

Consuming Identity: Ritual Dining in Roman Britain

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to explore how different modes of ritual dining in Roman Britain formed different ways of grouping-together. This work fills an important gap in the scholarship of religion in Roman Britain by moving away from the long-standing Romanization framework and towards a more nuanced understanding of the material evidence. This study also tests a recent framework posed by David Mattingly of a tripartite categorization of communities in Roman Britain as military, urban, or rural. The Carrawburgh mithraeum serves as the military case study, the site of Folly Lane in Verulamium as the urban case study, and the site of Higham Ferrers as the rural case study. The ceramic and faunal evidence from each of these sites is used to examine the *chaîne opératoire* of the practice of ritual dining within discrete stages of preparation, consumption, and disposal.

The aim of this study is to prove that ritual dining as a practice is inseparable from and dependent upon the communities in which it is conducted. The top-down frameworks of Romanization or even Mattingly's urban, rural, and military division are inadequate for examining situated practices like ritual dining. At the Carrawburgh mithraeum, worshippers used ritual dining to create hierarchical experiences and control access to certain rituals and information. At Folly Lane, worshippers used locally made, specialized vessels to commemorate a local hero/ancestor figure and his funerary rites that had been the catalyst for the resultant cult. At Higham Ferrers, worshippers made deliberate choices about meat and ceramic supply to the shrine to separate ritual meals from everyday dining. In each of these cases, worshippers made deliberate choices in how to conduct the practice of ritual dining that allowed them to construct, maintain, and negotiate their identity as a group, going beyond the limits imposed by previous frameworks.

Lay Summary

This thesis seeks to understand how three communities in Roman Britain used the practice of ritual dining to construct, maintain, and negotiate their identity as a community. This work fills an important gap in the prior scholarship of Roman Britain by moving away from top-down categories, like that of Romanization, to examine the evidence on a more nuanced level. Three sites are considered: the Carrawburgh mithraeum represents a military community, the site of Folly Lane in Verulamium represents an urban community, and the site of Higham Ferrers represents a rural community. Pottery and animal bones from each site are used to reconstruct how ritual meals were prepared, consumed, and disposed of within each community, and how the choices made throughout that process reflect the community's sense of identity within a ritual context.

Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, and independent work by the author, A. Hagler.

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To my family and friends

Chapter 1. Introduction

The main question I seek to answer is how different modes of ritual dining in Roman Britain formed ways of ‘grouping together’. That is, how were different modes of ritual dining used to construct, negotiate, and maintain identity in the context of worship? By coining the term ‘grouping together,’ Rüpke et al. refer to how groups construct, negotiate, and communicate their collective and individual identities, as seen through the material culture.¹ Ritual dining, or ritual feasting as some scholars prefer, fits very well into this ‘grouping together’ model when it is separated from the everyday practice of eating, because it is by nature a community event while simultaneously being exclusive. In other words, ritual dining as a practice offers opportunities for groups to create a sense of identity as separate from others while also ‘grouping together’ their own community, however defined (i.e., as inhabitants of a town, as members of a particular religious cult, etc.). This means that differences in the material evidence can give us glimpses of how these communities understood and communicated their worship-based identity.

There are three main gaps in the prior scholarship that I intend to address with this project: 1. the overreliance on the Romanization framework in studies of Roman Britain; 2. the lack of serious studies on ritual dining in Roman Britain; and 3. the lack of studies on food and ritual dining in Roman Britain that synthesize artefactual evidence across functional categories. Much of the prior scholarship has identified Romanization as the main axis along which worship-based identity was formed in Roman Britain, but that axis relies on binaries, such as ‘Roman’ versus ‘native,’ and does not allow for a nuanced perspective of the evidence. We can see these binaries especially in earlier works on the province, such as M. J. T. Lewis’ 1966

¹ Rüpke et al 2017, 3.

synthesis of temples in Roman Britain categorized into Romano-Celtic or Classical. Anthony King, in his seminal 1984 study of dietary identity of military and civilian groups in Roman Britain, Germany, and Gaul, used a Romanization framework to argue for differences in diet between ‘Romanized’ and ‘unromanized’ sites, a pattern which many scholars of Roman Britain have followed.² Writing much later Martin Henig even went so far as to argue, “before we can understand what happened to the native religion of Britain, we must turn to look at Roman beliefs,” demonstrating the longevity of this sort of binary, container thinking.³

This type of thinking obscures many of the variations that I seek to understand within the practice of ritual dining as a mode of ‘grouping together’, because it does not allow for a consideration of the material evidence on its own terms. Instead, such studies assume that ethno-cultural groups are the primary divisions that mattered in antiquity: an idea that a host of recent scholarship has challenged. For example, David Mattingly suggests that urban, rural, and military divisions in both economic trends and ideas of identity represent a better method through which to see the evidence. However, this does not solve the problem, because it is still applying container thinking and top-down categories to the evidence. Practice-oriented frameworks like ‘grouping together’ get around these containers to see the evidence on its own terms.⁴

Within the realm of studies of ancient food, ritual dining has often been neglected as a practice worthy of study, despite the general interest in monumental religious sites. Instead, the focus has been on a different aspect of the *chaîne opératoire* of ritual at sanctuary sites: individual sacrifice. In many of the excavation reports of Roman British religious sites where

² Maltby in Millett et al. 2016; Henig 2004; Todd 2004; Mattingly 2006.

³ Henig 2004, 8.

⁴ Gardner 2021.

meal remains have been found, the interpretation of a feast or other ritual dining practice is often mentioned off-hand or as secondary to that of an individual sacrifice. King falls into this trap in his 2005 paper summarizing all the animal remain findings from temples in Roman Britain, favouring the sacrifice interpretation over that of ritual dining. While sacrifices occupy quite a lot of space in the literature, the space dedicated to feasting or ritual dining is much more limited. For example, in his chapter on Roman religious practices, Martin Henig mentions curse tablets, blood sacrifice, and wine/food offerings as categories of practices, but ignores ritual dining.⁵ In the more recent 2016 *Oxford Handbook on Roman Britain*, ritual dining only merits a couple of mentions, with most clustered in Alex Smith's chapter on ritual deposition. It is only within religious contexts with a known practice of ritual feasting, namely Mithras-worship, that scholars discuss the evidence for ritual feasts in depth. However, as a host of recent scholarship on animal-offering in the ancient world has shown, the act of dedicating and slaughtering an animal went hand in hand with different forms of communal dining.⁶ Michael Dietler and Brian Hayden argue that "the time is long overdue for feasts to be taken seriously by archaeologists as a significant – perhaps a central – social practice."⁷ Focusing only on individual sacrifice neglects that ritual dining was a large component of the ritual practice surrounding food and ignores how ritual dining functioned as a way to create, interpret, and maintain social relationships.

Part of this neglect of ritual dining is due to the historical focus in studies of Romano-British religion on deities and their identity, stemming from modernist ethnographic notions that divine identities and ideals sit at the heart of "religion."⁸ Such studies have often read the intersections of Roman deity names with indigenous ones along the lines of Romanization, as a

⁵ Henig in Todd 2004.

⁶ Lepetz and van Andringa 2008; Detienne and Vernant 1989.

⁷ Dietler and Hayden 2012, 1.

⁸ Aldhouse-Green and Henig in Todd 2004; Henig 2004. See also Rüpke 2014.

form of identity negotiation or resistance.⁹ This, in turn, has led scholars to favour evidence that would aid in such identification, such as inscriptions and individual sacrifices especially as it allows for connections with similar evidence in other parts of the imperial world. These sorts of studies do not offer much in the way of insight into how people ‘grouped together’, since the identification of a deity tells us almost nothing intrinsic about how people actually worshipped. Studies of ancient religion outside of Britain have long since moved to more practice-based models such as lived ancient religion, championed by scholars like John Scheid and Jorg Rüpke, but Romano-British studies have lagged behind.¹⁰ Within a practice-based model, ritual dining offers a better view of how people grouped together and calls for drawing on multiple forms of evidence.

Studying feasts requires looking at a range of artefactual and ecofactual material across functional categories, something that has rarely been done in Romano-British archaeology.¹¹ Most analyses only work with one category of material, mainly either pottery or animal remains, continuing to perpetuate container thinking of a different sort. Anthony King’s work on faunal remains is a good example of this kind of mono-categorical study, but others have followed, such as Rainsford et al. who analyze only the animal remains at two ritual sites in southeast Britain.¹² A look at any of the recent handbooks on the topic reveals the same problem. The nature of pulling material from excavation reports, particularly the way that specialist reports divide the material into separate categories, does not encourage cross-category analysis. The splitting of artefacts into disparate categories dates back to the nineteenth century, and Gavin Lucas has

⁹ Aldhouse-Green in Todd 2004. See also Aldhouse-Green 2018.

¹⁰ Scheid 2019.

¹¹ Ellen Swift in Millett et al. 2016, Hawkes 2000.

¹² Rainsford et al. 2021.

pointed out the myriad issues of interpretation these preconceived divisions can cause.¹³ Namely, using these disparate categories to structure archaeological reports biases later audiences to consider objects as divorced from their original connections to the site as a whole and to other object types. This has also meant that, as Ellen Swift puts it, “effectively, one generation has unwittingly decided what could be of interest to the future scholars of another,” not only in how objects are grouped together but also in the types of questions specialist reports are aimed towards answering.¹⁴ The long-standing tradition of using pottery primarily as a dating tool speaks to this issue, as many pottery reports are written with that use in mind, especially from earlier excavations.¹⁵

In addressing these gaps in the previous research, I will be following in the footsteps of prior scholarship on ritual dining from continental Europe, mainly the Roman provinces of Germania and Gaul. While much of the research on this topic there has been focused on the practice within the cult of Mithras specifically, it still represents a potential path forward for scholarship in Roman Britain. Marleen Martens and her work on the ritual meal remains at the mithraeum at Tienen offer a valuable model to follow in synthesizing both ceramic and faunal evidence.¹⁶ As well, the field of anthropology and particularly ethnoarchaeology has a long history of researching feasting as a legitimate practice of social identity construction that, while not geographically or chronologically connected to Roman Britain, can provide useful insights into the study of feasting as a practice.¹⁷ In particular, seeking to understand cultural processes like the creation of social identities through the lens of feasting allows us to work with the

¹³ Lucas 2000.

¹⁴ Swift in Millett et al. 2016, 84.

¹⁵ See Richmond and Gillam 1951 for a prime example of this.

¹⁶ Martens 2004a; 2004b, Chapters 2 and 3.

¹⁷ Dietler in Insoll 2011, Hayden and Dietler 2012.

evidence for how religion functioned on a local level within Romano-British society without reference to external factors overemphasized by the Romanization model.¹⁸

In this study, I will test the framework proposed by Mattingly in 2006 to view the evidence as divided between the military, urban, and rural communities, through which we can treat the material from a more flexible, nuanced perspective. In posing this framework, Mattingly does not dispute that ‘Romanization’ happened, by which I mean the process through which provincial communities adopted new or widely shared Roman cultural practices thereby becoming part of a wider imperial community. Rather, he acknowledges that ‘Romanization’ certainly played a large role in cultural change(s) but argues that it should not be considered the main or only factor in those changes. His tripartite division of the social, cultural, and economic experience within Roman Britain emphasizes that the province was not a unified whole in its experience of Roman control. Mattingly argues that each of the social groups he highlights constructed its identity separately from the others in ways that are distinct to that group and visible in the material evidence.

¹⁸ Hayden and Dietler 2012, 24.



Figure 1.1. Map of all locations studied. The Carrawburgh mithraeum is furthest north, followed by Higham Ferrers towards the center of the province, and Folly Lane the furthest south.

I have chosen my three case study sites to fit within Mattingly's framework as examples of ritual dining in military, urban, and rural religious spaces throughout the province (Figure 1.1). All deal primarily with the second to fourth centuries CE but represent a different geographic area. The mithraeum at Carrawburgh, a fort on Hadrian's Wall, represents not only the military community, but also the northern area of the province. The site of Folly Lane at Verulamium is an urban site in the southeast, while Higham Ferrers is a rural site towards the center of the province.¹⁹

To answer my main research question, the concept of *chaîne opératoire*, as articulated by Lemonnier as the sequence of events through which matter is transformed, is very useful, as a way of paying particular attention to how a practice like ritual dining was conducted.²⁰

¹⁹ Rudling 2008.

²⁰ Lemonnier 1992, 26.

Lemonnier argues for considering the impact of the “physical action” of the material culture as just as important as the “informational aspects” of material culture (i.e., decorations, symbols), which many previous scholars have favoured.²¹ In other words, he argues that *how* a practice like ritual dining was conducted communicated just as much meaning as the more visible style and quality of the food and pottery used. Within this conception of the practice of ritual dining, how people worked together to prepare the food, who was involved in food preparation versus consumption, and each choice made at each of these steps, functioned to bring people together through the process of making, consuming, and disposing of the meal, as well as certain information available only to those participating encoded into each step.

I will examine all facets of ritual dining practices, including food preparation and cooking, serving, and eating the meal, and how the meal remains were dealt with after the event. I will use the model laid out by Gillian Hawkes in her article, “An Archaeology of Food: a case study from Roman Britain,” in which she separated the meal into two stages, food procurement and food preparation, and further subdivided the second stage into six parts: initial processing, initial storage, meal preparation, cooking methods, serving and eating, and other information.²² Hawkes’ subdivision of the food preparation stage is especially useful for drawing out the nuances between each of the individual components, which previous scholars have often lumped together. My main areas of interest are Hawkes’ components of meal preparation, cooking methods, serving, and eating, and other information, for which I will rely primarily on the ceramic and faunal evidence from each of my three case study sites.

²¹ Lemonnier 1992, 3.

²² Hawkes 2000, 96.

