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10. Economy and Ritual: the use of Animal Bone in the Interpretation of the Iron Age to Roman Cultural Transition

by J. E. Richardson

Introduction

Animal bones in archaeology have traditionally been used as economic indicators. More recently, however, the ritual and symbolic content of such deposits has been stressed. This paper will attempt to utilise both interpretative paradigms in order to assess the extent of cultural change across the Iron Age – Roman period transition, in the Auvergne of central France. For example, it is accepted that the Roman domesticates were on average larger than their Iron Age predecessors. The economic interpretation of this size increase, associates changes in the nature of the assemblage with the coming of Rome and the Romanization of traditional indigenous agricultural practices. It is also possible, however, to develop the symbolic interpretation of such assemblages in order to investigate the underlying changes in society. Was this change purely economic in nature, or did it lead to far-reaching alterations in the foundations of the community's magico-ritual beliefs? Did the coming of Rome really lead to major economic and social changes in the indigenous society?

The Iron Age to Roman transition in Gaul has traditionally been viewed as a radical revolution in native cultural attitudes (cf. Drinkwater 1983:6; Dietler 1989:133–4). Gaul had already been exposed to the economic, social and cultural influences of Rome with the occupation of the Greek city state of *Massalia* by Roman forces in 125–120 BC (Drinkwater 1983:6; Collis 1984a:139; 1984b:22). Roman domination, however, was made more complete with the conquest of all Gaul by Caesar. But to what extent did these changes affect the lives of the inhabitants of rural Gaul? This research utilises the animal bones from the site of Le Pâtural which was occupied at this point of transition. The faunal remains are examined in order to determine whether there was a change in the ways in which animals were used economically and whether there were any changes in their use within the community's ritual activities. The variations that are identified are linked to either the process of Romanization or the on-going evolution of the indigenous society.

Le Pâtural, in the Auvergne of central France, was one of a number of settlements that occupied the fertile Limagne plain at this time (Mills 1985a:90). This site, along with La Grande Borne and others, shows evidence of abandonment as the inhabitants of the plain moved, apparently *en masse* to upland *oppida*, such as Gergovie, towards the end of the Iron Age (Mills 1985b:195; Woolf 1993:228). This is conceivably the site Caesar failed to take when faced by the local Arverni nobleman, Vercingetorix. Caesar was, of course, ultimately successful and soon after the Roman conquest, the Auvergne saw the abandonment of such imposing hilltop *oppida*. The renewed settlement of the plain included a major settlement at modern day Clermont-Ferrand (Augustonemetum) (Collis 1984b:78; Audouze & Büchsenschütz 1991:240). The foundation of this site has been

interpreted as economic rather than for defensive purposes (Collis 1976:8). The site of Le Pâtural also shows evidence of re-occupation in the Roman period. The archaeological evidence indicates that Roman ditches largely respected the alignments established in the late Iron Age, and one Roman ditch in fact re-cut an older feature (Collis *et al.* 1993:41). The burials identified from the Roman period also respected the Iron Age boundaries. This evidence suggests that, while occupation may have been intermittent or shifting, the farming of the land was a continuing feature and probably helped maintain a knowledge of abandoned settlements.

Animal Bone and Romanization

Traditionally animal bones have been used to answer essentially economic questions. What species were being used? Which animals contributed most to the economy? Was meat or a range of secondary products being targeted? One phenomenon identified from the time of the Roman conquest is an increase in the size of the main domesticates. Such an increase has been given a functionalist explanation. Either the Romans brought in new domestic breeds to improve the indigenous Iron Age stock, or they introduced improved methods of animal husbandry (Maltby 1981:185; Maltby unpublished; Noddle 1984:122). A second line of inquiry, certainly identified from Romano-British samples, is the adoption of a Romanized diet. The acculturation of native sites has been identified with an increase in 'foreign' elements, in particular, pigs (King 1978:216; King 1991:15). More recently, however, animal bones have also been seen as indicators of symbolic coding and ritual activities. Their treatment, the patterning of remains upon deposition, the associations and disassociations and their final contexts have been used to indicate their involvement in the religious life of a community. It is hoped that with the introduction of ritual themes it may be possible to identity not only economic changes, but also ideological shifts in emphasis during this period of transition.

