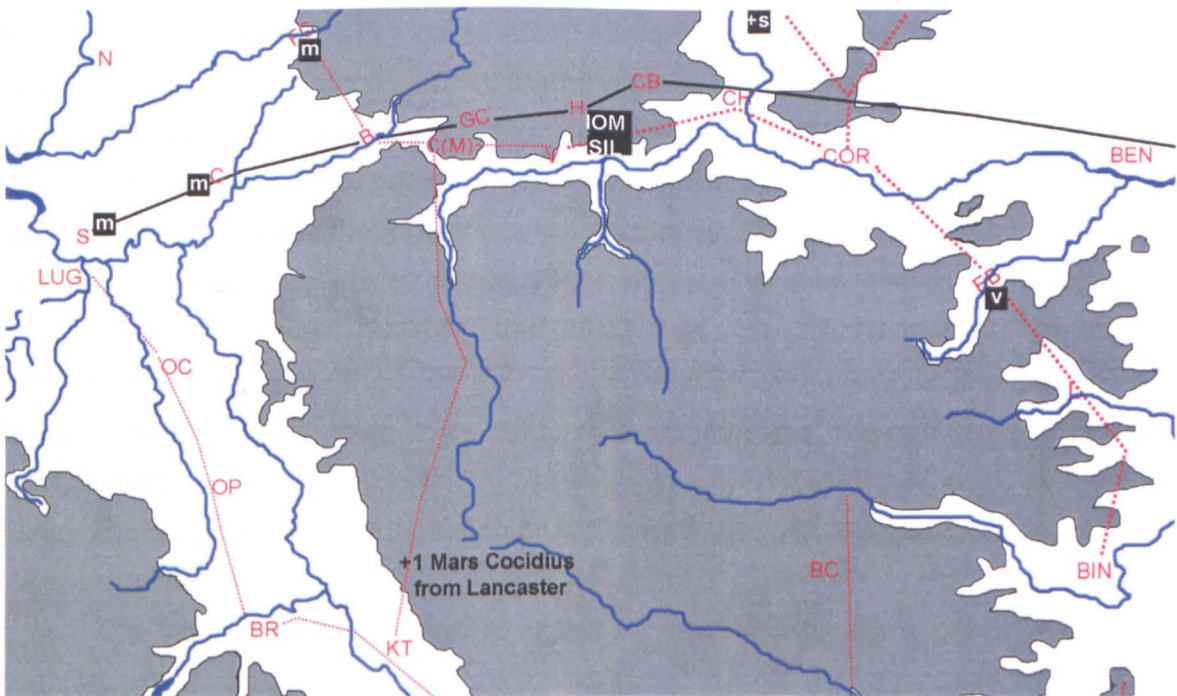
Other examples of Cocidius being name-paired help to refine and limit the eastern distribution of altars. Dedications linking Cocidius and Silvanus from Risingham (RIB1207), with the *genio praesidi* (RIB1577), Jupiter and the *geniusque huius loci* (RIB1583), as well as the direct name-pair with Silvanus (RIB1578), all from Housesteads, and the *interpretatio Celtica* with Vernostonus at Ebchester (RIB1102), show that through appropriation and name-pairing Cocidius was dis-embedded from his traditional orbit in northern Cumbria. There are two single Cocidius altars from the crag at Milecastle 37 near Housesteads (RIB1633) and Hardriding near Vindolanda (RIB 1683) that warn against creating hard and fast 'rules' in the highly mobile communities of the military frontier. In the west, two examples name-paired with Mars from Milecastles 59 (RIB2015) and 65 (RIB2024), by appropriately higher-ranking military dedications, cannot alter the pattern of single Cocidius dedications from along Hadrian's Wall (RIB1872; 1955; 1956; 1961; 2020) between Birdoswald and Stanwix that confirm the cult of Cocidius' heartland west of the Pennines. Although not the more personal lower-ranking dedications that make-up the majority of Vitiris altars, the string of corporate military dedications to Cocidius still serve to confirm the regional character of the cult. Removing the name-paired examples for Cocidius refines the distribution amongst the westward flowing river valleys of northern Cumbria.

Maponus, whose suggested cult-centre around Lochmaben in Annandale is even further removed from the frontier than Cocidius, undergoes considerable *interpretatio* with Apollo, the Divine hunter (Birley 2001). Apollo Maponus has three dedications at Corbridge by high-ranking soldiers of the sixth legion and south to Ribchester. The lack of geographic cohesion supports the thesis that cults could be disembedded from their original context through appropriation and name-pairing, with dislocation and the more widespread currency amongst higher-ranking dedicants symptomatic of *interpretatio* (Webster 1995a). Only two singular dedications to Maponus from known sites exist, one on a silver lunulae from Vindolanda (*Britannia* 1971:291), and the other on a slab from Birrens that appears to mention the *locus Maboni* (CSIR 1.4.14). Lochmaben and the Clochmabonstane in Dumfriesshire have both been linked with the *locus Maponi* and the proximity to Birrens encourages the suggestion that this region may have been the original locus for the cult (Birley 2001). An unlocated dedication from Cumbria (RIB 2063) links Maponus with the imperial *numen*.

The Vitiris pattern hardly alters except for removing the name-pair with Mogons from Netherby, where the dedications are definite western outliers to the main Vitiris group

east of the Tyne-Irthing gap. For Belatucadros, discounting the name-paired examples with Mars would remove one of the military dedications from Old Penrith (RIB918), the only dedications from Carlisle (RIB948) and Netherby (RIB970) and one of the three from Magnis (RIB1784), where there is some overlap with Vitiris. The Belatucadros dedication from Castlesteads (RIB1976 &1977) and the furthest outlier, the Belatucatros altar (RIB 1521) from Carrawburgh, again caution against geographic determinism. However, the removal of Mars name-paired examples generally confirms Belatucadros' cult focus in the southern Eden valley and the other northward flowing rivers bound for the Solway Firth (Edwards 2006; Fig.5.19).

5.4.3 - Local gods and regional identities

Despite the imposition of the massive military installation of Hadrian's Wall, there are surprisingly few over-laps between the distributions of altars dedicated to the three major local gods. The majority of dedications to local deities without *interpretatio* hold their regional consistency, with Belatucadros in southern Cumbria, Cocidius in northern Cumbria and Vitiris east of the Tyne-Irthing gap spreading into northeast England. These regionalised distributions were dependent on local knowledge, the combination of topographic and hydrographic awareness that congregated to create an extra-local perspective and defined the fragmented regional identities of northern England expressed through the worship of local gods.

The distribution of altars dedicated to local gods in the northern frontier zone make little sense in terms of troop movements over the course of several centuries. A Germanic origin for Vitiris has been suggested through the aegis of Germanic auxiliaries (Haverfield 1918; Webster 1986; Clay 2006), but this does not explain why the distribution of altars shows such definite regionalisation. Germanic units would also have been stationed at forts on the west side of the Pennines and the Germanic theory of origin cannot account for the general lack of altars to Vitiris from that area. For instance, *Cohors I Batavorum eq.* are attested at Carvoran (RIB1823-4), Castlesteads in the second century (RIB2015) and later Carawburgh (RIB1553; Irby-Massie 1999). The 'native' pedigree of the Cumbrian deities has never been questioned in the same way that Vitiris has. Belatucadros and Cocidius are considered Celtic names and therefore unproblematic and of local origin. Even though Vitiris has a corresponding regional distribution east of the North Pennines, the ethnic question of cult origin has arisen purely on etymological grounds.

BELATUCADER – God of the *Carvetti* ?

Land over 600' stippled.

Dedications to Belatucader ● 1; ■ 2; ■ 3; ☆ 4; ✳ 6   ○ = Roman forts without   / = inscriptions of the *Carvetii*
                                                    7   such dedications
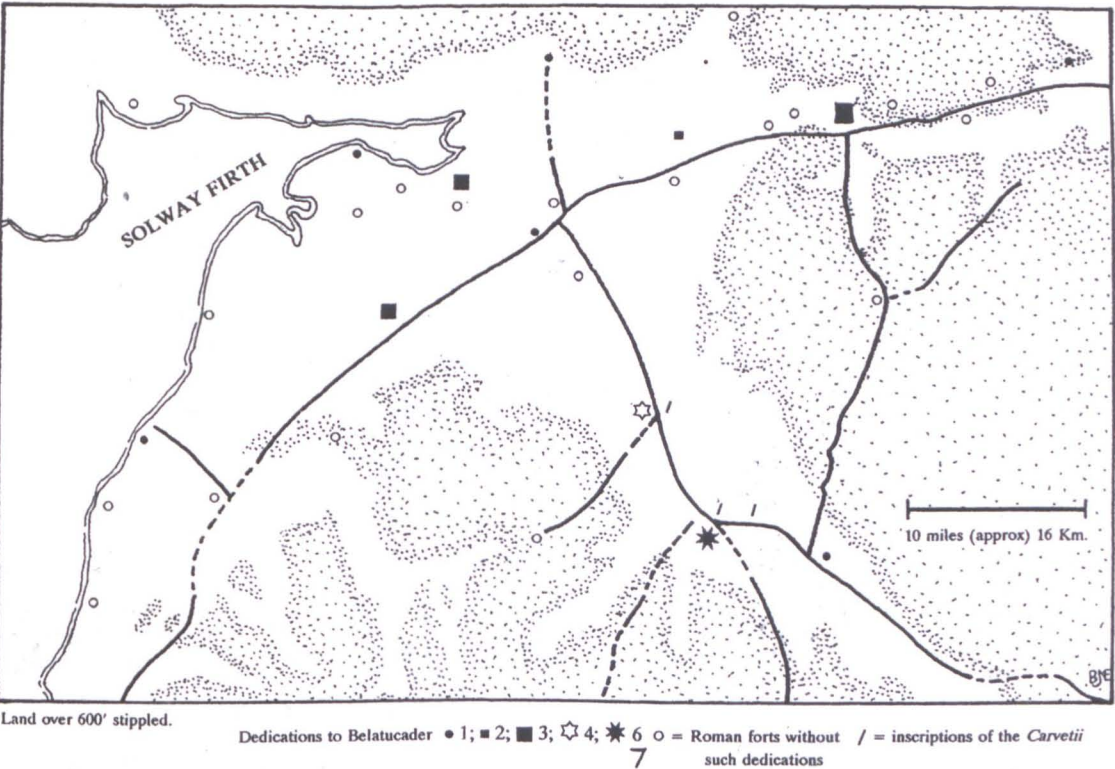
Fig. 5.19 (Above) – Belatucadros distribution in southern Cumbria with cult centred at Brougham in the Eden valley (from Edwards 2006)

Fig. 5.20 (Below) – Cocidius and Belatucadros single dedications showing differential distribution in Northern and Southern Cumbria respectively and little overlap with Vitiris east of the main east-west watershed.
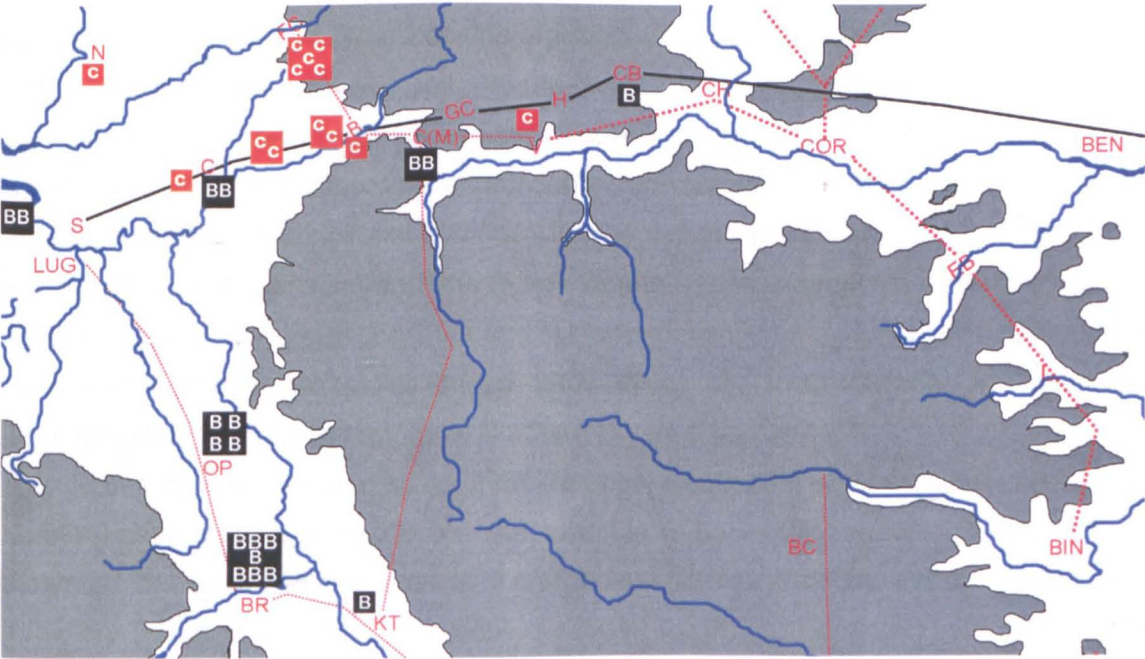
The activities of the cult worshippers, as displayed through the distribution of votive altars, are unlikely to be based on the movements of specific Germanic auxiliary units. The identity of the worshippers of Vitiris, or rather that portion of their identity projection that they associated with this vernacular cult, conforms to different notions of social organisation and can be linked to local, socio-cultural and geographical factors more than any specific military or ethnic affiliation.

Mattingly has argued that the worshippers of Vitiris were "lower-ranking soldiers and their families rather than native Britons", an unusual comment for an author otherwise careful about his use of native (2006:217). By the mid-second century AD and the *floruit* of the cult of Vitiris, the military communities were well-established and had reached a phase of 'maturity', having undergone several generations of inter-marriage and integration (McCarthy 2005:59). The hybridised identities of the *vicani* would have meant they considered themselves as 'native' or as local as their compatriots living nearby in roundhouses, but with a different set of social relations, allegiances and extra-local contacts. Their adaptation of the cult of Vitiris may signal a burgeoning local identity; the reconciliation of tradition and innovation (Woolf 2001) within the dynamic multi-cultural milieu of the northern frontier region. The new material form of cult practice, represents the renovation of the locally appropriate deity; renewal manifested through a new epigraphic medium of worship

These votive altars are a product of the Roman period and can only be taken as direct evidence of regionalism in that period, but they also seem unlikely to be a product of the military administration. There seems a distinct possibility that these distributions could relate to local, non-Roman and perhaps pre-Roman social organisation revealed through later cult worship. Caution should be used over any leading terms such as tribal structure, as if these regional identities have antecedents from before the Roman conquest, it is not Brigantian identity. Inscriptional evidence for the Anavionenses whose name Birley has associated with Annandale and the River Annan (2001), suggests that this type of hydrological basis for group definition and social organisation may have been ratified after the conquest and indeed valley based communities and local identities are persistent social factors in the upland regions of Northern Britain (Higham 1999).

On a broader regional scale, the differential distribution of local deities, defined by the main east-west watershed is but one example of socio-cultural distinctions that have separated the east and the west of the Pennines at many points through history and prehistory (Haselgrove 2002). The confederacy of the Brigantes would have been made

up of numerous smaller groups that were focused on river valley systems defined by the distinctive fragmented topography of Northern England. The core area of the Brigantes was in the more agriculturally productive and climatically favoured drainage system of the vale of York (Hartley and Fitts 1988). More traditional ritual practices on settlements support the notion of alternative regional identities to Brigantian hegemony. Regional patterns in the deposition of querns have highlighted different ritual traditions in Yorkshire than further north where the Vitiris distribution is concentrated (Heslop 2008). The regional cults of the frontier zone hint at an alternative political configuration within the confederacy of the Brigantes, with some of the smaller groups being expressed through later cult-worship.

5.4.4 - Regionalisation, resistance and appropriation

Higher-ranking officers and the military more actively appropriated Cocidius and Maponus with more instances of name-pairing and a more diffuse distribution than other local deities such as Belatucadros and Vitiris whose core distribution lay permanently within the boundaries of the Roman province. Webster's colonial discourse analysis (1995a&b) questioned why Cocidius and Maponus were more actively appropriated through name-pairing, but location in relation to Hadrian's Wall was a factor not previously considered. With better dating, different stages of appropriation and accommodation might also be observed in the votive altars to the various local gods. The *fanum* and *loci* of Cocidius and Maponus lay beyond Hadrian's Wall and colonisation of the local religious cosmography occurred through the conscious political appropriation and power discourse in name-pairing. A different set of social and political circumstances would have affected the cults of Belatucadros and Vitiris that lay permanently within the boundaries of Roman Britain.

The local gods may be ranked on a scale from the most actively appropriated Apollo Maponus, to the frequently appropriated Cocidius, the occasionally appropriated, but according to Webster (1995b) more resistant, Belatucadros, and finally Vitiris who might be considered completely resistant to *interpretatio Romana*. This type of ranking from appropriated to resistant or 'native' is broadly supported by the dispersal of name-paired dedications and the greater consistency in the clustering of single dedications to local gods. Maponus, with the most diffuse and frequently name-paired dedications is the most disembedded from his local context and the more popular Vitiris would be the most 'native' or resistant, embedded in a consistent cluster in the north-east of England defined

by the cultural and geographical boundary of the east-west watershed at the Tyne-Irthing gap.

However, despite this regionalism, the dedications to Vitiris are widely dispersed, stretching east and southwards into Yorkshire and eventually to the east midlands with the silver plaque from the temple-site at Thistleton. Detailed study of the Vitiris inscriptions (below) will show that simplistic dichotomies of Romanisation and resistance are not appropriate for this cult. Issues of Latinisation and translation necessitated more subtle processes of identity expression through cult-worship as revealed through the ritual practice of dedicating votive altars. The embedded and local interpretation of Vitiris is further complicated by the previous paradigm of study, which has focussed on the etymological interpretation of the theonym and the potentially Germanic origin suggested for this cult by the HV-variants. Further observations can be made from a closer analysis of variations within the epigraphic record of the votive altars providing more clues to questions of local and foreign influence and further regional patterning.

5.5.1 – Analysis of epigraphic variables

Irby-Massie's catalogue (1999) of Vitiris altars has now been superseded by the latest finds from Vindolanda (Birley 2003). A separate table has been provided here (Appendix 1) as Birley's list omitted the altar to *Deo Veteri* from Piercebridge (*Britannia* 1974:461). Birley's total of 61 also includes RIB 925 from Old Penrith dedicated to *Vicribus,* which is not included in this analysis as it is a lone find, and does not display the basic structure of **V*T*R**. Despite these minor differences, Birley's summary is particularly useful as it is the site of Vindolanda that has produced the bulk of well provenanced altars from modern excavations. New analysis has been conducted on the total sample of 61 votive altars currently known.

The letter pattern **V*T*R** is consistent over the entire group of 61 altars and is considered the defining characteristic. The spelling variations are mostly vowel variation and have been attributed to either lower levels of literacy amongst the worshippers or the sculptor's unfamiliarity with the theonym or to variations in pronunciation due to the multi-lingual character of frontier society (Irby-Massie 1999). These variations are also taken as an indication of the low-status of the dedicant (Coulston & Philips 1988). The vowel variations between I and e are common in many of the inscriptions from Britain and were a feature of speech patterns, most common in the spelling of names (Raybould 1999: 169). The generally low-status of the dedicants is also indicated by the small size and poor

quality of the altars (Coulston & Philips 1988). All of these factors played a part in creating the ambiguities that have frustrated previous interpretation. However, they also announce the vernacular characteristics of the cult. There are more votive altars dedicated to Vitiris than any other 'native' deity in all of Roman Britain, second only to Jupiter himself. Whilst the amount of spelling variations has hindered previous interpretation, a number of new observations can be made that help illuminate the geographic distribution.

5.5.2 - Geographical and regional analysis

The hypothesis that speech patterns and differences in pronunciation might be partly responsible for the spelling variations (Raybould 1999: 169), runs the danger of leading back to impenetrable linguistic, etymological, and ultimately ethnic questions regarding Vitiris. These problems are normally presented as justification for ignoring the cult. There is enough material in the dedications to produce a detailed analysis. The simplest way of beginning to organise the data is to separate the major variables of spelling [VIT-; VET-; HV-] and the different conceptualisations of the deity [single and plural]. The relative numbers of these basic characteristics are shown in Table 5.1. These will then be used to create smaller sub-regional groups (summarised and colour-coded in Table 5.2), in order to explore how the different variations of the theonym reflect localisation of the cult within the total regional sample.

TABLE 5.1

N=61(Votri excluded)	VIT (n=23)	VET (n=28)	HV + VH (n=9)
SINGLE n=39	16	16	7
PLURAL n=21	7	12	2

The basic characteristics are: (i) VET-variants have the highest proportion of pluralized theonyms, (ii) VIT-variants using the singular theonym outnumber plural *Vitiribus* by more than 2:1 and (iii) HV-variants are more than three times as likely to use the singular form of the theonym. Using simple map distributions it is easy to observe geographic variability among these characteristics. Singular theonyms are widespread across the entire distribution, but the pluralized ones are focussed in the central wall area (Fig. 5.21).
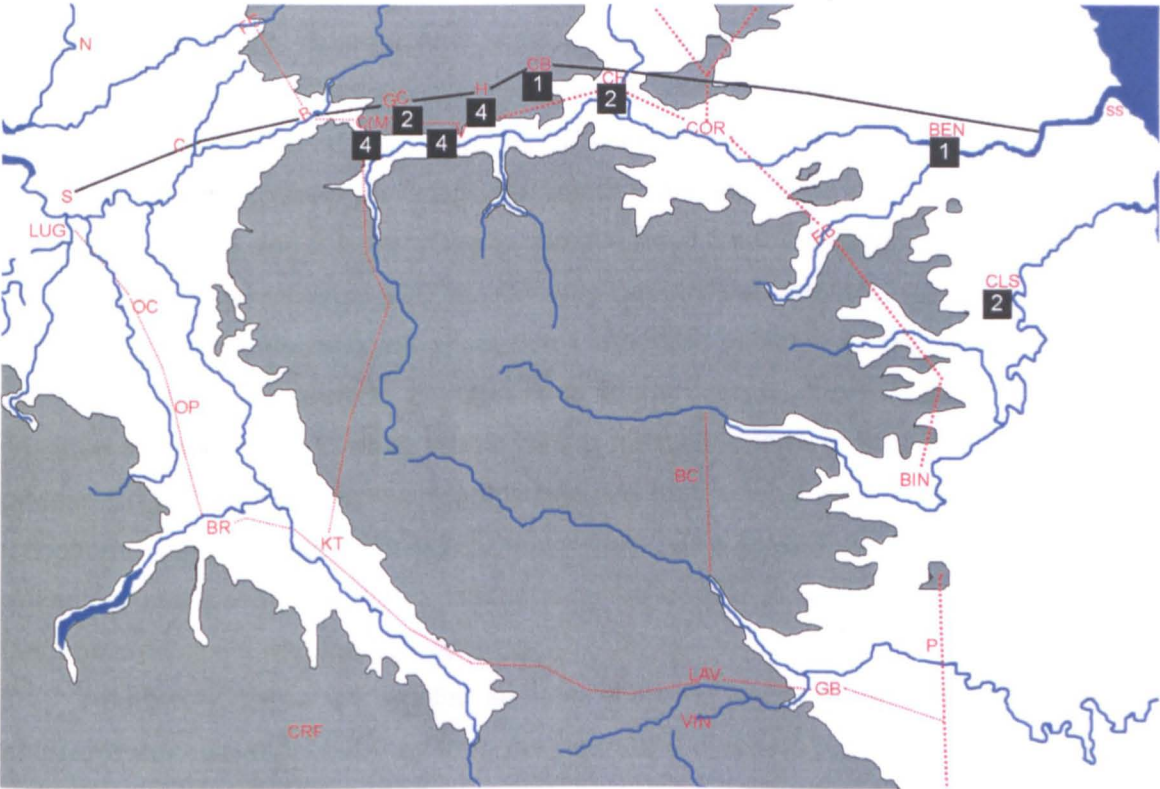
Fig.5.21 – Altars dedicated to the various spellings of the pluralized conceptualisation of the theonym (Vitiris) are clustered in the central Wall area, west of the North Tyne.
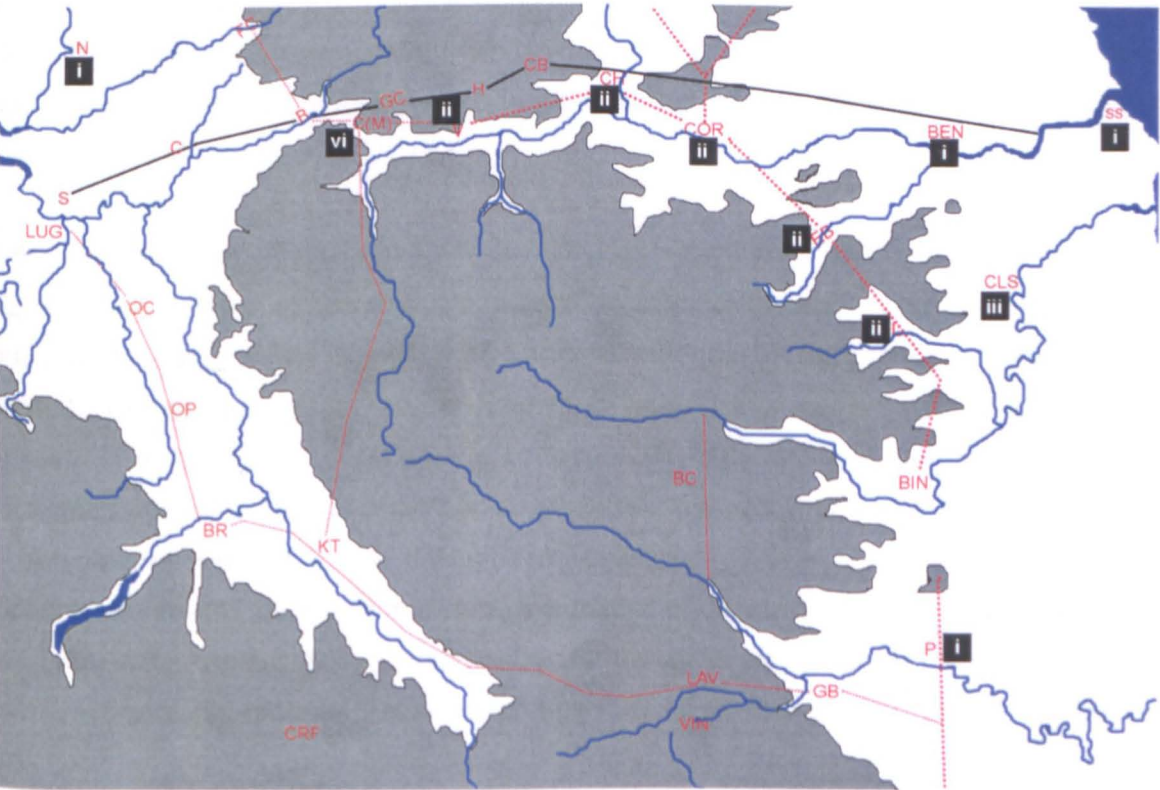
Fig.5.22 – Altars dedicated to the VIT-variant spelling of Vitiris are well spread east of the North Tyne (northeast), and are sparse in the central Wall area

The only outliers to this centralisation of the pluralized form are at Benwell and the highly anomalous goddess dedications *daeabs Vitiribus Vitalis VSLM* (RIB 1047) and *deabs Vit(iri)bus Viasudri* (RIB 1048) both from Chester-le-Street. These dedications to the goddesses[?]have received an inordinate amount of attention in interpretations of Vitiris (Heichelheim 1961) and it is tempting to remove them from the sample or treat them as errors for the normal *dibus* as they are the only two that use *daeabs*. However, arbitrarily tampering with the sample could affect other important data the inscriptions contain and this type of gender inversion is not unprecedented in Northern Britain. RIB 623 is dedicated to *deo Breganti*, which would be the masculine form of the more usual female goddess Brigantia. The goddess dedications are from one of only three sites that have inscriptions with completely consistent vowel use. The three forts of Chester-le-Street, Lanchester and Ebchester, in the hinterland of the frontier in northeast England, all have standardised vowels with the VIT- spelling.

Admittedly, these are smaller samples than the highly variable collections in the centre of Hadrian's Wall, but they form the heart of a cluster on the VIT- distribution map (Fig.5.22). VIT- spelling variants are comparatively rare in the central wall zone west of the North Tyne, although they re-appear at the western limits of the main distribution. The North Tyne marks a boundary for the pluralized *Veteribus*, which does not occur east of that river. Similarly there is a cluster of 5 HV- variants in the central wall zone west of the North Tyne, between Carrawburgh, Housesteads and Vindolanda, but surprisingly there are no HV-variants at Carvoran, which has the largest single sample of 13 altars (21% of the overall total sample of 61).

5.5.3 - Localisation

Using these readily observable characteristics of spelling and conceptualisation it is possible to demonstrate some broad-brush summaries of localisation within the total sample. Certain sub-regions can be shown to have higher percentages of a particular spelling of the theonym, and there are corresponding differences in the conceptualisation of single or plural god(s). Change and development through time would most probably be observable as well, if better dating were available. There is some overlap in the distinctions created here and it is always a matter of percentages rather than absolutes, but with initial organisation accomplished, further analysis will reveal patterning within these sub-regional groups. 5 regional groups may be postulated and are summarised in

Table 5.2. The colour-coding for these groups will be retained throughout the remainder of the analysis on all other tables. For full details and description see Appendix 1.

From this broad-brush summary it is possible to demonstrate that there was some geographic patterning within the distribution of altars, which corresponds to variations in spelling, conceptualisation, and at Carvoran, inscriptional practice. These will form the basis for further analysis. The North Tyne provides a workable boundary for many of the features that characterise Group 2 & 3. Benwell and Corbridge are included in Group 2 in order to increase the numbers for this group to 14 and avoid the accusation of simply cherry-picking consistent clusters. Separating Carvoran also gives a better weighting to the groups. A division of 14:26:13 between Groups 2,3 & 4 respectively was felt to take due consideration of both geography and the defining characteristics of each group.

Fig5.23 – Main regional Groups. Pluralised *Veteribus* (denoted by boxed [e]) defines Group 3 in the central Wall area, while singular *Vitiris* (denoted by boxed [i] defines Group 2 in the northeast. Group 4 has its own characteristic *orthopraxis* and Groups 1 and 2 are southern and westerly outliers.