In terms of the broader methodological debates about the archaeological analysis of ceramic and faunal evidence, I will rely on those methods chosen by the primary excavators of each of my main case study sites for ease of cross-site comparison. For the ceramic evidence, all the excavators used the estimated vessel equivalent (EVE) method of quantification, supplemented by sherd count and weight, except for Richmond and Gillam at Carrawburgh who used the minimum number of individual (MNI) vessel method.²³ For the faunal evidence, the excavators counted bone fragments by species, then identified minimum numbers of individuals (MNI) for each species to analyze preference trends at each site.²⁴

I will examine the indicators of food preparation from the faunal remains, including butchery marks and skeletal element representation, as well as the pertinent ceramic evidence, such as the number and distribution of mortaria at the site. To analyze cooking methods, I will try to match evidence for particular cooking methods to ceramic vessels present, as seen through both analysis of vessel function and markers from animal bones, such as burn marks, pot polish, and size of the cut of meat. I will also include evidence for cooking done on site as seen through hearths and ovens that are traceable archaeologically. It is worth noting that although Hawkes lays out her model in some detail, her analysis is rather limited when applied to her case study site of Dragonby. She spends more time analyzing aspects of food preparation and cooking methods than consumption, and overall, there is much more work to be done in applying her model to sites. Consumption (serving and eating) is one such area where I will build on her model. In terms of serving and eating the meal, I will examine the types of tablewares in terms of size, function, and fabric. Were tablewares suitable for individual or group servings based on

²³ See Orton et al. 1993 for an overview of both methods and the benefits and problems of each.

²⁴ Vigne 1992.

their size and typical function? Did each community have preferences for different types of tablewares that might inform our understanding of how they conducted the practice of ritual dining (i.e., a ritual more focused on drinking rather than eating)? Analysis of tablewares by fabric quality and finish will allow for a better understanding of hierarchies and status display within each community.

Mattingly in his 2014 book poses the idea of discrepant experience creating discrepant identity. In other words, he argues that different experiences of being in a province under Roman control would create different senses of identity based on those experiences. This idea has reverberations for my question of how different modes of ritual dining were used to construct, negotiate, and maintain worship-based identity. Can we see those discrepant identities forming in the evidence for ritual dining? On another level, could we see those differences along more subtle lines than just Mattingly's urban, military, and rural division? Or could we push beyond our current framework(s) to imagine that people would have been constructing their identities along more than just one axis, as has been proposed in gender studies and Roman frontier studies?²⁵ To answer one or all these questions would respond to the call put forward by Timothy Insoll when he wrote, "We need within our archaeology of religions to explore more fully the notions of syncretism and religious dualism, of multiple elements comfortably coexisting, and in so doing defying neat categories."²⁶

²⁵ In gender studies, see Scott 1986 and Boydston 2008. In Roman frontier studies, see Ivleva 2020.

²⁶ Insoll 2004, 2.

Chapter 2. The Carrawburgh Mithraeum

As a site to explore modes of ritual dining, the Carrawburgh mithraeum demonstrates the effects of a closed, self-reflexive environment on a practice like ritual dining. It is one of the few such cult sites to be comprehensively excavated on Hadrian's Wall, although evidence for other mithraea has been found at Housesteads and Rudchester.²⁷ As such, it represents a valuable glimpse into Mithraic dining practices along the northern frontier, but it also offers unique challenges to the archaeologist. Excavated by Ian Richmond and John Gillam in 1950-1951, the mithraeum lies to the south of the fort itself, as part of the vicus. It was established presumably by soldiers stationed at the fort in the late second century and continued in use until the early or mid-fourth century at which point the site was abandoned. The excavators identified five periods of construction and occupation of the site, as well as a post-abandonment silt layer. While the nature of the excavation and publication methods used at Carrawburgh hampers some types of analysis, as discussed further below, there is still much that can be said about dining at this site. Dining practices at the Carrawburgh mithraeum were intrinsically tied to the military nature of the community. Worshippers created hierarchies within the community to control access to certain practices, which replicated military hierarchies outside of the cult.

Compared to continental Mithraic sites, such as Tienen, Kempraten, and others, Carrawburgh has a scant amount of ceramic and faunal evidence to its name, consisting of approximately fifty-eight vessels and only fifty-two mammalian bones (with an unrecorded number of chicken bones) across all phases. This relatively small assemblage means that any analysis of dining at Carrawburgh will be unable to capture the same range of evidence available

²⁷ Gillam et al. 1954; Hodgson 1822.

at similar sites. Compounding this is the fact that Carrawburgh was excavated over seventy years ago, without many of the scientific advancements that more recent Mithraic excavations have employed, meaning that some analytical methods are completely out of reach.

A few methodological concerns are worth addressing here. To take the pottery first, the excavators (and specialists) are at times infuriatingly vague in their descriptions, particularly when it comes to exact counts of the sherds found, leaving many as “several” or “few”. They do not offer firm fabric or ware identifications except in a few cases, and they seem only to have listed ceramics in their report that were of particular interest at the time. There are a few mentions of other ceramics found that are not listed, such as fragments of terra sigillata vessels that were found with an amphora fragment from period I, leaving the true total number of ceramic sherds and vessels unknown.²⁸ As well, the illustrations of the ceramics do not include scales, so it is impossible to accurately estimate vessel dimensions from them alone. To address the lack of firm identification and scales, I use Paul Tyers’ 1996 book, *Pottery in Roman Britain*, to match Richmond and Gillam’s descriptions and drawings to actual known vessels. This matching usefully allowed for estimates of the size of individual vessels (rim diameter), as well as further identification of vessel type, according to Tyers’ drawings. There is always a possibility for error in this kind of work, but I believe that the benefit of having this information outweighs the risk.

The publishing of the faunal evidence suffers from similar issues. The primary appendix of animal bones focuses entirely on mammalian bones, meaning that non-mammalian bones are not described at all beyond bare references in the main body of the report. This also means that there is no accurate total count of the bird bones. Two appendices focus on bird bones, but only

²⁸ Richmond and Gillam 1951, 64.

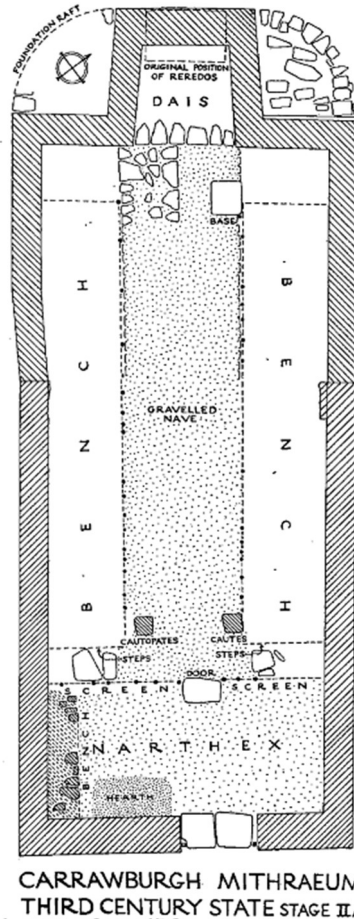


Figure 2.1. Plan of Carrawburgh Mithraeum, Phase IIa. From Richmond and Gillam 1951.

those found in the benches of period II and a ritual deposit beneath the period III altars and only to firmly identify the species. There are also no further photographs or other records of either the ceramic or faunal evidence from this site, except for one of a chicken skull found in a ritual deposit under the altar area and one of a vessel found beneath a statue to a “mother-goddess”. These issues mean that detailed analysis of factors like slaughter patterns and age estimates, which has been done at more recently excavated sites,²⁹ is impossible at Carrawburgh. However, general conclusions can still be drawn.

²⁹ See the excavations at Tabard Square, Killock 2015; excavations at Higham Ferrers, Lawrence and Smith 2009.

Space within the mithraeum was a controlled commodity. Across all periods, the anteroom and main worship area were separated by a screen and door or curtain of some sort (Figure 2.1). This inherently limited both physical and visual access to the main worship area, and therefore controlled what activities happened where. It is clear that there was a split in how both areas were used. All votive statues and altars except one were found in the main worship area, indicating that the vast majority of offerings were conducted there rather than throughout the entire mithraeum.

While anterooms served a range of functions in mithraea,³⁰ finds suggest that food preparation was a key activity in this space at Carrawburgh. The spatial distribution of mammalian bones in the mithraeum confirms the use of the anteroom in this way, with 61.5% of all mammalian bones were found in the anteroom, compared to only 32.7% found in the main worship area. The composition of the bones of pigs, sheep/goats, and cattle suggest that in periods IIa and IIb animals would have been brought to the anteroom alive and “on the hoof” or as whole carcasses.³¹ Starting in period IIc, only upper fore and hind limbs of sheep/goats are found, most likely representing preserved joints of meat, although the pig was still a whole carcass. By period III all meat (except chickens) was brought to the mithraeum already butchered into joints, with only leg and shoulder bones represented for the sheep/goat and pig. It is very likely that secondary butchery would have been required to portion the carcasses or preserved joints into smaller cuts ready for cooking.³² Also, the skeletal element representation of all mammalian bones indicates that the types of bones found in the anteroom favour those parts that were inedible or that would have had the meat filleted off before cooking, such as the skull and

³⁰ Hensen in Nagel, Quack, Witchel (eds.) 2017, 391.

³¹ Thomas in Stallibrass and Thomas 2008, 32.

³² Seetah 2018, 168.

jawbones (Figure 2.2). The anteroom may also have been used for the disposal of mammalian bones, although the evidence is not conclusive.

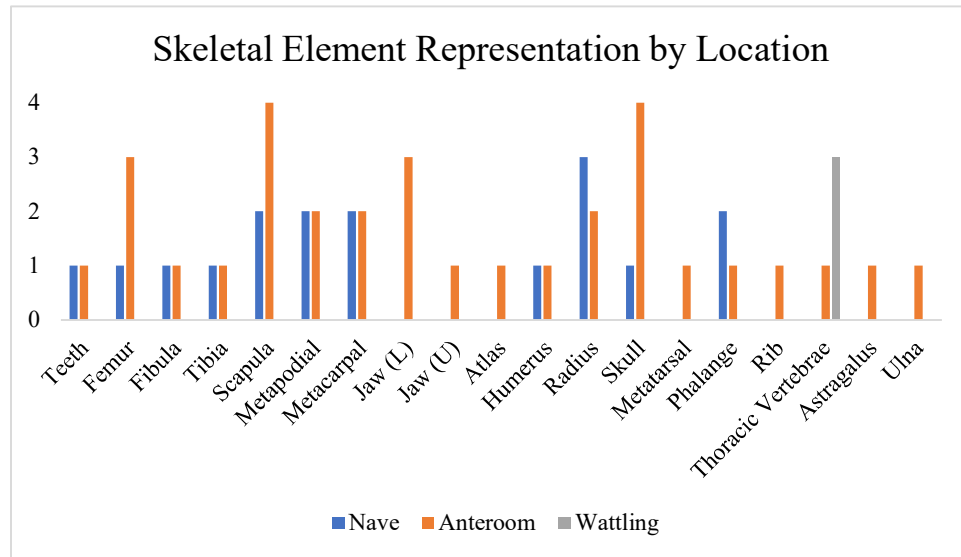


Figure 2.2. Skeletal Element Representation by Location

After the butchery process was over, the anteroom would have transitioned into a cooking space. The excavators identified a hearth on the western side of the anteroom, added in period IIA during the first reconstruction of the building, by the heavily calcined wall above it.³³ This hearth remained in place, and with only slight adjustments to its size, until the mithraeum's destruction over a hundred years later. This hearth would have served as the only heating and cooking element within the mithraeum, making its use crucial for preparing a ritual meal on site. Some mithraea had outbuildings that functioned as food preparation areas, but due to the nature of the excavation at Carrawburgh, there is no evidence remaining of such outbuildings.³⁴

Within the anteroom itself, the hearth did not take up much space, representing only a fraction of the total space in the anteroom across periods IIA – III, but it would have drastically affected movement around the space. The people actively cooking on the hearth would have

³³ Richmond and Gillam 1951, 14, 29.

³⁴ Hensen in Nagel, Quack, Witschel 2017, 392.

required extra space to maneuver, and the heat generated would have limited how close people and objects could come. This would have left only a limited amount of space on the western side of the anteroom and likely forced other activities not related to cooking or food preparation to occur on the eastern side of the room. This may explain why the only clearly votive object found in the anteroom, a statue of a “mother-goddess” in period III, was on the eastern side. Both tasks, butchery and cooking, were kept to the anteroom, and it was only the products from those tasks that were brought into the main worship area. These items would have been deemed ritually significant from the moment they were brought into the mithraeum for use in a meal. However, their particular role in ritual practices beyond the meal would only have become clear after they were brought into the anteroom.

The logistics of cooking in the anteroom affect how access to the meal itself would have been controlled by initiates. Cooking on the hearth would not have been a simple task, needing to balance the space budget (how many cooking vessels could fit at once) with the heat budget (indirect and direct heat needed for certain dishes). To calculate a space budget, the total area of the hearth can be set against the minimum and maximum rim diameters of various cooking vessels in each period, estimating the number of vessels that could fit on the hearth at once. Both cooking pots and bowls/dishes were found soot-caked during the excavation, indicating that both types of vessels could have been used on the hearth and should be considered in this calculation. Using the rim diameters of the soot-caked vessels returns a hearth capacity of three to four vessels, including both pots and bowls/dishes. This is the capacity range I will use for all calculations moving forward.

Given the estimated hearth capacity of four vessels maximum, it is possible to imagine that any cooking for the ritual meal would have been done in stages. Although all the vessels

disposed in a period may not represent the entire assemblage used for a meal, the numbers of vessels found in each period can offer a glimpse of what cooking in stages could have looked like. The minimum number of stages required to cook with all extant cooking vessels would have been two in period IIa and up to four in period III. It is important to note that this estimate only includes cooking done in these ceramic vessels. Extra cooking space on the hearth may have been required for food prepared in other ways, such as roasting meat on a grill, that would increase the total number of stages required to cook a meal on this hearth. However, the lack of burn marks on any animal remains and the absence of any grill or roasting apparatus would suggest that the primary cooking method at Carrawburgh was by stewing in a ceramic vessel.