This paper will present evidence for an increase in the size of the domesticates at Le Pâtural. It will be established whether the phenomenon can be assigned to a period that post-dates the Roman conquest, or results from changes already under way before the dominance of Rome. The evidence for a change in dietary preferences over time will also be examined. The data will be assessed with reference to the contents of La Tène B, C and D ditches, as well as Roman features. Finally, an attempt will be made to identify the ritualised use of these same domesticates. In particular, the symbolic significance and depositional contexts of each species will be examined over time.

Size Increase

A metrical analysis of the bones from Le Pâtural and also from La Grande Borne a few kilometres away at Aulnat, indicates that the La Tène domesticates were the typical small, slender Iron Age creatures. Their small stature has been related to nutritional levels and more convincingly, to their relative genetic isolation (Meniel 1987:12–3). Certainly by the Roman period at Le Pâtural there is evidence for significant size increases (cf. Maltby 1985a:65). This increase is usually linked to an importation of new herds or selected breeders by the Romans. An opening up of western Europe is also seen as beneficial for a mixing of the animal populations (cf. Maltby 1981:189; Meniel 1984:39), however, a more symbolic interpretation may also be feasible. Perhaps livestock were not simply seen as quantities of meat and providers of milk, wool and hides. Reid (1996:44) has

recognised that cattle can be economically valuable while *simultaneously* symbolising social and political power. It is possible that larger animals were seen to represent something foreign while the smaller Iron Age creatures embodied concepts of an indigenous nature. The debate, however, is whether these size changes and the associated social transformations were in evidence prior to the conquest of Gaul or were directly influenced by Rome.

The site of Le Pâtural has revealed a succession of ditches from La Tène B to La Tène D. The metrical data from the bones within these ditches has been compared to the bone measurements from the Roman ditches. Table 1 includes a number of common measurements from cow and sheep bones. Pig bones are not included as there is a large variation in their size (Maltby unpublished) and there were too few measurements from horse bones to make a comparison viable. In order to highlight the implications of the results only one of the two final columns were marked. The results indicate that either size increases were underway in the La Tène period or that increases came about around the time of re-occupation. From this evidence, an increase in animal size over the La Tène era is quite clear; it is also apparent that this increase continued into the Roman period. Maltby (1985b:111) also recognises that size modifications may have begun before the arrival of the Romans. An increase in the average size of sheep can be witnessed in Iron Age levels within Britain.

These data, however, do not allow us to give all the credit to Iron Age farmers who appreciated the benefits of improved nutrition or more extensive breeding regimes. The inhabitants of Le Patural during the early Roman occupation did not merely see a continuation of processes already identified in the Iron Age. The *substantially* greater sized Roman animals imply that new stock was being imported, or that Roman occupation had opened up the country to an extent that the indigenous population benefited by trading their animals much further afield. It is also possible that the large and 'foreign' livestock became desirable objects that provided extra meat but also made

		LA TENE B	LA TENE C	LA TENE D	ROMAN	INCREASE PRE-ROMAN	INCREASE ROMAN
COW							
Scapula	GLP	512	580		863	###	
	SLC	363	362	561	665	###	
Humerus	Bd	760	772			###	
Tibia	Bd	574	574	622		###	
Calcaneum	GL		1184		1610		###
Metatarsal	Bp		409	406	621		###
	Bd		585	549	702		###
SHEEP							
Metacarpal	Bp		206	208		###	
Tibia	Bd	254	240		257		###
Metatarsal	Bp	180	178				
	Bd	202	220			###	