TABLE 5.2 – Localisation and sub-regional groups in the Cult of Vitiris

Group	Sub-region	No.	Key Characteristics	Basic Statistics
1	SOUTHERN outliers from south of River Tees	3 from 3 sites	All SINGULAR concept of deity NO VIT-variants	2 VET-variants 1 *Vheteri* (RIB 727)
2	NORTHEAST group east of River North Tyne	14 altars from 7 sites	Dominated by VIT-variants and the SINGULAR concept of deity. NO HV-variants FEW PLURALIZED	12 VIT-variants (86%) 11 singular deity (78.5%) 9 VIT- and single (64%) from core area of 5 sites south of Hadrian's Wall. +3 *Vitiribus* Group 2 accounts for more than half of all VIT-variants (12/23=52%)
3	CENTRAL group from Chesters westward to Great Chesters	26 altars from 5 sites	Dominated by VET-variants and the PLURALIZED concept of deity. FEW VIT-variants	16 VET-variants (61.5%) 13 pluralized deity (50%) 10 *Veteribus* (38.5%) 4 VIT-variants (15%) 5 HV-variants 1 anomolous *Votri*
4	CARVORAN Cult centre?	13 altars from 1 site	Almost equal VIT- & VET-*ORTHOPRAXIS>>>>>>* NO HV-variants	6 VIT:7 VET ; 4 pluralized : 9 singular All 11 complete altars use votive formulae. 8 use VSLM compared to only 5 outwith Carvoran (8/13=61.5%)
5	WESTERN outliers from Netherby beyond Hadrian's Wall	3 altars from 1 site	All SINGULAR concept of deity NO VET-variants Only *Interpretatio* for Vitiris	2 HV-variants including one re-dedicated from Jupiter Dolichenus (RIB 969) and the elaborately sculpted RIB 973 Includes the name-paired example *Deo Mogunti Vitire*

There are two altars from Hadrian's Wall of unknown provenance: (RIB2068) *Deo Veteri* & (RIB2069) *Hvitiribus,* which from the above analysis are both most likely from group 3.

5.5.4 – Differential use of votive formula between Carvoran and Vindolanda

Table 5.3 compares the two largest samples of 11 altars from Vindolanda and 13 from Carvoran (*Magnis*) and justifies the creation of Group 4 from the latter. The only two altars from Vindolanda that attempt to convey votive formula are the two highly irregular HV-variants (*deo Hvitiri V S* and *deo Hvvet[i]r[i] Nob[...]vegus vo(tum) L S*). In contrast, Carvoran does not have any examples of the HV- variant, although it provides more single variations in vowel use than any other site (*Veteri, Vetiri, Veteribus, Vitiri, Viteri, Vitiribus*). The most striking feature that sets group 4 apart is that all of the complete inscriptions at Carvoran contain some attempt at votive formulae suggesting *orthopraxis* (Scheid 1997:18) was of importance at this potential cult-centre. Eight altars from Carvoran include both the dedicants names and the standard votive formula *V(otum) S(oluit) L(ibens) M(erito)*, which is in stark contrast to only five altars that use VSLM from all the other groups combined. The most standardised dedications at Vindolanda are the three *Veteribus* altars dedicated by individuals with single, Romanised names, but no votive formula. One of the *Veteribus* dedications from Carvoran is only a paper record (RIB 1802) and the inscription appears incomplete, but the other complete example (RIB 1803) *dibus Veteribus votm* is one of only two from Carvoran, along with (RIB 1797) *deo Vetiri V*, which does not include a dedicants name and has only the briefest abbreviated attempt at commemorating the vow.

5.5.5 - Naming and identity

What is also striking about Group 4 (Carvoran) is the sheer variety of potential identities revealed by named dedicants: from Celtic and possibly female Andiatis (RIB 976) to the Roman Deccius (RIB 1805); to the joint dedication by the Greek sounding Milus and Aurides (RIB 1800); to the equally exotic Necalames who dedicated RIB1793 & 1794) and a possible third (RIB 1801), which if it is the same dedicant, manages to spell both the theonym and his own name differently! Ivixa (RIB1804) has an ambiguous name, and like many Vitiris dedicants, is difficult to designate as either Celtic or German (Birley 2003). Given the themes of this thesis it would be tempting to label these as vernacular names, as many will belong to local inhabitants. However, for the purposes of this stage of analysis it might be more appropriate to refer to them by the cruder distinction of non-Latinate names. This does, of course, create a dichotomy, but at this stage this is a necessary measure for exploring broad issues of Romanisation and Latinisation.

TABLE 5.3

	VINDOLANDA		CARVORAN	
VETERIBUS	1699	Veteribus pos. Senaculus	1802	Veteribus [ ]
	VIND 4: Brit.4(1973) 329, no.11,	Dibus Veteribus pos. Longinus	1803	dibus Veteribus vot(u)m
	VIND 5: Brit.4(1973) 329, no.12,	Veteribus po[s]uit Senilis		
VETERI	1698	[ ]Veteri[ ]tin[ ]s	1793	deo Veteri Necalame[s] V S L M
	1697	deo [V]ete[r]I	1794	deo Veteri Necalames V S L M
	VIND 7: Brit.6(1975) 285,no.7	deo Ve[ ]n[...]	1795	deo sanct[o] Veteri Iul Pastor imag. Coh II Delma. V S L M
VETIRI	VIND 6: Brit.6(1975) 285,no.6	deo s(ancto) Vetiri pos. [...]	1796	deo Vetiri sancto Andiatis V S L M
			1797	deo Vetiri V
VITIRI	VIND 9: Brit.10(1979) 346,no.8	ara Vitirum	1799	deo Vitiri Meni(us) Dada V S L M
			1800	deo Vitiri Milus et Aurides V S L M
			1801	deo Vitiri Ne[ca]limes [p]ro v(oto) p(osuit) L M
VITERI			1798	deo Viteri No[ ]
VITIRIBUS	VIND 11:	dibus Vitiribus Adnamatus fil	1804	dibus Vit[iribus] Ivixa V S L M
			1805	dibus Vitiribus Deccius V S L M
HV-varient	VIND 10:	deo Hvvet[i]r[i] Nob[..]vegus vo(tum) L S		
	VIND 8: Brit.8(1977) 432,no.22	deo Hvitiri V S		

Comparison between the two largest single site samples from Vindolanda and Carvoran justifies making a separate group (4) from the latter, with its preference for *orthopraxis* in all complete inscriptions and the lack of HV-variants..

The dangers of assuming a rigid ethnic identity based on the appearance of personal names are manifold, but it is also one form of identity expression that it would be foolish to ignore. Inscriptions "materialise one of the key linguistic technologies of the self – the personal name – which in the Roman world was clearly a culturally charged label that encapsulated an individuals relationship with his or her contemporary community, ancestors and successors" (Gardner 2003:9). Whether names are given by parents or acquired during life, choosing to include a personal identifier on a votive altar represents an act of self-expression and the inscription as a whole is a declaration of an affiliation with a particular deity and the wider network of cult worshippers. Despite arguing against ethnic theories for the *origin* of a cult based on the etymology of a theonym, issues of ethnicity and self-expression through naming (whether god or worshipper) are important for considering the lived practice of the cult. The varying conceptualisations of the deity, in tandem with other naming practices, will be essential for understanding how cult expression related to the identity of worshippers in the multi-cultural milieu of the northern frontier.

5.5.6 - Dedications to the pluralized concept of deity rarely include votive formula.

The dedication by Ivixa raises another issue, which is that in the total sample of Vitiris altars, very few using the pluralized theonym also use votive formulae. Only six out of the total sample of 61 altars (6/61=10%) dedicate to the plural concept of deity with any votive formula and Carvoran accounts for half of these. Within the plural dedications that use votive formulae there is an interesting correlation between spelling variation and those that use fuller inscriptions. As Table 5.4 illustrates, all three altars that provide full votive formulae dedicate to *Vitiribus*, and include the dedicants name, even the *daeabs* dedication (RIB 1047) from Chester-le-Street. The three altars that use a simple *votum*, acknowledging a vow, use the *Veteribus* and *Hvitiribus* spellings and the dedicants do not name themselves, suggesting that these spelling variations have a greater tendency towards simpler inscriptions. The only other examples of using a simple *votum* have also been added to this table as they too remain anonymous. Both use the abbreviated V for v(otum) and although they are not pluralised they both use the same variant *Vetiri* that Andiatis preferred. This confirms that the only two dedications from Carvoran that do not use full votive formula and do not declare the name of the dedicant (RIB 1797 &1803) are matched, in using the spelling variants *Vetiri and Veteribus,* by parallel examples from Group 3.

TABLE 5.4

GROUP	SITE	INSCRIPTION	REF.	VET-	VIT-	HV-	Dedicant	Full formula	votum
4	Carvoran	dibus Vit[iribus] Ivixa V S L M	1804		Vit		Yes	VSLM	
4	Carvoran	dibus Vitiribus Deccius V S L M	1805		Vitiribus		Yes	VSLM	
2	Chester-le-St	daeabs Vitiribus Vitalis [V] S L M	1047		Vitiribus		Yes	VSLM	
?	Hadrian's Wall	Hvitiribus votum	2069			Hvitiribus	No		V
3	Housesteads	deo Veteribus votum[..]	1604	Veteribus			No		V
4	Carvoran	dibus Veteribus vot(u)m	1803	Veteribus			No		V
3	Great Chesters	deo Vetiri V	1728	Vetiri			No		V
4	Carvoran	deo Vetiri V	1797	Vetiri			No		V

Across all groups only 6 altars dedicated to the pluralised concept of deity use votive formula. Wiithin this small sample there is a striking correlation between use of formulae and the form of the theonym with *Vitiribus* inscriptions using full VSLM formulae.

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Table 5.4 shows that although Group 4 (Carvoran) has been separated from Group 3, there are still characteristics that crosscut the regional sub-groups and wider factors affecting choices in the form of the inscriptions.

While the observation that abbreviated inscriptions are unlikely to include dedicants seems obvious, the correspondence with certain representations and conceptualisations of the theonym encourages a more detailed examination of the epigraphic evidence for the cult of Vitiris. In order to counter the previous assumption that the randomness of illiteracy produced the variations in the inscriptions, similar correlations between details in the form of the inscription will be sought. The contrast between simple and more detailed inscriptions within the plural dedications with formulae, choosing different versions of the theonym, encourages the possibility that further distinctions and correlations between the basic features of the inscriptions may be found within both the regional groupings and the total sample.

5.5.7 - The singular deity, identitification and use of votive formula

37 altars include dedicants names. There is a general trend in the overall sample whereby inscriptions using the single concept of deity are more than twice as likely to include the dedicants name (Fig.5.22; 25/37= 67.5%) of those altars that include dedicants use the single theonym, compared to 12/37= 32.5% named dedicants that use the plural theonym). This suggests some sort of relationship between conception of deity and either willingness or ability to self-identify. Numerous questions arise from this simple observation. Why would dedications that use the plural theonym have a greater tendency towards anonymity? Is this an act of resistance or an indication of an alternative discrepant identity? Is the plural concept of deity a Celtic/native characteristic, as with the *matres* and other triads (Green 1991)? Are plural dedications simpler because locals are less literate? These questions must be dealt with after further analysis.

27 altars use votive formulae. Dedications including votive formulae are more than three times as likely to use the single concept of deity (21/27=78%;) than those inscriptions with votive formula dedicated to the pluralized theonym (6/27=22%) The 6 plural dedications using votive formulae represent less than a third of the total number that use the pluralized concept of deity (6/21=28.5%) whereas the 21 inscriptions that use votive formula in dedicating to the single concept of deity represent more than half of all singular theonyms (21/39=54%) and more than a third of the total sample (21/61=34.5%). This suggests some sort of relationship between conceptualisation of deity and *orthopraxis*.

Fig 5.22 Statistical analysis of naming practice, votive formulae, and conceptualisation of deity

Naming practice and votive formula

Votive formula more appropriate for the singular deity

Proportions of the main features of inscriptional practice

- singular deity dedicant + formula
- singular deity formula no dedicant
- Plural deity dedicant + formula
- Plural deity formula no dedicant
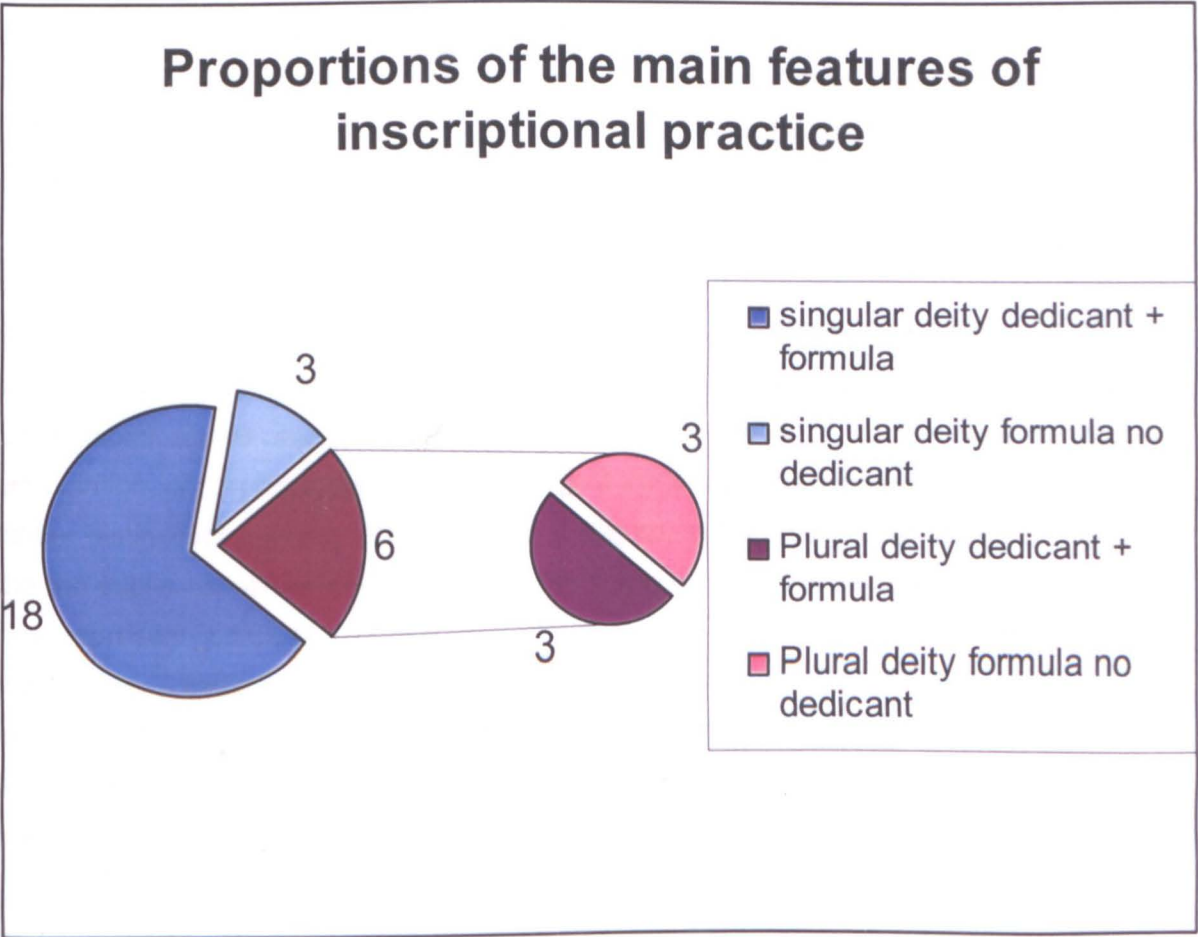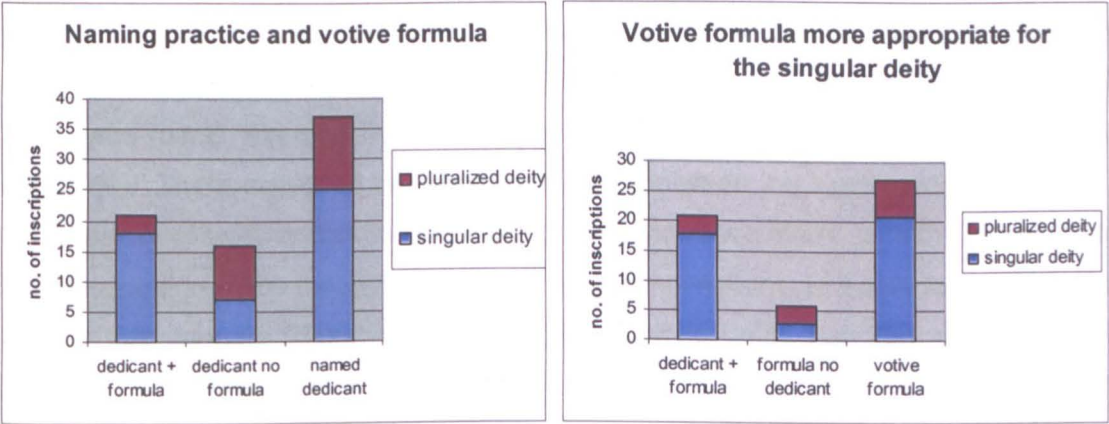
By looking at combinations of variables in the form of the inscription rather than etymological analysis of the theonym, the inter-locking nature of much of the evidence can begin to be teased apart. 19 of those 21 altars dedicated to the singular theonyms with votive formulae, also includes the dedicant name (19/21=90.5%) whereas only half of those who used the pluralized dedication with votive formulae named themselves (3/6=50%). There seems to be some correlation between the single concept of deity and the tendency of worshippers to follow *orthopraxis* for votive altars, with the converse trend that pluralisation of the theonym relates to simpler inscriptions. Is it safe to assume that the singular deity is more Romanised and the plural deity a Celtic triad (Green 1992:220;Ross 1974:469;"doubtless a trio of divinities")?

Broad-brush statistical analysis does damage to the nuances of the evidence and the following tables attempt to isolate some of these characteristics further and allow more detailed comparison within the total sample of inscriptions and between the sub-regional groups. Tables 5.5-5.9 will tease out more detail about the relationships between the variables, in order to test whether the more detailed inscriptions favour one particular spelling variant, as Vitalis (RIB1047), Ivixa (RIB 1804) and Deccius (RIB 1805) did when they dedicated to the plural *Vitiribus* using the standard VSLM formula.

5.5.8 - Defining the variables for analysis

The assumption that the ambiguities of the altars were a consequence of the vagaries of illiteracy has been used to justify ignoring this most popular frontier cult. The statistical observations above suggest that such assumptions need to be qualified by closer examination. Within these generalisations about the sample as a whole there may also be subtler distinctions relating to the regional sub-groups. The basic data of the inscriptions and the subtle variations they contain will be tested in order to pursue the hypothesis that they represent conscious choice and decisions on the part of the authors of the dedications. Inscriptions will be analysed based on four features: (a) the spelling variations of the theonym, (b) use of the singular or plural concept of deity, (c) whether the dedicant includes their name, and (d) what type of votive formula (if any) the inscription uses.

Certain assumptions arising from the etymological and ethnic focus of the previous discussion of the cult of Vitiris and the formulation of syncretism within a Romanisation paradigm can be questioned. Raybould's (1999) analysis has already demonstrated that Latinisation of the theonym represented by VET-variants does not

correspond to superior literacy. The highest-ranking Vitiris altars in Raybould's scheme (1999 Table R2) were surprisingly two of the most complex forms of the theonym, RIB1602 *deo Hveteri* and RIB973 *deo Hvetiri* whose dedicant could also afford some of the finest carved iconography in Roman Britain. Analysis should be able to test assumptions about literacy, orthography, ethnicity and Romanisation as used in traditional formulations of syncretism in the Roman provinces through questioning whether:

(i) Certain spelling variants of the theonym correspond to ethnic identities such as Germanic, Roman or non-Roman.

(ii) The plural concept of deity is a Celtic/native/non-Roman form and the singular more Romanised.

(iii) The use of formula exemplifying *orthopraxis* may represent standardisation by more Romanised worshippers.

5.5.9 - *Deo sancto Vitiri*: the holy Vitiris (Table 5.5)

The Latin title *sanctus,* 'holy', could be applied to anything that was considered inviolable and pure. This included boundaries, laws, treaties, ambassadors, tombs, sacred objects, and deities, especially the Roman god Silvanus, unofficially worshipped in the countryside at the boundaries between the agricultural landscape and the wilderness (Scheid 2003: 25-6, 157). Attempts at reading a colonial discourse into the cult of Vitiris have been frustrated by the lack of *interpretatio romana* and the modern perception of the low status and illiteracy of the dedicants. The *sancto* set of altars crosscuts the 5 geographical sub-groups of altars with at least one in every regional group. Group 5 is most notable with two out of the three from Netherby including the Latin title *sanctus.*

The 8 worshippers who dedicate their altars to the holy (*sancto*) god include the highest ranking of any of the Vitiris' worshipers and the only military dedicant, Julius Pastor, *imaginifer* of the second cohort of Dalmatians. He dedicates his altar to *deo sanct[o] Veteri...V S L M* at Carvoran, and it is worth testing whether the spelling that assimilates with Latin *vetus/veteri*, 'old' may be the chosen form for the more 'Romanised' dedicants who have translated the theonym into a comprehensible Latinate form. Julius Pastor has a 'romanised' name, a military rank, uses the Roman title *sancto* 'holy', the standard abbreviated votive formula V S L M and the Latinate form of the theonym, but his inscription only ranks as a 'C' in Raybould's scheme (1999:223).

TABLE 5.5

GROUP	SITE	INSCRIPTION	REF.	THEONYM	DEDICANT	FORMULA
4	Carvoran	deo sanct[o] Veteri lul Pastor imag. Coh II Delma. V S L M	1795	Veteri	Romanised	VSLM
4	Carvoran	deo Vetiri sancto Andiatis V S L M	1796	Vetiri	Non-Roman (Celtic?) Female?	VSLM
3	Vindolanda	deo s(ancto) Vetiri pos. [...]	VIND 6: Brit.6(1975) 285,no.6	Vetiri	Incomplete	Incomplete
3	Chesters	deo sancto Vitiri Tertulus V S L M	1455	Vitiri	Romanised	VSLM
2	Benwell	deo Vetri Sangto	1335	Vetri	None	None
1	Catterick	deo sancto Vheteri pro s(alute) Aureli Muciani V S L M	727	Vheteri	Romanised	VSLM
5	Netherby	d(eo) Hv[e]ter(i) sanct(o) Fortunat[us..]	969	Hv[]ter	Romanised	Incomplete
5	Netherby	deo Mogonti Vitire san(cto) Ael[...]s[...] V S L M	971	Vitire	Romanised	VSLM

- Dedications that use the Latin title 'sanctus', the holy god Vitiris are mostly dedicants with Latinate names, except for Andiatis (RIB1796).
- The majority include *orthopraxis* formulae VSLM.
- All prefer the singular concept of deity.
- There is no standardisation of spelling amongst this more literate set.

Dedicants that use *sanctus* as a holy title mostly have Romanised names. The only exception is RIB1796, also from Carvoran, dedicated by the Celtic sounding and probably female Andiatis, who does not use the same Latinate spelling as Julius Pastor, but instead uses the variant *Vetiri*. Andiatis provides a salutary warning about making assumptions when considering Romanisation and literacy, and her example represents alternative forms of identity beyond ethnicity that might have determined different modes of expression within the cult of Vitiris.

The holy god (*sancto*) is always singular and the spelling is still extremely variable for the mostly Romanised worshippers. None except Julius Pastor use the Latinate *Veteri* and conspicuously amongst the eight there are two HV-variants and the only name-paired example of *deo Mogonti Vitire san(cto)*. This confirms that Latinisation of the theonym does not equate with the more complex inscriptions. The Latinate *Veteri* is definitely not a standardised spelling for those dedicants with Romanised names and more detailed inscriptions. It is also tempting to suggest that at Carvoran there is an apparent distinction between the military identity of Julius Pastor with his very orthodox dedication and the deviation away from Latinate spelling to *Vetiri* by Andiatis. Her identity as a potentially local woman is by no means certain just because she has a Celtic name, but she does provide demographic breadth for the cult of Vetiris (as she would refer to it).

The least literate of the *sancto* set of altars (RIB 1335), *Deo Vetri sangto* by an unknown dedicant at Benwell fort, has the virtue of providing rare iconographic indications that Vitiris received both blood and bloodless sacrifice (*patera* and jug on left; axe and knife on the right), demonstrating that sacrificial *orthopraxis* was a factor in the cult of Vitiris. A high proportion of the complete altars that use the title *sancto* also include the formulaic VSLM in their inscription (5/6=83%) and three of those are also in the small group of five from Groups 1,2,3&5 that use the full standard formula. The combination of the sanctus title and *orthopraxis* from the groups other than Carvoran (Group 5) represent higher levels of epigraphic consciousness that stand out in the wider distribution.

Orthopraxis outwith Carvoran (Table 5.6)

There are only 5 altars from outwith Group 5 (Carvoran) that use the standard votive formula VSLM. There is at least one example from each of the other four regional groups. Three of these are *sancto* dedications considered in the previous section and therefore this set of 5 shares many of the same characteristics; all are dedicated by people with Romanised names and they are still highly variable in spelling the theonym.

TABLE 5.6 – *Orthopraxis* outwith Group 4 (Carvoran)

GROUP	SITE	INSCRIPTION	REF.	THEONYM	DEDICANT	FORMULA	Distinguishing features
1	Catterick	deo sancto Vheteri pro s(alute) Aureli Muciani V S L M	727	Vheteri	Romanised	VSLM	Only VH in southern outliers
2	Chester-le-St	daeabs Vitiribus Vitalis [V] S L M	1047	Vitiribus	Romanised	VSLM	Anomalous feminine plural
3	Chesters	deo sancto Vitiri Tertulus V S L M	1455	Vitiri	Romanised	VSLM	Only singular VIT- variant in Group 3
3	Housesteads	deo Hveteri Superstes [et] Regulus V S L M	1602	Hveteri	Romanised	VSLM	High quality inscription ranked 'A' in Rayboulds scheme
5	Netherby	deo Mogonti Vitire san(cto) Ael[...]s[...] V S L M	971	Vitire	Romanised	VSLM	The only VIT- variant in Group 5 and the only example of name-pairing

- Very few inscriptions outwith Group 4 use full VSLM formulae.
- as with the sanctus set, these are highly variable in the spelling of the theonym,
- and mostly conceive of their god as a single deity.
- All stand out in some way, either being different to the normal characteristics of the sub-regional group or stand out within the full sample.

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Also similar to the *sancto* group is the high proportion of singular theonyms and avoidance of the Latinate *Veteri*. Three use VIT- and two HV- variants. The HV-variants are not just the ones already examined in the *sancto* group, as the VSLM set also includes the joint dedication by Superstes and Regulus (RIB1602) to *deo Hveteri*. Four of the five altars use the singular theonym. The highly anomalous (RIB1047) *daeabs Vitiribus Vitalis (V)SLM* is the only inscription with a pluralized theonym and full standard formula from anywhere other than Carvoran; it therefore stands out for reasons other than gender.

What is striking about all of the examples in table 5.5 is that, other than their use of the formula VSLM, each inscription stands out in some way from the general characteristics within its regional group or, as with RIB 1047, from the entire sample. RIB 727 dedicated to *deo sancto Vheteri* is the only HV-variant from the southern outliers of Group 1. RIB 971 dedicated to *deo Mogonti Vitire san(cto)* is the only VIT-variant from Netherby and the only name-paired inscription from the entire sample of Vitiris altars. RIB 1455 dedicated to *deo sancto Vitiri* is the only singular VIT-variant in Group 3, more normally characterised by pluralised VET- variant spelling. RIB 1602 was ranked in Raybould's top "A" category (1999:237) and therefore stands out amongst Vitiris altars for the quality of its inscription and the high epigraphic consciousness it displays.

5.5.11 - First among (un)equals?

The dedication (RIB1795) by the only overtly military worshipper who gives his rank might represent the most 'romanised' form of the god; singular, latinised as *Veteri* 'old', with the additional latin title, sanctus, and formulae displaying *orthopraxis*, but this interpretation is based on a Romanisation paradigm. Raybould's analysis has already urged caution about making equations regarding literacy and the Latinisation of the theonym. The dedicants who use more detailed inscriptions and standardised formulae outwith Group 5 all have Romanised names, but none use a standardised spelling of the theonym. In tandem with the *sancto* set of altars, all but one agree on the singular conception of deity. The spelling of the theonym remains highly variable and there is a noticeable avoidance of VET-variants. Therefore Latinisation of the theonym does not equate with greater levels of literacy indicated by more detailed inscriptions. This conclusion harmonises with Raybould's analysis, which indicated that the more literate Vitiris inscriptions use the most complex and non-Latinate forms of spelling the theonym. Assumptions regarding literacy derived from a Romanisation paradigm do not match the evidence and similar assumptions regarding ethnicity must also be questioned. The inscriptions on Vitiris altars

are best interpreted from the new perspective that acknowledges the possibility of discrepant identities in the multi-cultural milieu of the frontier, leading to a more nuanced discussion of the relevance of ethnicity and identity to the cult of Vitiris.

5.5.12 - Ethnicity, regional groups and spelling variations

Table 5.7 shows the 8 inscriptions from outwith Group 5 (Carvoran) that use variations on votive formula. These use fragments of the standard formulae VSLM, but the examples of simple *votum* already considered in Table 5.3 are not included. All 8 dedicate their altars to the singular concept of deity, but again there is no consistency in the spelling of the theonym across the sub-regional groups. The two examples (RIB 1046 & 1103) using *Vitiri* are typical of Group 2 with the singular VIT-variant forming the core element of this regional group. This contrasts with the Group 3 examples, which are at odds with the general characteristics of their regional group. The Group 3 examples are dedicated to the singular concept of deity with variable spelling of the theonym, in contrast to the high proportions of pluralized and VET-variants that characterise this largest regional group. The singular HV- variants are the most frequent spelling in the Group 3 examples using partial formula, although these still show great spelling variability.

The dangers of making simplistic ethnic equations based on the dedicants name are also highlighted in Table 5.7. Duihno (RIB1046) and Uccus (RIB1548) are two people who Birley (2003) considers to have Germanic names and yet neither use the HV- spelling variant, nor do they use the same spelling of the theonym. Uccus uses the Latinate spelling *Veteri*. Although from different sites in Group 2, Duihno's inscription from Chester-le-Street is almost identical in form to Maximus' at Ebchester, again urging caution about attributing Romanisation and ethnicity as a factor in the relative levels of literacy displayed.

In the regional groups outwith Group 5 (Carvoran) almost all of the dedicants using more detailed inscriptions (*sancto; VSLM* etc.) had Romanised names. In the Group 3 examples in Table 5.7 there is a clear switch, with those using variations on votive formula having non-Roman names. This startling correlation between identity expressed through dedicants names and the form of the inscription indicates that it would be unwise to assume that Romanisation equals greater levels of literacy. This set of 5 inscriptions from Group 3 were already united by using some variation of votive formula and dedicating altars to the singular concept of deity, but are further characterised by dedicants all having non-Roman names. When compared to the data in table 5.8 these characteristics become even more pronounced.