While the hearth cooking was happening, there would also have been other items prepared, likely including cereals and vegetables, although no archaeobotanical evidence survives from the mithraeum. Some of these items may have been prepared in the mortaria that appear from period IIa onwards. Using residue analysis, Cramp et al. argue that Romano-British mortaria were used mostly to process plant and animal products, such as fats, for sauces and other meal components.³⁵ Other possible items prepared with a mortaria may be dairy products or ground cereals, such as for bread.³⁶ While we cannot know the specifics of these non-faunal dishes from Carrawburgh, due to the lack of archaeobotanical evidence, it is clear that this would have been a complex, multi-flavour, and multi-dish meal.

Considering all the steps needed to prepare this meal, from butchery to mixing ingredients to cooking in stages on the hearth, it seems reasonable to assume that multiple people would be required to accomplish all of this. This manpower requirement would have created a

³⁵ Cramp et al. 2011, 1343, 1346.

³⁶ Cramp et al. 2011, 1347.

division between labour and participation in the meal; people would have been occupied with this work to support the diners. This hints at the hierarchization created by the Carrawburgh community and enforced through the practice of the ritual meal. After the meal had been prepared, it was served in the main worship area beyond the anteroom. Most scholars have tacitly assumed that serving and eating the meal would have occurred all at once, but that does not need to be the case. Especially with the possibility that cooking may have been done in at least two stages, it is possible that the food would also have been served in stages. This would mean that the people who served the meal could not have been the ones participating in it. Such an idea has interesting implications for ideas of hierarchy within the mithraeum and who could participate in which rituals. If the idea that the meal may have been served in stages is plausible, then access to the meal would have been controlled by more than just space.

Even if we only assume a team of at least three people for meal preparations (one each for butchery, hearth cooking, and other meal preparations) discussed above, the number of people unable to partake in the meal itself would have been a noticeable portion of the total community at the event. From its earliest period this Mithraic community was small; Richmond and Gillam estimated the mithraeum could have housed at most a dozen worshippers in its earliest form, which only marginally increased in later periods.³⁷ Michael White, refining a method put forward by J. T. Bakker, proposed to allow an individual 0.50 to 0.60 meters of lateral space on the benches, assuming that the bench was of sufficient width to accommodate this (above 1.40m on average).³⁸ If the bench was narrower, White proposes a different range of 0.75-1m per person. Taking these numbers and the dimensions of the benches of the earliest

³⁷ Richmond and Gillam 1951, 9.

³⁸ White in Balch 2012, 471-474.

Carrawburgh mithraeum (Period I; L: 4.57 x 1.83m; R: 4.57 x 1.52m), the calculated capacity is 15-18 people, larger than Richmond and Gillam's original estimate. That capacity range does not shift until period III, when it decreases to 10-13 people. White and Bakker both note that these calculated capacities just represent people reclining on the benches and so do not include people standing, sitting, or otherwise positioned within the mithraeum.³⁹ The visibility of worshippers reclining versus standing and possibly working in the anteroom would have demarcated the social dynamics at the meal and who was privy to the full meaning of each part of the ritual meal.



FIGURE 47 The two-sided Mithraic relief from Konjic. After CIMRM 2.1896.
DRAWN BY LLOYD BOSWORTH.

Figure 2.3. The relief from the Konjic mithraeum, with the dining scene at the bottom. From Walsh (2019), 91.

³⁹ White 2012, 474; Bakker 1994, 115.

Reliefs of dining found at other mithraea emphasize how pose and activity create and enforce hierarchy within the community. The relief from the Konjic mithraeum shows four people walking towards Sol and Mithras while they eat, including a *Corax* (Raven), *Leo* (Lion), an initiate wearing a Phrygian cap, and one other initiate carrying various cups and dishes to the gods (Figure 2.3).⁴⁰ A painting from the mithraeum at Dura Europos depicts a *Corax* offering Mithras and Sol pieces of meat from a spit.⁴¹ Another procession from Santa Prisca shows not only initiates offering prepared food and drink, represented by the vessels they are holding, but also live animals, including a bull, ram, pig, and chickens.⁴² Mithras and Sol are both sitting at a table, with a *Corax* as the closest worshipper to them. In all these reliefs, the gods are shown sitting or otherwise not in an active stance, indicating that they are of higher status and expecting the lower status worshippers to serve them. Although these reliefs depict a procession of food and drink to the gods, they may visually replicate how the ritual meal was actually conducted, with initiates of the lower grades (i.e., *Corax*) bringing food and drink from the anteroom as a procession for the gods and worshippers of higher grades. How a worshipper was posed during the meal would have communicated and enforced hierarchical division of labour.

The iconography of these reliefs also strengthens the idea that access to the meal was restricted according to initiatory grade, with those of the lowest levels required to prepare the food. Restricting access to the meal according to status within the cult by initiate grade would have intensified the feeling of a shared experience for those welcome to partake in the ritual. If such access was dependent on initiatory grade, then each worshipper participating in the meal would have been the one cooking at an earlier stage in their membership in the cult. This is the

⁴⁰ CIMRM II 1895.

⁴¹ CIMRM I 42.

⁴² CIMRM I 480-484.

type of ritual behavior and reflection that Panagiotidou and Beck identify as a key component of social cohesion among Mithraic communities, writing that these shared experiences “forged the Mithraic identity of initiates as an essential component of both their personal and social self-concepts, which they shared with their co-participants.”⁴³ A common sense of identity would have formed among those worshippers participating in the meal because they all knew that each other had experienced the same deprivation in their earlier stages of initiation. Participating in the meal and learning or facilitating its ritual components (e.g., foundation deposits with remains from the meal) would have then reinforced that sense of shared experience and common identity.

Beyond just the social benefits of participating in the meal, there would also have been material benefits in the amount of food available for each person. Using estimated cooking vessel capacities, it is possible to calculate the amount of food was produced total, how much food would have been available for each person, and ultimately how this meal would compare to the amount of food a worshipper could expect to eat daily. What I will show through these calculations is that the food at this ritual meal would not have been just a symbolic gesture, but a large amount of what a soldier could expect to consume in a day. Working off the assumption that the food would have been served in stages, one stage would still have represented a large amount of food. Assuming that each vessel was filled to three quarters its total capacity, due to the likelihood of boiling over, spills, and other losses during and after cooking, one four-vessel stage in period IIa would have produced 12.04 litres of food. Period IIc returns a slightly larger value of 13.47 litres, and the amount of food produced decreases in Period III to 9.84 litres.⁴⁴

⁴³ Panagiotidou and Beck 2017, 154.

⁴⁴ Period IIb appears to be an outlier, as no cooking pots from the period survived. It is not included in these calculations for that reason.

Given that the Carrawburgh mithraeum was associated with the fort just a few meters away, the Mithraic community present at this meal would have consisted primarily or only of soldiers. Therefore, it is possible to use the daily rations of a soldier as a baseline for a worshipper's daily food intake. Examining the written records for soldier's daily food rations, Roth concluded that a Roman soldier could have expected around 1.33kg of food daily.⁴⁵ Assuming that stew was the main preparation of food at the Carrawburgh mithraeum, the average liters of food per person at the meal calculations above can be converted into kilograms of food at an approximate ratio of 1:1, with a five percent error margin.⁴⁶ From this the kilograms of food can be converted into a percentage of a soldier's daily rations, to give a sense of the significance of participating in a meal like this for an average soldier. With the average number of diners at the meal hovering at 14-18, an individual serving could have been anywhere from over half a kilogram to close to a full kilogram of food in just one 4-vessel stage. That one stage would have represented about 60% of the daily rations of an average soldier across all periods. If there were more than one stage in a meal, as seems likely, this meal could easily have exceeded a soldier's daily food intake.

These material benefits to participating in the meal may not have been available to those who were cooking. This would have served to further bond not only the meal participants together, but also those initiates unable to partake. Such an event, and the visible social restrictions imposed as a result, would have played on ideas of exclusivity (for those unrestricted) and anticipation (for those restricted), in knowing that one day their turn would come.

⁴⁵ Roth 1999, 43.

⁴⁶ This rate is based on the density of water, so 1 liter of water is the same as 1 kilogram. The 5% error margin accounts for slight differences in the approximate density of a meat-based stew.

Information, too, was controlled by this hierarchical access to the meal itself. Particular aspects of the meal were enhanced by ritual significance and meaning known only to those participating in the stages after the food and drink was brought from the anteroom (i.e., consumption and disposal of the meal). The chicken remains are a prime example of this, as they were consistently treated separately from the cattle, sheep/goat, and pig remains. Chickens were laden with meaning specific to the cult, being at times connected to the god Mithras himself, *Cautes*, and the initiatory grade *Heliodromus*.⁴⁷ Within the Carrawburgh mithraeum, chicken bones were never found in the anteroom, indicating that their special treatment depended on the consumption and disposal aspects of the meal and that both of those aspects took place after the food was transferred from the anteroom. Chicken bones are the only animal remains found as part of two foundation deposits in period IIa and period III, near the altar area and under the altars respectively. These foundation deposits were carefully curated from the meal remains as a type of disposal, and such a specific ritual would have needed to be learned by initiates especially across the multi-decade gap between these occurrences at Carrawburgh.⁴⁸ It is striking that, at least in terms of the animal remains, these two foundation deposits were very similar, indicating a continuity in the practice. It would only have been possible to learn this practice by participating in the meal.

At first glance, the probable exclusion of the food preparers from the meal itself would seem to indicate that the community considered the food preparation as a less important or inferior aspect of the meal, but the continued emphasis on food preparation in later stages of the meal suggests otherwise. For one thing, rather than using separate cookware and tableware, all

⁴⁷ Lentacker et al. 2004, 73-74.

⁴⁸ McCarty, Egri, Rustoiu 2019.

the cooking vessels would have doubled as serving vessels. Only three cooking vessels and a mortarium were found in the anteroom across all periods, out of a total of fifty-eight, indicating that cooking vessels were overwhelmingly brought into the main worship area. At other mithraea, it appears rather standard to see separate cookware and tableware, indicated by different fineness and slipped finishes like terra sigillata, such as at continental sites like Apulum and Tienen but also at the Walbrook mithraeum in London, which makes the elision of those functions at Carrawburgh more striking.⁴⁹ That all the cooking/serving vessels at the mithraeum were coarsewares, mostly black-burnished ware (BB1 and BB2) and Derbyshire ware, may speak to the kinds of vessels and eating experience initiates were accustomed to in the military barracks.⁵⁰ Worshippers at Carrawburgh then would have chosen these vessels to highlight that aspect of their shared background as soldiers.

As well, there were two terra sigillata mortaria decorated with lion head spouts, a favorite motif in Mithraic belief, found during the excavation that may have been intentionally fragmented as cult objects, with one found almost complete near the altars and one at the hearth. Richmond and Gillam note that, “both vessels are in excellent condition and received very little wear, either before or after they were broken.”⁵¹ That these mortaria were decorated with a Mithraic motif, experienced little to no use before their deposition, and were seemingly a pair broken and deposited in two different places in the mithraeum reinforces the idea that their deposition was deliberate, intended to communicate a particular message to the community. There was a similar instance of intentional fragmentation of a Mithraic cult vessel in the mithraeum of Bornheim-Sechtem, in which three ceramic appliques from the same vessel

⁴⁹ Drăgan in Egri and McCarty 2020, 137; Martens in Egri and McCarty 2020, 12; Shepherd 1998, 104.

⁵⁰ Allison and Sterry 2012, 490.

⁵¹ Richmond and Gillam 1951, 70-71.

depicting a Caudes, lion, and serpent were found in three separate deposits.⁵² In that case, the deposits were even of different dates, indicating that the community at Bornheim-Sechtem kept the appliques for some time for this specific ritual. At their core, the terra sigillata mortaria from Carrawburgh were very visible food preparation objects, even if they may not have been ever used in that way, and their deliberate deposition speaks to what the Carrawburgh community wanted to highlight of the ritual meal.

Perhaps moreso than a shared experience or a shared symbology and set of rituals, the physical act of sharing an eating and drinking vessel would have tied community members together. The serving and drinking vessels would most likely have been placed on small tables in front of the benches, as can be seen in the dining reliefs from Konjic and Dura-Europos.⁵³ Based on the space capacity calculations mentioned above, a picture emerges of how much of this meal would have required sharing not only space, but also food and drink. In terms of drinking, there were five beakers found in period IIa, and with a capacity of fourteen to eighteen people, around two to three worshippers would have had to share a beaker at any one time. Only one or two people would have needed to share a beaker by period IIc. Periods I and III are outliers, as only one beaker was found in each, suggesting either the entire community shared one beaker or more beakers would have been present that have been lost archaeologically.

We can also look at the eating vessels to explore the sharing dynamics of the meal. In his synthesis of first to fifth century tablewares from Roman Celtiberia (modern day Spain), Jesús Bermejo Tirado laid out categories for the function of tablewares according to rim diameter size, with anything under eighteen centimeters identified as “individual” size and anything larger as

⁵² Ulbert 2004, in Martens and De Boe, 87; Wulfmeier 2004 in Martens and De Boe, 93.

⁵³ Dunbabin 2003.

“communal”.⁵⁴ It is worth emphasizing here that these categories of “individual” and “communal” only indicate how a vessel may have been used, given that it is not possible to truly know how each of these vessels would actually have been used. In each period, except for period IIb, there is an almost equal mix of communal and individual vessels, with a slight preference in later periods for larger vessels. This indicates that sharing eating vessels was a universal experience at meals within the mithraeum.

This mix of individual and communal eating and drinking vessels speaks again to the hierarchization of the meal. We know from dedicatory inscriptions found at the Carrawburgh mithraeum that military rank mattered within the cult, as all three individuals making the dedications identified themselves as a *praefectus*, or prefect in the army.⁵⁵ This implies that some elements of military hierarchies were preserved in the context of the cult, perhaps even in who was allowed to use individual vessels rather than share the communal ones. Although it is not possible to know whether higher military rank translated to a higher Mithraic grade, as none of the prefects recorded their grade within the cult, the implications are striking.