Table 1. Metrical data from cow and sheep bones from La Tène and Roman deposits at Le Pâtural

GLP = greatest length of glenoid process, SLC = smallest length of neck of scapula, Bd = greatest breadth of distal end, GL = greatest length, Bp = greatest breadth of proximal end. All measurements to the tenth of a millimetre. Mean measurement given.

powerful socio-cultural statements. Overall the result was a mixing of populations and an increase in the potential to select preferred breeders. The conquest, therefore, whilst amplifying trends that dated back into the Iron Age, rapidly expanded the potential of these indigenous farmers (cf. Meniel 1984:15, 38).

Dietary Changes

A recording of the species present at Iron Age Le Pâtural indicate that the major domesticates, sheep, pigs, cows and horses were being utilised, in that order of importance (figure 1). From the La Tène B, C and D features it is clear that the numbers of cows, pigs and horses remained fairly stable over time. The exception is the continuous decline in sheep over this period. The Roman assemblage from Le Pâtural indicates that cattle became increasingly important at the expense of sheep and pigs but that the numbers of horses increased most dramatically. It is apparent from figure 1 that the most significant shift in species numbers occurred as Le Pâtural was re-occupied in the Roman period. Only the sheep maintain the trend that is already in evidence across the La Tène period. Whether these effects are of Roman influence or are related to indigenous manipulation is unclear, although changes in species proportions after several hundred years of stability may indicate the former. Meniel, an archaeozoologist who concentrates on sites in northern France, believes the influence of the Roman world is perceptible after the conquest as horse and dogs are no longer consumed (Meniel 1992:16) and cattle increase in number at the expense of pigs (Meniel 1987:68). Certainly dogs and horses cease to be butchered at Roman Le Pâtural and cattle numbers do rise as pig numbers fall.

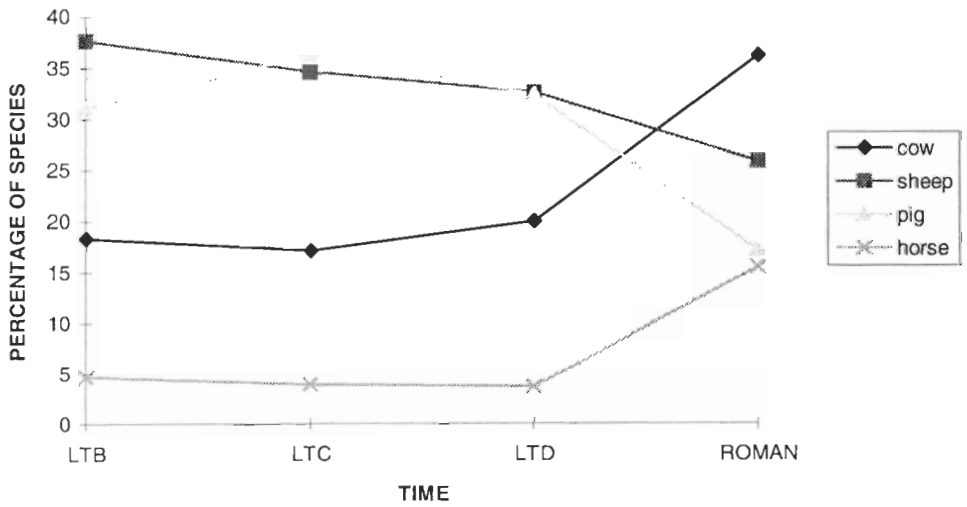

Figure 1. Percentage of species from the La Tène to early Roman period at Le Pâtural

Ritual Activities

The interpretation of Iron Age societies, however, has undergone something of a revolution in recent years. There has been a realisation that Iron Age society was structured differently from our own, with its own rules, social codes and rituals (Hill 1989:22). Cunliffe has charted this development through the changing conception of pits. He details the sequence of interpretation from pits as houses, pits as silos, to pits as symbolically structured features. They are embedded in a social, spatial and religious framework (Cunliffe 1992:82). The analysis of the faunal component of Iron Age material culture has also developed along similar lines. Where animal bones were once taken as indicators of a site's economic situation, now they are viewed with reference to the structuring principles of that society (cf. Rackham 1995). The new aim is to make economic and ritual interpretation the twin goals of faunal analysis.