TABLE 5.7 – Use of partial votive formulae across groups 1,2,3&4

GROUP	SITE	INSCRIPTION	REF.	THEONYM	DEDICANT	Group Comments
1	York	deo Veteri Primulus vo(tum) l(ibens) m	660	Veteri	Romanised	Latinate and single
2	Chester-le-St	deo Vitiri Duihno V S	1046	Vitiri	Non-Roman (German?)	Standardised VIT-variant
2	Ebchester	deo Vitiri Maximus V S	1103	Vitiri	Romanised	Singular normal for group
3	Chesters	Suadnus votum d(e)o Votri v(otum) s(olvit)	1458	Votri	Non-Roman (C/G?)	Singular with variable spelling
3	Carrawburgh	deo Veteri votum Uccus V L	1548	Veteri	Non-Roman (German?)	Contrasts with group dominated by plural and VET- variant
3	Housesteads	deo Hvitri Aspuanis pro (se) et suis vot(um) sol(vit)	1603	Hvitri	Non-Roman (C/G?) Female?	ALL NON-ROMAN DEDICANTS
3	Vindolanda	deo Hvitiri V S	VIND 8: Brit.8(1977) 432,no.22	Hvitiri	No dedicant	
3	Vindolanda	deo Hvvet[i]r[i] Nob[..]vegus vo(tum) L S	VIND 10:	Hvvet[]r[]	Non-Roman (C/G?)	

Again the singular concept of deity is preferred, and the spelling varies, but within group 3 a distinct correlation emerges with dedicants who have non-Roman names. These stand out in a group otherwise dominated by VET-variants and the pluralised concept of deity.

TABLE 5.8 – Inscriptions without votive formulae

GRP	SITE	INSCRIPTION	REF.	Theonym	Dedicant	Group Comments
2	Chester-le-St	deabs Vit(iri)bus Viasudri	1048	Vitbus	Non-Roman (C/G?) Female?	All VIT- variant
2	South Shields	deo ansu Vitiri Cr[]	Brit.18(1987) 368 no.7	Vitiri	incomplete	Normal for group
2	Lanchester	deo Vitir(i) Unthau[s..] po(suit?)...	1088	Vitir	Non-Roman (German?)	Some contraction and abbreviation
2	Ebchester	deo Vitiri I.it[ ]	1104	Vitiri	incomplete	
2	Corbridge	Vit(iri) Miti	1141	Vit	Non-Roman (C/G?)	Non-Roman dedicants
3	Housesteads	Veteribus [p]osuuit Aure(lius) Vict(or)	1606	Veteribus	Romanised	All Plural
3	Housesteads	dibus Ve[te]ri[b]u[s].I.[..] ilu..[..]..	1607	Veteribus	incomplete	Majority VET- variant
3	Vindolanda	Veteribus pos. Senaculus	1699	Veteribus	Romanised	Normal for group
3	Vindolanda	dibus Veteribus pos. Longinus	VIND 4: Brit.4 (1973) 329, no.11	Veteribus	Romanised	Romanised dedicants
3	Vindolanda	Veteribus po[s]uit Senilis	VIND 5: Brit.4 (1973) 329, no.12	Veteribus	Romanised	
3	Vindolanda	dibus Vitiribus Adnamatus fil	VIND 11:	Vitiribus	Non-Roman (Celtic & son of the same)	<<<<<<Notable exception: plural, but VIT-spelling with a non-Roman name
3	Great Chesters	dib[us[Veteribus posuit Romana	1729	Veteribus	Romanised Female?	
5	Netherby	d(eo) Hv[e]ter(i) sanct(o) Fortunat[us...]	969	Hv[]ter	Romanised	Incomplete

- Without votive formulae the focus of the inscription becomes the theonym and the identity of the dedicant
- Distinct identities begin to emerge within the sub-regional groups 2 & 3
- In Group 2 the VIT-variant is used by people with non-Roman names
- In Group 3 the plural *Veteribus* is used by people with Latinate names
- A notable exception in Group 3 is Adnamatus, a Celtic name common in continental inscriptions who favours the pluralised *Vitiribus*

TABLE 5.9 – Simple inscriptions (5 incomplete are excluded and the curious *Ara Vitirium* from Vindolanda

GRP	SITE	INSCRIPTION	REF.	Singular	Plural	Group comments
2	Piercebridge	diio Viiteri	Brit.5(1974) 461 no.3	S		
2	Lanchester	deo Vit(iri)	1087	S		
2	Corbridge	deo Veteri	1139	S		Predominantly singular is appropriate for Group 2
2	Corbridge	deo Vitiri	1140	S		
2	Benwell	deo Vetri Sangto	1335	S		
2	Benwell	Vitir(i)bus	1336		P	
3	Chesters	dibus Veteribus	1456		P	
3	Chesters	[di]bus Vitiribus	1457		P	
3	Carrawburgh	[dibu]s Hviteribus	1549		P	Predominantly plural is appropriate for Group 3
3	Housesteads	[dib]us Vete[ri]bus	1605		P	
3	Vindolanda	deo [V]ete[r]I	1697	S		
3	Great Chesters	dibus Veteribus [...]	1730		P	
5	Netherby	deo Hvetiri	973	S		Outstanding iconograpghy

- The remainder of the simple inscriptions confirm the general characteristics of Groups 2 & 3
- There is a preference for the singular concept of deity in northeast group 2
- There is a preference for the pluralised concept of deity in central group 3
- At the bottom of this series of tables that appear to stratify the epigraphic consciousness of the inscriptions is the beautifully sculpted RIB 973 with its outstandingly ambivalent iconography.
- An assimilative Romanisation model cannot explain the complexities of the patterns that have emerged from this analysis

Table 5.8 demonstrates that inscriptions without votive formula, where complete, reveal certain identities emerging within Groups 2 and 3. Pluralized theonyms begin to feature at this level of analysis emphasising the observation made previously that, other than at Carvoran, the ignorance or deliberate avoidance of votive formula is characteristic of people who conceptualised plural deities. All of the altars from Group 3 that do not use votive formulae, are dedicated to *Veteribus* by people with Romanised names. This differs in almost every detail from those Group 3 examples in Table 5.7, which were dedicated to the singular god, spelt in a variety of ways, by people with non-Roman names. Such a stark contrast in combined characteristics of conceptualisation of deity and use of votive formulae within the same regional group is unexpected, but the correlation with certain identities as expressed through dedicants names is even more striking. There is only one exception in Group 3 on Table 5.8 where Adnamatus the son of Adnamatus, from Vindolanda, dedicates to *dibus Vitiribus;* an exception that might prove the rule as a Celtic identity was matched by the choice of non-Latinate theonym. In Group 2 a distinct identity also emerges at this level of analysis, with the complete inscriptions that do not use votive formulae all being dedicated by people with non-Roman names. Again these are all VIT-variants and the singular concept of deity is preferred, showing the key characteristics of this regional group. The only exception is dedicated to the goddesses, *deabs Vitbus* (RIB 1048), by the possibly female Viasudri who shares the non-Roman identity.

5.5.13 - Inter-locking Issues: *Orthopraxis*, variability of spelling and the singular conceptualisation of deity

This analysis has fleshed out more detail than the statistical generalisations. Dedications that use the single concept of deity are indeed more likely to use votive formulae, but Tables 5.5-5.7 above demonstrate that these are also highly variable in the spelling of the singular theonym. HV-variants are often features of the more elaborate inscriptions. The many spelling variables that had inhibited previous etymological analysis are actually not the key characteristic for the expression of identity. Variations in inscriptional practice correlate with identity through naming practice and the conceptualisation as a singular or plural deities. Those inscriptions from outwith Group 5 (Carvoran) that show higher levels of epigraphic consciousness through more detailed inscriptions, and *orthopraxis* through the use of formulae, have mostly Latinate names and yet do not standardise the spelling of the theonym. The small sub-set in Group 3 (Table 5.7) that used partial formula provide the most dramatic contrast by having distinctly non-Roman names.
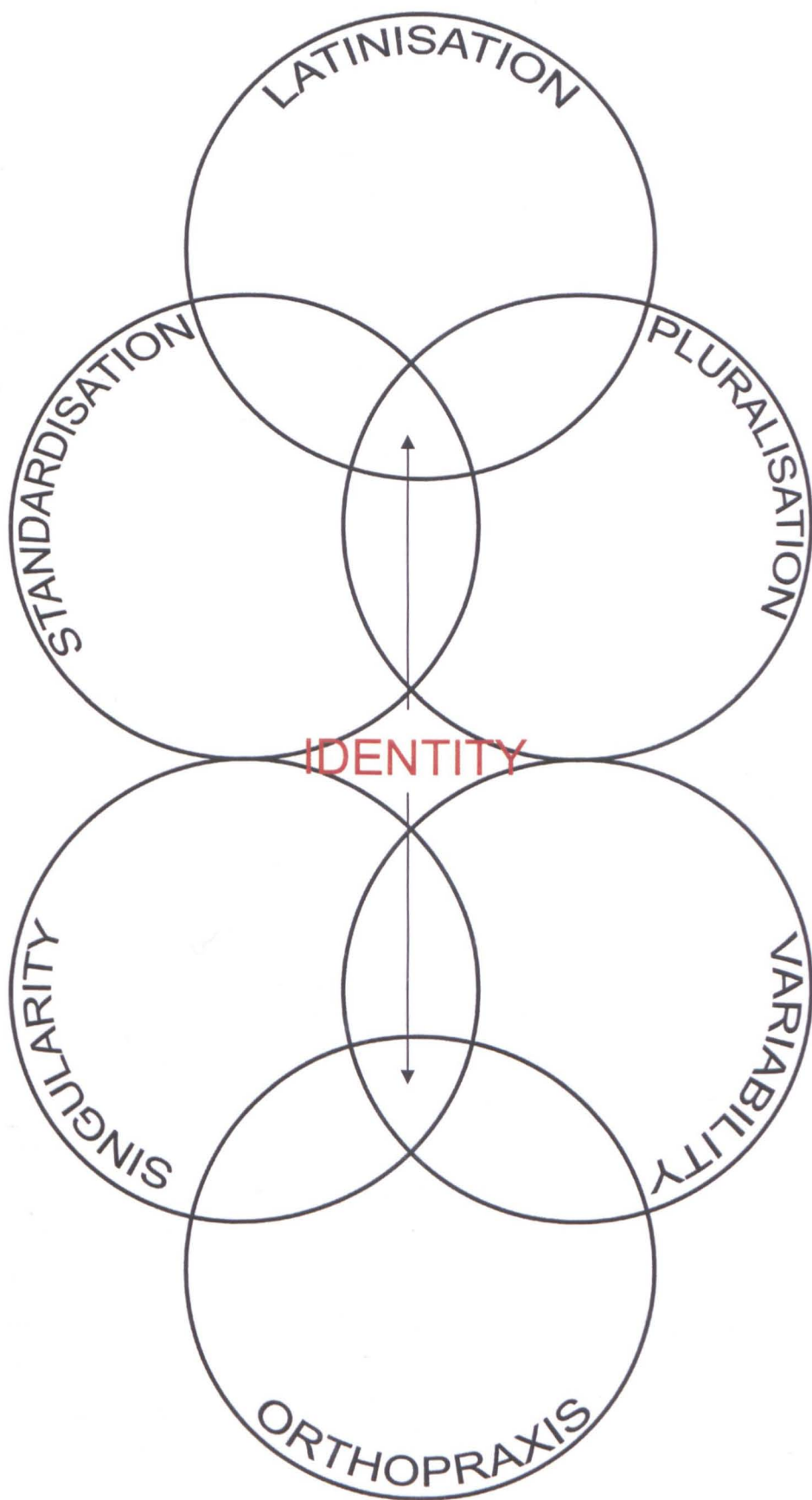
Fig.5.24 – Inter-locking issues and divergent trends in inscriptional practice

5.5.14 - Inter-locking Issues: Latinisation, Standardisation and Pluralisation

In Group 3 *Veteribus* was more popular with dedicants who had Latinate names (Table 5.8) and attempted Latinisation and standardisation of the theonym. These are amongst the poorer quality altars in the total sample and exhibit lower epigraphic consciousness, confirming that Latinisation and standardisation does not equate with literacy, let alone status judgements based on a Romanisation paradigm. The attempts at standardisation may have been at a certain point in the *floruit* of the cult, but without better dating for the monuments it is impossible establish this. The choice of referring to plural gods has been previously assumed to be a Celtic triad and a non-Roman characteristic, but this would be at odds with the Latinate spelling and Romanised names of the dedicants in Group 3. Could the plural gods be a celestial and craftsman dyad rather than a triad? Different processes of standardisation were at work in the northeast Group 2, which has a striking contrast with Group 3, through dedicants with non-Latinate names favouring the singular VIT-variants.

5.5.15 - Conclusion of epigraphic analysis

Returning to the three initial propositions for this analysis:

(i)   Certain spelling variants of the theonym <u>do not correspond to ethnic identities,</u> such as Germanic, Roman, or Celtic. However, certain spelling variants were preferred in certain sub-regional groups revealing local identities and affiliations to certain conceptualisations of deity and inscriptional practices.

(ii)   The plural concept of deity <u>is not a Celtic/native form,</u> but inscriptions favouring the concept of god(s) tend to be simpler. The singular concept of deity is preferred by dedicants across all the groups who demonstrate higher epigraphic consciousness through the details and relative elaboration of their inscriptions. However, this does not equate with Romanisation or even Latinisation as they emphasise non-Latinate forms of the theonym. Conversely, in Group 3, relatively simple inscriptions to the Latinised pluralized form *Veteribus* were favoured by dedicants with Latinate names, demonstrating that literacy and epigraphic consciousness do not equate with Romanisation.

(iii)   The use of formulae exemplifying *orthopraxis* <u>does represent standardisation of practice and also the concept of deity.</u> These might traditionally be thought of as the more Romanised worshippers, but are presented here as exhibiting higher epigraphic consciousness within the social stratification of the cult.

The lack of chronological control for the sequence of altars is the unknown factor and some of the distinctions highlighted here may be a result of change through time. There is some overlap between the two main Groups (2) and (3) but the corresponding patterns of standardisation and variations in conceptualisation hint at real regional differences that again would be hard to tally with the movements of Germanic auxiliary units. Although taphonomic issues have obviously biased the overall distribution to the centre of the wall, the general observations of regional groups still seem valid. The evidence as ever remains tantalising, but more finds would be unlikely to considerably alter the basic observations. The regionalised distribution defined by the east-west watershed would certainly support the local affiliation of the cult of the Vitiris. However, this cult was also a product of the cultural hybridity of the frontier and would have been perceived in subtly different ways by the various members of frontier society, as the above analysis of inscriptions has demonstrated.

Different identities are indicated by the dedicants names, and correlate with different choices regarding choice of votive formulae and conceptualisation of the deity. Social stratification was revealed through isolating and comparing the features of the inscriptions. Although dedicants names were split into Latinate/non-Latinate, the corresponding details of variations in inscriptional practice, and sub-regional patterning are more complex than simple Roman versus native distinctions. The basic regional groupings with their statistical preference for certain forms of the theonym (Fig.5.22) have been shown by more detailed analysis to reflect even more distinctive correlations between identity and inscriptional practice. The expression of identity through dedicants names and the resultant choice of theonym does not rely on the supposed ethnic origin of the theonym. Inscriptional practice, *orthopraxis*, and the choice of including variant formulae, or indeed no votive formulae at all, provided the key for unlocking this analysis.

Group 4 dedications, where complete, all used some sort of votive formulae. In this largest single sample, closest to the main east-west watershed of Britain, there was more variation in spelling the deities name than at any other site, matched by the range of identities revealed through dedicants names, which fits the general religious and cultural pluralism at Carvoran. There is no apparent ethnic distinction with choice of theonym or conceptualisation of deity, but the observation of the use of votive formula at this apparent cult-centre provided the stimulus for examining *orthopraxis* and inscriptional practice.

Comparing inscriptions from Groups 2 and 3 that did not use any votive formula revealed the most distinctive correlations with sub-regional identities projected through the

cult worship of Vitiris (table 5.8). With no formulae, the focus of the inscription becomes the form of the theonym. Multiple levels of identity conforming to different levels of practice are most pronounced in Group 3 where there is also a sub-set with non-Roman names using partial votive formula that choose the singular form of the theonym variously spelled (Table 5.7). Assuming that *orthopraxis* and higher epigraphic consciousness would go hand-in-hand with Latinisation of the theonym, has proved too simplistic.

Haynes has commented that epigraphy "can only go so far in illuminating regional aspects of religion in the Roman army. Little is revealed about local religious custom and little about how the soldiers viewed native gods. A divine name can only tell us so much." (1997:114). It is hoped that breaking free of ethnic dichotomies and not seeing the military as the arbiter of all activity on the frontier has allowed something to be said about local religious custom. Focussing on the variations in patterns of use of votive formulae has been the key to revealing these alternative sub-regional identities within the cult of Vitiris. The varying conceptualisations of the deity have more relevance to the identities of dedicants as expressed through their names, than the ethnic identities proposed by the etymological theories of origin. There is certainly no correlation with HV-variants and Germanic dedicants. The correlations between dedicants names, variations in inscriptional practice and the conceptualisation of the deity as singular or plural gods seem to reflect a multiplicity of sub-regional identities and stratification within those and across the whole sample. The levels of variation reveal the complexity of the socio-political context of ritual practice in the religious melting-pot of the frontier. The variations in inscriptional practice reach beyond simple dichotomies of Romanised assimilation versus native resistance.

Conclusion: the Hybrid Vitiris

The socio-political context of ritual practice in central Britain reveals a variety of processes at work. Both local and foreign cults were adopted and appropriated in different ways. Some local cults were semi-official and promoted at certain times (Brigantia), while others were popular but un-official (Vitiris) and both interacted with foreign cults in different ways. Some local cults remained embedded in their regional context and while *interpretatio* was presented as dis-embedding Cocidius and Maponus from beyond Hadrian's Wall, in reality they were simply being embedded in a different set of socio-political circumstances by military dedicants and through engagement and name-pairing with exotic cults. More widely scattered distributions of dedications are more easily linked to the military context of the frontier and some cults such as Mogons may have been imported by auxiliary units

from the Rhineland and then equated with the local deity Vitiris. Whether originally from Greece via Rome (Apollo), rural *Latium* (Silvanus), Commagene (Dolichenus), Libya (Caelestis/Tanit), *Mogontiacum* in the Rhineland or the Tyne valley, there are complex processes of interaction at work in the reconciliation of local tradition and foreign innovation (Woolf 2001:182).

The distribution of votive altars dedicated to local gods of the northern frontier suggests that regional identities were being expressed through participation in local cults, but these represent alternatives to the timeless tribal continuity often suggested for British Later Prehistoric peoples. A model of combined social, territorial and religious organisation has been suggested that utilised drainage basins and topographic boundaries. Three regional groupings correspond to Cocidius in Northern Cumbria with rivers flowing west to the Solway Firth, Belatucadros in Southern Cumbria, with rivers flowing north to the Solway, and Vitiris east of the Pennines with a western limit geographically defined by the main east-west watershed of Britain. Such definite regionalisation should be attributed to the resident population rather than any characteristic of military governance. The combination of hydrography and topography defined distinct regions in northern England and vernacular cult activity reflected these local and regional identities. The involvement of 'Roman' military communities in the worship of local deities demonstrates that by the second century A.D. these communities considered themselves as local to the region and chose to express this through the worship of appropriate and regionally distinct deities. Name-pairing of local deities with Roman gods indicates active appropriation by official and military dedicants (Webster 1995a&b). The process of *interpretatio Romana* resulted in greater dislocation from the *loci* and *fanum,* with the cults of Cocidius and especially Maponus being dis-embedded from their specific regional context, but at the same time re-embedded in a wider imperial context.

Vitiris was one of these localised *numen,* but should not be strictly assigned as a Roman, German, or native cult. This kind of ethnic label seems to miss the point; the etymological focus of interpretation does not work and has hindered further study. Vitiris can probably best be understood as a hybrid cult whose characteristics appealed across the cultural and linguistic boundaries that were being dissolved, re-negotiated and renewed in the frontier zone of northern England. Originally, *hybrid* was a Latin term for the offspring of a wild boar and a tame sow and this is a good metaphor for understanding this cult. Vitiris was not a pugnacious native Celtic deity symbolised by the archetypal wild boar nor was it a tame Romanized version of a 'native' cult, but something between these

opposite poles, and something more; best characterised as the tenacious offspring of the different cultural backgrounds and identities that inhabitants of Northern Britain were adapting and expressing through cult affiliation.

Previous analysis of the cult of Vitiris has sought to assign an ethnic origin for cult worship largely based on linguistic study and the etymology of the theonym. The lack of standardisation of the theonym in combination with the multiple conceptualisations of the deity suggests that the original meaning was not the determining factor in the cults popularity. Vitiris provides an example of the multi-cultural influences at work on ritual practice, but grounded in a local context (Pitts 2008) and manifested through the material evidence for this distinctive hybridised cult (the *ara Vitirum*[?] mentioned on Vindolanda 9: see Appendix 1). The cult's origin may be rooted in the local cultural geography, but this is not a timeless continuum and care must be taken in matching the evidence of later cults with prehistoric identities. The cult of Vitiris may even represent the ritual affiliation of local communities attached to military sites within *civitas Brigantum*, whose ancestors would not have considered themselves part of that tribal group.

Webster highlighted deliberate ambiguity in cult imagery as a negotiation strategy in colonial situations (2002, 40). In the case of Vitiris, ambivalence or rather polyvalence may have been used as a positive strategy for the promotion and development of this cult. The detailed analysis of inscriptional practice has demonstrated how different conceptualisations of the deity were related to different forms of epigraphic practice and different identities as revealed through dedicants names. Identity and ritual practice proved more complex in the cult of Vitiris than simple oppositions of Roman and native. While there are still many inherent ambiguities in the evidence and multiple conceptions of this deity, there were also remarkable trends in individual expression that conformed to sub-regional groupings with Latinate and local personal names hinting at multiple identities. Standardisation, Latinisation and pluralisation operated at a lower level of epigraphic consciousness than the complex singular forms of the theonym on more literate altars. Perhaps the most surprising revelation was that the lowest levels of literacy were apparent amongst dedicants with Latinate names, who Latinised the theonym but also conceived of a plural deity, which would normally be considered a non-Roman characteristic.

The pluralisation of Vitiris has previously been assumed to be Celtic triplism (Ross 1974), but there is no triadic element to the iconography. An alternative suggestion of an associated pair of celestial and craftsman deities based on interaction with the cult of

Jupiter Dolichenus may seem distinctly un-Celtic, but reflects the contemporary socio-political context of ritual practice on the northern frontiers. Although tentative, this suggestion has the virtue of placing the development of a local cult into the wider provincial and imperial context of religious interaction, as well as considering the contemporary social and political context of the Antonine and Severan periods. The corresponding feature of watershed boundaries interpreted from the landscape analysis of the cult site at Thistleton and the northern distribution of altars, demonstrated how essential characteristics of the cult of Vitiris were embedded in the potency of the ritualised landscape. These facilitated points of comparison and translation with cults introduced to Britain from both the heart of the Empire and originating from its far-flung corners. The links to specific ritualised features of the British landscape has the dual advantage of supporting the connections to these wider influences whilst also confirming the localisation of the cult.

Linguistic creolization is suggested by the evidence of inscriptions, indicating localised identities developing from heterogeneous origins. This is matched by the metalworking styles of central Britain which have been described as constituting a distinct frontier culture (Hunter 2007; see Chapter 7.8). The evidence for Vitiris does not exhibit the same characteristics of resistance that Webster has inferred for her creolised Gaulish pantheon, but this variance can be attributed to the different social and political situation of the northern frontier zone. The adoption of epigraphy and the material form of the votive altar demonstrate more subtle strategies of adaptation that this specific socio-political situation demanded. This material appropriation of a foreign ritual practice facilitated the translation and incorporation of multiple conceptualisations of deity within a flexible cult framework. The 61 Roman period altars dedicated to the many forms of Vitiris have been previously dismissed as ambiguous in the extreme. However, detailed analysis of the inscriptions revealed subtle evidence for identity expression with correlations between dedicants names, variations in inscriptional practice and conceptualisation of the deity. The extremes of Romanisation and resistance are difficult to match with this evidence. Divergent trends in epigraphic consciousness, *orthopraxis*, Latinisation and standardisation of the theonym, indicate poles of influence beyond the much-touted illiteracy that had curtailed etymological analysis. Along with the adaptive strategies of artistic and conceptual syncretism, and linguistic creolisation, these all contributed to making this the most popular vernacular cult in the multi-cultural milieu of Northern England during the early centuries AD.

Chapter 6 - Ritualisation and the landscape context of ritual practice

6.1 - Introduction

Numerous items of Later Prehistoric and Roman metalwork were discovered through peat-cutting, draining boggy, waterlogged and marginal land or deep ploughing during the agricultural improvements of the British landscape in the 18th and 19th centuries. Close contextual information is rarely available due to find circumstances and the variable standards of antiquarian recording. These objects present numerous methodological problems for modern study and interpretation. They have often been referred to as 'stray' finds and at best are considered useful for plotting distributions of related artefact types.

The debate between ritual and utilitarian explanations for the deposition of prestige metalwork creates yet another interpretative dichotomy (Needham 2001; Bradley 1998a:xviii). Although a ritual interpretation is now commonly used, there is a danger in assuming that all these artefacts were votives. Context is key to the votive interpretation. The excavation of contemporaneous settlement sites rarely produce this type of material, so a votive interpretation is encouraged by the general wet context of many finds and analogy with other better known ritual sites (Fiskerton – Parker Pearson & Field 2003). Liminal characteristics are often inferred from the general context of stray finds, being in watery, boggy and agriculturally marginal locations (Hunter 1997). The term hoarding acknowledges the possibility of other interpretations for the occurrence of prestige metalwork in the archaeological record, other than as votives (cf. Osborne 2004; Needham 2001 and Ritualisation section below). Hunter's (1997) comprehensive regional study of hoarding in Northern Britain from the Iron Age and Roman period widened out the interpretative possibilities for this material with a fuller contextual description and this discussion will build on these advances in the archaeological interpretation of prehistoric hoarding traditions (Hunter 1997; 2007; Bradley 1998a; 2000).

Watery contexts appear to have been the appropriate medium for the deposition of prestige metalwork in Later Prehistoric Britain, although this view is largely shaped by Late Bronze Age evidence. The River Thames and the River Witham in particular were the focus of long-term depositional activity (Fitzpatrick 1984; Fields and Parker Pearson 2003). These archaeological correlates have been used within the interpretative framework of Celtic religion to substantiate generalising theories about sacred landscapes, the sacred nature of water and the sacred springs, bogs, lakes and rivers associated with deities in

later mythologies (Green 1992:223-4; Green 1986:Ch.5). Cross-cultural study has demonstrated that the essential nature of water as numinous has been perceived in remarkably similar ways in many cultures (Strang 2005). Notions of purity and sanctity are often evoked by water. These factors may have been acknowledged through the numerous acts of votive deposition in watery contexts throughout prehistory. There is evidence for certain features of the landscape retaining something of that significance into the early historic period (Hunter 1994) with some eventually being Christianised. In Ireland, many of the most famous examples of artefacts recovered from watery contexts were deposited in areas that were later used as barony, county and parish boundaries and have been linked to the kingship rituals inferred from medieval vernacular literature (Kelly 2006). However, creating a timeless construction (Fitzpatrick 1991) of sacred landscapes existing over a millennium will ignore the many shifts in socio-cultural conditions within such immense time-spans (see critique of Yeates 2006 in Ch.2). A focus on landscape context can be used uncritically as grounds for religious continuity from later prehistory into the Roman period (e.g.Yeates 2006; Woolf 2000:626-8). The cultural disruption caused by Roman military action, occupation and colonisation had visible affects on the landscape through the construction of roads, forts, villa's settlements, towns, temples and burial grounds. Although less visible archaeologically, new agricultural intensification strategies (Chapter 4; Albarella 2007) and a different attitude to resource exploitation (Bowie 2006) can signal the clash of cosmologies as much as name-pairing classical and local deities on votive altars. The rapidly changing socio-cultural conditions surrounding the Roman conquest of Britain may have stimulated different responses, meanings and motivations in ritual practice and landscape perception (Woolf 2000:626-8).

Water had undoubted potency for the ancient inhabitants of Britain, but this chapter will question the generalised notion of sacred landscapes. The veneration of significant natural places through the practice of votive deposition has become a common trope of Celtic religion (Green 1986:19-22), but modern study risks marginalising other important information by simply relying on the interpretation of Celtic religion as a 'natural' religion (Webster 1991;1995c). Wherever possible, archaeologists should attempt to say something more meaningful about the landscape context of ritual practice.

Landscape approaches have proved immensely popular for the archaeological study of early prehistoric ritual monuments and have also been successfully applied to the study of later prehistoric hoarding (Bradley 1998a&b; 2000; Hunter 1997). However,

landscape context has rarely featured in studies of Roman Britain (Petts 1998; Taylor 1997). Prehistoric archaeology has particularly focused on artefacts deposited in wet contexts, whether rivers, lakes, bogs or springs, but consequently an interpretative dichotomy is then created through a natural juxtaposition with a minority of other deposits interpreted as 'dry', from locations such as hill, moor or mountain (Bradley 1998a:9-10). Binary divisions of wet and dry or Roman and native cannot fully explain the complexities of these important interactions between people, objects and places. An awareness of the entire fluvial system and especially the watershed boundary has the capacity to include a variety of topographical and hydrographical features and thus over-ride dichotomies such as high and low or wet and dry. Exploring the nature of 'continuity' of votive practice into the Roman period may help to resolve the misleading labels of Roman and native assigned to the depositional context of these objects.

The performance of votive practices and the locations chosen for these depositional acts by the inhabitants of Northern Britain would have been invested with considerable social and cultural meaning. Due to the lack of close contextual information for many finds, a broader geographical perspective is essential in order to take analysis further. The context of certain 'stray finds' will be examined at a variety of spatial scales in order to articulate the sense of place, ranging from the specifics of landscape features and immediate locality, wherever possible, to ultimately the topographic position within the fluvial basin and relationship with the larger river system. Examining finds of prestige metalwork in relation to the over-arching contextual category of the watershed boundary of major river systems creates the opportunity for much more to be theorised about this body of evidence than the label of stray finds allows. A contextualised analysis will provide a more nuanced interpretation of these material engagements that allowed people to create a potent sense of place at the boundaries of the ritualised landscape.

6.2 - Watersheds

It is a physical truism that water will naturally flow off high ground to the lowest point of the immediate landscape, and as every watercourse flows downstream they connect with others in a constant downward dynamic feeding into successively larger bodies of water. This process continues until eventually the water reaches the coast and enters into the sea. Drainage or fluvial basins are the topographic regions that contain water systems sharing a single outlet to the sea and topographic barriers called watersheds divide

drainage basins from each other (Mayhew 2004). The watershed is sometimes known as the water parting, the summit of drainage or colloquially in Northern Britain as 'the heaven-water boundary' (Huxley 1887:19). Watersheds are much easier to recognise in upland areas where continuous high ground connects in order to separate the flow of water and clearly define the watershed.   However, there are also ambiguous points where hydrological and geological factors dictate that the watershed boundary must cross lower ground that is not clearly defined topographically and where alluvial or geological factors can inhibit the flow of water.   Here, the boundaries between previously separate and clearly defined drainage basins become blurred and boggy; an ambiguity compounded by the fact that these watershed areas connect river systems at a relatively lower altitude, and so, up until reaching the morass, they provide the least strenuous means of moving between river systems.   The watershed as a context-type has a useful interpretative flexibility, defining the entire catchment area of a river system and covering a variety of topographic positions from the coast to the highest peaks.