Worshippers at Carrawburgh were drawing from a common set of experiences both as soldiers outside the cult and as initiates within the confines of the mithraeum. Who was tasked with preparing the food depended on status within the mithraeum’s hierarchy, and who was allowed beyond the anteroom into the main worship area to partake in the meal would have been a very visible sign of that status. These hierarchies, and the activities that created and reinforced them, replicated the experiences of initiates outside the cult space within their military hierarchies. Many aspects of the meal can be tied directly to Mithraic practices, but some, like

⁵⁴ Bermejo Tirado 2018, Table 1.

⁵⁵ Richmond and Gillam 1951, 45.

the dual function of coarseware vessels as both cookwares and tablewares, may be tied more to the initiates' shared identity as soldiers and their places in the larger military community. However, it is clear that how ritual dining was practiced at Carrawburgh was not determined wholly by the military framework proposed by Mattingly, even if that might inflect the hierarchies at play.

Chapter 3. Folly Lane, Verulamium

As a ritual site, Folly Lane, just outside of Roman Verulamium (modern day St. Alban's), offers a fascinating glimpse into how a community kept its traditions alive across generations. Most interpreters see the site as an important burial of an elite individual, which subsequently became the locus of a local hero/ancestor-worship cult which involved dining. Ritual dining practices at Folly Lane had very little to do with Verulamium's urban context but were instead tied to the memorialization of a very localized cult. In later periods, worshippers sought new ways to maintain a sense of identity tied to the cult by responding to and reinterpreting the original meal that accompanied the burial of a local hero/ancestor figure. This points to the ways that dining practices might be deliberately localized and manipulated in intentional and specific ways that relate to individual cult. Pasts and memorialization in the context of specific cults could transcend urban, rural, and military community divides.

Introduction to Folly Lane

Excavators identified eight periods of occupation of Folly Lane, from the Iron Age to the post-Roman Saxon period in the fifth and sixth centuries. Periods 3 to 6, representing the mid first century to the late third century, are of the most interest for my purposes. In Period 3, during the early days of Roman military control of Britain in the mid to late first century, an elite individual was buried at Folly Lane in what was called the Funerary Shaft by excavators, and a turf stack erected to mark the location.⁵⁶ This burial served as the catalyst for the establishment of a local hero/ancestor cult that continued until the temple's abandonment nearly three hundred years

⁵⁶ Niblett 1999, 64.

later. A Ceremonial Enclosure was demarcated at the same time as the burial or soon afterwards, and fifty years later, in Period 4, a stone Romano-Celtic temple was built only steps away from

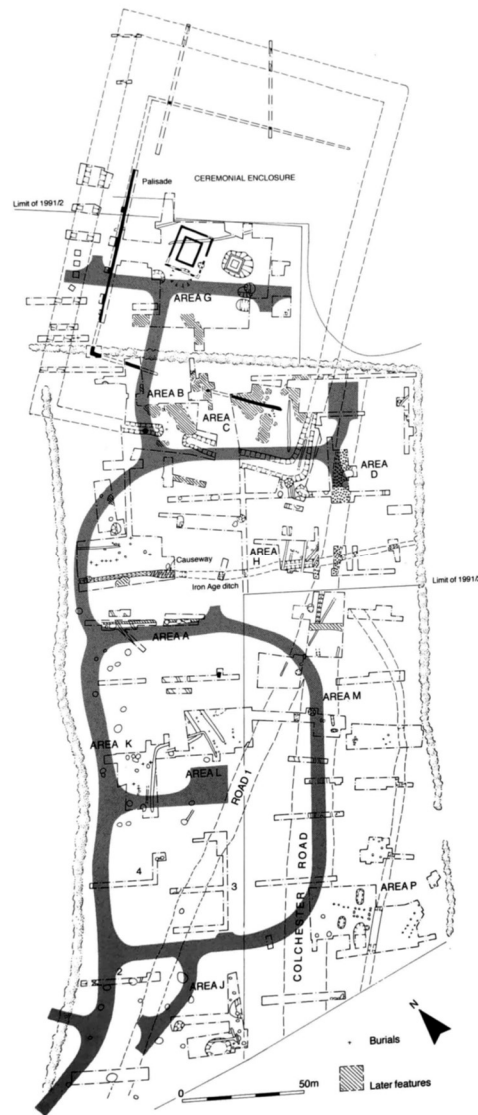


Figure 3.1. Plan of Folly Lane site. The Romano-Celtic temple, earlier Funerary Shaft, and Ceremonial Enclosure are at the top of the plan. From Niblett 1999, Fig. 2.

the turf stack (Figure 3.1).⁵⁷ Around the same time, starting in Period 4, over twenty cremation burials were dug southwest of the Enclosure area, in an area of the site known as the Lower Slope.⁵⁸ Following this spate of activity, over forty shafts were dug from Periods 4 to 6 in the

⁵⁷ Niblett 1999, 57, 65.

⁵⁸ Niblett 1999, 79.

Lower Slope, each of which excavators named using a series of three letters (e.g., ABC, AAB). Throughout the intervening centuries from his burial, the local hero/ancestor figure would remain of central importance to worshippers until the temple's abandonment in the early fourth century (Period 7) possibly due to competition with early Christian worship of St. Alban, after whom the modern town was named.⁵⁹

An Original Distinctive Meal

Ritual dining began at Folly Lane with the funerary meal of the local hero/ancestor figure in the mid first century, which became a model and orienting point for later ritual meals. As a part of the funerary rites, sherds making up between forty and fifty vessels were scattered into the Funerary Shaft, including a mix of terra sigillata and local wares.⁶⁰ Accompanying the fragmented pottery were 153 grams of cremated human bone, indicating that this was most likely a “token burial”, with only part of the cremated individual and associated pyre offerings deposited into the Funerary Shaft.⁶¹ The remains from the pyre offerings were scattered into the Funerary Shaft while still hot, discolouring the surrounding soil, while the pottery from the meal was thrown in specific groupings across the Shaft made up of terra sigillata and local fineware sherds, amphora fragments, and a piece of metal.⁶² Cremated remains of cattle, sheep/goat, and pig were also found mixed into the material, but these remains were never quantified in the final report.⁶³

⁵⁹ Niblett 1999, 417.

⁶⁰ Quantification of these vessels is uncertain, but the minimum number estimated is 40. Based on sherds identified as part of individual vessels recorded in the pottery catalogue, my total vessel number is 46.

⁶¹ Niblett 1999, 60.

⁶² Niblett 1999, 57, 62.

⁶³ Niblett 1999, 59.

In terms of the *chaîne opératoire* of the funerary meal, there is very limited evidence of food preparation on site. An oven cut into the western Enclosure ditch attests to either food preparation or ceramic production for the funerary meal, but because there was no organic material like seeds or cereal grains recovered nor other indicators of a particular function, its original use remains unclear.⁶⁴ Among the pottery, only one jar survived, suggesting that either much of the cooking for this meal would have been done off site or cooking vessels were intentionally excluded from the Shaft assemblage. The vast majority of the pottery from the Shaft was tablewares, including eating vessels like bowls and dishes, drinking vessels like beakers and cups, and other related forms like flagons, meaning that worshippers highly emphasized the consumption stage of the meal.

Using these tablewares, it is possible to estimate the minimum number of people present. Given that there was no clearly defined eating space in Period 3, we cannot use space estimates to calculate the human capacity of this funerary meal, unlike at Carrawburgh. Edward Biddulph, writing on pottery as grave goods in Roman Britain, suggests that an “individual” table setting in those grave goods would comprise one liquid serving vessel (i.e., a flagon), one drinking vessel (i.e., a beaker or cup), and one eating vessel (i.e., a bowl or dish).⁶⁵ Given the funerary context of this meal, this idea offers an interesting possibility for estimating how many people may have been present. Because only one flagon or other liquid service vessel survived in the Funerary Shaft, Biddulph’s idea of a complete table setting cannot be applied entirely. However, we can use his idea of one bowl/dish representing one person to establish the absolute minimum number of people who could have been present at this (Table 3.1). Using this method, at least twenty-

⁶⁴ Niblett 1999, 22-23.

⁶⁵ Biddulph 2018.

eight people would have been present at the Funerary Shaft meal, a medium sized group that may represent an extended kin group.

Shaft	Period	Individual Vessels	Communal Vessels	Ratio of Individual vessels: Communal vessels	Absolute Minimum (1 person/vessel)	Communal Minimum (2 people/communal vessel)
Funerary Shaft	3	15	13	1:0.87	28	41
DKM	4	7	6	1:0.87	13	19
ABT	4	0	2	0:2	2	4
AAE/ABZ	5	1	7	1:7	7	15
AAB	5	7	3	1:0.43	10	13
ABC	5	0	6	0:6	6	12
ADN	5	0	3	0:3	3	6
ACG	6	1	1	1:1	2	3
ASK	6	4	1	4:1	5	6
AET (AES/AEY)	6	2	4	1:2	6	10

Table 3.1. Estimates of People Present at Ritual Meals using Bermejo Tirado's (2018) individual vs. communal categories.

However, another way of calculating the number of people present at a meal is to examine the size of the eating vessels, according to Bermejo Tirado's categories.⁶⁶ Within his classification system, eating vessels are individual or communal by rim diameter, with communal referring to any vessel over eighteen centimeters in diameter that would have been used as a group serving dish or to serve multiple people at once. This method calculates a minimum number of people present that more closely matches what we see in the pottery. The

⁶⁶ Bermejo Tirado 2018, Table 1.

“communal minimum” in Table 3.1 refers to the minimum number of people present if we assume that at least two people would have used each communal vessel and is then calculated by adding the number of individual vessels (assuming one person per vessel) to the number of communal vessels multiplied by two (assuming at least two people per vessel). This would increase the minimum of the Funerary Shaft from twenty-eight to forty-one people. Combining these two methods to create a minimum range more accurately reflects the possibilities in how these eating vessels may have been used, all as individual servings (absolute minimum) or some as group servings (communal minimum). It is important to note that both calculations are *minimums*, meant only to establish a possible baseline for understanding the size of these ritual meals. At the funerary meal then, a minimum of thirty to forty people would have been present, with some using individual dishes while others shared theirs, suggesting a sort of social stratification or discrepant experience of the event.

It is in the consumption stage of the meal that the unique social dynamics at Folly Lane become clear. Given that this funerary meal memorialized a local elite individual, it is no surprise that the pottery consisted of mostly imported vessels, including seventeen terra sigillata cups and dishes from South Gaul, three imitation terra nigra/terra rubia cups and dishes, and one black eggshell beaker. Here a cup refers to a small, deep vessel with a mouth wider than its base, while a beaker would usually have a mouth the same width as its base or slightly smaller. The high ratio of cups to beakers (eleven to three) reinforces the idea that this was a luxury, high status event, as cups are more often associated with high status burials in Roman Britain.⁶⁷ After the imported wares, local grog-tempered bowls/dishes were the most common, followed by a variety of local fineware products. To see these kinds of high-status, luxury vessels in such

⁶⁷ Biddulph 2018.

quantities would have been a staggering display of wealth for the average person from Verulamium.

The almost even number of terra sigillata and grog-tempered dishes (ten to eleven) suggests that there may have been an element of hierarchization in who would have used the luxury, imported dishes. Terra sigillata dishes were much more likely to be individual sized (six out of ten), while the grog-tempered dishes were more often communal sized (eight out of eleven). One could imagine scenarios where the imported vessels marked individual, high-status diners, while the locally made, larger diameter vessels fed a distinctively less elite group. Which worshippers used which dishes at this meal would have been a very visible sign of social status and connection to the elite individual and may hint at deeper hierarchies at play in rituals at Folly Lane.

The King Harry Lane cemetery and the cremation burials at Folly Lane demonstrate funerary rites common to the Verulamium-area, and so the differences between those burials and the elite individual's funerary meal indicate the special circumstances and dynamics of that meal. In most of the cremation burials at King Harry Lane and the Lower Slope at Folly Lane, vessels that could serve a double function as a table setting for the deceased and as cremation urns in the burial itself were preferred.⁶⁸ In the mid first century, the King Harry Lane cemetery heavily favoured beakers (25%), followed by jars (18%) and dishes (15%), although in the later Roman period cemetery, those numbers shift to prefer jars and flagons in the cremation burials.⁶⁹ In the Lower Slope cremation burials, mostly dating to Period 4 (late first to mid second century), the most popular vessel form is jars (34%), followed by flagons (29%), bowls/dishes (22%), and

⁶⁸ Stead and Rigby 1989, 217.

⁶⁹ Stead and Rigby 1989, 200, 217.

beakers (7%). Within the Funerary Shaft, that double function is not present. In fact, most of the vessels in the Funerary Shaft could be termed “accessory vessels”, which were intended to accompany the cremation urn but conveyed status and meaning through their presence in the burial, rather than by holding the cremated remains.⁷⁰

In this way, the treatment and number of Funerary Shaft vessels conveyed the status of the elite individual through their deposition in the burial. The average cremation burial at Folly Lane had around two vessels, with the largest burial having ten. The Funerary Shaft had forty-six vessels, completely dwarfing the later cremation burials, which may not even be fully representative of all the vessels at the funerary meal if the token burial extended to the ceramics, and the assemblage is a partial record of a funerary feasting event. The cremation burial vessels were mostly Verulamium whiteware from local kilns, with terra sigillata only found in two of the nineteen burials, while the Funerary Shaft contained a large number of terra sigillata and other imported vessels. The intentional disposal of such luxury imports in the Shaft would have reinforced the wealth and status of the elite individual for the community. As well, if the oven in the Enclosure Ditch was used as a kiln for many of the locally made vessels in the Funerary Shaft, then it is plausible that many of the vessels would only have been used for the meal and disposed immediately afterwards. Such conspicuous consumption and waste were specific to the elite individual’s funerary meal and not replicated in typical funerary practices in the Verulamium area.