Traditionally animal deposits have been considered 'special', 'significant' or 'symbolic' when they have been in a state of completeness, when skulls have been deposited, when animals have been placed in association with other objects and when the context of deposition has been considered unusual (Grant 1984a:533, 1989:79, 1991:109). More recently, however, Hill has questioned the perceived dichotomy between these apparently ritualised deposits and the disarticulated fragments that are commonly viewed as economic waste (Hill 1995). With the realisation that these apparently mundane, random deposits may also be symbolically coded, comes the necessity to examine the spatial context and associations of all forms of material culture (Parker Pearson 1996:125). To date, the analysis of the faunal remains from the Iron Age and Roman deposits of Le Pâtural has concentrated on the spatial patterning of bone on discard. The data presented here represents initial results. Statistical analysis is continuing, in particular with reference to the disarticulated bone remains and their spatial context. The association of other objects also remains to be determined. The recording of skeletons, partial skeletons and skulls, however, has allowed these particular finds to be mapped and the incidence of species present has also been compared to their presence in the disarticulated bone contexts.

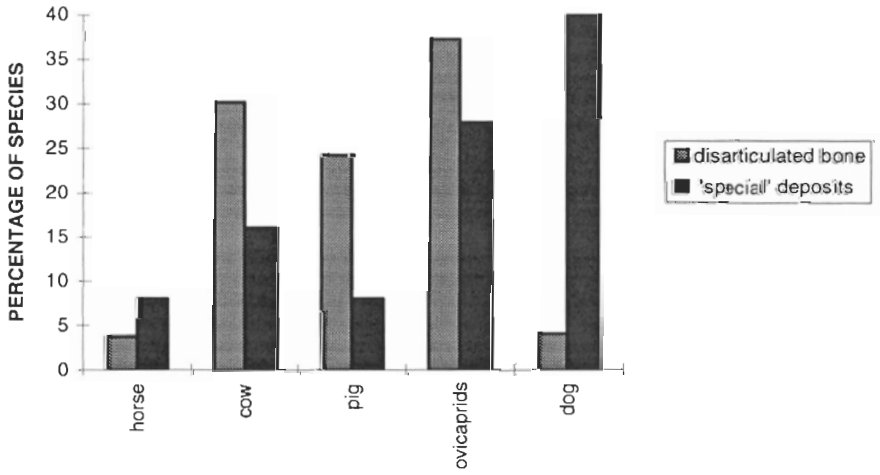

Figure 2. Percentage of species present in the disarticulated bone deposits and 'special' deposits from Le Pâtural

Firstly, the skulls and skeletons from Iron Age Le Pâtural indicate that dogs are much more likely to appear in ritual deposits. Figure 2 shows the dominance of dogs in such special deposits as compared to the presence of other species. Horse also appears more commonly in a state of completeness (cf. Maltby 1994:10). The choice of these two species as symbolic signifiers has been recognised in other Iron Age contexts (Grant 1991:110; Cunliffe 1992:75). A highly structured example comes from Vertault, where over forty horses and 150 dogs were deposited whole and according to strict rules of placement (Meniel 1992:71, 82). For some the use of horses and dogs in these contexts is related to the practical considerations of minimising economic loss. Both species are of restricted use and hence are available to be used as symbols and sacrifices (cf. Grant 1984a:522; 1984b:224). A funerary deposit from Tartigny, which contained horse, dog and also hare, has been seen as symbolic of 'the chase' (Meniel 1989:96). For Lévi-Strauss (1962:207) and Sahlins (1975:174) there is an ideological link between dogs, horses and humans, as the two animal species are perceived as part of human society and are subjects rather than objects. Hill (1995:107) considers that dogs, horses and humans are alike as they all need training and discipline. Perhaps in this light they make a suitable substitute for human sacrifice.