6.3 - Ritualisation and Later Prehistoric traditions.

As discussed in Chapter 3, use of the term 'ritual' in archaeological literature often separates these actions from other social processes and is a result of a modern post-enlightenment division of the religious from secular (Brück 1999). The dynamic approach of ritualisation (Bell 1992) theorises the process of investing some actions with added meaning, whilst still situating them within the overall flow of human action. The distinction between modern categories of domestic and religious, or functional and ritual is questionable when applied to prehistoric Europe and ritualisation has been proposed as a sounder theoretical framework (e.g. Hill 1995b; Bradley 2005).

The origins of a 'monumental' switch in prehistoric ritual practice can be traced back to the Middle Bronze Age when many widespread social, economic and consequently ritual changes occurred (Bradley 2008). Agricultural and pastoralist intensification occurred in tandem with the abandonment of monumental ritual constructions. This fundamental shift in the nature of the archaeological record is often simplistically conceived as a switch from a ritually dominated earlier prehistory to a domesticated later prehistory (Hill 1989; Bradley 2005). Economic activity expanded into the uplands, which had been the domain of ancestors, as demonstrated by the many upland burial mounds. Activity in the upland zone would have had both localised and long-

term environmental impact, particularly on the hydrology of drainage basins (Macklin 1999), and ultimately this may have an indirect relationship to votive practices in the Late Bronze Age, characterised by increased activity on hill-top enclosures, the disappearance of monumental burial rites and dramatic increases in the amount of prestige metalwork being deposited.

Weapons in watery contexts typify the Ewart Park phase of Late Bronze Age metalwork in Northern Britain. The contrast between wet context and dry land is often an artificial creation and has occasionally justified a parallel ritual:utilitarian divide (Bradley 1998a). Hilltop enclosures in central Britain, such as the Eildon Hills (O'Connor and Cowie 1985) and Traprain Law (Coles 1960), reinforce the role of hills as focal points for deposition, but would have also provided arenas for a host of social interactions (Hill 1995c). Arthur's seat, Edinburgh, with the Duddingston loch hoard at its base, shows how hills could provide focal points for regional cosmologies, even if the immediate context of deposition is a significant body of water beneath the prominence. The subtle interplay between a variety of hydrographic and topographic characteristics must have played an essential role in the conception and perception of place, informing practices of votive deposition. Hawkes and Smith (1957:149) suggested a votive interpretation for Duddingston, but Coles (1960:38) used the functionalist economic interpretations of merchants and founders hoards, which were favoured in the mid-twentieth century. There have been many advances in the study of Bronze Age metalwork since Coles study of the Scottish material (Bradley 1998a; Pare 2000; Roberts and Ottaway 2003; Cowie et al. 1998). Detailed study of patterns in the data has further encouraged votive interpretations, with complex hoards often having long-term formation processes through the frequent curation of material and collection from different regional traditions, with these trends even displayed in relatively simple hoards of paired axes (Huth 1997).

One of Coles' few certain 'ritual' deposits was the bronze shields from Lugtonridge, near Beith, since they had been discovered deliberately arranged in a circle (1960:39). Other than this tantalising glimpse of patterned placement little is known of the wider context with several Lugton names in close proximity, but together covering a wider area of broken topography separating Renfrewshire and Cunninghame. Although it is unclear exactly where the hoard came from, the wider context of Lugtonridge is the ambiguously draining area that separates water flowing to the north into the Clyde system and water flowing west into Ayrshire, and so in a broad sense the general locality can be categorised

as a watershed context. Comparison with the shields deposited at Auchmaliddie, Aberdeenshire, found during the draining of a moss located on a ridge separating the rivers Ythan and Ugie, confirms that a watershed context was appropriate for this type of material.

Needham (2001) has argued for more careful consideration of hoarding beyond a simple dichotomous equation between utilitarian deposition with hope of retrieval and ritual/votive practices with no intention of recovery. Ritual and utility need not be mutually exclusive categories (Needham 2001; Brück 1999) and acts of deposition have immense scope for both variation and purpose. The occasion of deposition and the social conditions triggering recovery are vital factors in a hoard's archaeological survival (Needham 2001:291-2). However, the great majority of deposits would have been en-acted with care, ceremony and performance, even if this was only to ensure protection till recovery and so in this sense most, if not all, hoards could be considered ritualised (Needham 2001:294).

A retreat from upland occupation at the beginning of the Late Bronze Age has been frequently linked to climatic deterioration glimpsed in paleoecological evidence, but a recent review of the evidence has questioned previous theories of population disruption and competition for the prime agricultural land in the valleys (Dark 2006). The growth of substantial settlements and boundary enclosure indicate tenurial claims on landscape and the domestication of the Later Prehistoric archaeological record (Hill 1989). There is evidence for centennial flood events *circa* 800 BC (Macklin 2006) and the earliest Iron Age transition sees the dramatic curtailment of depositional activity across much of Europe (Bradley 1998a), although what relationship there might be between these is unlikely to be as simple as environmental cause and effect.

The apparent demise of Late Bronze Age hoarding and votive practices and the hiatus during the Earlier Iron Age is enmeshed within the narrative of metallurgical change from bronze technology to iron. The transition to iron technology was both sporadic and gradual according to region (Needham 2007), but the main changes are to be observed in ritual practice. The wider narrative is most often presented from an economic and technological standpoint, the bottom rungs of Hawkes' (1954) ladder of inference and the wider impact is only usually discussed in relation to the breakdown of European networks of connectivity and the social disruption this caused. However, the material used to theorise about economic networks and technological change was primarily used for ritualised activities; this is the context where most prestige metalwork appears in the

archaeological record. The steady increase followed by dramatic demise of the practice of votive deposition is the key feature in the archaeological record that signals this transitional period from Late Bronze Age to Early Iron Age. These important ritualised activities should be integrated into broader considerations of society, group identities, power relations and politics, as well as the economic and technological implications. The florescence of hoarding activities in the Roman Iron Age, with different regional traditions, must be similarly integrated into wider narratives (Hunter 1997; 2001; 2007).

The apparent hiatus in Early Iron Age votive deposition in landscape contexts is matched by a lessening of activity on settlement sites (Pope 2003; 2007), suggesting a fundamental shift in values and practices. In the Later Iron Age (from *circa* 300BC) an increased emphasis on fertility has been proposed (Chapter 4) with the practice of votive deposition no longer focussed on the weapons, tools and ornaments of the Late Bronze Age, but instead utilising a wider range of items, many relating to agricultural practices as a pervasive metaphor for basic social values (Hingley 1992; Bradley 1998a:160-166; Williams 2003). The increase in agricultural production and valley-wide decisions for maintenance of resources is revealed through the environmental record and dated to roughly the same period circa 300BC (Tipping 1994; 1997). Environmental evidence for massive landscape re-organisation in Northern Britain had previously been sucked into the narrative of Roman conquest, with hilltop enclosures as sites of native resistance and episodes of tree clearance attributed to the presence of the Roman military. However, hilltop enclosures were often unoccupied immediately prior to the Roman invasions (Harding 2004) and improved dating techniques have confirmed the large-scale re-organisation of the agricultural basis of society as a Late Iron Age development. This evidence, along with a lack of imported goods from the Empire, demonstrates that northern Britain had its own cultural trajectory that was not reliant on outside stimuli, such as pre-Romanisation (Haselgrove 1999; 2002).

In the Roman Iron Age, goods originating within the Empire became an important component of ritual practice and votive deposition beyond the northern frontiers (Hunter 1997). As with the Early Iron Age transition, the pattern of increased depositional practice in settlement contexts of the Roman Iron Age (Pope 2003) indicates complementary trends in on-site and off-site ritualised practices with material culture in structured or placed deposits at focal points in settlements, such as hearths or liminal areas such as entrances, and boundary ditches (Bowden and McOmish 1987, Hingley 1990:96-104;

Parker Pearson 1994). The landscape analysis that informed the interpretation of the cult of Vitiris (Chapter 5) provides a convenient introduction to the methodology for this chapter and has already demonstrated the utility of the watershed context, interpreted as both focal point and liminal area. The main east-west watershed of Britain defined the distribution of Vitiris altars, with a concentration at the site closest to this major hydrological boundary at modern Carvoran, ancient Magnis. The location of the Thistleton temple at a nodal point where the watershed boundaries of three river systems meet demonstrated the ambivalence of watersheds as both boundary and focal point. These two observations gave some coherence to the interpretation of the cult of Vitiris and the strength of the landscape approach was the observation of topographical and hydrographical features at a variety of scales.

The following case study will focus on various themes that arose from using such landscape approaches, including routeways, boundaries, liminality and especially the subtle interaction between water and topography that shape and define movement within the landscape. A more nuanced interpretation will be proposed beyond the binary distinctions of wet and dry deposits and 'Celtic' tropes of sacred springs, lakes, rivers and bogs. Particular emphasis will be placed on the watershed context as a new category for interpretation and a useful and flexible tool for dealing with problems of lack of close context. Ritualisation theorises "all action as context specific, so that landscape and material culture do not provide merely a stage setting for human action but create a set of locales integral to that action" (Gosden & Lock 1998: 4). The rest of this chapter will examine material culture in its landscape context and illustrate how the watershed boundaries of British river systems became ritualised locales through the practice of votive deposition.

6.4 Prehistoric gold ornaments from the main East-West watershed of Northern Britain

Watersheds can be defined as "the boundary between two river systems; the watershed marks the divide between drainage basins, and *usually* runs along the highest points of the interfluves" [my italics] (Mayhew 2004). The easiest way to understand basic hydrology on the island of Britain is to consider watersheds at the macro-scale through the major east-west watershed division separating river systems flowing west to the Irish Sea from those flowing east to the North Sea [fig.6.1].

Fig.6.1 –

The main east-west watershed of Britain (red line) dividing land with water draining into the North Sea (Pink) from that flowing to the Irish Sea (Green).

Places mentioned in the text:
Med = Medionemeton
Br = Bracco Roman coin hoard
Cm = Cobbinshaw Moss Roman coin hoard
B = Biggar Gap & Culter Shaw
E = Ericstanebrae brooch
C = Carvoran
GC = Green Castle/Burney Silvanus altar RIB 763
Es = Ewartly Shank Cauldron
Lm = Lamberton Moor hoard

This primary watershed boundary runs along the highest point of the upper reaches of many river systems and topographically separates the eastern and western halves of Northern Britain. The example of a gold ribbon torc from Culter parish, South Lanarkshire, demonstrates some of the methodological challenges involved in analysing this material. Ribbon torcs were previously thought to be Bronze Age artefacts (Coles 1960), but a longer chronology has been established and some have now been confirmed as Iron Age artefacts (Warner 2003). Not only has the dating evidence been controversial, but the contextual information for this particular example is of the sparsest kind, being recorded as found "near the boundaries of Culter parish" (Irving 1861). The eastern half of Culter's parish boundary is contiguous with the main east-west watershed of Britain formed in this region by the watershed boundary between the major river systems of the Clyde and the Tweed. Despite the lack of close contextual information it is worth speculating that the deposition of the Culter ribbon torc might be related to the watershed boundary of the parish. All other finds of prehistoric gold ornaments from Biggar, Culter and Broughton parishes come from where the contiguous parish and watershed boundaries cross the corridors of low-lying boggy land known as the Biggar gap and a smaller valley to the south called Culter Shaw [fig.6.2]. These adjacent valleys are both low-lying corridors where the primary tributaries of the major river systems of the Clyde and Tweed are ambiguously indistinct. The contiguous watershed and parish boundary crosses these two ambiguously draining areas and two earlier Bronze Age deposits of prestigious gold ornaments have been recovered, indicating an enduring depositional tradition and encouraging further investigation of the Culter ribbon torc.

The main east-west watershed follows the high ground of the parish boundary from the south, along Culter Heights for approximately 5 miles, until a combination of geological and topographic factors dictate that the boundary drops into the small valley of Culter Shaw where an ambiguous moss separated Clyde from Tweed till modern drainage improved the land and reduced the boggy ground. As a result of such drainage activities numerous stray finds are recorded for the parish and several examples of Bronze Age metalwork are known from the vicinity of Culter Shaw, including two relatively rare Early Bronze Age gold lunulae from Southside farm, found in 1859 just on the Tweed side of the parish/watershed boundary (Coles 1971:53).
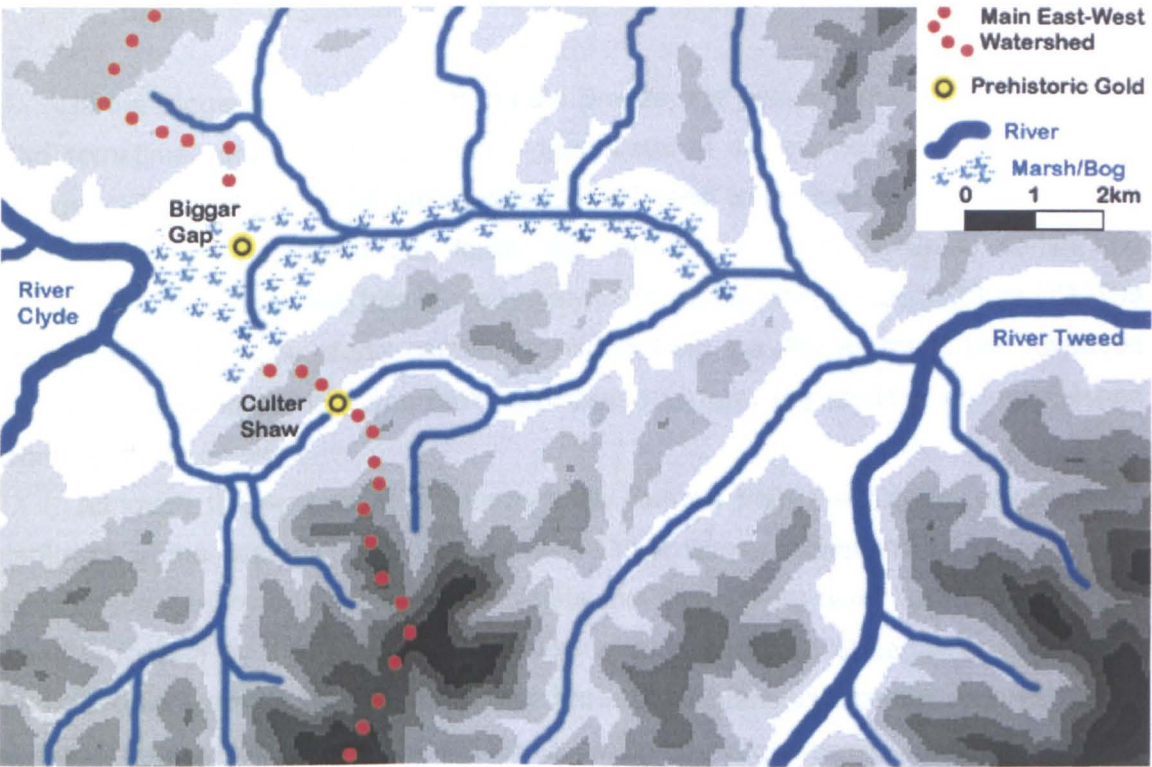
Fig.6.2 – The Biggar gap and Culter Shaw prehistoric gold deposits in relation to the main east-west watershed.
Below is a (1921 OS) map showing Biggar as a nodal point in the modern communication network.

In the Biggar gap, to the north, a Late Bronze age penannular gold 'lock-ring' was found sometime before 1947, near the Biggar Water at the evocatively named Boghall, and again in the vicinity of the ambiguous Clyde-Tweed watershed and parish boundary (Coles 1960:91). The Biggar gap forms the northern boundary of Culter parish and compared to the surrounding hills is a relatively low-lying corridor of land at 200m OD. The geographical importance of this corridor is evident from the Roman roads that fossilised previous axes of movement and have contributed to form the modern well-established communications network.

Although the watershed is most usually formed from the highest points of the interfluves, in the case of the Biggar gap and Culter Shaw, a combination of geological, topographical and hydrographic factors dictate that the highest point between Clyde and Tweed is formed by these comparatively low altitude stretches of boggy ground, which when traversed provide convenient access between western and eastern regions via the two major river systems of Tweed and Clyde, which are otherwise separated by hill, moor and mountain. No altitude needs to be gained to pass from one to the other as no gradient separates the rivers in the boggy corridors. In the past, when a top flood arose in the upper Clyde the surge of water hitting the tight curve of the river to the west of Biggar would lead to the Clyde bursting its banks, flooding the Biggar gap and connecting with the upper tributaries of the Tweed to briefly flow to the North Sea instead of the Irish (Statistical Account of Scotland 1834-45, vol.6: 342). Recognition of this unusual seasonal phenomenon in the past would contribute to the ambiguity and special character of this locale.

The two Early Bronze Age gold lunulae, the Late Bronze Age golden penannular lock-ring and the Culter gold ribbon torc are all exotic items that indicate metalworking connections between Ireland and Southern Scotland at widely separate points throughout prehistory. This range of gold artefacts, representing metalworking traditions crossing seas, and distant connections covering more than a millennium, all share a similar depositional context at the furthest limit of the river system that drains to the Irish Sea. These ritualised acts of depositing prestigious gold ornaments in ambiguously draining boggy ground conveniently represent the two contradictory definitions of ritual. In one sense they are repeated acts when considered over the *longue durée* of several millennia, being similar types of ornament from comparable depositional contexts, but they also fulfil

the other definition of ritual, which is of rare or unusual acts that would have stood out as a notable event in anyone's lifetime.

At first, the reference to the gold ribbon torc found 'near the borders of Culter parish', appeared far too vague to discuss other than as a poorly provenanced stray find. However, the possibility that the Culter ribbon torc was deposited in this watershed zone is stimulated by the pattern of other gold ornaments found in this ambiguous low-lying watershed zone between the Clyde and Tweed river systems. This interpretation is attractive, although the nature of the evidence dictates that it will always remain speculative. The example of the Culter ribbon torc demonstrates the potential for considering the movement of water and a broader awareness of river systems and their watershed boundaries to assist in contextualising some of the most poorly provenanced 'stray finds'. Single objects are not normally considered as hoards and so the term votive is necessary, although this unitary term disguises what would be a variety of motivations shifting through time. The other deposits of gold artefacts on Culter parish boundary demonstrate the longevity of votive practices in relation to the major east-west watershed of Britain.

6.5 - Ericstanebrae, where Tweed, Clyde and Annan spring forth

A fourth century A.D. gold crossbow brooch was discovered in 1787 during peat-cutting, 12 miles to the south of Culter at Ericstanebrae, and further emphasises the longevity of depositional practices at watershed contexts. Roman period artefacts provide a contrast with later prehistoric material in terms of greater accuracy in dating, but despite better chronological control, Roman material culture has disadvantages too. The framework provided by the sporadic historical accounts has meant that Roman artefacts get sucked into pseudo-historical narratives (Hunter 1997:109). The Ericstanebrae brooch has openwork Latin characters cast into the body, providing suitable clues to its origin. Haverfield (1893: 305) interpreted the characters as referring to the Vicennalia of Diocletian celebrated on 20th November A.D. 303. Sir Arthur Evans suggested that the crossbow brooch may have formed part of the insignia sent to Constantius Chlorus in Gaul, and thus its loss may be connected with his Caledonian expedition of A.D. 306 (Curle 1932a: 335, 370-1). The perennial military focus of Roman studies often dictates that artefacts must be related to events such as invasions, as casual losses by the Roman army or to the closest Roman military installations, even if found some distance away. The

specific context of the find is often ignored. Hunter (2001) has challenged this attitude, demonstrating the interpretative potential of Roman artefacts beyond the frontier and particularly the adoption of these objects into existing and adaptive ritual practices (1997:116-119). However, he also observes that, "in most cases the donor, whether 'Roman', 'native', or some shade in between, remains elusive." (Hunter 1997:118).

By virtue of the specific place-name, Ericstanebrae, a definite association can be made with watershed boundaries. Although the place-name does not allow us to pin-point the precise find-spot of the gold brooch, Ericstanebrae is described by the Ordnance Survey as the hill contiguous to the meeting-point of Dumfries, Peebles and Lanark shires, with the headwaters of the three rivers, Annan, Tweed and Clyde that define those regions rising in the immediate vicinity, including Tweed's well directly to the east [fig.6.3]. The Roman road from Annandale north into Clydesdale utilised the high ground of Ericstanebrae, demonstrating the familiar pattern of the deposition of exotic metalwork and a route-way traversing the watershed boundaries of two and sometimes, as in this case, the more geographically precise spot where three river systems meet. This situation is similar to the landscape context of the Thistleton temple as a triple watershed nodal point. Such watershed nodal points are formed because drainage basins always share their boundaries with more than one other fluvial system and these connecting points where three watershed boundaries meet are highly specific geographical locations marking the transition from one set of contiguous boundaries to another.

6.6 - Medionemeton (Fig.6.1)

In the mid-second century AD, Rome's northernmost frontier exploited the narrowest point of mainland Britain at the Clyde-Forth isthmus through the construction of the Antonine Wall (Hanson and Maxwell 1983). There are indications of the ritualised recognition of the major east-west watershed to the south of this frontier. A Roman coin hoard was discovered at Cobbinshaw Moss on the boundary of Lanarkshire and West Lothian formed by that main east-west watershed separating upper tributaries of the rivers Clyde and Almond. A coin hoard from Bracco (Robertson 1978) on the moors that form the main east-west watershed, just north of the highest point on the modern Glasgow-Edinburgh M8, again suggests a votive interpretation in a watershed context distinct from normative Roman military activity.

Fig.6.3 – Erickstanebrae as triple watershed nodal point defining valley systems and regional boundaries, based on Blaeu's map (1654) and Ainslie's map (1821) [National Library of Scotland]

The place-name of *Medionemeton,* the 'middle sanctuary', is recorded in the *Ravenna Cosmography* (Rivet and Smith 1979, 417-419) and should be assigned to the central section of the Wall (Hanson and Maxwell 1983:217). The name would seem particularly appropriate where the major hydrological division crosses the narrowest point of Britain. Due to its shorter-lived occupation and the different nature of interaction with the local population compared to Hadrian's Wall, the Antonine Wall has not produced votive altars dedicated to local deities. However, there is some evidence of votive practices in relation to the watershed, with the large votive altar of the Carrickstone (Donelly 1897) apparently still in its original location on a ridge between the forts of Croy Hill and Westerwood, where the main east-west watershed crosses the frontier. Another votive altar was found at the eastern end of that same ridge during the draining of a small loch on the farm of Arniebog (Keppie 1998:111). The Carrickstone and the second votive deposit from Arniebog serve to confirm the potency of the main east-west watershed. The altars are obviously related to the wider context of the Roman frontier, but through the landscape context can be considered separately from the nearby military contexts of forts. Both acknowledge the watershed context, but it seems likely that different motivations are involved in the erection of a monumental altar on a conspicuous hilltop and the more covert and possibly secondary rite of depositing an altar in a watery context.

Nemeton place-names often appear in synthetic accounts of Celtic religion, with the various names from Scotland to the *Drunemeton* of the Galatians used to substantiate notions of pan-Celtic religion. This evidence needs to be adequately accounted for (Fitzpatrick 1996), but there is also a danger of conflating evidence from different time-periods (Fitzparick 1991). The use of the term should not be restricted to the sacred Druidic oak groves of popular imagination (Yeates 2006). Modern nemeton place-names surviving in Scotland encompass a variety of sites e.g. Finavon Hill is a monumental vitrified fort and Navity Hill, Kinross is another hill-top enclosure with a Roman coin hoard recovered from draining boggy ground at the base. Tarnavie is a long moraine at the foot of the Ochills that produced what was probably a hoard of sheet copper alloy of which all that remains is a triskele ring of massive style metalwork dated to the first centuries AD (MacGregor 1976:260; and provided the inspiration for the motif in Fig.1). Diachronic study of the nemeton place-names of Scotland suggest that modern survival of the element may be related to sanctuary and a term that became Christianised and applied to churchland (Simon Taylor pers. comm.). These issues of ritual succession complicate

some nemeton place-names, but rather than surviving as an element in modern toponymy, *Medionemeton* has the advantage of being from one of the oldest sources for place-names in Scotland. However, there is no evidence of Iron Age hoarding or other ritualised practice in the vicinity. The military occupation provides the historical record of the place-name and Roman altars provide the acknowledgment of local ritualised topography.

6.7 - Silvanus on the watershed boundaries of Tees, Wear and Eden

The perennial military focus of Roman studies in Northern Britain often results in artefacts being related to the closest Roman military installations, even if found some distance away. Stray finds of artefacts are often used on distribution maps to indicate the presence of Roman influence or of 'Romans' themselves, often ignoring the specific context of the find (Hunter 1997:117). Moving analysis within the boundaries of Roman Britain to the hinterland of Hadrian's Wall reinforces the view that the watershed was not just a focus for votive deposition in a 'native' context beyond the boundaries of the Empire, but also affected ritual practices dedicated to Roman gods using 'Roman' votive objects (as with the cult of Vitiris – Chapter 5). The stray find of a votive altar dedicated to Silvanus from Green Castle (RIB763), high above the Eden valley on the Pennine escarpment, is catalogued under Kirby Thore fort, following the accepted format of relating altars to the nearest military installation in *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain* (Collingwood and Wright 1995: 258). Green castle is four miles from Kirby Thore and several hundred feet higher, near a vantage point on the third highest hill of the North Pennine ridge. The Green Castle altar hints at the interpretative straight-jacket that the military focus of Roman studies has often created, as well as methodological concerns about how such finds are recorded. The Pennine ridge in England forms that major east-west watershed of Northern Britain, in this region separating the River Eden that flows to the Irish Sea from the Tees river system flowing east to the North Sea.

There are other stray finds of Silvanus altars from moors bounding the Tees system to the north and the south (Fig.6.4). One group is epigraphically linked through *interpretatio Romana* with the local deity Vinotonus, recorded under the fort of Bowes despite being discovered 4 miles to the south on Scargill High Moor, in a pair of moorland shrines sheltered in a basin beneath the southern watershed boundary of the Tees and the Swale (RIB732-738).

Fig.6.4 - Silvanus altars on the watershed boundaries of Tees, Wear and Eden and other places mentioned in south Durham
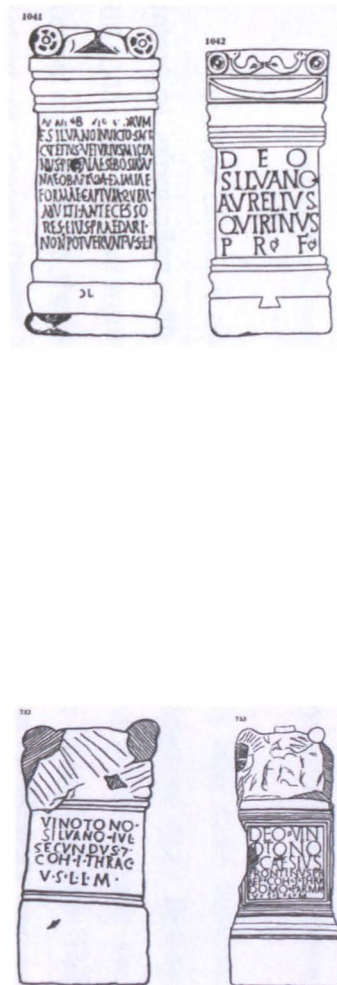
Another Silvanus altar, famous for its celebratory boar hunt dedication, has poor contextual information with the find-spot vaguely recorded as from Bollihope Common (RIB1041), an area of moorland at the southern edge of the Wear river system where a Roman road crosses the watershed, heading north into Weardale from Teesdale. The context of Green Castle and Scargill provide suitable analogues for supporting the suggestion that the Bollihope altar should be considered in relation to the Tees-Wear watershed.

Guided initially by the landscape analysis of the cult of Vitiris, examples have focussed on the main east-west watershed as an important division, but with ritualised activity often targeting low-lying areas that punctuate the higher topographic barriers of the Pennines and the Southern uplands of Scotland. These examples of altars dedicated mostly by military officers to the foreign deity Silvanus, or a local deity (Vinotonus) name-paired with the Latin God, from the boundaries of the Tees river systems demonstrate again how Roman period evidence from within the imperial boundaries can also indicate the ritualisation of watershed boundaries. Is this evidence of the Roman military stamping their authority on the landscape of Northern England, building shrines, hunting boar and dedicating to the Latin god of wilderness and boundaries at the Tees watershed?

The landscape analysis of Chapter 5 confirmed a contextual relationship between the southern dedication to Vitiris on the appropriate medium for a temple site, a votive plaque, and the northerly distribution of votive altars, which form the bulk of the evidence for the cult. This distinction between cult practice in northern and southern Roman Britain has often been commented on (Millett 1995; Mattingly 2004) and seen as one form of evidence for a fundamental geo-historical division manifested throughout British history. The environmental determinism of Fox's (1932) Highland and Lowland Britain reflects a progressive and evolutionary perspective that in the Late and Roman Iron Age was used to promote the primitivism of the North as part of a Romanisation paradigm (Bevan 1999; Haselgrove 2002), and has been further accentuated by core-periphery models (Cunliffe 1991). The landscape context of the two Roman period shrines from southwest County Durham and the villa at Holme house near Piercebridge disturb the neat progressive picture of Romanisation dividing England into a less developed North compared to a civilised South, just as the agricultural intensification of the Durham lowlands and the complexity of settlement around the 'oppida' of Stanwick disturbs the Late Iron Age picture of 'Celtic cowboys' (Haselgrove 2002). The Roman period temples located in the Greta

valley system also demonstrate the potential for greater consideration of the landscape context of ritual practice in Roman Britain.

6.8 - Prominence and confluence

Piercebridge on the River Tees and Bowes on the River Greta, approximately 15 miles apart in southwest Durham, have both produced Roman altars dedicated to the local god Condatis, name-paired with Mars (RIB 1024 & 731). Condatis is a Celtic word meaning confluence (Ross 1974). There are several Condate names in France, and there is continental evidence for temples, oppida, burial grounds and riverine deposition sites at confluences. Confluences are the lowest point of the landscape for both valleys and particularly dynamic points in the landscape where the power of the two watercourses meeting has a potent affect, constantly altering the physical appearance of the land. The place-name element Aber- in Scotland has a cognate meaning and the notably high occurrence in early parish names has led Nicolaisen (1997) to suggest that these sites had a previous ritual significance. In between Bowes and Piercebridge, the major confluence is that of the Tees and Greta, still known today as the Meeting of the Waters. A building, possibly a shrine recorded by Horsley (1732) just to the south of the confluence, received a fair amount of antiquarian interest by the local landowner and produced at least one votive altar (RIB 745).