The earlier funerary meal was clearly a special event, conducted under special circumstances. It stands out for its use of higher-end wares in greater quantities and as a much larger affair with much more dining, in addition to drinking, attested. The social stratification

⁷⁰ Stead and Rigby 1989, 217-218.

implied in the sizes of luxury and everyday dishes speaks to the larger social dynamics at play at this event, which may have been specific to this event. It was this large and conspicuous event that was transformed into a model and orienting point for the meals that followed.

The Shaft Deposits

In the centuries following the establishment of the cult, worshippers responded to and reinterpreted this original funerary meal in ways that were localized and intertwined with local industries. This later ritual meal evidence comes entirely from a series of deep shafts dug on the Lower Slope, separated from the Ceremonial Enclosure by fifty to one hundred meters (Figures 3.2 and 3.3). In the excavation report, Niblett suggests that these shafts represent a range of activities and separates them into ‘ritual’ and ‘non-ritual’ categories, but how to interpret these shafts and the activities they represent is worth considering at length. Some may have simply been rubbish pits, of a kind widely used in the Roman Empire to dispose of domestic and industrial waste. The question of how to recognize “ritualized” objects or deposits has been generally neglected by scholars, who have largely shied away from such interpretations.⁷¹

⁷¹ Osborne 2004, 3. See also Insoll (2004) for a broader discussion of scholarly neglect of religion as a driving force in the ancient world.

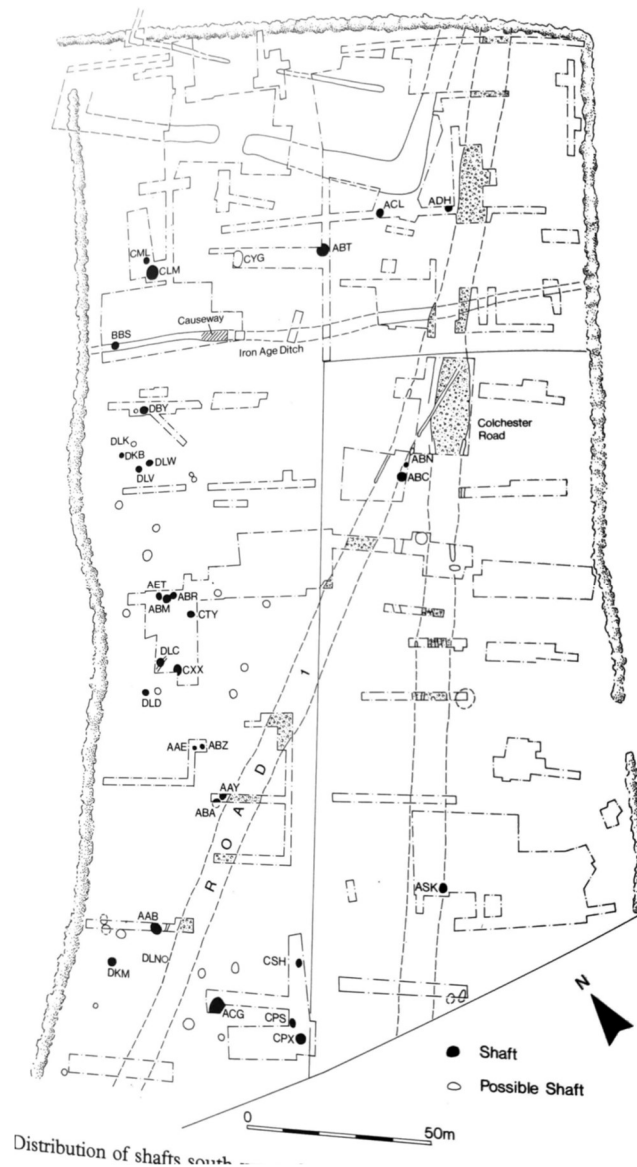


Figure 3.2. Plan of most shafts on the Lower Slope. From Niblett 1999, Fig. 39.

Robin Osborne draws out a key observation about recognizing “ritualized” deposits: while the type of object or location can reinforce the identification of a deposit as ritual, the evidence must be considered as a whole assemblage within its site-specific context. Only in this way is it possible to identify what factors at a specific site determine a ritual interpretation, because such factors will often look different across sites. Osborne also lays out a series of common features of ritual deposits, including religious imagery, precious or exotic materials,

predominance of one type of object, and a special location for the deposit.⁷² Michael Fulford takes a different tactic, suggesting that to qualify as a ‘ritual’ deposit, the deposit must contain evidence for repetitive activity and have “irrational characteristics,” which go beyond any actions explainable by everyday activities.⁷³

I would argue that, of the forty or so shafts at Folly Lane, twelve are structured, ritual deposits, with layers representing separate deliberate depositions of material (see Table 3.2 for the full list). For example, worshippers placed a human skull at the bottom of shaft AET, followed by a layer with the complete skeleton of a puppy and a possible face-pot, followed by two separate deposits of cattle bones and a large pottery assemblage, which contained a number of complete vessels.⁷⁴ The sequencing of these layers indicates that the selection of material was deliberate and deliberately placed, and the presence of complete vessels and lack of other material in the bottom layers suggests that each layer represents a single event. That cattle bones make up 98% of the animal bones in this shaft also speaks to behaviors unexplainable by everyday activities, because it drastically exceeds the average proportion of cattle seen in other areas of the site (63%). This all strengthens the idea that shaft AET, and the eleven other shafts that share similar qualities, qualify as structured, ritual deposits according to both Osborne’s and Fulford’s definitions.

Going beyond just the deposited material contained within, the location of these shafts suggests a ritual identification. The shafts were only separated from the Ceremonial Enclosure by a matter of meters, and they were dug near a road leading from Verulamium to the temple site (Figure 3.2). Their location on this road would have acted as a transitional space as worshippers

⁷² Osborne 2004, 4, 7.

⁷³ Fulford 2001, 201.

⁷⁴ Niblett 1999, 86-87.

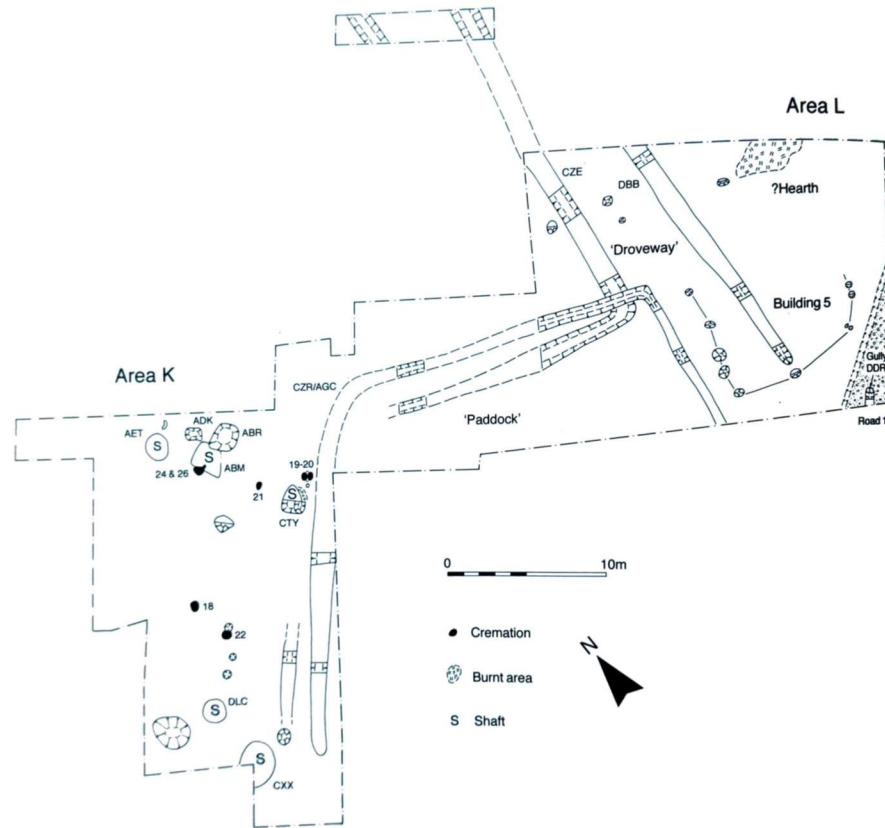


Figure 3.3. Plan of cremation burials on Lower Slope and some ritual shafts. From Niblett 1999, Fig. 38.

made their way up to the temple, which was one of the common features of ritual deposits suggested by Osborne.⁷⁵ These pits were also dug deliberately amongst series of cremation burials, most of which would have been there before the pits (Figure 3.3). Given that the burial of an elite individual was the locus of the cult, it seems plausible to suggest that the use of the site for later cremation burials was connected to that original event. Even without that connection, the spatial association between some of these pits and the cremation burials would seemingly suggest a ritual interpretation. Fulford, in arguing that the Folly Lane shafts should be seen as unconnected to the temple based on the location of the shafts outside the temple

⁷⁵ Osborne 2004, 7.

enclosure and the everyday character of some of the deposited material, neglects to consider their full site-specific context, as suggested by Osborne.⁷⁶

Of these twelve ritual deposits, which have ritual meal evidence? Lyne et al. suggest three criteria: 1. High numbers of open forms (bowls/dishes), 2. Low numbers of jars, 3. High numbers of drinking vessels such as beakers or cups.⁷⁷ It is important to note that the first three criteria are based, in part, on the vessel type selection of the earlier funerary meal, characterized by extremely high numbers of fineware open forms (bowls/dishes) and beakers and extremely low numbers of cooking pots/jars.⁷⁸ Among the bowls/dishes in the shafts, 90% were of finer fabrics and of that, 70% lacked sooting marks or other food preparation evidence.⁷⁹ Among the jars, finer fabric quality did not determine function, as 92% of the jars that were soot-caked were of finer fabrics. Although there were deviations from the norm, in general fineware open forms (bowls/dishes) were used as tablewares, while jars could be used as either cookware or tablewares regardless of fabric quality.

To these I might add two more: the presence of mortaria, and the presence of animal bones. Table 3.2 lays out the twelve shafts as having definite (“yes” in the table), probable, or no ritual meal evidence, based on how many of the five criteria each shaft meets. If a shaft meets all of the first three measures, or four out of five generally, I categorize it as definite ritual meal evidence. If a shaft does not meet all of the first three measures, but had mortaria or animal bones, I categorize it as “probable”. Using this method, five of the twelve shafts had definite ritual meal evidence: ABC, ABT, ADN, AET (AES/AEY), and DKM. A further four shafts had

⁷⁶ Fulford 2001, 210-211.

⁷⁷ Lyne et al. 1999, 250. A note on the drinking vessels: of the 21 drinking vessels from the twelve shafts, only 2 are cups.

⁷⁸ Niblett 1999, 190.

⁷⁹ Following the criteria for determining vessel function by Andreea Drăgan in Egri and McCarty 2020, 138.

probable ritual meal evidence: AAB, AAE/ABZ, ACG, and ASK. The ritual meal evidence from these nine shafts represents the disposal stage of the *chaîne opératoire* of the meal, just like the earlier funerary meal evidence.

Shaft	Fully Excavated?	% Open Forms	% Jars	% Drinking Vessels	Mortaria?	Animal Bones?	Ritual meal?
AAB	Yes	31.3	37.5	6.3	Yes	Yes	Probable
AAE/ABZ	Yes	30.4	34.8	17.4	Yes	Yes	Probable
ABC	Yes	66.6	11.1	22.2	No	Yes	Yes
ABR	Yes	30.8	46.2	15.4	No	Yes	No
ABT	Unknown	33.3	16.7	33.3	No	No	Yes
ACG	Yes	25	12.5	0	Yes	No	Probable
ADN	No	33.3	11.1	44.4	No	No	Yes
AET (AES/AEY)	Yes	54.6	27.3	0	No	Yes	Yes
AET (DHR)	Yes	0	100	0	No	Yes	No
ASK	Yes	49.9	25	16.7	Yes	No	Probable
CTY	Yes	50	50	0	No	No	No
DKM	No	72.2	11.1	16.7	No	No	Yes

Table 3.2. *Ritual Shafts of Interest.*

In later periods, the influence of the earlier funerary meal as a model for later ritual meals on site waned as worshippers modified how they used pottery to fit their changing preferences (Figure 3.4). The proportion of jars increases from just over 2% in the Funerary Shaft to a peak of nearly 24% in Period 5, while the percentage of open forms decreases overall from 60% in the Funerary Shaft to just over 40% in Period 6. Although the increase in jars must be due partially to the inclusion of the vessels that had been excluded from the earlier funerary meal evidence, the increased number of soot-caked jars in Period 5 indicates an increased preference for stews, coinciding with the decreased numbers of open forms used for roasting or frying. Beakers too decrease steadily in Periods 4 and 5 until they nearly disappear in Period 6, which Niblett suggests may be related to a shift in practice from using beakers to using small jars

as drinking vessels.⁸⁰ By Period 6, the vessel composition of later ritual meals had become nearly unrecognizable to that of the earlier funerary meal as worshippers privileged their cooking and eating preferences over replicating the funerary meal. Worshippers would have used fewer beakers, perhaps preferring small jars instead, and more of the food would have been prepared as stews rather than roasted or fried. This would have made for a completely different experience of participating in the meal than in earlier periods.