An analysis of the patterning of these deposits across the site indicates a tendency for skeletons and skulls to be placed within ditch deposits. This phenomenon, however, can be explained by taphonomic processes. Any skulls or skeletons placed on the surfaces within the enclosures could have been trampled beyond identification. There does, however, seem to be a tendency for these finds to be placed at the intersection of ditches. There is also a concentration of skeletons and skulls in the region of the river which forms the northern boundary of the site. Together these two locations account for seventy-two percent of the 'special' Iron Age deposits. Of the deposits in the ditches, sixty-four percent are dog: there are no horses, and the river deposit contains twenty-five percent dog and thirteen percent horse. These particular species do not dominate the layers at ditch intersections, where sheep make up fifty percent of these deposits. Overall, Iron Age Le Pâtural reveals an emphasis on dogs in particular as symbolic animals and their dominance on the riverine boundary may be significant in terms of liminality. This observation of transition may be linked to Hill's (1995:107) interpretation of dogs (and also horses) as sitting between the wild and untameable animals and the more placid and submissive domesticates.

Fewer 'ritual' skulls and skeletons have been identified from the less rich Roman deposits. Nevertheless, they are still situated at ditch intersections or towards ditch terminals. It may be significant, that no 'special' dog deposits were noted from Roman layers, despite the fact that the relative percentages of this species remained stable over time. The absence of butchery marks on the dog bones indicate that canids were seen as inedible by this time. Inedibility of this species has been linked to their participation in human society (Sahlins 1975:174) but also to their association with dirt and filth (Tambiah 1969:435). It is possible that the inhabitants of Roman Le Pâtural maintained some rules of placement in their ritualised activities while accepting new ideas on the perceptions of their common domesticates.

Conclusion

The ultimate aim for working with this evidence of size increase, economic change and ritualised deposition, is to address the belief of Haselgrove and Scull that there has been a failure to distinguish between changes set in motion by the conquest itself and changes that merely represent an intensification of existing trends (1992:9). In response to the apparent dichotomy of indigenous

adaptation and ingenuity versus Roman influence, this paper suggests that the data from Le Pâtural reveal a number of economic trends that continue through the La Tène period and into the Roman era. The arrival of the Romans certainly amplified these changes and provided different opportunities, as the influence of Rome opened up western Europe to an extent that had never been seen before, and this cannot have left communities unaffected (cf. Drinkwater 1983:124). Nevertheless, it is possible that the indigenous population of this part of central France may have assimilated new ideas concerning diet and increased productivity by introducing breeds from further afield, while refusing to accept wholesale a new cultural way of life (cf. Hamilton 1995:41).

If so, it is significant that ritual practices are also affected in this period. For example, 'special' deposits hint at a continuation of the use of skulls and skeletons as symbolic signifiers; as well as a continuation of rules that govern their placement. The animals being utilised in such acts, however, seem to indicate a change in emphasis according to species. There is a move away from the dog, which was the preferred Iron Age symbolic deposit. The dog was also seen by this earlier community as an edible commodity. Perhaps a similarity of deposition is being maintained while changes in species use represents some level of ideological shift. It may be suggested that Roman Le Pâtural saw a continuation of native ritual deposition but one that had been modified to incorporate Roman ideals. The inhabitants of Roman Le Pâtural took on board the Roman prohibition on the consumption of dog, while maintaining an indigenous ritualised tradition that deposited animals in specific contexts. Overall, breeding, diet and ritual practice, indicate that some continuation of indigenous practices did occur, but that a fusion with Roman cultural ideals led to a creation of a specifically Gallo-Roman society.

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