The second Roman period religious site at the opposite extremity within the Greta valley system are the two Vinotonus shrines on Scargill High Moor. These have been variously interpreted as a wayside, hunting or otherwise rural shrine (Henig 1984; Ross 1974). The presiding deity is generally assumed to be one of the 'horned gods of the north' because of the iconography of a ram-horned patera on one of the altars and the equation with Silvanus, the Roman deity of woodlands and hunting. Other suggestions have linked the god with the stream on which the shrines are immediately situated and less plausibly with vines or wine from Latin *vino (Adkins and Adkins 2000:240). The siting of the shrines on the narrow banks of the East Black Sike had a practical purpose as the steep banks of the gulley provide amazingly calm shelter from the bad weather and harsh winds of the moors. However if we look at the wider geographical positioning of the shrines there may be wider implications to the general locality.

When looking at the hills to the south of Bowes, the long, generally flat and unbroken horizon provided by the South Pennines, is punctuated by an unusual conical

peak, the Citron Seat. This promontory is by no means one of the highest peaks in the Pennines, but it sticks out on the horizon because of its position close to and jutting out above the valley and its unusual even-sided shape, which resembles Bronze Age watershed barrows on a grand scale. The Vinotonus shrines are almost directly east of the Citron Seat sheltered in the gulley of the East Black Sike, which as its name suggests, is the most easterly of the streams that drain the locality of the Seat and the limestone scarp of White Edge, of which the Citron Seat is the northernmost projection. Bronze Age barrows should not be treated as simply part of the Bronze Age landscape but would also have formed part of the relict landscape of Iron Age Britain, along with other prominent landscape features (Barrett 1999). This is supported by the Irish *Dindshencas* where prehistoric burial mounds and certain hills and mountains could equally be conceived as access points to the otherworld, termed *sid*, which derives from the root **sed-* 'sit' meaning 'seat, abode' (Sims Williams 1990:61). Both natural and anthropogenic features formed the mythographic landscape (Bradley 2000).

Celtic religion has often been conceived as a natural religion with few man-made ritual structures or monuments and a focus on natural sites and features (Green 1986; Ross 1974). Caution is necessary when imposing the modern rationalist distinction between cultural and natural categories onto ancient mentalities (Brück 1999). Young and Symonds (1999) have argued that "all interventions in the landscape are, through their location and the nature of any possible material remains, potentially indicative of attitudes towards the natural environment." The landscape should not be seen as a mere reflection of the subsistence organisation of society, but as a potential map of its cultural vision (Evans 1985). This conception of landscapes as both socially and symbolically constructed is very pertinent to the interpretation of votive deposition, which through ritual practice created places that dissolve the distinction between culture and nature. Memory, mythography and naming practices would have played a part in the continuing perception of certain locations as numinous in the intervening centuries between votive acts. Beyond the relevance to deposition, Young and Symonds criticised the assumption that 'places' must equate with activities and therefore 'sites', since this "ignores the temporal, cultural and cognitive recognition of places through which they may exist as loci of meaning and not necessarily as foci of activity" (1999; citing Evans 1985). The cognitive encoding of the landscape through naming encourages engagement with toponymy as a vital tool for archaeological interpretation.

The Citron Seat is not just a local reference point within the Greta valley, but can be seen from miles around. Unlike other less prominent nearby hills, looking westward the Seat has a view to and can also be clearly seen from the Rere cross, site of a Roman watchtower, stone circle and the medieval boundary marker at the highest point of the Stainmore pass. Uninterrupted views from the Citron Seat east to the sea are also possible on clear days. The position almost directly east of the Seat may have some relevance as other Romano-British temples show similar considerations. Uley and Brean Down are orientated in relation to earlier prehistoric barrows and the temple at Maiden Castle is located over and immediately north of the focal eastern end of one of longest Neolithic barrows in Britain (Smith 2001). At Slonk Hill the eastern of a pair of Bronze Age round barrows was surrounded by an Iron Age square post structure and enclosed (Woodward 1992: 26-27) The entrances of the Vinotonus shrines themselves face east as do the majority of Romano-British temples. Was orientation also relevant when siting the shrines in relation to the most prominent feature of the landscape?

Silvanus' role as God of boundaries may bear some relevance to his equation with Vinotonus. The water flowing from the southern side of the Citron Seat flows into Arkengarthdale and forms one of the northernmost tributaries of the Swale-Ouse river system. The Citron Seat is the northern projection of hard geology forming the long exposed cliff edge called White Crag, which forms a basin drained by the East Black Sike and the Eller Beck that are primary tributaries of the Tees river system. There is evidence from very close by in the Pennines that exposed rock outcrops and cliff-scars could be perceived as numinous locations and the focus of ritual activity. Fremmington Edge (Hagg) is a long cliff outcrop similar to White Crag 8 miles to the south above the confluence of the River Swale and the Arkle Beck of Arkengarthdale, which form on the south side of Citron Seat. In excess of 75 pieces of horse harness were deposited at the scar (Hunter 1997:113&126) and, although the contents of this hoard are classed as Roman (Webster 1971), they fit into the character of local traditions of votive practice. The Group IV 'Brigantian' sword from Great Asby Scar, Westmorland (Richardson 1999) provides another example where the limestone plateau and outcrops form the watershed for the northward flowing Eden river system and the southward flowing Lune. Characteristics of how hydrology affects the limestone geology in the Pennines might also encourage the numinous assignation of the locality of the Citron Seat. Streams and water features can erode the soft rock, suddenly disappearing down a swallett or fissure leaving

a dry bed behind that the stream had previously followed for hundreds of years. These streams reappear, bursting out lower down the valley, sometimes out of apparently sheer rock faces. The site of the Gilmonby Late Bronze Age hoard is on one of the re-emerging spring lines in the valley below (O'Conner forthcoming).

Having disagreed with the etymological basis of analysis in Chapter 5, it is still possible that etymology can supplement interpretation. Vinotonus is unlikely to contain the Celtic element *vind- 'white' to link it to the White Crag basin where the shrines are located. When considering the placename *Vinovia*, the fort in Weardale that connects to Bowes, Rivet and Smith (1979:504) are careful to point out a distinction between Celtic *vind- 'white' and an element of similar appearance *vin- *vin-t-, an Old European element meaning 'mountain or prominence' (e.g. Mount Ventoux the site of a Gallic shrine on an outstanding prominent mountain dominating the topographic vista of Provence). The theonym may contain this element and indicate the Citron Seat and the White Edge scarp as the *loca* of the deity, Vinotonus, whose name describes a prominent feature of the local topography, just as Condatis does. Although engaging in etymological reasoning, these are not the basis of interpretation, but complementary to landscape contextualisation. This explanation is more attractive than one that tries to make an association with vines on this bleak stretch of moorland (Ross 1974).

6.9 - *Deae Nymphae NEINE*, the River Greta & *Lavatris*, the Roman fort at Bowes, SW Durham

In, or before 1702 a Roman period altar was found (RIB 744) somewhere in the vicinity of the River Greta, dedicated to *Deae Nymphae NEINE* (Collingwood and Wright 1995: 250). There is some confusion in the antiquarian sources about the precise find-spot with R. Goodman in a letter of 1727 claiming it came from 'near the middle of' Greta Bridge fort and Whitacker's *History of Richmondshire* (1823) placing it on the banks of the River Greta. Whitacker himself did not see the altar, but Horsley did and the best recording of the inscription comes from his *Britannia Romana* (1732). Collingwood and Wright used Horsley for their reproduction and in a footnote suggest that the five capitalised letters "conceal the local name of the Nymph" (1995, 250-51). Due to the association with a water spirit and location somewhere in the vicinity of the River Greta it can be suggested that this altar may *reveal* the local name of the tutelary spirit of the River Greta.

The present name of the Greta comes from the Scandinavian *griot* or *gryt* referring to stones and is an apt name for the rock-strewn bed of the river (Ekwall 1928, 185). The pre-Viking eponym appears to be related to the root of the River Nene, which Ekwall in 'English River-Names' deduces as *Nein-*. He offers two possible roots, one of which is *sneighu-* in Old Irish *snigid* 'it snows, it rains'. However, Ekwall preferred *neigu-* 'to wash', in Old Irish *nigid* 'washes', *necht* 'pure', Welsh *nith* 'to ventilate', Sanskrit *nenekti* 'to wash', Old English *nicor* and Old High German *nihhus* 'a water demon'. The second root is preferred for this discussion as it explains the etymology of the Roman fort *Lavatris* at Bowes, 6 miles further up the River Greta. Kenneth Jackson suggested the root was British *lavatro-* 'water-trough, tub, bath', and thought it might refer to a Roman bathhouse (Jackson 1970, 75). Rivet and Smith (1979: 384) question why Latin *balneum* was not used, if the intention was to signify a Roman bath-house, especially as this word has left abundant traces in continental toponymy and Gaulish *lautro* is glossed 'balneo' in the Vienna Glossary. Gelling (1989), agreeing with Rivet and Smith, considered Jackson's explanation unlikely because all Roman forts had a bath-house and this would not have distinguished *Lavatris* enough to justify the place-name. However, none of them disagree with the root *lavatro-*. Rivet and Smith conclude that *Lavatris* represents a latinisation of this existing British name, but look to the local landscape for inspiration because of the related Old Irish *lóathar*, glossed as 'alveus' ('river-bed'). Both Jackson's original derivation and Rivet and Smith's proposed relationship to the river are compatible through consideration of the additional meanings associated with the name of the Nymph NEINE.

The correspondence of meaning between *Nein-* and *lavatro-* relating to washing suggests a relationship between the names of both the river and the place occupied by the Roman fort. Further evidence can be discerned from Horsley's drawing of the inscription, which between NYMPE and NEINE show contracted symbols that Horsley read as LAV. The altar is missing so it is impossible to verify those carvings, but Horsley was a first hand observer and Collingwood and Wright (1995:251) have faithfully reproduced his drawing as the now authoritative record of the inscription. Although the evidence for both names comes from the Roman period it is likely that *Neine* is an older form (Coates and Breeze 2000) preserved perhaps by the innate conservatism observed in many titles of deities. The cognate term *lavatro-* was later latinised as the name for Roman fort at Bowes, *Lavatris*.

Neine, the goddess of the Greta denotes purity and cleanliness, which are not uncommon motifs to associate with water. In the traditional formulation of Celtic religion, the theonym would be used to provide a link to other aspects of tutelary goddesses from Britain and Ireland. Especially pertinent would be the mythological figure known as the *Beann Nighe*, 'the Washer at the Ford', a variant of the supernatural death messenger most frequently called the Banshee, from Irish and Scottish folklore. These traditions of the supernatural death messenger have been linked to older aspects of Irish tutelary goddesses that have survived into Medieval and modern folklore, most notably as the Morrigan (Lysaght 1996). The influence of this type of goddess encompassed death and the mortality of warfare, but particularly the premonition and grief associated with the inevitability of violent death. When this took place at fording points it was in the guise of the *Beann Nighe,* the Washer at the Ford, a persistent motif and probably of some antiquity as it occurs in the earliest sources of Irish literature and continues right through into the traditional lore of the 19th century. In the *Tain Bo Cuilagne,* the Morrigan is first encountered as a premonition of the death of Cuchulain, in the guise of a woman washing armour at a strategic fording point and liminal boundary (Lysaght 1996). The ritualised deposition of Later Prehistoric metalwork frequently occurred at fording points on the rivers in Ireland and the later vernacular literature has been used in the interpretation of the archaeological evidence (Bourke 2001). Iron Age swords from Carham and Sadberge at fording points on the rivers Tweed and Skerne suggest that some Northern British rivers received similar deposits (Hunter 1997:113).

The aspects of death and warfare were emphasised in the Christian literary milieu that recorded Irish vernacular tales in order to demonise the goddess. However, recent reappraisals have sought to provide a more balanced description of the Morrigan, (Herbert 1999; Lysaght 1996). These have attempted to show that her areas of influence also included sovereignty with its emphasis on the sacral marriage between King and goddess representing the land (Creighton 2005). This leads obviously to the ubiquitous fertility implications (Green 1992) and particularly an association with cattle as an indication of wealth, property, social status and frequent war-booty. The martial element is the consistent link and thus became the one that was later magnified by Christian writers. Traditions relating to the washer at the ford are often located at streams or rivers that are boundaries reflecting that element of sovereignty and territoriality (Lysaght 1996).

Other goddesses named on inscriptions from Northern England can reveal similar elements, showing that the divine functions of this type of deity might be recognised in Roman Britain centuries before they are recorded in the vernacular literature of Ireland. An altar dedicated by an unknown group in Northern England, the *Tectoverdi*, to a goddess *Sattadae* was found in Beltingham churchyard on a ridge above a confluence where the River Allen meets the South Tyne (RIB 1695). Jackson has translated the name as goddess of grief (1953, 325) and, given the find-spot, an association with one of the bodies of water close by would seem plausible, most probably the Allen. Further south in Yorkshire is a dedication to Verbeia, the tutelary goddess of the River Wharfe, whose name contains the element *firb-* cattle (Ross 1974). The name of the eponymous goddess of the region, *Brigantia*, has been etymologically compared to both Rhiannon (*Rigantona*) and the Morrigan, the two outstanding female figures of Welsh and Irish mythology who display sovereignty motifs (Ross 1974).

The inter-connecting elements of landscape perception revealed through the formalisation of sacred space at the two northernmost Roman period rural temples provide a mechanism for thinking about the ritualisation of landscapes in Roman Britain that can be complemented by etymological analysis. Reducing this to related binary oppositions of male:female, high:low, wet:dry would be too simplistic. The Vinotonus shrine was not situated directly on the watershed at the highest point of the landscape, but was instead sheltered in a gulley at the lowest point of the basin draining the geological outcropping scar of White Edge. Similarly the NEINE dedication may not have been from the lowest point of the landscape, but is associated with the River Greta through name and proximity. High and low points of hydrological systems are extremes, binary opposites that unnecessarily polarise interpretation. There were obviously a great variety of landscape features that were considered numinous and provided the focus for ritualised activity. Even with contextual information, it is not always possible to reconstruct the reasons why some features were considered liminal and others were not, nor why this may have varied through time. The examples of Roman period votive altars from within the discrete study area of southwest Durham demonstrates how places become inscribed on the landscape through the memory and human action, with the interaction between fluvial systems (hydrography) and topography impacting on ritual practice through naming of place and deity. At this level of landscape and toponymic analysis, there is the opportunity to re-engage with Celtic linguistic evidence and even cautiously step back on the mythological

roundabout. The invaluable knowledge of the highly specialised academic discipline of Celtic linguistic and literary study has the potential to reveal much about the cognitive mechanisms that are inscribed on the landscape through the place-name record (Maier 2006). There is also potential to re-engage with elements of the previous paradigm of Celtic religion, whose pan-European associations need to be explained rather than simply deconstructed and dismissed (Fitzpatrick 1996).

6.10 - Text and Landscape

When discussing the formation and perception of place, some consideration must be given to naming, as has been done for theonyms and *civitates*. The perennial problem of using non-comparable source material from prehistory and proto-history appears again. The first place-names in Central Britain are recorded in Roman sources. Place-names have proved a lodestone for linguists, historians and archaeologists with much theory, debate and speculation, especially for the areas of Britain poorly served by historical document, such as beyond the northern frontiers.

Ptolemy's Geography used material from just after Agricola's campaigns as neither Hadrian's Wall, its later forts, nor most of the earlier Stanegate forts including Vindolanda are mentioned. However, as with the archaeological characteristics of some Scottish *nemeton* sites, there are hints of prehistoric precedence for some of the places Ptolemy records. The recent discovery of a large pre-Roman rectilinear enclosure immediately to the west of the fort of Bremenium at High Rochester shows the importance of this place in the pre-conquest landscape and not just as a Roman fort (Crow 2006: 216-217). Ptolemy's map undoubtedly contains many clues to the perception of the landscape and a combination of both linguistic and archaeological perspectives has the greatest chance of successful interpretation. The identification of sites has also been hindered by the military focus of Roman studies in Northern Britain. The pre-conquest landscape would have been one of the factors that dictated the placement of forts and within that strategy an ideological dimension to the conquest should not be over-looked.

In some cases forts appropriated the names of existing sites, but also perhaps usurped something of their role in the social landscape. Trimontium is illustrative in this case. The Roman name for the fort at Newstead and the importance of its positioning at the foot of the three Eildon Hills is reflected in the name, with the latinisation of a presumed earlier Trimontion appropriately describing the triple prominence (Rivet and

Smith 1979). The large hill fort on Eildon Hill North (Owen and Rideout 1992) had been a focus of various stages of monumental construction, settlement and ritualised activities since at least the Late Bronze Age and has been variously suggested as functioning as a tribal centre and ideological focal point or the equivalent of continental *oppidum*. Roman roads in Scotland seem to have been measured from Trimontium, which emphasises its continued importance as a focal feature of the landscape. The large Roman fort continued in occupation well into the later second century AD and the unusual ritualised deposits in various wells and shafts on the site have received some speculation about usurping the ideological role of the hill-top enclosure (Clarke 1997).

A recent reconstruction of Ptolemy's map has attempted to correct the discrepancies caused by the turning of Northern Britain and provide an impartial study, attempting to locate the place-names with more consideration for local factors of topography and settlement instead of the military pre-occupation that has dominated previous attempts (Strang 1997). The various *Curia* or *Coria* names recorded for Northern Britain have been interpreted as assembly or gathering places, although there is debate about whether these were pre-existing or established by the Romans for the purpose of tax collection (Mann and Breeze 1987). Strang's correction places the *Coria Damnonii* in the heart of the Campsie Fells in the vicinity of the upper reaches of the Endrick Water and River Carron, a perfect meeting place on the main east-west watershed of Britain, just to the north of *Medionemeton* and connecting the lands surrounding the Firths of Forth and Clyde.

There are religious and cosmological aspects to many ancient place-names. For instance, *Luguvalium* (modern Carlisle) is one of a scatter of names from throughout Europe, which record the name of the god Lugus, whose name appears in the incantation on the tablet of Chamalieres and in the later mythologies of Ireland and Wales. This example is used as a cornerstone of pan-Celtic religion (Green 1992) and indeed, like the spread of La Tene art, these well-recognised elements of the Celtic paradigm need to be explained rather than simply explained away (Fitzpatrick 1996). River-names are frequently eponymous goddess names such as the Dee (Nicolaison 1997) and the Braint (Ross 1974) and the *locus Maponi* and *fanum Cocidi* have already been mentioned in Chapter 5. Unlike *Medionemeton* there are votive deposits of Iron Age cauldrons from Whitehills Moss, Lochmaben and Bewcastle (MacGregor 1976:307-8) that hint at previous religious significance. However, the relative chronology established for these artefacts are

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crucial to interpretation and, as with much of the Late Iron Age to Roman Iron Age material we are left with the unsatisfactory situation of regarding these deposits as 'peri-Roman' (Hunter 2007:289). Do the cauldron deposits represent prehistoric antecedents for the Roman period cults revealed through the place-name record and votive altars? The cauldrons could have been curated or even produced contemporaneously. Large sheet metal cauldrons persisted into the Roman Iron Age, as demonstrated by the Carlingwark loch and Blackburn Mill hoards discussed below. The Lochmaben and Bewcastle cauldrons could represent alternative rites in the vicinity of sacred places that the Roman military had appropriated, as much as Iron Age precedents.

Similar questions might be asked of the cauldron deposit from Elvanfoot, Lanarkshire (MacGregor 1976:303), whose lack of close context is best characterised as a crossroads where Roman roads out of Nithsdale and Annandale converge in the Upper Clyde valley. Does the Roman road convergence fossilise previous routes? The Elvanfoot vessel deposit represents an alternative recognition of the significance of this place, but was it earlier or contemporaneous with the Roman roads? The Roman crossroads near the site of the Netherurd hoard (Feacham 1958) begs the same sort of chicken and egg questions, which the poor dating evidence cannot resolve. A normative interpretation would place these in the first century BC. The exotic material of Snettisham style torc terminals and Gaulish coins indicates widespread material connections that complement the location at this point of inter-regional communication ideally situated between Tweeddale, Clydesdale and on the route northeast to the Lothian plain. These examples all help in considering the contingent and cultural nature of these sites of votive deposition.

6.11 - Vessel deposits from between the Northern frontiers (Fig.6.5)

The following examples will highlight a regional tradition of the votive deposition of vessels in relation to the watershed boundaries of major river systems in between the Hadrianic and Antonine frontiers, although it is uncertain which frontier was in operation at the time of deposition. Hunter's survey of Iron Age and Roman hoarding traditions in Northern Britain demonstrated that vessels overwhelmingly come from liminal contexts and that "Roman vessels played a significant role in native ritual" (1997:117). Considering some of these deposits in relation to the over-arching concept of watershed boundaries will allow a fuller contextual description that where possible covers the immediate context, but also considers the wider geographical context, taking into account a variety of topographic

positions and placement in relation to the boundaries of drainage basins that share a watershed boundary with the Tyne river system. The immediate context of the Backworth hoard is unknown (Hunter 1997: Appendix 2), but through the name can be placed just to the north of Hadrian's Wall at the northern edge of the River Tyne's watershed boundary close to the North Sea coast. The hoard comprised coins and jewellery contained in an inscribed patera dedicated to the *matres*, and has recently been classified as the northernmost example of a snake jewellery hoard (Cool 2000). This category of hoard are grouped together by the presence of zoomorphic serpentine jewellery and are complex hoarding compositions incorporating esoteric classical artistic motifs and influences from a variety of mystery cults, formulated in a distinctly vernacular British tradition. Although the exact location of the Backworth hoard cannot be pinpointed, the wider context is a watershed location on the north-eastern edge of an expanse of former heathland that defines the northern edge of the valley of the Tyne closest to the coast. There are numerous springs and wells in the vicinity of Backworth including the headwaters of the Brierdene burn, which is the first body of water north of the Tyne with its own sea outlet. The streams forming to the south of Backworth flow to the Tyne itself. Moving west along the northern watershed boundary of the Tyne system, an outstanding collection of vessels, including a cauldron, 7 paterae, and 5 bowls, were recovered from Prestwick Carr (Hunter 1997: Appendix 2). The Carr is a low-lying basin beneath a triple watershed point separating the River Pont from the Tyne system and both of those from Seaton Burn, originating just to the east, which although not a river, is a separate drainage basin with its own sea outlet, like the Brierdene burn at Backworth.

Hadrian's Wall utilises the watershed to the west of Prestwick, formed by the high ground between the Rivers Pont and Tyne, until it reaches the strategic point where a northward running ridge defines the Pont from the major tributary of the North Tyne. On this ridge the two Roman roads of Dere Street and the Devils Causeway branch out from the frontier northwest and northeast respectively. At Ingoe (Matfen), two bronze patera were found during drainage operations in an area of springs that are first-order sources for the River Pont, on the eastern side of the upland ridge that separates the extremities of the eastward flowing rivers of Northumbria from the River North Tyne (Hunter 1997: Appendix 2). The Devil's Causeway utilises this ridge to traverse the upper reaches of the Pont before dropping off the high ground just east of Capheaton.
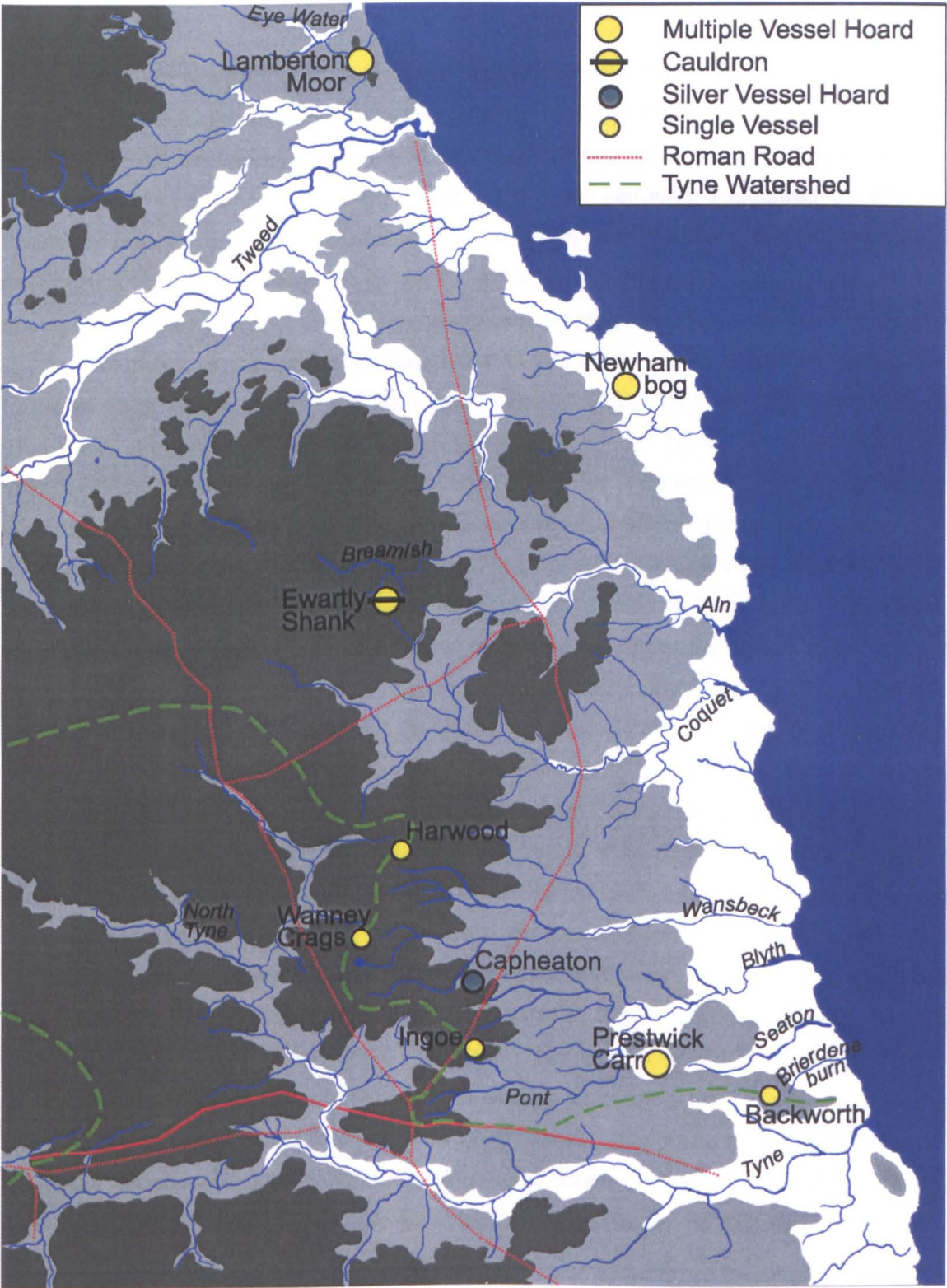
Fig.6.5 – A regional pattern of vessel deposition from Tyne to Tweed that demonstrates the versatility of considering the watershed context.

Although not part of the pattern of vessel deposits defining the watershed of the North Tyne, the Capheaton silver hoard (Hunter 1997: 117) is situated on a prominent ridge that forms the watershed between the Rivers Blyth and Wansbeck. The Capheaton hoard contained four patera handles that have been variously suggested as a votive deposit or perhaps even the burial of a temple treasure (Henig 1984:117). The imagery on one patera handle from the hoard seems particularly pertinent to the discussion as it shows both a river god and Minerva presiding over a spring.

Returning to the watershed boundary of the North Tyne, a Roman patera was found in 1885 in the bed of a stream near Wanney Crags (Hunter 1997: Appendix 2). This rocky promontory is on the watershed separating the North Tyne from the River Wansbeck and the stream is a primary tributary of the Wansbeck. The promontory of Wanney Crags itself has several panels of prehistoric cup-and-ring rock art surrounded by a later prehistoric hill top enclosure whose traditional interpretation would be as a defensive settlement, but is also open to ritualised interpretations (Hill 1995c). The Roman road of Dere Street, which connects Hadrian's Wall to the fort at Risingham in the valley of the North Tyne, crosses the watershed to the west of Wanney Crags. Between the road and the crags, long-term landscape enculturation is present in the form of a large Early Bronze Age tumulus on Chesterhope Common, containing exotica in the form of two gold bracelets and a necklace of gold beads (Hodgson 1827: 167). Bronze age antecedents for the ritualisation of watershed boundaries have already been demonstrated. In a study of prehistoric boundaries on the North York Moors, Spratt (1981, 95 & fig. 7.5) postulated that the watershed positioning of inter-visible Early Bronze Age round barrows formed upland focal points for small sub-valley 'estate' systems that were units within larger valley territories further defined by the cumulative effect of all the watershed barrows. In a later article, Spratt (1991) also highlighted numerous other examples of watersheds functioning as territorial boundaries in many time periods and on a variety of scales throughout Britain.

An enamelled vessel from Harwood represents the most poorly recorded example from this group with little contextual information other than the name of the nearest settlement (Hunter 1997:127). However, looking at the wider context, the settlement of Harwood is centred between the Rivers Font and Wansbeck, and the upland zone of Harwood forest separates the North Tyne from the primary tributaries of the eastern flowing rivers of Northumbria the Coquet and Wansbeck. Analysis of these 'stray finds' of Roman paterae and vessels from non-military contexts in Northumbria has revealed that

the distribution pattern of vessel deposits defines the extremities of the eastward flowing rivers of Northumbria from the watershed of the Tyne.

The above survey constitutes 6 of the 7 Roman vessels discovered in non-military contexts in Northumbria and demonstrates that a broader geographical perspective can provide more relevant information than considering them as stray finds. The seventh vessel deposit, from Newham bog, cannot be related to the watershed context of any major river system, as it is located in the lowland coastal region near Bamburgh. However, this final example could be the exception that proves the rule, as through meta-scale analysis this context can be shown to exhibit a consideration of smaller-scale drainage basins. Newham bog is a drained lough, providing a primary source of water that drains away to the northeast into Budle bay. The lough was defined by a low ridge that served not only as a barrier separating the bog from water sources draining south to Beadnell bay, but also functioned as a causeway connecting the two lowland regions. Newham bog produced 3 bronze vessels during draining, one probably Roman, an early Medieval hanging bowl and the third unknown (Bruce 1880: 134). The presence of the hanging bowl pushes the significance of vessel deposits into the Early Historic period matched by a hanging bowl from Capheaton. Multi-period vessel deposition at Dowelton Loch, Wigtonshire, indicates that continuation of these practices is not unprecedented although in this case facilitated by the presence of a crannog (Hunter 1994). Hoarding/votive deposition in liminal and watershed contexts can also be demonstrated for certain other early historic artefacts such as the Whitecleugh silver chain from a bog near the Dumfriesshire-Lanarkshire border formed by the watershed between the Rivers Nith and Clyde.