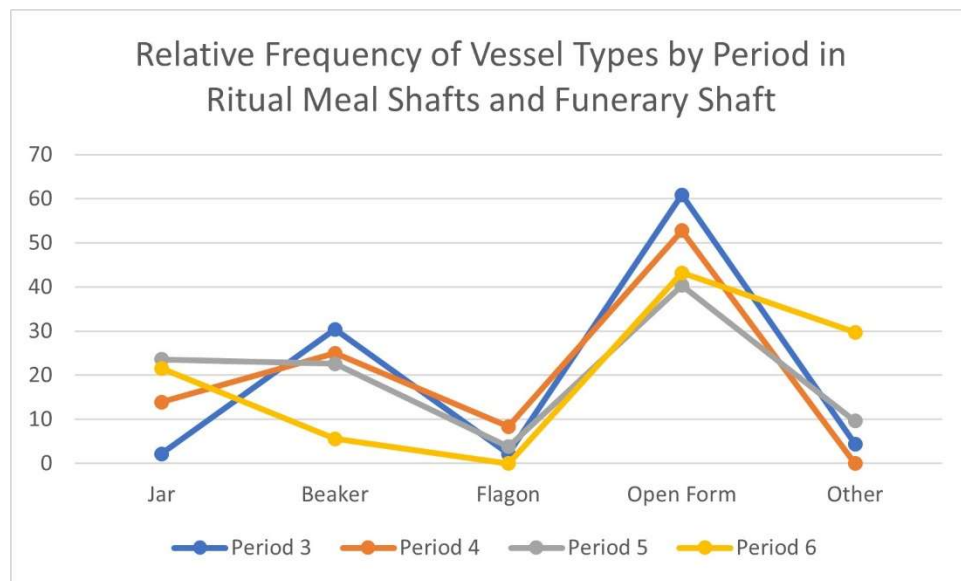


Figure 3.4. Relative Frequency of Vessel Types by Period in Ritual Meal Shafts and Funerary Shaft. Beakers as a category includes cups.

There was also a range of meal experiences and dining practices in these later periods, especially related to sharing vessels at the meal. Using the same calculation methods as with the funerary meal above, it becomes clear that the ritual meal shafts all had variable proportions of individual to communal eating vessels, ranging from none in shafts ABT, ABC, and ADN, to over half in shafts DKM, AAB, and ASK. The lack of any clear trend suggests that worshippers may have decided whether to use individual sized or communal sized eating vessels on a meal-by-meal basis, rather than any specific cult-wide tradition or practice. The lack of individual-

⁸⁰ Niblett 1999, 300.

sized eating vessels in some of the shafts implies that the experience of sharing dishes with others may have been a deliberate choice made by worshippers. The size of these meals varied widely as well, with minimums ranging from a couple of people to fifteen or larger. All of these factors speak to the increasing individuality of this later ritual meal practice, as the unifying model offered by the earlier funerary meal faded.

As worshippers shifted away from simply replicating the earlier funerary meal, they increasingly emphasized the highly local nature of the cult and its funerary origin through the inclusion of locally made, specialized ceramic vessels. One such kind of vessel was kiln wasters or seconds. These vessels had been broken, warped, or otherwise under- or over-fired during the firing process, rendering them unusable. Of the shafts with ritual meal evidence, AAE/ABZ, AAB, ACG, and AET (AES/AEY) all have wasters/seconds, representing a little under half of all such shafts. All of the wasters/seconds were of Verulamium white ware, emphasizing the specific regionality of this practice. Given that these wasters/seconds were inherently unusable, it is especially interesting that most of them found in the Lower Slope shafts were meant to be used for drinking, eating, or food preparation. There are a range of vessel types represented, including one flagon, two bowls, two mortaria, one face-pot, and one triple vase. Within each individual shaft, these vessels represent only a fraction of the total assemblage, so not necessarily enough on their own to materially change the experience of the meal for worshippers. That is, there would have been enough usable vessels present for worshippers to still be able to consume the meal, assuming that these wasters/seconds were present during the consumption phase and not merely deposited in the shaft during the disposal phase. However, the presence of these wasters/seconds may indicate that these ritual meals were not meant to be truly consumed, but

rather that they were a ‘token’ meal, like the ‘token’ burial of the local hero/ancestor figure, drawing yet another connection between the two.

These wasters/seconds were also part of a funerary tradition that seems to have been specific to south-east Britain, in which they were buried in cremation burials as pottery intended for the deceased. Niblett suggests that the tradition may have been to “kill” a pot, to “prevent it being used in some way against the living,” by breaking it intentionally or using misfired vessels like wasters or seconds.⁸¹ Similar misfired vessels were found in ritual shafts at Baldock⁸², the Roman cemetery at Chichester⁸³, and some of the cremation burials on the Lower Slope at Folly Lane.⁸⁴ The cremation burials on the Lower Slope also have quite a few truncated or otherwise broken vessels, and there is even a dish type with an intentionally useless foot-ring found among the vessels of the earlier funerary meal, both of which may be part of the same tradition. Although the tradition itself may have been more widespread, the fact that all of the

⁸¹ Niblett 1999, 301.

⁸² Stead and Rigby 1986.

⁸³ Down and Rule 1971, 73.

⁸⁴ Niblett 1999, 115.

wasters/seconds in the Lower Slope shafts were of local fabric indicates that how this tradition was conducted was specific to each individual community.

The other kind of local, specialized ceramic vessel that worshippers at Folly Lane brought into their ritual meals was face-pots. Similar to the localization of the wasters/seconds tradition, the design of face-pots was hyper specific, almost to the level of individual communities. Within the Verulamium region, face-pots most often had a rouletted rim, handles, and a face with smaller, less pronounced features with the earliest examples from the second century (Figure 3.5).⁸⁵ At Folly Lane, there were twelve face-pots found across five shafts, four of which had ritual meal

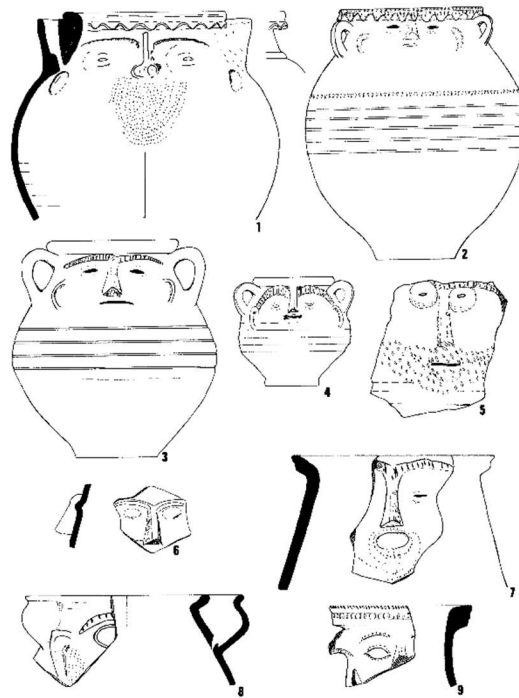


Figure 3.5. Face-pots from the Verulamium and London Region. No. 2 in the figure is from Verulamium. From Braithwaite 1984, Fig. 6, p. 109.

evidence.⁸⁶ One of the face-pots was also a waster/second. They may have been used to hold

⁸⁵ Braithwaite 1984, 108.

⁸⁶ Five of which were included in the illustrated pottery catalogue (Lyne et al. 1999).

liquids or foods during meals, such as a special porridge or drink associated with funerary rites, or they may have served some other cult purpose, although their exact use is unclear.⁸⁷

Worshippers used the face-pots in a uniquely local way to memorialize the cult as representations of the local hero/ancestor figure. The face-pots may have been a part of a practice of consecration using an animal or, in one case, human sacrifice, by acting as ceramic substitutes for an animal or human skull ritually placed in the Lower Slope shafts. In Shaft AET, for example, the skull of a young man was placed at the bottom of the shaft as the first deposit.⁸⁸ The face of the young man had been cut away almost immediately after death, which was mirrored in intentional damage to some of the face-pots deposited in other shafts nearby, implying that there may have been a link in practice between the two.⁸⁹ In Shaft ABC, where face-pots were found among the ritual meal evidence, two adult cattle skulls were similarly found as first deposits in the shaft.⁹⁰ These cases seem to suggest that the deposition of a skull, human or otherwise, was used to sanctify the shaft before it was used for other ritual purposes, including for disposal of ritual meal remains.⁹¹

It is possible that these skull deposits were meant to re-enact the original burial of the local hero/ancestor figure. The location of the shafts among the Lower Slope cremation burials would seem to lend credence to this idea. Why worshippers would have used a ceramic substitute for animal or human sacrifice in some cases but not others is unclear, but most of the face-pots were found in shafts that did not have a primary skull deposit, which suggests that whether face-pots were used in this way related directly to whether a shaft had been consecrated with a skull

⁸⁷ Braithwaite 2007, 398-399.

⁸⁸ Niblett 1999, 330.

⁸⁹ Niblett 1999, 415.

⁹⁰ Niblett 1999, 335.

⁹¹ See Tucker 2015 for a fuller discussion of the practice of human decapitation as a burial rite in Roman Britain.

deposit. In a similar vein, it is also plausible, although not ultimately provable, that these face-pots may have represented the local hero/ancestor figure himself. In this case, the burial of the face-pots with the ritual meal remains would have re-enacted the original burial of the hero/ancestor figure and would effectively make the shafts with ritual meal remains quasi-burials in their own right. The presence of kiln wasters/seconds in three of the shafts with face-pots would only have reinforced the burial characteristics in the disposal of the ritual meal remains. If these face-pots could plausibly be seen as representations of the local hero/ancestor figure, their inclusion in ritual meals would have been a powerful symbol of connection back to the heart of the cult.

Rather than drawing on their urban milieu, the community at Folly Lane looked inward to maintain their sense of connection and identity amidst a rapidly changing landscape. Worshippers pulled from specifically local iterations of wide-spread traditions to honor and memorialize their local cult and its cult figure. The model of the local hero/ancestor figure's funerary meal had found purchase in the immediate years following the event, but as time passed, that influence faded as worshippers' tastes and preferences continued to change. Seeking new ways to maintain their ties to their cult figure, worshippers turned to local funerary rites, including kiln wasters and face-pots in their meals that symbolically represented their community and benefited their industries. Around the late third or fourth century, an early Christian cult to St. Alban sprung up on a nearby hill overlooking Verulamium.⁹² Perhaps finding purchase in Verulamium because of the tradition of local hero/ancestor-worship at Folly Lane, the cult to St. Alban quickly gained followers and by the early fourth century, the temple at Folly Lane had been abandoned. Although brought to a relatively quick end, the cult at Folly

⁹² Niblett 1999, 417.

Lane and its dining practices attests to the continuity and change at the heart of maintaining traditions over many generations.

Chapter 4. Higham Ferrers

At Higham Ferrers we see a rather different picture of ritual dining than at the Carrawburgh mithraeum or Folly Lane. Rather than strict boundaries between ritual and non-ritual spaces and activities, ritual dining at Higham Ferrers blurred those boundaries, with ritualized food preparation spilling into the supposedly non-ritual settlement and everyday ceramics made ritually significant through disposal at the shrine. Worship within the community at Higham Ferrers was much more embedded in the everyday rhythms of life, and so worshippers highlighted aspects of ritual meals that separated them from everyday dining. In particular, ritual meals commemorated each worshipper as an individual, rather than a sense of collective identity.

Introduction to Higham Ferrers

Excavated from 2001 to 2003, Higham Ferrers was a roadside settlement in the Nene Valley in central Britain, just 200 meters east from the Nene River (Figure 4.1).⁹³ Excavators Lawrence and Smith identified six phases of occupation, from the early prehistoric period to the post-Roman, Saxon period. I will focus on Phases 3 to 5, representing the early second to the fourth centuries. Constructed in Phase 4, in the late second or early third century, the shrine complex itself consisted of a monumental façade facing south, an outer precinct, and an inner precinct (Figure 4.2). The western side of both precincts, facing the river, were left open without a wall. There was no temple building within the shrine complex, but the density of finds suggests that the entire inner precinct may have functioned like a temple building, acting as the primary place

⁹³ Lawrence and Smith 2009, 6.

for votive offerings.⁹⁴ The shrine fell into disuse and disrepair in Phase 5, the late third century, and religious focus at Higham Ferrers may have shifted north to Building 8019, tentatively identified as a temple by its separation from the main settlement and large quantities of tile (suggesting a tile roof like at the shrine), among other factors.⁹⁵



Figure 4.1. Plan of Higham Ferrers roadside settlement, Phase 4. The shrine is on the western side of the road. From Lawrence and Smith 2009, Fig. 4.10.

Unfortunately, the ceramics found in the shrine interior were not published separately from the list of quantified ceramics found in Phase 4 contexts. There is some information

⁹⁴ Lawrence and Smith 2009, 332-333.

⁹⁵ Lawrence and Smith 2009, 135.

available about the range and relative proportions of vessel forms present in the shrine, as well as partial information about which wares and fabrics may have been preferred. However, all of the specific, quantified trends and information that might be expected are not available, such as which forms were most common in which types of wares at the shrine. Due to the close connection between the shrine and settlement, we can assume that the vast majority of the shrine ceramics were selected from what was available at the settlement. In fact, it may even be possible to see these two assemblages as part of a larger whole, given the porosity of the boundaries between the shrine and settlement as will be discussed further below. This means that we can draw from general trends in what was published as the settlement assemblage to better understand the shrine ceramic assemblage.

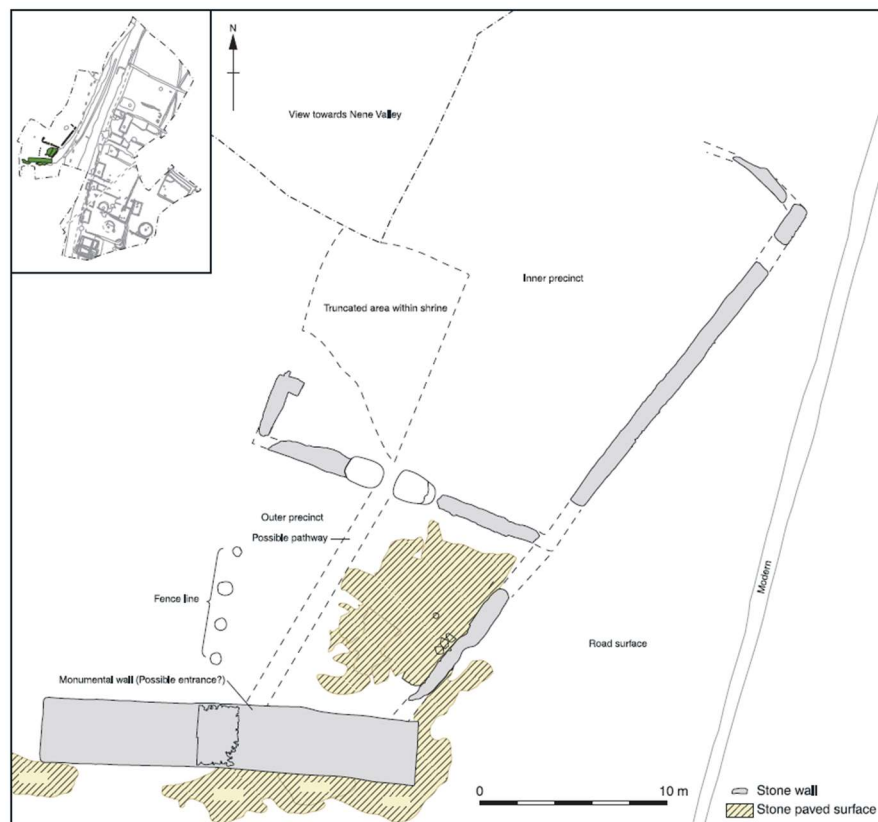


Figure 4.2. Plan of shrine complex. From Lawrence and Smith 2009, Fig. 7.4.