6.12 - Ewartly Shank and High Knowes, where Tweed, Coquet and Aln spring forth

A bronze cauldron recovered from draining bogs on Alnham moor (Hardy 1885-86) potentially provides a Later prehistoric precedent for the deposition of bronze vessels at watershed contexts. The context for this Late Iron Age cauldron is a boggy basin between the farmstead of Ewartly Shank and High Knowes. Primary tributaries of three separate river systems, the Coquet, the Breamish and the Aln flow from the triple watershed nodal point of High Knowes [Fig.6.6]. The promontory of High Knowes has a complex of monuments on it that span several millennia and includes palisaded enclosures, a putative henge and a cairn field with evidence of burial activity dating from the Bronze Age through
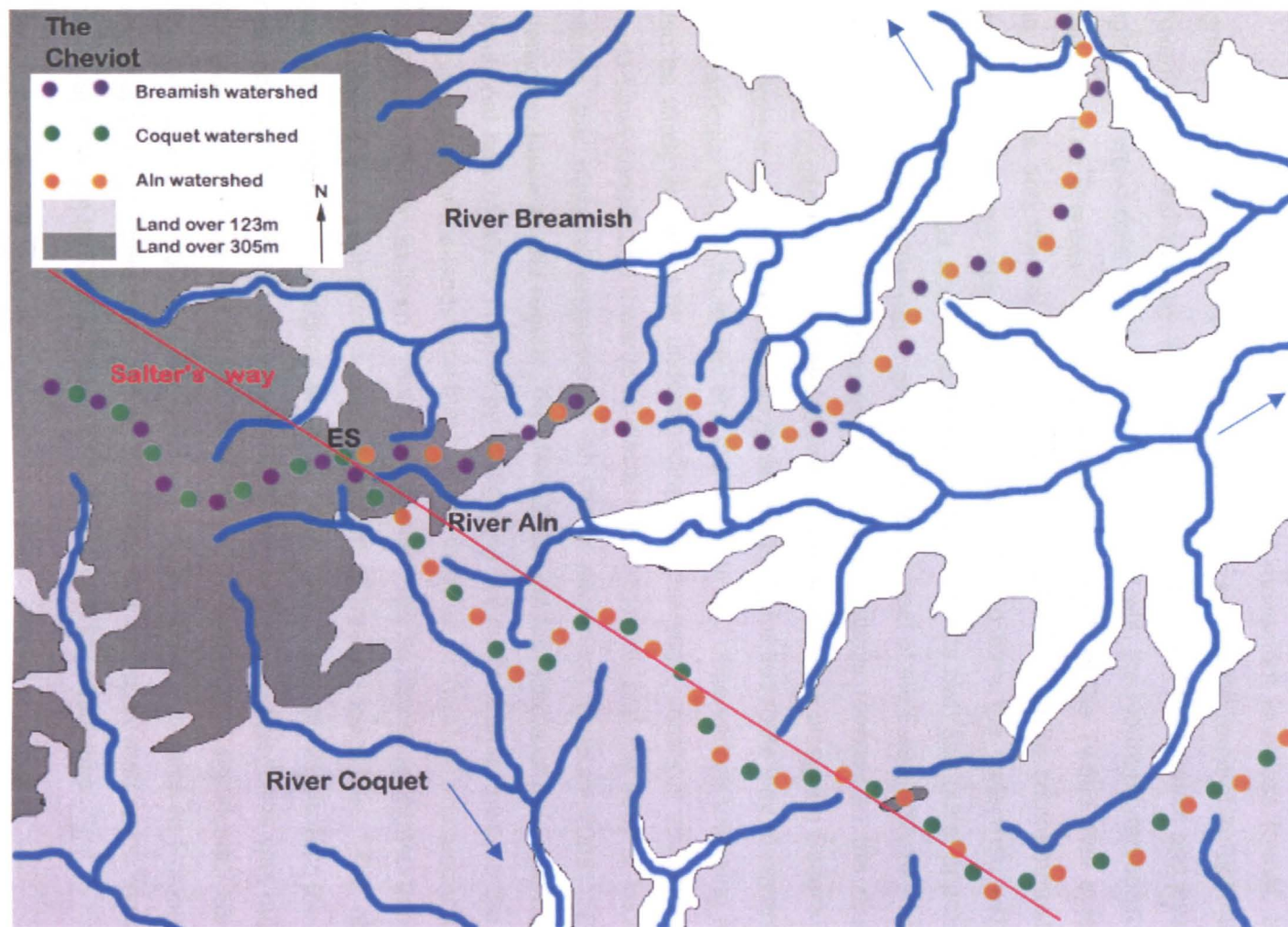
Fig.6.6 - Ewartly Shank [ES] Iron age cauldron deposit beneath High Knowes, which forms a triple watershed nodal point for the river systems Tweed (Breamish), Coquet, and Aln. It is also on a traditional transhumance route, the Salter's way links both sides of the Cheviots.

to the Roman period (Jobey and Tait 1966). Beyond the practices of votive deposition that are the focus of this study, the palimpsest of features on High Knowes may provide further evidence of other ritualised activities at watershed nodal points.

Once again emphasising inter-regional movement in a less formal, but no less significant way, Ewartly Shank and High Knowes are on the route of an upland traditional drove road, the Salter's way, which passes by the flanks of the Cheviot and links the upper regions of Tweed-dale on the west of the Cheviots with the Northumbrian coastal region to the east. The Breamish is the southernmost tributary of the Tweed river system east of the Cheviots and the upland basin of Ewartly Shank is at its southernmost extremity, draining the eastern side of the Cheviots that also form the watershed with the River Coquet. The Coquet is a separate river system with its own sea outlet approximately 40 miles to the south of Tweedmouth. The wider context of the Ewartly Shank vessel deposit typifies many of the characteristics that are potentially relevant to the ritualisation of watershed boundary zones. The location of prehistoric sites along the Salter's way and in the regions it serves to connect, suggests longevity for this route way of several millennia. This particular type of route way and the activities and observations unfolding along it may also be vitally important for understanding how everyday, seasonal and annual practices would have contributed towards landscape enculturation and the body of knowledge that informs the material engagement of votive deposition (Jordan 2003: 17-18). The interaction between the regular, rhythmic, seasonal movement of man and beast and the directional flow of water shaped by topography would contribute towards the awareness and perception of the landscape that became manifest in the ritual enactment of depositing the Ewartly Shank cauldron. This deposit should not be strictly separated from the *patera* deposits as they represent a related pattern of vessel deposition. The chronological separation may be typological as much as a real temporal disjunction; the curation of material and the over-lap of Late Iron Age and Roman Iron Age forms was quite possible. However, the context and character of the routeway may be significant. Several of the objects that originated within the Empire were deposited in relation to Roman routeways, whereas the traditional form of the Ewartly Shank cauldron matches a more traditional routeway that can be linked to traditional practices of transhumance.

6.13 - Lamberton Moor

A hoard of bronze articles was found around 1845 by a labourer digging drains on Lamberton Moor. As was frequently the case, many of the items were sold, disappeared, or given away (Anderson 1905). Those that survive included a beaded bronze torc and four bowls (described in previous terminology as 'late Celtic'), pieces of four *paterae*, an enamelled dragonesque brooch, two enamelled head-stud brooches and two bronze spiral finger-rings one with zoomorphic terminals (Curle 1932a). The Lamberton Moor hoard has been well noted for its unusual composition of 'Roman' and 'native' material, but has rarely been interpreted other than as Roman 'drift' in native hands (Curle 1932b: 75). Yet again, with only a very general place-name, contextual information is lacking other than as a presumed watery deposit discovered during draining operations. However, Lamberton Moor is a raised area of coastal moor-land between Eyemouth and Tweedsmouth that can be generally characterised as a watershed terminus separating the two river systems of the Tweed and the Eye Water close to the coast between their respective sea outlets. Comparison between the Lamberton Moor and Ewartly Shank example shows the versatility of the watershed context as an interpretative tool, allowing analysis to move from the southeastern limits of the Tweed system in the uplands of the Cheviots to a coastal liminal zone that forms the northern boundary with the Eye Water. Despite the lack of a find-spot for the Lamberton Moor hoard, the coastal watershed terminus for a major river system compares well with the vessel deposit from Backworth on the northern watershed terminus of the Tyne river system.

The watershed context of Backworth and Lamberton Moor evoke votive practices with a long-standing pedigree and potency. There is a compositional resemblance through the regional tradition of vessel deposition, as well as zoomorphic jewellery, although the inclusion of the Lamberton hoard's beaded torc and different vessel types represents significant differences in provenance and procurement. Whether or not the Lamberton hoard might be considered a northern variant of the snake jewellery hoard, the two hoards from beyond Hadrian's Wall share contextual similarities that can be more readily related to prehistoric traditions of depositional practice than can their southern comparanda; the exception being the Snettisham Roman jewellers hoard in the immediate vicinity of the spectacular Late Iron Age torc hoards (contrasting views of the Iron Age hoards Stead 1991 [utilitarian]; Fitzparick 1992 [ritualised]; Johns 1997 whose interpretation of the Roman hoard is utilitarian; Cool 2000 [ritualised]).

Fig.6.7 – The Lamberton Moor hoard.

A complex deposit of vessels and jewellery, but due to the lack of context it has rarely been considered beyond 'Roman drift in Caledonia' (Curle 1931).

Various metalwork types are incorporated in the Lamberton Moor Hoard including examples of what might normally be considered as native central British metalwork (left) and Roman *patera* (right). Caution must be exercised about baldly considering this as 'hybrid' simply because of the mixture of Roman and native material as it is the practices of creation, use and deposition that are more likely to reveal processes of hybridiation. Complex hoards are a distinctive feature of southern Scotland in the Roman Iron Age (Hunter 1997) and were often on a scale unprecedented since the Bronze Age. The practice incorporates Late Iron Age traditions of depositing exotica and an older motif of vessel deposition, which continued to flourish after the conquest. Incorporating traditional artefacts and a range of new exotica procured from within the imperial boundaries, these complex Roman Iron Age hoards are the renewal of depositional practices that served to create potent places in the ritualised landscape.

Both the Newham bog and the Lamberton Moor hoard contained material generally considered to be from two separate cultural traditions and/or time periods, although Lamberton is probably a single deposit. As with any transitional period it is important to recognise the potential for hybridisation (van Dommelen 2006), the persistence and overlapping use of certain material forms and the deliberate curation of material whose age may have given it extra symbolic currency as a materialisation of time and ancestral memory (Jones 2007:40-44; Helms 2004). Bradley (2005: 54) has suggested that the significance of such accumulations of material culture depended on the combined affect of their individual histories; how they were acquired, how they were used, the people who had used them, and given final emphasis through the place chosen for the act of deposition.

6.14 - Carlingwark Loch, Blackburn Mill and Eckford

No discussion of Roman Iron Age vessel deposition would be complete without mentioning the three large ironwork hoards of Southern Scotland (Piggott 1953). Interpretation of whether these hoards were 'Roman' or 'native' has centred on examination of the hoard content with Manning (1981) arguing for Roman on the basis of comparison with material from military assemblages. However, metallographic analysis has established that the bladed tools from the hoards differed from examples from the fort of Newstead in terms of complexity of manufacture and metal quality and were comparable with material from Traprain Law (Hutcheson 1997).

Eckford and Carlingwark Loch both have Bronze Age deposits in the vicinity, although at Eckford it is somewhat removed to the confluence of Kale and Jed. Carlingwark has unusual evidence of multi-period deposition as a Late Bronze Age sword was recovered from the loch and another Ewart Park sword comes from nearby at Kelton Glebe. There is also a concentration of Late Iron Age metalwork in this region (Hunter 1997:124 and fig.12.1) that show links to distant places and much wider traditions (Stevenson 1966; Hunter 2007). The style of the famous Torrs chamfrein displays an affinity with a wider body of British material that adapted continental forms (Hunter 2007:288), and the item was recovered from draining a smaller loch to the east of Carlingwark. An enamelled crescentic terret from south-east England was found during draining operations somewhere near Auchendolly to the north of Carlingwark and the Dungyle torc of probable Gallic origin was found on high ground to the south. The exotic

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nature of the Later prehistoric material suggests far-flung contacts and wider networks (Stevenson 1966; Fig.6.9). Due to the steep topography, Dungyle is the clearest example of a votive deposit from the Dee-Urr watershed, but although the drainage is highly ambiguous in the lower-lying area to the north, Carlingwark loch too is located at the extremity of the Urr river system. Even though no gradient separates them and a modern drainage channel cuts the short distance westward from Carlingwark loch to the River Dee, early maps clearly show the water of the loch draining eastwards through the shallow broken topography, past the now drained Torrs loch and eventually connecting to the River Urr (Fig.6.9). The longer-term significance of the deposits between the Urr and Dee suggest that this region was a focus of ritual activity throughout Later prehistory, sporadically re-affirmed through the deposition of prestige and exotic metalwork and culminating in the large ironwork hoard of the Roman Iron Age.

The exotica that were frequently deposited in the Late Iron Age could be interpreted as the sacrifice of one powerful person or the controlled disposal of powerful and polluting material, a rejection of individual power by a wider community that would fit with the theorisation of Iron Age society as segmentary heterarchies (Hill 2006). The three ironwork hoards are unlikely to represent the ownership of one person and the combined symbolism of the material and emphasis on craft working seems more like the expression of creative and productive capacity sacrificed as community action (Hunter 1997:117). The hoards may be conglomerations of the creative force of a community, but wider social questions beg to be asked. In many ways the interpretation of the material in these large hoards depends on theories about the nature of Roman Iron Age society, and whether they retained the segmentary heterarchy structure of the Iron Age (Hill 2006) or whether increasing hierarchization in the Roman Iron Age is envisaged. There is a danger of circularity of reasoning, as favouring either one of these theories depends on the wider questions about the expression of power and identity of which hoarding is considered an expression.

Vessel deposition has been taken to represent native action and interpreted with reference to cauldrons in later mythology and the inevitable connotation of fertility (see Green 1998b). Late Bronze Age vessels were sometimes part of complex hoards, but Iron Age buckets and cauldrons were rarely accompanied by other items (except for the cauldron containing a torc found 2 miles north of Comlaggen Castle on a ridge-end overlooking Lochar Moss; MacGregor 1976:204,297).

Fig.6.8 – The range of influences on Late Iron Age and Roman Iron Age metalwork in Southern Scotland; note the cluster around Carlingwark Loch, several of which are votive deposits from the vicinity of the Urr-Dee watershed (taken from Stevenson 1966).

Fig 6.9 – Carlingwark loch is at the western extremity of the Urr river system despite being in close proximity to the River Dee. No gradient separates them and modern drainage confuses the hydrology.

Large bronze cauldrons indicate community and communal practices and the complex characteristics of the three ironwork hoards from Southern Scotland support this interpretation. Is this reflected in the context of deposition, with the immediate topographic character of a watery basin acting as a theatre for the performance of votive practices and an open communal form of worship? Does this context allow for large numbers of people to be involved and what was their level of involvement? Alternatively, control of these communal objects and deliberate removal of a material symbol of community could signify a rejection of communal values, an expression of power over the communal performed in front of a large and complicit audience. Are the additional items voluntarily placed in the ironwork hoards or under the coercion of a dominant section of society or even one powerful individual who wished to express their control over community production? Whether symbols of communal authority are held with the tacit approval of the rest of the community again relies on the dialectic between power from above, and power from below and whether the deposits represent the rejection or affirmation of communal values depends on wider theories about the nature of society.

Turner's (1969) conception of the anti-structural characteristics of the liminal stage of the ritual would add further complexity to any theorisation. The rejection of cherished symbols during the liminal stage can serve to re-affirm the cultural values they represent through the inherent ambivalence of the ritual process. This concept of liminality is matched by the ambivalence of the watershed serving as both boundary and access. The analogy of a doorway helps to conceptualise the paradox of the liminal stage of the ritual process. A doorway provides structure to an access point whilst still being part of a boundary. Threshold, doorway and boundary deposits on Iron Age settlements are similarly conceived as liminal (Parker Pearson 1996). Following Turner's concepts of the liminal stage, rejection and sacrifice of valued practical objects would result in powerful affirmation of the creative force of a burgeoning communal identity, and in the case of Carlingwark loch this would be matched by the liminality of the watershed context.

These three complex Roman Iron Age hoards are on a scale not seen since the Late Bronze Age and must be seen as a new practice that incorporates elements of traditional ritual practice, especially the symbolism of the vessel and the watery context of deposition, but is also innovative in the unprecedented scale of the deposit indicating corporate activity deposited by common purpose (Hunter 1997). They do not seem likely as the rejection of the local, but through a new form of practice reflect a new form of

corporate identity. The differences in landscape context suggest that different places were considered appropriate in different regions. The presence of the Roman military is variable so thankfully an interpretation of a ritual reaction to the stress of invasion cannot be sustained. Carlingwark Loch is a large body of water with crannogs and other prehistoric activity at a low-lying extremity of a watershed boundary. This region had been a focus for long-term deposition and was at the limits of Roman military presence as recognised by modern aerial photography. Blackburn Mill seems to be beyond the Roman military presence, deposited in the carr of a valley that provides a route between the Lothians and Berwickshire. Eckford is on a ridge-end above the confluence of the River Jed and Kale water, with the Roman road of Dere Street a short distance to the west. Whatever the motivations and meanings, through an examination of material culture and the landscape context of ritual practice it has been possible to illustrate the complexities underlying why at certain times, certain places became ritualised locales through the practice of votive deposition.

6.15 - Discussion

To over-ride interpretative dichotomies it is important to consider what a hoard is expressing both in its material content and the specific meaning of that material within the wider context of deposition (Needham 2001:291). Evidence has been presented for the longevity of votive practices relating to the watershed zone of river systems and the continuation of those practices from both within and beyond the fluctuating boundaries of the Roman province of Britain. Analysis has shifted between contexts close to the military frontiers (Backworth; Prestwick Carr) and close to Roman route-ways (Ingoe; Erickstanebrae) and apparently more 'native' contexts in the landscape between and beyond those frontiers (Lamberton Moor; Wanney Crags). How useful are the terms Roman and native for interpreting the context of these ritualised practices? If material culture is deposited in a watershed context, is this 'Roman' or 'native' practice and are those labels of any use for defining those places? To remove the colonial and ethnic labels of Roman and native, vessel deposits from beyond the frontier were considered as objects originating within the Roman Empire, but recovered from contexts that had a resonance with long-established votive practices. The well-dated Ericstanebrae brooch is of undoubted imperial origin, and like some of the other examples was recovered from very close to the military construction of a Roman road. Was the route that the road followed

dependent purely on Roman surveying skills and knowledge or was it also a fossilisation of a routeway that would have been part of the itineraries of countless occupants of these landscapes for generations? Both bodies of knowledge might be capable of conceiving of river systems in their entirety, but which body of knowledge would be more likely to recognise the geographic specificity of a triple watershed nodal point as the appropriate context for the deposition of prestige metalwork? If context is key then the ritualisation of watershed contexts had a long pedigree in Northern Britain and this relevance was obviously retained from prehistory into the post-conquest period.

The sense of place that this analysis has attempted to articulate would indicate a close observance and an intimate knowledge of the local landscape, but must also represent the ability of certain people to recognise inter-regional topography and hydrology at a variety of scales; from a contiguous boundary between valley systems, to a watershed nodal point where the boundaries of three drainage basins connect, to the main east-west watershed of Britain separating water flowing to opposite seas, but also punctuated at certain key points. Rather than just discussing material culture deposited at watershed zones in terms of boundaries and separation, it is equally important to emphasise movement to the watershed and between river systems; observation on the ground forming systems of knowledge that informed practice. Following Ingold, "places do not have locations but histories. Bound together by the itineraries of their inhabitants, places exist not in space but as nodes in a matrix of movement." (2000: 219). The inhabitants of that matrix, which Ingold terms a region, have a strong advantage over a stranger with a map, who is attempting to plot a course from one spatial location to another. The local inhabitant can utilise their knowledge, which is based on the sum total of their journeys to, from and around the places within the region (Ingold 2000:219-220). Places are experienced through movement, action and participation, which form both the perception and knowledge of the local landscape and ultimately the wider world. Much of this knowledge is from the paths of observation traversed as part of the related activities and practices which Ingold has termed the taskscape (2000:194-200); summarised as 'the ensemble of tasks carried out by individuals as they move around the landscape' (Jordan 2003, 17). Thus, knowledge of a region and the formation and perception of enculturated landscapes is bound into a historically constructed, symbiotic relationship with the taskscape (Jordan 2003).

Water being an essential life-giving element for both man and beast would have made it central to any activity within the taskscape. These might be considered as the daily rituals, the everyday tasks that become unconscious habit, but are still informed by an intimate knowledge of the locality. The movement of water was fundamental to the continuous routine of activities, but also gives a dynamic flow to the landscape, connecting people, settlements and activity zones within drainage basins. Watery features, pools, primary streams, and especially boggy ground do seem to be the preferred medium for the act of deposition. However, evidence for the ritualisation of the boundaries of Northern British river systems, suggests that the watershed was perceived as a broad ambiguous zone incorporating many features of the landscape, and not just the spring line itself. Away from sharp topography, the watershed can only be defined on the ground through the movement of water away from ambiguously draining zones. These features were experienced on the ground through routine human practices and participation in a range of activities that would inform the perception and knowledge of the wider world. The prestige metalwork deposited in watershed contexts also suggests highly specialised activities and notable individuals; a taskscape for certain people that may have involved journeys of great distance and the accumulation of specialised knowledge. This knowledge informed the hoarding activities and votive practices, but it also requires a similar perspective from modern scholarship, in order to recognise the dynamic interaction between topography, geology and hydrology, to know the landscapes under study, and to experience them in a similar way – on the ground.

The many transactions across watershed zones, including the journeys of prestige metalwork, but also the routine and seasonal movement of humans and livestock will have been fundamental to the perception, the knowledge and the enculturation of the landscapes under consideration. The detailed nature of this topographical and hydrographical awareness should be attributed to the local inhabitants whose activities and movement through the landscape would contribute to the generational accumulation of knowledge. Just as streams successively feed into larger bodies of water as they flow to the sea, so an awareness of local landscapes feeds into larger 'pools' of knowledge that culminate in a regional perspective of drainage basins and how their watershed boundaries interconnect. This concatenation of bodies of localised knowledge formed and reproduced over generations is manifested through hoarding practices and the ritualisation of river systems and their watershed boundaries.

Rather than polarising between high and low, or wet and dry, the variety of contexts included under the watershed category can provide a multi-layered descriptive spectrum linked through an over-arching theme and a broad geographical perspective. Beyond the immediate wet context, it has been demonstrated that the watershed can also encompass coastal heath (Lamberton Moor), upland and moorland basins (Ewartley Shank), hills (Ericstanebrae), hillforts (Dungyle), rocky outcrops (Wanney Crags), plateaus (Cottesmore), lowland moors (Backworth), lowland lochs (Carlingwark) and, in certain strategic locations boggy low-lying corridors (Culter Shaw and Biggar). This ability to characterise many different topographic positions under a more broadly realised contextual category illustrates the flexibility and utility of the watershed context for examining hoarding and votive practices.

Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to contextualise 'stray finds' of votive altars and prestige metalwork. By considering hoarding and votive deposition of material culture in a wider landscape setting it was possible to demonstrate that, despite a lack of close context, the wider context of discovery can reveal significant evidence about these practices, even when the specific find-spot is unclear. Context has been key in pursuing a ritualised interpretation. Although votive deposition of prestige metalwork can be taken as tangible evidence for ritual practice in both Later Prehistory and the Roman period, it would be all too easy to assume that these practices represent continuity of tradition. The question of site succession at Thistleton in Chapter 5 demonstrated the long-term significance of this landscape location, but it would be too simplistic to say that this proved the cult of Vitiris' pre-conquest credentials. Similarly, the re-appearance of hoarding in the Late Iron Age and the florescence of votive practices (both on and off settlements) in the Roman Iron Age should not be seen simplistically as the re-emergence of practices abandoned half a millennia before. The perception of the landscape would have changed through time and few sites show persistent accumulations of deposits through time.

The different character of deposits in the Late Iron Age, compared to the Late Bronze Age focus on weapons and ornaments, suggests that wider social and economic factors affected the practices of votive deposition and hoarding. The difference in material considered appropriate in different time periods should warn against the idea of continuity; what can be observed is the re-constitution and renewal of traditional practices manifested

through new forms and usually in new locations. A focus on the landscape as an unchanging static context can be all to easily interpreted as continuity (e.g. Yeates 2006). Constant processes of transformation were at work on the landscape through complex interaction between human and environmental forces, and it should not be assumed that the same meanings were attached to landscape features through time, nor that practices of veneration remained constant. Changes in social and economic conditions, especially those brought about by conquest, colonisation and proximity to imperial power, should be expected to inform different interactions with the landscape (Woolf 2000:626-8).

Interpretation ultimately focused on the relationship of some of these deposits to the watershed boundaries of river systems. This wider geographical perspective has obvious implications for inter-regional movement and contact and opens up numerous interpretative avenues. Consideration of the watershed boundary necessitates a perspective that encompasses the entirety of fluvial systems, and allows analysis to get closer to the topographic and hydrological reality of these previously poorly contextualised stray finds. Particular points along the topographic boundaries of river systems became focal places within the landscape and were ritualised through the votive deposition of prestige metalwork. Movement, around and through the landscape, would inform the perception of these numinous places. This would contribute to, and build upon, local knowledge, culminating in a multi-regional perspective for watershed zones that serve not only separate but also connect distant communities, different cultural traditions and in some cases, journeys between different seas. The evidence presented here is a testament to the longevity of these potent interactions between people, places and objects.

Chapter 7 – Vernacular Religion

7.1 - Introduction

Any attempt to add yet another term to the proliferation of terminology currently available to Roman archaeology should be approached with trepidation. However, dichotomies have been a persistent problem throughout this thesis and continue to be-devil the study of religion in the Roman Empire, despite the advances of the last decade with the introduction of post-colonial theory, hybridisation, the deconstruction of ethnicity and the recent focus on identity. Ethnic terminology creating essentialist binary oppositions is especially problematic for the study of Romano-Celtic syncretism. Interpreting religion in the Roman province of Britain without resorting to ethnic constructs has been one of the main challenges of this thesis. This final discussion will consider the evidence from the previous interpretative chapters within an integrated framework that relies on hybridisation, ritualisation and contextualisation as a vernacular methodology for advancing the study of ritual practice as an integral part of the wider study of the Roman Empire (see Fig1.1). Hybridisation, as the continuous generative processes underlying cultural synthesis, problematizes ethnic constructs (Van Dommelen 2006) and can be integrated with ritualisation (Bell 1992) as the process mediating between the sacred/profane and ritual/practical polarities created by modern study (Brück 1999). An understanding of the vernacular as local must be situated in ever-widening scales of context and action, from ordinary, everyday practice to the operation of imperial power (Gramsci 1971; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991). The concept of vernacular religion has been used in the modern ethnographic study of religious folklife to provide a reflexive methodology for reconceptualising existing classifications and highlighting the materiality of religious practice (Primiano 1995). Vernacular religion is proposed here as a methodological approach that has similar potential for advancing the study of the hybridised, ritualised practices of the Roman provinces, transcending the interpretative dichotomy between Roman and Native and provide a useful alternative to syncretism.

"Vernacular religion is, by definition, religion as it is lived; as human beings encounter, understand, interpret, and *practice* it" [my emphasis] (Primiano 1995:44). The network of relationships that people use to construct their everyday existence, their identity and ultimately their world-view, includes their own interpretation of reality, their own encounter with the divine, their own vernacular religion. Methodologically, vernacular religion focuses on ritualised practices and the contextual analysis of material culture, rather than basing interpretation on assumed ethnic characteristics or other dichotomous

categories. The concept of vernacular religion strives to recognise the complexity of cult worship in the Roman provinces. Complexity does not necessarily mystify interpretation, but rather provides "a better guide to the territory" (Woolf 2000:620) than Romano-Celtic syncretism has previously provided.

This chapter will develop the holistic approach of vernacular religion through the integration of the contextual categories used in Chapters 4,5, & 6. The sculpture, votive deposits and altars that have figured so prominently in previous studies of Celtic religion have been re-considered and contextualised through considering them in the specific time and place of Britain after the Roman conquest. Using vernacular throughout this thesis has generally emphasised the local context, but the evidence reviewed here must also be placed in the wider British and imperial context.

The contextual categories chosen for this thesis, although anathema to holistic study, provide a convenient device for showing how the normative evidence for religion in Roman Britain can be interpreted with reference to wider aspects of archaeological analysis and social theory. However, the methodological goal for vernacular religion is to inter-weave multiple factors such as everyday social and economic practices, long-term landscape use and development, household activities and social reproduction, power relations and identity projection. The device of separate contextual categories proved impossible throughout the interpretative chapters. The relatively straightforward symbolic references to pastoral production in iconography used as a case study for the socio-economic context of ritual practice (Chapter 4) were inevitably complicated by Roman and native dichotomies and issues of identity and ethnicity that were the main focus of Chapter 5. The re-consideration of the cult of Vitiris largely relied on the inscriptional analysis to illuminate the socio-political context of ritual practice, but also introduced the concept of the watershed, which was the focus for Chapter 6. Landscape context can be related to subsistence strategies and ecological adaptation, but the sum total of those quotidian activities have been theorised as informing the ritualisation of watershed zones. This symbiotic relationship between taskscape and landscape (Ingold 2000) brings the contextual categories full circle. The oscillating temporal scales allowed discussion of the ritualisation of everyday practice over the *longue durée*; tradition transformed in a moment, practically experienced throughout an individual's lifetime, with the reconciliation of continuity and innovation (Woolf 2001) leading to constant processes of renewal across the inter-linking generations.

7.2 - Roman and Native in Romano-Celtic Syncretism

The critique of Romanisation is well known (see papers in Mattingly 1997), and scholars of Roman archaeology should easily comprehend similar criticism of the dichotomous approaches to syncretism. Romanisation has been conceived as an assimilative process, a charge that can be equally aimed at out-dated conceptions of syncretism (Graf 2005). Although defined by the *Oxford Dictionary of English* as "the amalgamation or attempted amalgamation of different religions, cultures or schools of thought", there is usually a hierarchical organisation of the component elements in syncretism, especially in colonial or imperial contexts. The negative, assimilative and essentialist connotations of syncretism have been difficult to shake off. A series of related dichotomies have emerged within the study of Romano-Celtic syncretism. These include top-down Romanist versus bottom-up nativist approaches (Webster 2001), further accentuated by a Romanisation-resistance dichotomy in studies that alternately emphasise elite emulation (Bendlin 1997) or subaltern resistance (Webster 1995).

The nativist approach to Romano-Celtic syncretism, which emerged in the last quarter of the twentieth century, attempted to counter-balance the top-down classical orientation of the Romanisation paradigm (Webster 2001:212). However, accentuating the native or Celtic side of the equation did little to resolve the dichotomy between Roman and native. King's suggestion that religion in the Roman provinces became "culturally Roman while remaining ethnically Celtic" (1990, 237) illustrates the same problems as the Romanisation model, especially through perpetuating dichotomous ethnic constructs. The intervening years have seen the deconstruction of ethnicity (Jones 1997) and a focus on identity in Roman studies (Pitts 2007), but the most recent re-consideration of King's thesis (King & Haüssler 2007), demonstrates how these important issues are still problematic in the study of Romano-Celtic syncretism. In discussing the formation of Romano-Celtic religion(s) King & Haüssler (2007:7-12) ask many pertinent questions about: changes in representation and appearance of cult practice, the effects of epigraphy, architecturally augmented sacred space, the interaction between religion and socio-political structures and attendant issues of linguistic, conceptual and site continuity. Ultimately though, these questions devolve into ethnic dichotomies by asking - was "the essence of Celtic religion...preserved into the Roman period with just a veneer of 'Romanized' cult practice on top?" (King & Haüssler 2007:10; cf. Forcey 1997:17). King and Haüssler acknowledge religion as being at the forefront of wider social change with the emergence of Romano-Celtic religion promoting a new imposed value system, rather than traditional values

(2007:10), but despite important questions and insights, they persist in re-formulating the ethno-cultural definition from King's 1990 paper, suggesting that,

this period of change had the effect of preserving the under-lying belief system. Since Celtic religion was capable of absorbing Roman values nearly everywhere Celtic cults survived in Romano-Celtic form. In essence Romano-Celtic religion was culturally Roman while remaining Celtic in tradition (2007:10).

This later formulation has changed little in 17 years with Celtic ethnicity being replaced by Celtic tradition, but still using ethnic descriptive terms and retaining the 'essence' of Celtic spirit that many scholars have become wary of (Merriman 1987; Fitzpatrick 1991). Although it is perhaps unfair to use these introductory quotes in this way, as their more detailed studies are better nuanced (e.g. Haüssler 2007), the ethnic formulations are symptomatic of the problems that persist in discussing both the formation of post-conquest religion and the continuing processes of ritual practice transforming through time.

Syncretism might be thought of as the initial product of the forces pushing or pulling two cosmological systems together; the clash of world-views often represented by a tiny hyphenation, as in Romano[–]Celtic. The hyphenation inadequately signifies the continuing complex interactions, and syncretism in Roman archaeology has been criticised for offering a simplified, un-politicized and passive fusion; Roman+Celtic = Romano-Celtic (Webster 1997a:324-328). Syncretism does not easily acknowledge the constant dynamism of transformation and consequent re-constitution, but rather tends to be continually defined by its component elements, perpetuating and isolating those recognisable characteristics as if they were frozen at the point of fusion. Syncretism also presupposes categorisation and is predicated on the initial establishment of an essentialist difference through modern classifications and ethnic constructs. The descriptive use of syncretism relies on assumptions about purity, originality and religions being homologous with cultures as autonomous units. Notions of boundedness of groups, unproblematic continuity of tradition (e.g.Yeates 2007) and homogeneity of material culture continue to be-devil the study of religion in the Roman Empire (e.g. Revell 2007), but need to be recognised as a product of classification and categorisation. When such subjective constructs are imposed on the data, they rarely acknowledge how easily these scholarly categories can be disturbed in practice, through the permeability of cultural boundaries, the ever-changing nature of tradition, and the heterogeneity of practice (Shaw & Stewart 1994).

7.3 - Homogeneity, heterogeneity and hybridisation

Syncretism best describes the initial blending of heterogeneous traditions, but often fails in theorising continuing processes of religious interaction generating further heterogeneity through time (Graf 2005:8934-8938). However, syncretism as a term is intimately related to perceptions of the religious imperialism of the Roman Empire and for this reason alone should not be easily discarded. In 1853, the first use of syncretism in the modern history of religions described the Roman appropriation of foreign cults as a strategy for homogenizing the Empire; "all the varieties of mankind...restamped at the Caesarean mint" (Graf 2005:8934). The perceived role of syncretism facilitating homogeneity, in tandem with Romanisation, has proved an amazingly long-lived interpretation of Roman provincial religion. The paradox of local heterogeneity of practice and the perceived homogeneity of material forms in the Roman Empire are still the subject of debate (Revell 2007). Rives has suggested that within the Roman Empire "the pervasive tendencies towards particularization and generalization provided a framework within which new traditions could be incorporated" (2007:182).

The monumental forms of 'Roman' worship are still often presented as homogenous cult practice that, "held together the Roman Empire and which formed part of a shared Roman identity" (Revell 2007:211); this despite studies that emphasise not just adoption, but also complex adaptation in a provincial context (Woolf 2001a:178; Webster 1997a & 2003). To some extent these represent differences in the scale of analysis. However, alleged homogeneity frequently represents the dominant discourse or ideology of the colonial power (e.g. Revell 2007:227), and should be "interspersed with implicit references to and statements by groups of people who are denied an official voice" (van Dommelen 2006:107; Spivak 1985; Mattingly 2004). Later Prehistoric heterogeneity was not overwhelmed by Roman period homogeneity, but rather "diversity generated by local choice" was replaced by "diversity ordered by imperial power" (Woolf 1997a:344). Re-casting syncretism as the politics of religious synthesis (Shaw & Stewart 1994) encourages the integration of power relations and identity into the study of religion (Mattingly 2004:17-22).

The theorisation of vernacular religion changing through time can be conceived in tandem with hybridisation as a continuously generative process. The concept of hybridity has been used in the anthropology of religion as part of the post-colonial critique of syncretism and cultural imperialism. Hybridity acknowledges the production of something new in the 'middle ground' (Gosden 2004:32-34) or "third space" (Bhabha 1990) between coloniser and colonised, dissolving ideological boundaries and demanding radical

reconsideration of identifications based on essentialist opposition, like the dichotomy between Roman and Native. In material culture studies, hybridity can be misused by simply observing the combined appearance of objects of diverse origin in the same assemblage (van Dommelen 2006:118-119) and has similar failings as syncretism when considered simplistically as the blending of two previously autonomous cultural formations (e.g. Revell 2007:221). While considering material culture in terms of hybridity helps to define the physical co-presence of coloniser and colonised, analytical force is lost if merely describing the material correlates of cultural synthesis. Hybridisation needs to be recognised as the dynamic processes expressed through practices, not just a blending of material forms. For some, the Vitiris altars might be viewed as the materialisation of "Roman" votive practice (Revell 2007), or a nativist approach might consider the Latin inscriptions as a hybrid form through the non-Latin name of the deity. However, it was the realisation of multiple variations in inscriptional practice relating to the identity of the dedicants, which truly demonstrated the process of hybridisation (Chapter 5.5).

Throughout this thesis binary oppositions such as Roman and native have been avoided when describing material culture; hybridisation theory complicates these dichotomies. Mortaria on rural sites (Chapter 4.8) or *patera* in watery contexts (Chapter 6.11) and the discussion of *orthopraxis* on the votive altars dedicated to Vitiris (Chapter 5.5), suggest that the practices involved in the use and deposition of 'Roman' material culture in 'native' contexts were complex, socially contingent and regionally variable (Hunter 2001:292-8; Hanson 2002:834-6). Studying underlying practices is fundamental for the successful application of hybridisation into colonial situations and for appreciating the diverse methods by which people continually "construct a distinct identity within the colonial context and situate themselves with respect to the dominant i.e. colonial culture" (van Dommelen 1997:309; 2006).

7.4 - Vernacular Language

Many key terms in religious studies such as syncretism, sacred, ritual and of course religion itself have a semantic origin in the classical languages of Greece and Rome. These semantic roots should not be ignored as they are part of the historical development of the word and help to trace the contours of how the term can be used. The Latin term *vernaculus* means native, household or domestic, and there is also a connotation of slavery from Latin *verna*, a household born slave (Oxford Dictionary of English). Used simply as a descriptive term, these semantic origins might ally vernacular with subaltern identities and resistant adaptation in studies that have focussed on religion in the colonial

context of the Roman provinces (Webster 1997a). When using linguistic analogies for the theorisation of culture, power and knowledge, the vernacular becomes "a barometer that tracks the rise and decline of the lower classes within a given society" (Fontana 2000:310), again emphasising the subaltern. However, there is a danger of using vernacular as a substitute for native, which would simplistically exchange one term for another, and runs the danger of perpetuating the dichotomy with Roman.

In more modern developments, vernacular has been used in a variety of contexts for particular times, places and groups of people, but is primarily defined as the native or indigenous language of a country or a particular locality (Primiano 1995:42). However, using linguistic analogies for material culture still creates the danger of producing further dichotomies. The 'linguistic turn' in 20th century social sciences applied language models, derived from the semiology of Ferdinand Saussure, to the wider study of meaning (Preucel and Bauer 2001:85-86). By the second half of the 20th century this had led to the popularity of structuralism as an interpretative tool in anthropology and archaeology. The post-structuralist critique focussed on a textual metaphor and consequently many archaeologists have promoted the interpretation of material culture being read like a text (Hodder 1986), including Roman archaeologists (Webster 2003:41; Mattingly 2004:22). However, both linguistic and textual analogies relying on Sausurrean semiology have come under increasing criticism for the tendency to perpetuate dyadic relationships and binary oppositions (Preucel and Bauer 2001:87-89). For example, creolization is a socio-linguistic term in origin, but as an alternative postcolonial approach to Romanisation, "a creole perspective offers insights into the negotiation of post-conquest identities from the 'bottom up' rather than – as is often the case in studies of Romanisation – from the perspective of provincial elites" (Webster 2001:209). Although creolization provides a useful counter-balance to the previous elite focus of Romanisation (Millett 1990), ultimately it still needs to be integrated with those top-down approaches it was critical of, in order to represent the full spectrum of Roman provincial and imperial society. Vernacular religion provides a more complex picture, avoiding the extreme polarisation of Roman and Native, or Romanisation and resistance, and acknowledges the dialectic between top-down and bottom up approaches (Mattingly 2006:520).

7.5 - Vernacular Materialism

Language, social relations and cultural practices are thoroughly enmeshed in Antonio Gramsci's socio-political writings (Ives 2004:15; Gramsci 1971). Gramsci developed a historical materialist theory of language in tandem with a linguistically informed theory of

politics and society. When used metaphorically in relation to cultural analysis this has been dubbed 'vernacular materialism' (Ives 2004:3-10). Gramsci used translation as a metaphor for cross-cultural analysis and vernacular as a cultural metaphor for popular practice. Translation adapts concepts from the original translated language and consequently affects change in the language into which the term is being adopted. "Language is rooted in the materiality of the production of words...because language is always historically metaphorical words and linguistic structures are always related to meanings from their past" (Ives 2004:34-5). This resonates with the analysis of inscriptional practice in the cult of Vitiris (Chapter 5.5), through its material production of words, where Latin and non-Latin elements were often juxtaposed on the same altar and there were numerous translations and conceptualisations of the theonym. In translation, new meanings are created through a continual process of metaphorical development from previous meanings.

Vernacular language usually has a different 'grammar' to official language, and subtle differences and new meanings are frequently created in the process of translation. Gramsci used the analogy of spontaneous and normative grammar. Spontaneous grammar is "created throughout the molecular processes of learning a language from birth throughout one's entire life," a process by which "sedimentation is affected by religion, class, gender, and geographic location" (Ives 2004:43). Normative grammar as the structural, institutional aspects of language is not opposed to spontaneous grammar, but is in a dialectical relationship. "Spontaneous grammar is the historical product of past interaction of normative and spontaneous grammars" (Ives 2004:44). This is conceived in similar ways to structuration theory and the dialectic between structure and agency (Giddens 1984; Barrett 2005). Ritualisation is the practice approach to ritual in which a whole series of binary opposites (sacred:profane; thought:action etc.) can be resolved by the recognition that they are in a dialectical relationship (Bell 1992).

Vernacular materialism has the potential to collapse the distinctions between language and culture and has been proposed as a historically grounded methodology for exploring the contradictions of power, knowledge and identity. However, using vernacular language as a metaphor for subaltern common sense and the practical knowledge of hegemonic culture, still poses the danger of producing binary oppositions, especially if used uncritically as a replacement for native. Vernacular languages and literatures were a historical development from the interaction of Latin with the other languages of Europe. Although this may be conceptually reminiscent of the development of provincial cults, using linguistic analogy still creates the danger of producing a further dichotomy with Latin.

7.6 - Vernacular vs. Latin; Popular vs. Official

In relation to rationalist scientific language, the vernacular is everyday language as opposed to Latinate scientific nomenclature, but even this modern socio-linguistic use of vernacular is permeated by the dichotomy between official and popular language and the discourse of knowledge and power. The socio-linguistic dichotomy between popular and official language may take interpretation beyond ethnic constructs, but we are still left with two idealised poles (Primiano 1995). The contrast between official and popular religion perpetuates a similar dichotomy, with interpretation inhibited unless consideration is given to the dialectic between opposed elements.

Woolf's (1997b) discussion of *polis*-religion demonstrated a dialectic relationship between the public and private cults of the Roman Empire. He concluded that the "religious ferment that private religion inadequately describes" is important for understanding religious change in the public cults, which attempted to marginalise the personal in order to promote the communal (Woolf 1997b:83). The dialectic between official and popular language, or public and private religion, helps to conceptualise the tension between power from above and power from below (Foucault 1980). In the oscillating discourse of power between official and popular forms of worship, public cults would attempt to naturalize their position, providing opportunities for patronage, creating community identities that could be personally invested in, and to which allegiance could be offered. However, although the 'official' cult of Jupiter Dolichenus was frequently juxtaposed with the more popular cult of Vitiris (Chapter 5.2-5.3), the inter-action between the two contributed to various forms of related cult expression and identity on the frontier. The interaction between these two cults was symptomatic of the dynamism of cult expression on the northern frontier and even the officially promoted Jupiter Dolichenus could be locally appropriated and adapted.

Although taking into account the politics of religion, official and popular can easily polarise. The modern conception of vernacular religion argues that even the most orthodox individual or the pivotal figure in any institution will have their own lived practices and experience through time that is their own vernacular religion (Primiano 1995:46). The numerous variations in religious orientation of the Roman Emperors are a testament to the individuality of belief, even while they themselves were the focus of the imperial cult. Their beliefs would be a response to circumstance, background, *habitus*, and the popularity of certain cults during their lifetime, whilst their patronage also had a wider impact on the official promotion of certain cults, which might then be reflected in an increase in popular

worship. Even the most official forms of 'Roman' ritual practice such as the imperial cult could be subject to variation, interpretation and innovation through the interaction between centralised authority and localised practice. The provincial manifestations of imperial cult worship indicate that it was not a homogenous practice imposed in a rigid fashion from the metropolitan centre. Even though the Latin concept of *Divi Augusti* and the Greek *Theoi Sebastoi* are analogous and have a close semantic relationship they are not exact equivalents (Lozano 2007:139-140). The Greek term can be considered a translation of the Roman original, but in practice they are not synonymous. The Roman term *divus* was restricted to only those members of the *Augusti* who were deified by the Senate post-mortem, through the complex negotiation and expression of power typical of the imperial centre. The Greek term encompassed the much larger collective of the imperial family who were selectively worshipped during their lifetime with great local variation and endless permutations dependent on historical circumstance and the local traditions of ruler-worship amongst the city-states of the Greek East (Lozano 2007:140-145).

In Britain, the widespread cult of the imperial *numen,* which represents the Emperors supernatural guiding spirit, his superhuman power and wisdom, was a more popular, unofficial variant, and commonly worshipped with a large variety of other deities. The only example of the *domus divina* common to other provinces is the corporate dedication from Vindolanda (RIB1700) where there is still conflation with *numen* worship (Breeze and Dobson 2000:279) and a pairing with Vulcan (Chapter 5.1.5). One of the deities worshipped with the imperial *numen* was Antenociticus whose highly localised cult centred on a classical style shrine found in a military context at Benwell. The idiosyncratic features of the cult statue have been frequently commented on for the disguised zoomorphism of stylised horns in the textured hair. The dedicant of one altar to Antenociticus (RIB 1329) was equestrian class, emphasising the importance of high status individuals being incorporated into analysis, in order to provide for the full spectrum of vernacular religion. The official normative views of religion represented in the classical literary sources and localised popular practices represented through material culture are not just different forms of evidence producing different interpretations, but are also comparable to the paradox between heterogeneity and homogeneity. Vernacular religion is the continuous historical product of the dialectic between these opposed elements.

A de-colonized analysis seeks to avoid the extremes of Roman and Native or Romanisation and resistance (Woolf 1997a:341). Romanisation and other colonialist accounts have a tendency to reify the ideology of the dominant, but equally postcolonial studies have often emphasised the redemptive, resistant and rebellious nature of popular

tradition (van Dommelen 2006:111; Comaroff & Comaroff 1991:23-7; Dietler 1999). Although emulation strategies and creolization both contribute to the "complexities of multi-directional flow in inter-societal contacts" (Mattingly 2004:7), hybridisation is preferred as a more neutral term with a wider theoretical application (Gardner 2003) that can account for many of the unusual combinations and contradictions of colonial experience (van Dommelen 2006). The approach to vernacular religion proposed here can usefully integrate hybridisation as a non-linguistic theory of cultural synthesis, and therefore not reliant on binary oppositions. Rather than focussing on ethnic identities (Pitts 2007:696), that have often inhibited interpretation (cf. the cult of Vitiris - Chapter 5), vernacular religion emerges from the dialectical relationship between the top-down and bottom-up dichotomies that persist in the study of Romano-Celtic syncretism.

7.7 - Vernacular Identity

Subtle differences in the use of material culture rely on close contextual analysis (van Dommelen 2006:112-120; Eckhardt 2008) in order to assess whether these can be consistently correlated with "distinct expressions of identity in society (Mattingly 2004:9). In Chapter 5.5, the subtle differences in the use of inscriptional practice on Vitiris altars were linked with "distinct expressions of identity" through the self-identification of dedicants. The different conceptualisations of the deity represented through the variety of literary forms had previously inhibited interpretation according to ethnic criteria. New analysis has shown that the altars exhibit regional patterning and further levels of sub-regional variation with multiple identities revealed through the combination of naming and inscriptional practice. The etymology of the theonym had shaped previous theories, but it was the use of votive formula (orthopraxis) and different conceptualisations of the deity that indicated discrepant identities. There was no easy binary ethnic opposition within the epigraphic consciousness of the cult of Vitiris. More elaborate inscriptions created by dedicants with Latinised names across all regional groups were unsurprising, but the lack of standardisation in spelling and the general avoidance of the Latinised and pluralized theonym was unexpected in this more literate group (Table 5.5-5.6). A group of worshippers with non-Latinate names from the central Hadrian's Wall area (Group 3) also favoured the conceptualisation of a variably spelled singular theonym and attempted votive formula in their inscriptions; these can be contrasted in the same regional group with simpler inscriptions with no votive formula, focussed on the pluralized and Latinised version of the theonym (Veteribus) by dedicants with Latinate names (Tables 5.7-5.8). Similar unelaborated inscriptions without votive formula, were used by another sub-

regional group in the northeast hinterland of Hadrian's Wall (Group 2), but they preferred the non-Latinate spelling of Vitiris and emphasised a distinct sub-regional identity through their non-Latinate names.

Vernacular has been used descriptively at numerous points during this thesis, but as with the example of the cult of Vitiris, this was often to avoid using ethnic labels, such as Celtic or Romano-British. Using vernacular descriptively could potentially encompass a host of discrepant identities being created and expressed through provincial religion (Mattingly 2004). However, just as hybridity can be used uncritically (e.g. Revell 2007), as a basic description without considering the underlying practices involved in hybridisation (van Dommelen 2006; Nederveen Pieterse 2001), so the blanket labelling of material culture as vernacular loses analytical force and would produce equally unsatisfactory homogeneity. Identity is expressed through the active use of material culture and relies on multiple factors, including, but not limited to: age, gender, wealth, class, status, kinship, geographical location and can be revealed through multi-scale and careful contextual analysis (Hanson 1994:150; Woolf 1997a:341; Mattingly 2004; Pitts 2007).

7.8 - Vernacular material culture

The modern sociological use of vernacular is based on the practical, everyday, localised and context specific application of the term, often referring to the specific materiality of objects, buildings (Deetz 1977; Johnson 1997) and even landscapes (Jackson 1984). Although often used descriptively, a vernacular approach is most useful for considering the practices involved in creating locally situated material culture including architecture, art and crafts (Glassie 2000). The material products of those activities must be contextualised in order reveal the practices of use and deposition.

The relevance of vernacular material culture can be explored through the two major metalworking styles of north Britain that emerged in the Late pre-Roman and Roman Iron Age: the 'massive' metal-work of north-east Scotland, between the firths of Moray and Forth; and the central British style zone from the Forth to a diffuse boundary at the Humber (Hunter 2007). These mark out separate regional identities by drawing on past tradition and exotic influences in different ways and producing material that was "new, distinctive and local" (Hunter 2007:289). The development of these styles may be another manifestation of revolutionary cultural processes sweeping through Europe (Woolf 2001a) signalled by changes in the material culture used to display authority and identity, both within and beyond the boundaries of the Empire. Dating problems, rapid change and the transition from prehistory to proto-history mean that these developments are often sucked

into the historical narrative of the equally rapid Roman conquest; historical sequence confused as generative process (Barrett 2005). Although cautious of the stimulus of Romanisation or pre-Romanisation, proximity to Roman power was responsible for different trajectories of association and practice in the regional metalwork styles of northern Britain.

The 'massive' style, from beyond the Forth, uses a decorative repertoire that is typical of north British metalwork, but with pronounced high-relief forms (Hunter 2007:291) that for many betokens 'Celtic' art. Distinctive artefacts such as the Deskford carnyx also hint at those widespread European traditions that need to be explained, not just deconstructed and explained away (Fitzpatrick 1996:246-250; Hunter 2006:103-106). Finger-rings produced in 'massive' style show the adoption of Roman forms and compositional analysis shows that metals originating within the Empire were re-used as the raw material (Hunter 2006b:150). These influences were re-interpreted locally and, indeed, forms such as the massive armlets are "entirely local inventions" for striking displays of identity (Hunter 2007: 291). The central British metalwork exhibits an even greater degree of stylistic influence and hybridisation that befits the material culture of an area in which Roman power fluctuated dramatically over the course of several centuries. Beyond the initial impression of stylistic difference and differential geographical distribution, the main distinctions between 'massive' and central British styles of metalwork are in the practices revealed through Hunter's contextual analysis (2007:291-293). The 'massive' style is very rare on Roman sites and within its home area is never hoarded with Roman material, whereas a high proportion of central British metalwork is from Roman contexts and hoards are mixed. Manufacturing evidence for central British metalwork also comes from both non-military and military contexts.

There are different mechanisms at work in the metalwork traditions based on proximity to Roman power, just as there was when comparing the local gods within the imperial boundaries, to those from beyond (Chapter 5.4). The obvious appropriation through *interpretatio* of gods from beyond Hadrian's Wall (Cocidius and Maponus) was juxtaposed with the hybridised cult of Vitiris. So too, the accentuated regional identity displayed through the 'massive' style from beyond the Forth can be compared with central British metalwork, which, just like Vitiris, displays the more subtle processes of hybridisation at work within the imperial boundaries. Should central British metalwork be described as vernacular because this avoids the extremes of Roman and native and if so, how then can different and sometimes subtle variations within this category be distinguished? Labelling the massive style as vernacular would be more problematic as

this is more likely to be interpreted as a polarisation with Roman. Both are locally situated material culture, but using vernacular descriptively is not always appropriate. More was revealed about regionality and identity through the contextual analysis of the practices these objects were involved with.

A practice approach to vernacular religion is preferred here, in order to move interpretation away from the binary oppositions of linguistic analogy and basic description of cultural identity (Pitts 2006). As a methodological approach vernacular religion considers how diverse identities were negotiated through hybridised ritual practices in specific localised contexts throughout the Roman provinces and even beyond. In the colonial context of the Roman Empire the normative evidence provided by sculpture, altars, votives, and temples have often been labelled with rigid idealisations of Roman and native or the blurry categories of syncretic and hybrid (i.e. Romano-Celtic), but it is the more spontaneous localised practices that should be considered 'vernacular', involving material culture in complex processes of appropriation, adaptation, transformation, reconstitution and renovation.

7.9 - Vernacular practice

Linguists consider the first form of speech to be comprehended as a child as vernacular. This formative development of practical knowledge brings vernacular closer to social and practice theory, especially Bourdieu's (1977) concept of *habitus*. Historical process is best expressed through the metaphor of praxis (Ives 2004; Barrett 2005). The vernacular may be everyday local language, but it also denotes everyday local practices; "culture-as-it-is-lived appropriate to well-defined places and situations" (Lantis 1960: 203). Vernacular religion as a contextualised practice approach is more suitable to archaeological methodology than using the term as a label. Through practice, vernacular has developed related secondary meanings of informal, personal, private, and often refers to intimate, domestic or household situations.

The household would have been one of the key arenas for social reproduction and ritual practice in later prehistoric and Roman Central Britain. The British roundhouse is the archetypal artefact of Iron Age archaeology (Hill 1995b:54). After the rejection of the previous paradigm for Celtic religion, the roundhouse became the focus of research for a ritualised Iron Age and an exploration of everyday practice (Webster 1991; Fitzparick 1991; 1997; Oswald 1997; Hill 1995a&b; Parker Pearson and Richards 1994; Parker Pearson 1996). Repetition and routinisation are characteristics of everyday activities that are shared with ritual. Through the ritualisation of place, time, people and objects, ritual as practice can

draw upon and reproduce the same structuration principles that guided everyday practices (Hill 1995a:112). The full range of practices from everyday basic subsistence, to seasonal management of surplus production, to craft specialisation can provide both a basic motivation for appeals for success to divine or superhuman forces, as well as providing a set of conceptual constructions and material metaphors that act recursively with related ritualised activities (Bradley 2005).

Recent analysis suggests that deposition in Later prehistoric houses was rarely the residue of everyday activity, but rather the product of deliberate acts at notable points in the 'life' of the household, often as foundation or abandonment deposits (Webley 2007; Pope 2003). Quernstones were items of everyday use that were subject to complex processes of fragmentation and deposition on sites, being frequently incorporated into structured (or structural) deposits on settlements (Heslop 2008; Pope 2003). In Northern British roundhouses it has been suggested that the hearth provided a focus for the deposition of decorative metalwork as closure deposits (Pope 2003:366). Evidence for everyday activities of food preparation is most common from floor surfaces, whereas craft-working debris is most commonly recovered from decay deposits and may represent abandonment processes (Pope 2003:430). Different cultural values were associated with certain activities and selective deposition could be provoked by more symbolic meanings associated with objects such as decorative metalwork, querns or spindle whorls. The practice of spinning was also dictated by cultural convention – clockwise, sunwise or Z-spun in Britain and the western provinces (Wild 2002:10 Bender Jorgensen 1992). The rotation of the quern, the spinning of wool, the internal features choreographing movement within roundhouses or the specified sunwise movement of a communal drinking vessel as recorded by the classical author Athenaeus, involve simple actions and gestures that were consciously and unconsciously performed, reflecting fundamental cosmological signatures inscribed on the body through the ritualisation of everyday practice (Bell 1992).

7.10 - Vernacular Architecture

The British roundhouse has also been suggested as encoded with cosmological referents (Parker Pearson and Richards 1994; Fitzpatrick 1997). Oswald's (1997) thesis that the predominantly east-southeast orientation of roundhouse doors related to the movements of the rising sun through the course of the year has been widely used (e.g.Hodgson *et al* 2001) and developed (Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999), but has also caused some controversy (Pope 2007). The roundhouse has been theorised as a metaphor for the passage of time, from diurnal and seasonal to the lifespan of the individual (Fitzpatrick

1997; Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999). Roundhouses continued to be constructed and occupied throughout the Roman period especially in Northern Britain (Hingley 2004). More work is needed on the adaptation of practices through time, but there are indications that in the Roman period there is an increase in structured and structural deposits (Pope 2003:413 fig.9.13) suggesting that homes became a more potent arena for the realisation and reconstitution of traditional practices. Ritualised practice and deposition on settlements should not just be considered as continuity from Later Prehistory, but rather part of a flourishing tradition, although it is also tempting to see the growth of these practices as a reaction to external forces without the household, perhaps even a conservative response to changes in provincial religion beyond the roundhouse.

The monumentalisation of sacred space in the Roman provinces represents one of the key debates about continuity and innovation. Derks (1998:168-185) argued that there is no clear evidence for an Iron Age predecessor for the developed Romano-Celtic temple with *porticus*. However, the addition of the *porticus* is not as simple as the fusion of a Roman architectural feature onto the basic form of a Celtic shrine – this would represent the simplistic view of hybridity as the melding of material forms. Instead, post-conquest shrines represent a new architectural repertoire, a vernacular architecture whose popularity made it ubiquitous in the NW provinces.

Describing British roundhouses and Romano-Celtic temples as vernacular architecture evokes the most familiar descriptive use of the term. However, modern study emphasises that vernacular architecture should not just be used to classify certain types of building, but should also be a constant meditation on the contingent and cultural nature of those buildings and the activities within them; "Buildings, like poems and rituals, realise culture" (Glassie 2000:17). Rather than being most useful as a descriptive term, vernacular religion is proposed primarily as a methodological approach that shifts the focus of analysis onto the materiality of the archaeological record (Gardner 2003), and most importantly the practices embedded in context. Discussing ritualised practices in a non-essentialist way demonstrates complexity, but also tests our descriptive repertoire, generating greater subtlety in discussing collective identity, power relations, resistance to authority, hegemonic consent, historical processes of change and the complex interactions that continually recreate and reconstitute religious traditions (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991).

7.11 - Beyond the Local

How can a vernacular approach help to explain the development of such a widespread form of ceremonial architecture as the Romano-Celtic temple (King 2007)? Although the localised nature of many provincial cults and deities suits the local meaning of vernacular, analysis should not be constrained to only the local context. The paradox of homogeneity and heterogeneity (Revell 2007), suggests that the scale of analysis affects interpretation, and local context must be integrated with the wider provincial and imperial background (Woolf 2000:628). These multiple scales are exemplified by a local deity such as Apollo Cunomaglos from Nettleton, Wiltshire, named once and at this site only, but represented by the iconography of the British Hunter God (Merrifield 1996) whose regionalised distribution has been recognised in London and the southwest. The cult was housed in the cross-provincial style of architecture of the Romano-Celtic temple, but is linked to a particular octagonal sub-variant (Smith 2001). The patronage of the provincial elite embodies these multiple scales of reference that reflect the concerns of those situated at the nexus of locally diverse cultures ordered by an imperial system. The decentralisation of provincial elites political interests away from urban centres throughout the second and third centuries is manifested by an increasing pluralization of divine concepts, and the (re)development or renewal of religious activity in rural contexts (Bendlin 1997:62; Watts 1998:63); more fertile ground for vernacular religion.