In Phase 4, the settlement may have been reorganized because of the construction of the shrine across the road, and the economy of the settlement may have shifted to accommodate and support that shrine.⁹⁶ The settlement stretched out along the eastern side of the road and continued north past the shrine, with the two only separated by about fifty meters at their closest point. The true extent of the settlement is not entirely clear, as both north and south of the 2001-2003 excavation areas are modern housing complexes, rendering further excavation impossible.⁹⁷ It is therefore possible that the settlement of Higham Ferrers was larger and more expansive than we currently know. As mentioned above, a number of buildings in the settlement were constructed at the same time as the shrine complex, implying that both construction projects were part of the same wider effort to reorganize the settlement. The settlement area closest to the shrine was most heavily affected by this reorganization, as the previous roundhouses were almost entirely abandoned in favour of rectangular structures, and firmer boundaries were established that seemed to indicate separate plots of land. Some of these buildings will be discussed further below in the context of food preparation for the shrine.

When the shrine was constructed, its first major component was a monumental entrance facing south, away from the settlement across the road. Only the foundations survived, but the dimensions were massive at 20.5 x 3.6m. The width-length ratio of the foundations is unique among rural sites in Roman Britain, and the closest parallel is the so-called Riverside arch in London.⁹⁸ The entrance would have been so large that it was architecturally out of place within the rest of the shrine's construction, perhaps suggesting that the entrance may predate the shrine, although this is uncertain.⁹⁹ This entrance would have been huge and imposing, an immediate

⁹⁶ Lawrence and Smith 2009, 334.

⁹⁷ Lawrence and Smith 2009, 5.

⁹⁸ Lawrence and Smith 2009, 329.

⁹⁹ Lawrence and Smith 2009, 329.

draw for anyone approaching the settlement from the south. Having been constructed on the edge of a very steep slope down to the Nene River, the shrine complex, especially with this monumental entrance, may have been visible from up to four kilometres away, in a nearby town of Irchester.¹⁰⁰ The inner precinct of the shrine also had a much smaller monumental entrance similar to the outer precinct. Given the proximity of the settlement across the road to the east, the fact that the entrance does not face the settlement suggests that it was built to attract attention from those outside of the community. Lawrence and Smith use this, among other factors, to suggest that ‘travelers’ may have used the shrine and therefore that there may have been an economic component to the shrine in supplying materials for those travelers.¹⁰¹ How prevalent these travelers were in the use of the shrine is unknown, so at this time we can only acknowledge it as a possibility.

Many votive offerings, such as brooches, hairpins, and finger rings, were found deposited outside the shrine entrance and in the inner precinct as well, indicating a link in practice between the two spaces. However, the area between the two precincts was kept mostly clear of offerings, so there was a definite split between how the outer and inner precincts were used and perhaps even who was allowed into each. Of particular interest among the votive offerings are the finger rings, which were of simple design and make, suggesting that these may have been made within the settlement across the road.¹⁰² If these finger rings were made in the settlement to be used as votive offerings, they would indicate the close links between the shrine and settlement.

Excavators categorized the shrine and settlement as separate from one another, most importantly in ritual activities, considering the shrine as the ‘ritual’ space and the settlement as

¹⁰⁰ Lawrence and Smith 2009, 325.

¹⁰¹ Timby in Lawrence and Smith 2009, 182. What is meant exactly by travelers is not specified.

¹⁰² Lawrence and Smith 2009, 331.

‘non-ritual’. However, the reorganization of the settlement in parallel to the shrine’s construction and the possibility that some votive objects could have been made within the settlement suggest that the boundaries between these two spaces were more porous at Higham Ferrers than the excavators originally thought.

Separate from the Everyday

The practice of ritual dining further blurs the boundaries between the shrine and the settlement, making it that much more important for worshippers to separate ritual meals from everyday dining. Rather than being restricted to the shrine itself, food preparation for ritual meals seems to have been conducted within the settlement. There is no evidence for spaces for food preparation within the shrine complex itself and very little evidence for food preparation activities generally. Neither the inner nor the outer precincts have remnants of ovens or hearths, which implies that the food for ritual meals was likely brought to the shrine already prepared elsewhere. It is possible that certain food items may have been prepared in ways that do not survive archaeologically, such as grilling or roasting meat, but this seems unlikely given that only 0.3% of the animal bones in Phase 4 were burned across both the shrine and settlement.¹⁰³ The very low numbers of mortaria, which make up less than 1% of the shrine assemblage, also support the idea that food preparation was not done within the shrine complex.

However, there were hooves and other non-edible parts of the sheep, pigs, and cattle in the faunal assemblage at the shrine, suggesting that some butchery may have been occurring at the shrine. It is possible to imagine a scenario in which this butchery followed an animal

¹⁰³ Lawrence and Smith 2009, 288.

sacrifice and facilitated an easier transfer of the meat to the settlement to be prepared, while the non-edible parts were disposed of directly at the shrine. With this said, there is still an overrepresentation of sheep and pig limbs, implying that some meat may have been brought to the shrine as discrete joints.¹⁰⁴ In these cases, these discrete joints would have come to the shrine as prepared food. Butchery marks also indicate the carcasses of cattle, pig, and sheep had been dismembered into smaller pieces and some of the meat filleted from the bone.¹⁰⁵ Final stage “pot portioning”, breaking joints of meat down into the smaller pieces required to be useful for cooking methods like stewing and boiling, would likely have occurred in the settlement before the food was prepared.¹⁰⁶

It is impossible to know exactly where this ritualized food preparation would have taken place within the settlement, if only certain buildings were used, or if any building was a possibility. There are a number of buildings in the area closest to the shrine that seem like they may have been used for ritual purposes, but whether that ritual use was domestic or public is unclear. For example, Roundhouse 11340 was the only roundhouse to survive into Phase 4, which in itself suggests it may have enjoyed a “special status” for inhabitants.¹⁰⁷ Two pits were also found within the roundhouse, one with a ‘watering can’ ceramic vessel sealed underneath limestone slabs and the other with a broken oven plate as the only object deposited.¹⁰⁸ The deliberate nature of these deposits suggests that they were ritual in character, lending credence to the idea that Roundhouse 11340 may have been used for ritual purposes. However, there is no specific evidence to tie this building to the shrine, so this was most likely an example of

¹⁰⁴ Lawrence and Smith 2009, 295-296.

¹⁰⁵ Lawrence and Smith 2009, 289, 291-292.

¹⁰⁶ See Seetah 2018, 128, for a full explanation of the different stages of butchery.

¹⁰⁷ Lawrence and Smith 2009, 317.

¹⁰⁸ Lawrence and Smith 2009, Table 7.2, 334.

domestic ritual practices within the settlement.¹⁰⁹ Another option may be a building, further north than Roundhouse 11340, that had a hearth and a wild boar bone, an animal otherwise restricted to the shrine itself.¹¹⁰ Little else was found of the building or its contents to suggest a firmer identification though, so this must remain only a tantalizing possibility.

Regardless of where food for ritual meals was being prepared in the settlement, the most common cooking method was boiling or stewing, given the overall prevalence of jars in the settlement (60% of the settlement assemblage in Phase 4) and that jars were the only vessels found with marks of actual use in cooking. To develop sooted exteriors, internal burning, or inner deposits from boiling water, the jars must have been used quite extensively and repeatedly, suggesting that they may have been the most commonly used ceramic vessel in the settlement. It is possible that some of the coarseware bowls and dishes were also used for cooking but none of the physical or visual evidence remained. In general, local coarseware vessels, such as grog-tempered, shelly, and sandy wares, seem to have been used as cookwares, while local finewares (mostly Lower Nene Valley wares) were primarily tablewares.

Food being prepared in the settlement may explain the low numbers of jars found at the shrine, as jars only make up just over 25% of the shrine assemblage. This is far below the 60% within the settlement itself, and that discrepancy may suggest that worshippers did not dispose of all the jars used in the ritual meals at the shrine after the meal concluded. Rather, worshippers may have returned to the settlement with some of the vessels used in the ritual meals, only disposing of certain specially chosen vessels at the shrine. Making up 60% of the shrine assemblage, beakers were clearly one such specially chosen vessel type, indicating their overall

¹⁰⁹ See Osbourne 2004 and Chapter 3 of this thesis for a fuller discussion of how to identify a ritual deposit.

¹¹⁰ Lawrence and Smith 2009, 318.

importance to worshippers. This scenario would also explain the very low numbers of bowls and dishes found at the shrine, which make up only around 10% of the assemblage.

Worshippers may have reused these types of primarily coarseware vessels for other ritual meals or even for their everyday food preparation in the settlement. Fineware vessels, on the other hand, were much more likely to be disposed of after use in a ritual meal at the shrine. Terra sigillata and Lower Nene Valley (LNV) colour-coated ware alone represented about 5% and 14% of the shrine assemblage respectively. Given that most of the shrine ceramics were likely selected from what was available at the settlement, the settlement patterns can allow us to estimate how much of the assemblage at the shrine would have been made up of finewares overall. In the settlement, the most common ware was LNV grey ware, representing nearly 41% of all ceramics found there. If that proportion held true at the shrine, LNV grey and colour-coated wares together would have made up over half of the assemblage. While it is not possible to know for certain the relative frequency of each ware type at the shrine due to issues of publication, these estimates suggest that worshippers by and large preferred to dispose fineware vessels at the shrine but not coarseware vessels. The separation of vessels for shrine disposal and settlement reuse at the end of a ritual meal would have been a particular difference between ritual and everyday meals within the community.

As an agricultural settlement, Higham Ferrers would have produced most, if not all, of its own supply of animals, and it is not out of the question that part of that supply may have gone to the shrine. In terms of the meat-bearing animals, inhabitants of the settlement vastly preferred sheep/goats to cattle or pigs, with sheep/goat representing 78% compared to pigs at 13.6% and cattle at 8.5%. The proportion of sheep/goat at the settlement is high relative to the average of 45% sheep/goat at other rural sites in Britain and, even more specifically, rural roadside

settlements in the Central Belt region with Higham Ferrers.¹¹¹ On the other hand, rural religious sites across Britain offer the most similar levels of sheep/goat, like at Uley with sheep/goat reaching over 90% in some periods.¹¹² So, the settlement and shrine at Higham Ferrers, although higher than the average, should not be seen as abnormal in its preference for sheep/goat.

Of the bones reliably identified in the Roman-period faunal assemblage as either sheep or goat, nearly all (99%) were sheep rather than goat.¹¹³ For this reason, I will use 'sheep' from this point onwards. Most of these animals were likely kept within the limits or just outside of the settlement itself, and the prevalence of ewes and lambs identified from the sheep bones suggests that Higham Ferrers may have been focused on dairy production, as well as associated meat and wool production.¹¹⁴

Worshippers at the shrine would have enjoyed a different diet than at the settlement. Beyond the small numbers of wild game animals, such as wild boar and red deer, that were present only at the shrine, the proportions of the three main meat-bearing species were different. Sheep was preferred more at the shrine than the settlement (87.8%), but pig and cattle less (8.9% and 3.3% respectively). But these numbers based on the bones found do not show the entire picture. Using Vigne's Meat and Offal Weight (MOW) method¹¹⁵ allows for a better understanding of how much the meat of these three species would have contributed to a ritual meal (Tables 4.1 and 4.2). A note about this method before I discuss the results: the age-slaughter patterns are slightly different in the shrine and the settlement, so, where possible, I used the shrine patterns for the shrine animals. However, there was not enough evidence from the

¹¹¹ King 1984, 3; Smith et al. 2016, 190.

¹¹² Levitan in Leach and Woodward 1993, 258-260.

¹¹³ Lawrence and Smith 2009, 288.

¹¹⁴ Lawrence and Smith 2009, 324.

¹¹⁵ See Vigne 1992 for a full explanation of the method and its uses.

shrine cattle to establish a specific pattern of age at slaughter, so for that calculation, I used the settlement pattern.¹¹⁶ The significance of the differences in age-slaughter patterns will be discussed in more detail below.

¹¹⁶ Lawrence and Smith 2009, 296.

Meat Offal Weight Method for Shrine Animals (based on Vigne 1992)							
Animal	Age	Live Weight (kg)	Gross Meat Yield	MOW (kg)	MNI	MOWxMNI (kg)	% MOW
Sheep	0-1 yrs	20	0.5	10	26	260	
	1-2 yrs	30	0.5	15	15	225	
	2-4 yrs	32	0.5	16	19	304	
	4-6 yrs	33	0.5	16.5	8	132	
	Unknown				11		
Total					79	921	60.8
Pig	0-1 yrs	30	0.85	25.5	5	127.5	
	1-2 yrs	50	0.8	40	2	80	
	2+ yrs	115	0.8	92	1	92	
Total					8	299.5	19.8
Cattle*	1-2.5 yrs	130	0.5	65	2	130	
	4-8 yrs	330	0.5	165	1	165	
Total					3	295	19.4
Overall Total						1515.5	100
*Based on slaughter pattern for all cattle in Phase 4							

Table 4.1. Meat Offal Weight Method for Shrine Animals

Meat Offal Weight Method for Settlement Animals (based on Vigne 1992)							
Animal	Age	LW (kg)	GMV	MOW (kg)	MNI	MOWxMNI (kg)	% MOW
Sheep	0-1 yrs	20	0.5	10	21	210	
	1-2 yrs	30	0.5	15	6	90	
	2-4 yrs	32	0.5	16	15	240	
	4-6 yrs	33	0.5	16.5	4	66	
Total					46	606	40.5
Pig	0-1 yrs	30	0.85	25.5	4	102	
	1-2 yrs	50	0.8	40	2	80	
	2+ yrs	115	0.8	92	2	184	
Total					8	366	24.4
Cattle	1-2.5 yrs	130	0.5	65	3	195	
	4-8 yrs	330	0.5	165	2	330	
Total					5	525	35.1
Overall Total						1497	100

Table 4.2. Meat Offal Weight Method for Settlement Animals.