Hybridisation theory is capable of ranging from an empire-wide context, bringing diverse beliefs and cult practices into contact, through ever-decreasing scales to the material expression of those wider influences grounded in locally constituted and individually meaningful practice (van Dommelen 2006). Although the active appropriation of deities from beyond Hadrian's Wall through *interpretatio* was presented as a mechanism for dis-embedding local gods from their regional context and led to the wider distribution of name-paired Cocidius and Apollo Maponus, in reality the cults of these deities had become embedded in a different set of circumstances that reflected the contemporary socio-political context. Hunter emphasises how central British metalwork would have had different meanings and associations depending on how it was used and how it was perceived in different contexts (2007:292-3). In the south of the province it may have represented frontier culture; an identification encompassing both the military and other local inhabitants. On a central British rural settlement with roundhouses "a beaded torc or knobbed terret meant 'local'" (Hunter 2007:292), but that locality was part of the contemporary socio-political conditions that made the same material appropriate for use in

both the nearby forts and in traditional votive practices such as the Lamberton Moor hoard (Chapter 6.13).

Although vernacular emphasises the local context of material culture, a fuller analysis of ritualised practices is possible through the integration of social, economic, political and geographical factors, broadening the basis of interpretation through multiple levels of contextual analysis. A vernacular approach is synonymous with a contextualised approach. Vernacular religion is the historical product of the continuous dialectic between localised traditions and the numerous influences impinging on cult practice in the multi-cultural context of the Roman provinces.

7.12 - Pools of knowledge

The Roman period temple centred on the hot springs at Bath is not of Romano-Celtic type. From its early post-conquest construction the architecture of Bath bears closer resemblance to sanctuaries typical of the Mediterranean world, but this initial foreignness of form does not mean that Bath should be labelled 'Roman'. An initial focus on a monumental altar and open access to the spring had shifted by the third century A.D. when the spring was enclosed and votive offerings became more personal and private. Variations in practices through time demonstrate local adaptation within the layout of the 'classical' style temple. Amongst the offerings was the development of a distinctive rite of depositing curse tablets in the spring. A contrast can be made between the curse tablets written by single named locals and the stone epigraphy from the site, mostly dedicated by Roman citizens, military and foreign visitors (Mattingly 2004:20). Curse tablets may be a material form and practice adopted from wider Graeco-Roman world, but the exuberant adoption at Bath, the identities expressed through the names of the dedicants and the particular emphasis on theft stakes a claim for the local adaptation of practice (Tomlin 2002). Healing would be a more common feature of hot spring sanctuaries on the continent, but instead the goddess Sulis' juridical powers presided at Bath. Deposition in the spring, rather than the more usual practice of depositing curses in graves, reflects a localised adaptation of what might otherwise be considered as the adoption of 'Roman' religious practice (Mattingly 2004:19-20). In this case, comparison between local practice and wider comparanda enables variations in practice to be distinguished. The inscribed *patera* recovered from the temple spring can be taken as evidence of 'Roman' libations being performed (Revell 2007:218), but the context of recovery also suggests the alternative vernacular rites of vessel deposition in watery contexts that featured in Chapter 6 (Hunter 1997).

The recent discovery of a hoard, structured deposits and other components of ritualised activity devoted to Senua, a local goddess from the locality of Ashwell, Hertfordshire, provides a different example of a spring site. The Ashwell hoard has been compared to similar deposits from Backworth, Northumberland, and Barkway, Hertfordshire, although Jackson considered the two comparanda to be almost entirely lacking in contextual information (Jackson & Burleigh 2007:46). In material terms, Backworth differs from the other two as an example of a snake jewellery hoard - complex hoarding compositions incorporating esoteric classical artistic motifs and influences from a variety of mystery cults, formulated in a distinctly British vernacular tradition (Cool 2000). The lack of precision in recording the find-spot means that Backworth cannot be classified as a spring site, like Ashwell. However, the place-name allows us to characterise the general locale as a watershed context, due to its location on the northern-most edge of the Tyne river system where first-order streams spring forth (Chapter 6.11). Barkway is similar to Ashwell in material composition, with two silver plaques decorated with the figure of Vulcan standing before a gabled shrine (RIB 220) and other silver votive plaques inscribed to Mars, who is paired with Toutates and Alator. A shrine-site is presumed in the vicinity, as was discovered at Ashwell. The plaques show connections between craftsman god and vernacular deities, whose titles indicate tribal authority (Irby-Massie 1999: 275). Although the precise find-spot is unknown Barkway is positioned on the ridge that separates tributaries of the River Quin draining south into the Thames basin from those that drain out north to the Fenlands via the rivers Cam and Great Ouse – a classic watershed context. The landscape situation and the votive plaques dedicated to Vulcan provide another link between metalwork and watershed context.

As an overarching contextual category, watersheds have a flexible utility that encompasses a variety of geographical positions in the landscape from coastal sea scarps defining river mouths to relatively low-lying ambiguous bogs, to the highest points of the landscape, where hill and mountain separate springs that define the upper limits of river drainage basins. There may be a temptation to attribute this complex geographical awareness to Roman surveying and mapping capabilities, but ritualised activities at watershed contexts can be demonstrated throughout British prehistory, with many more examples than featured in Chapter 6 (e.g.Spratt 1990; Goldberg in prep.). The detailed nature of this topographical and hydrographical awareness should instead be attributed to the local inhabitants whose activities and movement through the landscape would contribute to the generational accumulation of knowledge. Just as streams successively feed into larger bodies of water as they flow to the sea, so an awareness of local

landscapes feeds into larger 'pools' of knowledge that culminate in a regional perspective of drainage basins and how they interconnect. That such potent places in the landscape continued to be focal points into the Roman period should occasion no surprise and illustrates how places can provide the common ground for new practices to flourish through the reconciliation of tradition and innovation.

The iconography of Minerva was used for the local goddess Senua, at Ashwell, but unlike Sulis Minerva at Bath, direct *interpretatio* never occurs, emphasising the integrity of this local deity whilst still appropriating more widely known representative forms (Mattingly 2006:484). Although the hoarding of votive plaques is taken as an indication of a temple treasure, structured deposition in a pit can be linked to numerous other examples of this type of practice (Veteris plaque at Thistleton Ch.5.3; Hill 1995a; Woodward 2004). Votive deposition in watery contexts, and construction of the sacred precinct can also be compared and contrasted with parallels elsewhere. Taken together these emphasise a range of practices considered appropriate during the early centuries A.D. Woolf (2000:626-28) warned that a focus on the landscape scale of analysis can lead to false impressions of continuity, but not if both subtle and dramatic variations in practice and perception are discussed. Excavations at the spring sanctuary of Springhead demonstrate how different attitudes to water sources inform a diversity of ritualised practices through time (Andrews 2007). The springs had ritualised activity in the immediate vicinity in the Bronze Age, but layers of sterile sediment accumulated till the Roman period when deposition in the water source appears associated with the construction of the sanctuary site. The Late Iron Age component of the site seems to have been removed from the springs themselves and defined by a boundary ditch and ceremonial way on the slopes above. Various Iron Age pits and structured deposits occur beyond the ditch, and a scatter of Iron Age coins define the ceremonial path, but no Iron Age features have as yet been discovered close to the springs. The Springhead example demonstrates that an acknowledgment of the wider potency of place can provide common ground for socio-political transitions with different attitudes and values manifested through different ritualised practices through time. However, many sites should not be expected to reveal such stark contrasts. A vernacular approach to religion in the Roman provinces should also recognise more subtle variations in the acknowledgment of place and promote discussion of the nuances of practice that are often masked by a focus on 'Celtic' tradition and 'Roman' innovations.

7.13 - Continuity, tradition and Innovation

Vernacular practices are often related to 'traditional' culture and there is a danger of creating a sense of timelessness. Previous academic constructions of Celtic religion have been criticised for being traditional and timeless (Fitzpatrick 1991) and recent constructions of Romano-Celtic syncretism as Celtic in tradition have been criticised already (King and Haüssler 2007:10). Traditional consciousness and popular religion present related difficulties for postcolonial theory by imposing notions of primordiality and primitivism onto popular beliefs (Patton 2005). However, religion need not be static and conservative. Tradition as transmitted and translated across generations is constantly moving through processes of transformation and re-constitution (Chamberlin 2006). Similarly, vernacular practices have the capacity to develop, evolving according to changes in environmental, historical, social and economic conditions, whilst still being spatially coherent, intimately attached to a particular locale or region. These inter-locking contexts and the myriad of impinging factors all need to be taken into account. In the cultural revolution that swept through the imperial provinces in the first centuries B.C and A.D., negotiating change and reconciling tradition with innovation were central to notions of collective identity, with this common dilemma requiring novel solutions according to local circumstances (Woolf 2001:182).

The wider modern use of vernacular describes essential features of a particular place or locality (Primiano 1995:42), but also covers practices associated with collective identities. The *genii cucullati* are often presented as archetypal native or Celtic images (Green 1992) and were used as the first example of vernacular religion. The distribution of the same iconographic group discussed in Chapter 4 has been plotted by Yeates (2007) with reference to the territory of what he presents as an Iron Age tribal group, the Dobunni. This theory did not account for the similar types of sculpture from elsewhere in Roman Britain. The advantage of the vernacular approach is that it accounts for the wider examples and integrates the relationship between the symbolic elements of this associated group of iconography through reference to the more prosaic practices of pastoralist production.

Two examples of Minerva with her head removed were deposited in Well 5 at Lower Slaughter, along with other sculptures depicting two triads of *genii cucullati*, a warrior triad and an altar depicting a local god and a ram (Chapter 4.8). These representations may reflect traditional practices of husbandry that can be traced back into prehistory, but designating this as 'native' or 'Celtic and considering the familiar 'Roman' iconography separately is unhelpful. These religious bricolages should not be divided into component

parts of classical and Celtic. Dissecting what is culturally Roman or elements of Celtic tradition would detract from the vernacular approach. One of Minerva's classical functions was as craft-patron of weaving and spinning and as with pastoral Mercury from the Bath relief, the vernacular approach acknowledges that recognisably foreign forms of material culture and depictions of deity can be re-constituted locally (Chapter 4.11). The iconography and functions of originally foreign deities can be adapted as locally appropriate representations of the socio-economic context fundamental to the lives of local worshippers.

Derks' (1998) study of religion in Northern Gaul used an ecological approach that linked differential distributions of altars dedicated to Mars and Hercules with different agricultural and pastoral landscapes. As with Yeates' thesis (2006) a focus on landscape, abstracted as a static influence, is bound to result in an interpretation of continuity (Woolf 2000:626-628) and much of Derks' material could have been marshaled to serve a different thesis that "stressed dramatic change and the inter-play and modification of religions" (Woolf 2000:627). The advantage provided by the methodological approach of vernacular religion is the emphasis on dynamism and complexity. For Yeates (2007) the more classical depictions of Minerva mask the cult of his proposed tribal goddess and the collection of sculpture from Well 5 at Lower Slaughter was used as evidence for a rural shrine dedicated to his goddess of the Dobunni (Yeates 2007:61). Yeates used the cult of Brigantia as an analogy for his Iron Age tribal goddess, but this timeless construction has also been questioned in Chapter 5.

Considering the specifics of depositional context and materiality of the sculpture from Lower Slaughter also reveals changing practice through time. The immediate context of deposition in Well 5 and the slighting of the goddess' sculpture suggest alternative narratives to Yeates' interpretation of continuity from Iron Age tribe to Roman *civitas* (2007:65-68). This final act of deposition at Lower Slaughter probably represents alternative rites from the original intentions of those who commissioned the sculpture, and resonates with other examples of altars and sculpture deposited in wells and other watery contexts (RIB 1047 at Chester-le-Street; Fulford 2001; Clarke 1995; 1997). There are many examples of sculpture missing heads like the Lower Slaughter goddesses and this may be partly due to taphonomic processes, but there are also more sculpted heads than matching bodies preserved in the archaeological record, suggesting preferential selection and fragmentation in the multiple lives of Roman period sculpture (Croxford 2003). These should not all be attributed to Christian iconoclasm – some may be earlier examples of the rejection of anthropomorphic representations of deities or alternatively the recognition of

the power of such images, but with a different response through alternative rites of deposition (Webster 2003).

7.14 – Wells sunk into common ground

Deposition in wells and shafts has been the subject of vigorous debate with older literature seeing these as 'Celtic' ritual sites (Ross 1968) while Webster argues that the notion of Celtic survivals is an expectation based on back-projection from medieval insular mythology (1997c). Some would still interpret the watery context of deposition as representing pervasive links to previous Iron Age practices (Fulford 2001), but Webster stresses that these are "new idiosyncratic rites – which should properly be considered as Romano-British rather than as either Roman or Celtic" (1997c:140). Webster notes how the "shared ground" between Graeco-Roman chthonic rites and later prehistoric traditions facilitated the generation of this new form of early post-conquest practice (Webster 1997c). New forms of knowledge, new cults and new practices were part of the cultural revolution that swept through the Roman provinces in the first centuries B.C. and A.D. (Woolf 2001:178) with wells and shafts becoming a potent focus for deposition.

Wells became a significant context for the deposition of tablewares and dining vessels in post Flavian Essex and Herefordshire (Pitts 2007). Correspondence analysis of this 'everyday' material culture has allowed wider shifts in patterns of ceramic consumption to be related to changing expressions of identity in the late first and second centuries A.D. Deposition in wells again seems to be a post-conquest phenomenon, but one enthusiastically incorporated into depositional practices. A pre-conquest focus on drinking vessels and commensal politics (Dietler 1999) was gradually replaced after the conquest by the adoption of ceramics associated with urbane dining practices (Pitts 2007:704-709). Similar trends are noted in funeral practice with certain key individual burials signalling wider social change in the next generation. A richly furnished burial from Folly Lane in Verulamium dating to 50-60 A.D. presages shifts in regional ceramic consumption and depositional practices, and exhibits a hybridised identity through the inclusion of material relating to both urban-style eating, and wine amphora referencing pre-conquest burial and drinking practices (Pitts 2007:707). The constructed burial context has similarities to continental shaft-burial rites indicating a complex range of references that may signify changing identities in the generation responsible for the burial, as much as the individual being buried. The biological and generative basis of hybridisation fits well with notions of successive generational change.

7.15 - East meets West: Exotica and local renovation

A broken sculpture recovered from a third century well beneath Southwark Cathedral provided a starting point for Merrifield's (1996) discussion of the British Hunter god. This regionalised cult has been identified in London and the southwest as a particular British response to a wider trajectory of religious reaction to the plagues that swept through the empire in the later second century A.D. Merrifield (1996:111) tentatively connected this cult to an oracle originating in Asia Minor, which if correct demonstrates how connectivity (Pitts 2008) and the movement of ideas can have far-reaching consequences and local manifestations in an imperial context. The sculpted images of this complex syncretistic deity were described as a conflation of Apollo, an eastern saviour god and a British god of youth (Merrifield 1996). Such combinations have elicited frustrated responses from classically trained art-historians (Webster 2003; Scott 2006), who have failed to understand what they have perceived as "the *confused* religious beliefs of the ordinary worshipper of the western Roman provinces" [my emphasis] (Drinkwater 1992:345). Provincial religious expression might appear idiosyncratic to the modern observer, but any lack of understanding and confusion is a result of the rigid classifications of modern study, rather than the meaningful practices of the past worshipper.

Most studies of Romano-Celtic syncretism focus on the integration of the Roman pantheon with indigenous deities (e.g.Derks 1998). Oriental cults are often considered separately as they are rarely epigraphically name-paired with western indigenous deities (Henig 1984; Richert 2005: 14). Yet there are a host of syncretic figures that appear in sculpture and other iconography, such as the Orphic mosaics of the third century British villas (Henig 2002). This elite interest in a diverse repertoire of classical mythology indicates that "the native people of Britain took a far more decisive role in developing a sophisticated religious life in Roman Britain" (Henig 2004, 238; using the term 'sophisticated' Henig again betrays his underlying bias towards the classical and material he values as sophisticated). The third century provided the socio-political context where such expression was possible as British elites increasingly took charge of their own affairs (Bendlin 1997:62; Watts 1998:63). The popularity of mythological figures such as Orpheus might be interpreted as conscious preference for alternatives to the Olympian order and the active enthusiasm for the appropriation of classical mythology concerned with salvation and the fate of the immortal soul may represent the desire to use new iconographic formats to illustrate revitalised, or dynamically re-constituted conceptions of religion (Woolf 2001a:176-179).

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Henig (2004:237) is of the opinion that much of Roman cult should not be seen as the anti-thesis of native religion but rather as complementary to it. There are bound to be subtle variations in influence and motive, but what Henig hints at is an indigenous template that exhibited choice rather than emulation. As demonstrated in Chapter 5.1, a Phrygian cap is often thought to indicate oriental influence, but the vernacular religion approach highlights the processes of appropriation and adaptation between concepts of divine power derived from both exotic and local models. Varying methods of conceptual equivalence and ambivalence played a role in the translation process, materially manifested in the clay moulds from Corbridge or various appearances of Mercury and Minerva, or the appropriation of Roman vessels for votive deposition. Considering the cult of Vitiris within the socio-political context of Northern England in the mid-second to mid-third century allowed interpretation to be placed into a wider context of religious synthesis and renovation that matches wider trends of cult worship in the western provinces of the Empire (Bendlin 1997; Woolf 2001b).

Local cults should still be considered as part of wider trajectories. The British Hunter god is not an eastern saviour god transported into Britain; the cult exhibits wide-ranging influences but is localised in London and southwest Britain. Hybridised material culture is always situated in a specific localised context, but can still exhibit diverse influences and the vernacular approach to religion distinguishes between origin and local availability. The origin of material culture and its 'original' meaning should not be confused with its new meaning when translated into new contexts and engaged in new practices (van Dommelen 2006:119-120). The provenance of material culture is by no means irrelevant, but the fact that this material had been made locally available, through whatever process of acquisition, demonstrates that diverse and sometimes distant influences (although I would hesitate to call these global) are still ultimately manifested in a local context (Pitts 2008). Focussing solely on origin tempts interpretation towards idealisations of culture-historical classification, including the authenticity of tradition, the autonomy of culture and the essentialism of ethnicity that featured in the critique of syncretism.

7.16 - Vernacular Religion

Instead of beginning analysis based on two opposing preconceived notions of Roman or native, or ethnic constructs of Roman culture and Celtic tradition, vernacular religion shifts focus to the localised context of the material culture associated with ritualised practices. Roman and native/Celtic have previously acted as two attractor positions in a binary opposition that polarised interpretation and simplified what would have been complex

processes in the creation of the syncretised religions of the Roman provinces. The post-colonial critique of syncretism takes analysis beyond essentialist categories of Roman and native. However, vernacular should not be used as a simple replacement for native as that would perpetuate dichotomies. Vernacular religion, integrated with hybridisation, operates in the ambiguous zone between individuals and institutions that could be considered synonymous with Bhabha's (1990) "third space" of colonial situations, the common ground bridging the colonial divide and the dichotomy between Roman and native. The concept of discrepant identities (Mattingly 2004) can help theorise a variety of responses and interactions based on a multiplicity of identities, varying according to context and especially in politically charged colonial situations.

The methodological approach of vernacular religion has a pragmatic value through its focus on contextualising material culture and ritualised practice. Rather than beginning analysis from dichotomous preconceived notions and working towards measuring degrees of influence from component elements, this methodology acknowledges the process of renewal; new forms of expression for older concepts, such as deity's names on altars and anthropomorphic sculpture, as well as traditional contexts for new material forms through temples in previously potent places, site succession and votive deposition. The full range of practices involved in the production, use and eventual deposition of artefacts can be related to an ever-widening consideration of inter-locking economic, social, political, environmental, temporal and spatial contexts. Religion separated as an isolated institution is considered an unhelpful by-product of western rationalism and modern analysis (Brück 1999). Vernacular religion thrives on integration with all other aspects of studying the past, which can only be advantageous for furthering knowledge of the everyday lives and practical concerns of past people.

The vernacular approach to religion in Roman Britain promotes a multi-scale contextual analysis of material culture, from feature to site to landscape context and eventually to the wider provincial and imperial context. Although grounded in the local context and the materiality of the archaeological record, the nexus of relationships at work on any practice reaches beyond the local and dictates reference to wider comparanda, precedence and analogy. The power of vernacular religion as an analytical tool resides in this potential for transcendence, connecting up and out to empire-wide concerns, but also down to localised ones. Analysis should begin with the localised, historically situated expression of diverse cultural interests interacting and constituted in a specific temporal and spatial context, which can then be related to ever-wider interlocking contexts.

Through a careful critical evaluation of vernacular religion, Roman archaeology has a chance to move beyond the dichotomies of religious syncretism – not by using vernacular descriptively as a simple replacement of native, but by considering the context specific processes of hybridisation and vernacular ritualised practice as exhibited through the materiality of the archaeological record. The vernacular approach to religion has the potential to open up the massive grey area between the black and white of Roman and Native (Hunter's shades in between; 1997:118). Syncretism recognises processes of translation involved in the creation of new forms of religion and ritual practice, but hybridisation as an evolving process of generational transformation is preferred over the binary oppositions resulting from linguistic analogies. New creations and new meanings emerge through historically and geographically situated interaction.

In abstract terms, vernacular religion might be conceived as operating within the hyphenation of Romano-Celtic syncretism, corresponding to the dialectic between many of the dichotomies created by modern analysis. The hyphenation inadequately represents the clash of cosmological systems involved in the creation of hybridised provincial religion. Rather than attempting to isolate the ethnic elements in Romano-Celtic, designate what is culturally Roman or identify Celtic tradition, the focus of study should be on the practices and processes represented by that tiny hyphenation – that is where all the action is.

Romano ⊖ Celtic

vernacular
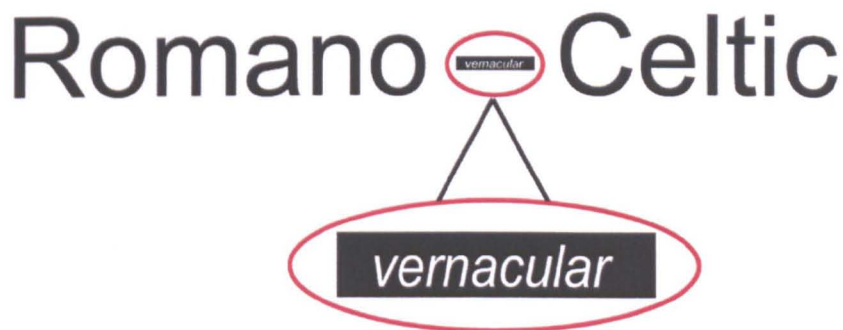
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PSAS = Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland,

TRAC+YEAR = Proceedings of the Nth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference. Oxford: Oxbow Books.

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Appendix 1: Table of inscriptions from Altars dedicated to the Cult of Vitiris (*ara Vitirum*)

Sub-regional groups are colour-coded as in Table 5.2 and throughout Chapter 5.

Group	Location	Inscription	RIB no./Ref.	VET	VIT	HV	Sing.	Plural	Formula	Dedicants	iconography	Notes
1	Thistleton	de(o) Vete(ri) Mocux[s]oma pa(ngit)	II.3, 2431.3	Vete			x			N-L		
1	York	deo Veteri Primulus vo(tum) l(ibens) m	660	Veteri			x		Vo L M	L		
1	Catterick	deo sancto Vheteri pro s(alute) Aureli Muciani V S L M	727			Vheteri	x		V S L M	L-double		Sancto
2	Piercebridge	diio Viiteri	Brit.5(1974) 461 no.3		VIITERI		x					In hypercaust in larest phase of structure in Tofts field
2	Chester-le-St	deo Vitiri Duihno V S	1046		Vitiri		x		V S	N-L		
2	Chester-le-St	daeabs Vitiribus Vitalis [V] S L M	1047		Vitiribus			x	S L M	L		should be dibus. Found in a well.
2	Chester-le-St	deabs Vit(iri)bus Viasudri	1048		Vitbus			x		N-L		should be dibus; abbreviated?
2	South Shields	deo ansu Vitiri Cr[]	Brit.18(1987) 368 no.7		Vitiri		x			?		
2	Lanchester	deo Vit(iri)	1087		Vit		x					abbreviated
2	Lanchester	deo Vitir(i) Unthau[s..] po(suit?)...	1088		Vitir		x			N-L		Birley 2002 does not recognise princeps and RIB reading is uncertain
2	Ebchester	deo Vitiri Maximus V S	1103		Vitiri		x		V S	L	L- Bird; R- Boar	

2	Ebchester	deo Vitiri l.it[ ]	1104		Vitiri	x			?		
2	Corbridge	deo Veteri	1139	Veteri		x					
2	Corbridge	deo Vitiri	1140		Vitiri	x					
2	Corbridge	Vit(iri) Miti	1141		Vit	x			N-L		abbreviated
2	Benwell	deo Vetri Sangto	1335	Vetri		x				L- Patera; R-axe & knife	Sancto corrupted. Found in the north part of the fort with a collection of other altars.
2	Benwell	Vitir(i)bus	1336		Vitirbus		x			Long-tailed quadruped below line 2. Unlikely to be hare suggested by Heichelheim.	
3	Chesters	deo sancto Vitiri Tertulus V S L M	1455		Vitiri	x		V S L M	L		Sancto
3	Chesters	dibus Veteribus	1456	Veteribus			x				
3	Chesters	[di]bus Vitiribus	1457		Vitiribus		x				near bridge over the Noth Tyne
3	Chesters	Suadnus votum d(e)o Votri v(otum) s(olvit)	1458			x		V S	N-L		
3	Carrawburgh	deo Veteri votum Uccus V L	1548	Veteri		x		V L	N-L		
3	Carrawburgh	[dibu]s Hviteribus	1549		Hviteribus		x				
3	Housesteads	deo Hveteri Superstes [et] Regulus V S L M	1602		Hveteri	x		V S L M	L		
3	Housesteads	deo Hvitri Aspuanis pro (se) et suis vot(um) sol(vit)	1603		Hvitri	x		vot sol	N-L		

3	Housesteads	deo Veteribus votum[..]	1604	Veteribus					x	votum		should be dibus
3	Housesteads	[dib]us Vete[ri]bus	1605	Veteribus					x			
3	Housesteads	Veteribus [p]osuuit Aure(lius) Vict(or)	1606	Veteribus					x		L-double	
3	Housesteads	dibus Ve[te]ri[b]u[s].l.[]ilu..[]..	1607	Veteribus					x		?	poor - worn & eroded
3	Vindolanda	deo [V]ete[r]I	1697	Veteri				x				
3	Vindolanda	[ ]Veteri[ ]tin[ ]s	1698	Veteri				?			?	poor - must assume Veteri although could be Hv or plural
3	Vindolanda	Veteribus pos. Senaculus	1699	Veteribus					x		L	
3	Vindolanda	dibus Veteribus pos. Longinus	VIND 4: Brit.4(1973) 329, no.11,	Veteribus					x		L	excavated 1972 in fourth century storehouse site LXXVIII
3	Vindolanda	Veteribus po[s]uit Senilis	VIND 5: Brit.4(1973) 329, no.12,	Veteribus					x		L	excavated 1972 in fourth century storehouse site LXXVIII

3	Vindolanda	deo s(ancto) Vetiri pos. [...]	VIND 6: Brit.6(1975) 285,no.6	Vetiri			x					?Sancto but incomplete could have had dedicant or VSLM. Excavated 1974 from loose rubble beside a water tank at the western end of the vicus
3	Vindolanda	deo Ve[ ]n[...]	VIND 7: Brit.6(1975) 285,no.7	Ve[t]			x					poor - fragmentary most that can be assumed is VET. Found in a field wall south of the south gate
3	Vindolanda	deo Hvitiri V S	VIND 8: Brit.8(1977) 432,no.22			Hvitiri	x		V S			rubble? In vicus? More context needed
3	Vindolanda	ara Vitirum	VIND 9: Brit.10(1979) 346,no.8		Vitirum							Fallen stone from fort wall at NW angle - refers to the ara (altar)
3	Vindolanda	deo Hvvet[i]r[i] Nob[..]vegus vo(tum) L S	VIND 10:			Hvvet[]r[]	x		vo L S	N-L		Excavated 2002 - Found in Severan well, context 02 20A

3	Vindolanda	dibus Vitiribus Adnamatus fil	VIND 11:	Vitiribus		x		N-L		Excavated 2002 - Found in Vicus site LXXI, context 02 22A
3	Great Chesters	deo Vetiri V	1728	Vetiri		x	V			
3	Great Chesters	dib[us[Veteribus posuit Romana	1729	Veteribus		x	L			Definite female dedicant
3	Great Chesters	dibus Veteribus [...]	1730	Veteribus		x			a star above the text	
?	Hadrian's Wall	[de]o Veteri	2068	Veteri		x				
?	Hadrian's Wall	Hvitiribus votum	2069		Hvitiribus	x	votum			
4	Carvoran	deo Veteri Necalame[s] V S L M	1793	Veteri		x	V S L M	?N-L	L- Knife & axe; R-Quadroped (prob. Boar)	dedicates 3 altarsand doesn't spell his own name consistently or the name of the deity
4	Carvoran	deo Veteri Necalames V S L M	1794	Veteri		x	V S L M	?N-L		
4	Carvoran	deo sanct[o] Veteri Iul Pastor imag. Coh II Delma. V S L M	1795	Veteri		x	V S L M	L-double		Sancto. Gives military rank
4	Carvoran	deo Vetiri sancto Andiatis V S L M	1796	Vetiri		x	V S L M	N-L		Sancto. Female dedicant
4	Carvoran	deo Vetiri V	1797	Vetiri		x	V			
4	Carvoran	deo Viteri No[ ]	1798		Viteri	x		?		

4	Carvoran	deo Vitiri Meni(us) Dada V S L M	1799		Vitiri	x		V S L M	L-double		
4	Carvoran	deo Vitiri Milus et Aurides V S L M	1800		Vitiri	x		V S L M	Greek?		
4	Carvoran	deo Vitiri Ne[ca]limes [p]ro v(oto) p(osuit) L M	1801		Vitiri	x		v p L M	?N-L		
4	Carvoran	Veteribus [ ]	1802	Veteribus			x				restored by Richmond (Birley 2003)
4	Carvoran	dibus Veteribus vot(u)m	1803	Veteribus			x	votm			double ll instead of E similar to Piercebridge but follow RIB
4	Carvoran	dibus Vit[iribus] Ivixa V S L M	1804	Vit			x	V S L M	N-L		
4	Carvoran	dibus Vitiribus Deccius V S L M	1805		Vitiribus		x	V S L M	L	L- Boar; R- S-shaped creature;Serpentine (Ross 1967: 314) probably based on a dolphin adapted from intaglio design (Coulston & Philips 1988)	
5	Netherby	d(eo) Hv[e]ter(i) sanct(o) Fortunat[us...]	969		Hv[]ter	x			L		Sancto. Revised by E.Birley 1986:63. Re-dedication of altar originally intended for Jupiter Dolichenus.

5	Netherby	deo Mogonti Vitire san(cto) Ael[..]s[..] V S L M	971		Vitire		x		V S L M	L-double		Sancto. Only name-paired example. Continental interpretatio
5	Netherby	deo Hvetiri	973			Hvetiri	x				L-Serpent wrapped around a tree;R-Boar with a tree in the background	Relief carved: "This is the most exquisitely carved altar in Roman Britain and its quality is far superior to that of other altars to the Veteres, although its size is similar".
61					28	23	9	39	21	27	37	0