The results show that the diets at the settlement and shrine were more distinct than at first glance. At the shrine, there were 79 sheep reliably identified, 68 of which could be aged (Table 4.1). Those 68 sheep would have produced 921 kilograms of meat, making up about 61% of the total meat yield for the shrine assemblage. The eight pigs produced just under 300 kg of meat, or

19.8% of the total meat yield. The three cattle produced a similar amount of meat to the pigs, 295 kg, or 19.4% of the total meat yield. This means that at the shrine, sheep made up three times the meat represented as pig or cattle, and if the remaining eleven sheep are factored in, that ratio would be even higher. At the settlement, the difference is drastic (Table 4.2). 46 sheep produced just over 600 kg of meat, or 40.5% of the total meat yield, while 8 pigs resulted in 366 kg of meat, or 24.4%, and five cattle produced 525 kg of meat, or just over 35%.

What the MOW method demonstrates is that an inhabitant of the settlement who went to the shrine for a ritual meal would have had a completely different experience in the types of meat consumed than their daily meals. The presence of wild game animals in the shrine diet, which were only available at the shrine, would have highlighted that difference to an even greater extent, as these sorts of animals like wild boar and red deer would have required special effort to hunt and prepare. The differences in age-slaughter patterns at the shrine versus the settlement are also notable. The shrine assemblage favoured younger animals more than the settlement, where the patterns are slightly more even. Since the animals for both the shrine and the settlement were probably coming from the same supply, these differences in meat consumption must be seen as intentional choices made by worshippers to separate ritual meals from their everyday counterparts.

Commemorating the Individual

Most of the votive offerings deposited at the entrance and in the inner precinct of the shrine were what could be termed as “individual possessions,” such as brooches, hairpins, and the aforementioned finger rings. These offerings seem to have been part of a larger tradition at

Higham Ferrers to ritually commemorate the individual worshipper. What at first glance appears to be simply an overrepresentation of beakers in the shrine assemblage would actually be best interpreted as part of this tradition. Just like the votive offerings of individual decorative items, the beakers represented individual worshippers.

The sharing dynamics of a ritual meal at the shrine shed a little light on this picture. The bowls/dishes deposited at the shrine would have been a mix of Central Gaulish terra sigillata, LNV wares (especially grey), and miscellaneous black and grey finewares. Of the range of terra sigillata bowl/dish types attested in Phase 4, four types qualify as “individual” vessels with diameters of 15-17cm, according to Bermejo Tirado’s cutoff of 18 centimeters.¹¹⁷ A further eight types are “communal”, with diameters of 18-20cm. Settlement trends suggest that many, if not most, of the local fineware bowls/dishes would have been LNV grey ware. The most common forms of LNV grey ware bowls and dishes at Higham Ferrers were 24cm and 18cm in diameter respectively. Based on these settlement trends, most of the non-terra sigillata bowls and dishes would have been “communal” as well. Overall, the size of the tableware bowls and dishes would suggest that they were mostly used as communal eating and serving vessels.

The communal nature of the eating vessels stands in contrast to the individual use of the drinking vessels, either cups or beakers. Cups here refer to a small vessel with a mouth wider than its body, while beakers most often have a mouth the same width as the body or slightly narrower. From both the shrine and the settlement, a total of around 350 cups and 4000 beakers were found. It is unknown exactly how many of these cups and beakers were found at the shrine, but because beakers only made up 15% of the settlement assemblage but 60% at the shrine, it can be assumed that the majority of these beakers were found at the shrine. The proportion of cups at

¹¹⁷ Bermejo Tirado 2018.

both the settlement and the shrine was about equal. Such high numbers of beakers, in particular, suggest that at each ritual meal each worshipper likely would have had their own beaker, rather than sharing them as was the case at Carrawburgh or Folly Lane. At the end of the meal, while some of the jars and bowls/dishes were returned to the settlement, each of those beakers would have been deposited at the shrine as an individual offering by the worshipper.

The small number of cups versus beakers raises questions of preference and display of status at the shrine, as cups represent only 4%, compared to the nearly 60% of beakers, suggesting that there was a difference in how these forms were used. 91% of the cups were Central Gaulish terra sigillata, while beakers were primarily LNV colour-coated ware. The differences in preferred ware for each of these forms, terra sigillata for cups and LNV colour-coat for beakers, may imply that the terra sigillata cups were only available to high status people, explaining their lower numbers overall. People in Higham Ferrers who could afford it may have chosen to use these luxury cups as a display of their wealth and status within the community, to separate themselves from the rest of the inhabitants using LNV colour-coated beakers. The presence of terra sigillata bowls and dishes at the shrine reinforces this idea. It would also have been a conspicuous display of wealth to then dispose of these luxury vessels at the shrine. There were also a small number¹¹⁸ of Moselle black slip and Central Gaulish black slip beakers found at the shrine, which likely would have functioned similarly to the terra sigillata cups due to their luxury, imported nature.

This is not to say, however, that inhabitants of Higham Ferrers who deposited the local LNV beakers could not also display their wealth and status in similar ways. One of the beakers found at the shrine had a ceramic applique of a human figure of possibly non-European origin,

¹¹⁸ Estimating how many vessels by any quantification method is impossible due to the small number of sherds and their fragmentary nature.

indicating that the decoration of these vessels could be quite intricate (Figure 4.3). Another beaker, although not found at the shrine, had a duck motif decoration (Figure 4.4). These two



Figure 4.3. Illustration of a beaker sherd found at the shrine with a ceramic applique of a human, perhaps of non-European origin.

beakers represent only a fraction of the possible decorative variation of LNV colour-coated beakers. The most common classification of LNV colour-coated beakers recognizes 31 separate types, each with its own decorative style and form.¹¹⁹ Beyond human figures, these beakers could be decorated with hunting scenes (known as “hunt cups”), barbotine scale work, or rouletting, and they could also be slipped in different colours. Worshippers at Higham Ferrers most likely would have had quite a large variety of these beakers through which to express their individual preferences in form and decoration before depositing them at the shrine.

These deliberate choices in the quality, style, and decoration of the cups and beakers

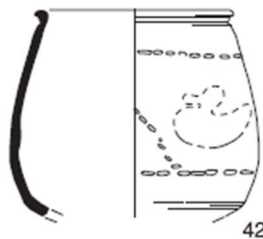


Figure 4.4. Illustration of a beaker with a duck motif decoration, found in the settlement. Diameter 9 cm.

deposited at the shrine demonstrate how closely tied these vessels were to worshippers. If they

¹¹⁹ Tyers 1996, 173.

were not intended to be representative of an individual worshipper, we might expect to see much less variety, or that all worshippers deposited the same type of vessel. Instead, worshippers used these choices to highlight specific aspects of themselves and their status in the community, whether their wealth or simply their decorative preferences. By depositing these vessels at the shrine, worshippers commemorated themselves as individuals.

This practice of commemorating the individual through the deposition of drinking vessels seems to be specific to Higham Ferrers. As we have seen, at both Carrawburgh and Folly Lane, beakers were shared amongst community members as necessary for the meal. While certain worshippers in these communities may have had or used their own beakers at a meal, they did not become a ceramic representation of the worshipper in the same way as at Higham Ferrers. At Carrawburgh in particular, the picture is rather the opposite. The number of beakers at each ritual meal compared to the number of participants suggests that sharing beakers was encouraged and that those beakers were therefore seen as community items. Their use in foundation deposits in the mithraeum also speak to the fact that these vessels were seen primarily as religiously significant items, rather than representations of individual worshippers.

Compared to similar religious sites, Higham Ferrers outstrips them all in the number of beakers found at the shrine.¹²⁰ Of the comparative sites specifically named in Lawrence and Smith's report, Lowbury Hill, a rural religious site, had only 12% beakers, while Barton Street, Manchester, an urban temple site, had 37%.¹²¹ Another urban religious site, Trentholme Drive in York, had 18% beakers, and even at the Carrawburgh mithraeum beakers made up on average 31% across all periods, although that number jumps to 45% and 42% in Phases IIa and IIc

¹²⁰ Timby in Lawrence and Smith 2009, 182-183.

¹²¹ Lowbury Hill: Timby 1994 in Fulford and Rippon; Barton Street: Leary 2007.

respectively.¹²² None of these sites come close to Higham Ferrers' 60% beakers. That this trend cannot be explained as a common feature at religious sites or as a factor of either a rural, urban, or military context strengthens the idea that Higham Ferrers had a unique practice of commemorating individual worshippers through the deposition of beakers.

Ritual dining at Higham Ferrers was embedded within the rhythms of daily life in the community, and so the connections between the settlement and the shrine must also be seen in that context. Rather than a strict division between the two spaces, the activities involved in conducting the practice of ritual dining elided that boundary. Although the food and the ceramics for meals at the shrine were selected from the settlement, worshippers intentionally highlighted aspects of the meal that would separate ritual meals from their everyday counterparts occurring in the settlement. Community members also used personal decorative items and beakers to commemorate themselves as individual worshippers at the shrine, displaying their wealth, status, and preferences to the community at large. Instead of pulling from regional or rural trends, ritual dining at Higham Ferrers largely speaks to unique ways the community used and conducted this practice. The uniqueness of this practice to Higham Ferrers highlights the need to view ritual dining as always situated within its context, inextricable from the community that practiced it.

¹²² Trentholme Drive: Evans 1993; Carrawburgh: Richmond and Gillam 1951.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

In each of these case studies, different aspects of ritual dining were highlighted and made significant by each community. At Carrawburgh, worshippers used ritual dining to create hierarchical experiences and control access to certain rituals and information. By emphasizing their shared experience of preparing food and then probably being excluded from the meal itself, initiates strengthened the bonds between themselves. At Folly Lane, worshippers used locally made, specialized vessels to commemorate a local hero/ancestor figure and his funerary rites that had been the catalyst for the resultant cult. By including these vessels in the meal assemblages and emphasizing the consumption and disposal stages of the meal, worshippers maintained their sense of identity tied to the local hero/ancestor figure. At Higham Ferrers, the distinction between shrine and settlement seems to have been blurred, and so worshippers made deliberate choices about meat and ceramic supply to the shrine to separate ritual meals from everyday dining. In emphasizing the disposal of beakers at the shrine, worshippers created opportunities for self-representation among a close-knit community. As exemplified by these differences, ritual dining as a practice is inseparable from and dependent upon the communities in which it is conducted.

That situatedness does not always reproduce the broad categories we might expect. I chose these three sites to test Mattingly's urban, rural, and military framework. Through the lens of ritual dining, only the military community, Carrawburgh, seems to draw on its military context. Made up mostly of soldiers from the nearby fort, the Carrawburgh mithraeum was a much more closed or bounded community than we see at either Folly Lane or Higham Ferrers. This insularity created an environment in which every member was drawing from the same set of experiences both within and outside the cult. The practice of ritual dining in this community was

then self-reflexive, in which members used ritual meals to recreate their shared experiences, such as their roles in military hierarchies. At Folly Lane and Higham Ferrers, on the other hand, we do not see this kind of insularity or self-reflexivity. Instead, rather than responding to their particular urban or rural contexts, the community of Folly Lane used ritual dining to commemorate its shared past, and that of Higham Ferrers to commemorate worshippers as individuals.

However, certain broad trends remain noticeable in the preferences for meat and ceramics. In terms of food supply, preference for sheep/goat seem overall to be a more rural characteristic, as it is the rural site, Higham Ferrers, that has the highest sheep/goat percentage of all three sites at 87.8%. Folly Lane also fits within the broader trends at urban sites with particularly high cattle numbers and low sheep/goat. With regards to ceramics, the urban setting of Folly Lane would have provided the easiest access to the continental imports trade, and so it is not surprising that Folly Lane, the urban site, had the highest proportion of terra sigillata on site at around 25%, compared to Carrawburgh at 3.4% or Higham Ferrers at 4.3%. By contrast, as the rural site, Higham Ferrers had the highest proportion of local wares, at 93.2%. Black burnished ware (BB1), a ubiquitous coarseware, also makes for an interesting comparison, being nearly nonexistent at Higham Ferrers (0.9%), in somewhat higher numbers at Folly Lane (5.2%), and a large proportion of the assemblage at Carrawburgh (41.4%). The relationship between BB1 and the military is well-documented and would explain the connection here.¹²³

However, these broader trends should not be seen as the defining characteristics of how ritual dining was conducted at any of these sites. As I have shown, these expected trends were notably not what worshippers in each of these three communities highlighted as most important to them. Instead, worshippers made deliberate choices that highlighted the distinctive nature of

¹²³ Allen and Fulford 1996, 267. See also Gerrard in Stallibrass and Thomas 2008.

ritual dining in each community. This fits well with Mattingly's idea of discrepant identity and the concept that identity construction must be seen as a situated process. While it is useful on a broad level to apply and work within categories like urban, rural, and military, based on these general trends, these categories are arbitrary and inherently limit our understanding of this material. Rather than applying these kinds of top-down categories, it is much more productive to look at ritual practices and ideas of worship-based identity in the context of discrete communities. In the three case studies examined above, we see only a brief snapshot of the ways in which a community in Roman Britain could use ritual dining as a form of 'grouping together'.

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