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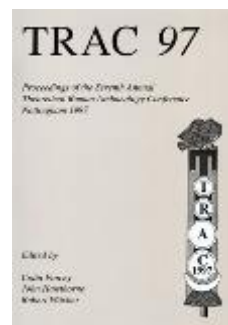
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From Death to Deposition: the sequence of ritual in cremation burials of the Roman period

by John Pearce

Introduction

It is increasingly acknowledged by the archaeologists of the Roman provinces that we need to understand not only broad economic and social changes, but also how these changes were understood and mediated by those who lived through them, in particular the ideological form that such mediation took (Metzler *et al.* 1995). Ideology can be defined in its broadest sense as:

a system of ideas, values and norms which structure human behaviour and thought. In this sense ideology cannot be isolated from the religious, social, political, or economic aspects of Romanization, for it is central to them all. (Millett, Roymans and Slofstra 1995:2)

Given this current favourable disposition towards the study of ideology, it is an appropriate moment to give renewed attention to how a body of material more traditionally related to the ideological sphere, that is the archaeological evidence for the mortuary practices of Roman Britain and neighbouring provinces, can be made central to the study of provincial Roman society. This evidence is paradoxically highly familiar yet, until recently, relatively little exploited. Its under-utilised potential has been recognised in a number of studies of the last two decades (e.g. Galliou 1992; Ferdière 1993; Jones 1983; Philpott 1991; Struck 1993, 1995). However, analysis has yet to assimilate the implications of more general work on the relationship of mortuary practice to society (Morris 1992), in particular the 'post-processual' critique. It is difficult for a brief formulation to encapsulate adequately the diverse and often contradictory facets of a 'post-processual' perspective. Expressed at its simplest, however, it suggests that the society of the living cannot be 'read off' directly from the mortuary record. Instead the dead represent an idealised form, an idealisation that depends on the attitudes in any given society of the living towards the dead: 'the pattern of death reinforces a societal ideal which is only part of what exists in practice and about which there is concern' (Hodder 1982:143).

My aim in this paper is to suggest one route to explore how these idealised representations are created. It is intended to complement the different methods that have already been offered (e.g. Parker Pearson 1993). The identity of the dead is a construct, but a construct that is not single, given and fixed, but is created, contested and adapted during the course of funerary rituals. Studies of mortuary practices of the Neolithic and Bronze Age have explored the changing identities given to the dead in mortuary rituals that could be extended not only over years but even decades or centuries (Mizoguchi 1993; Shanks and Tilley 1982; Thomas 1989). Whilst the long-term interaction of the dead with the living can be investigated profitably in the Roman period, this paper will argue that the sequence of ritual in the individual funeral can also be investigated, in particular from data derived from the excavation of cemeteries from which cremation burials have been recovered. This paper is therefore organised as follows. Firstly, attention is directed to the data that are available from Roman cremation cemeteries which allow a reconstruction of not only the deposition of cremated bone and grave goods but also the preceding and subsequent phases of ceremonial. Secondly, to characterise mortuary practices as

a process rather than as a single event encourages us to explore aspects which have been little examined previously but which may be archaeologically accessible. Archaeological examples are derived not only from Late pre-Roman Iron Age (LPRIA) and early Roman Britain but also from neighbouring provinces where, for reasons discussed below, there has been greater attention to deposits other than grave goods. Although some aspects of burial practice are shared between these provinces (see below), this is not to imply that an identical mortuary culture was practised across them. Nor do I intend to suggest that this approach is not applicable to the cremation cemeteries of Rome or Italy, which demonstrate interesting diversity (Struck 1995). Instead this sample area is chosen because of the availability of valuable evidence to illustrate the wealth of this approach. Thirdly, a case study based on the cemetery of King Harry Lane, St Albans, will illustrate how not only individual aspects but also the structure behind the sequence of funerary ritual may be interpreted as an idealisation of the identity of the dead.

Frequently occurring terms in this paper should first be clarified. The 'funeral' and 'funerary' and 'mortuary' practices are defined as the entire range of ceremonial, not only the final interment. 'Burial' is the act of deposition of the body or cremated bone and whatever has been chosen to accompany it, and 'burial' or 'grave' the archaeological feature containing body and sometimes other artefacts. 'Pyre goods' are those artefacts deposited by the mourners on the pyre, although they need not strictly speaking have been placed to accompany the deceased on the pyre but may have been destroyed on the pyre after use by the mourners. 'Commemoration' is used as a shorthand for other ceremonies that took place in the cemetery but were not strictly related to an individual funeral, for example festivals of the dead (e.g. Toynbee 1971).

Sources of reconstruction – a 'typology' of cemetery deposits

Most discussions of the mortuary practice of any period acknowledge that burial is only the final episode in a ceremonial of which it need not be the most significant element. Cremation is, however, often conceived of as particularly destructive of evidence of earlier rituals (Roymans 1990:219). Whilst cremation is a taphonomic agent, its effects, however, include the preservation of evidence which allows us to reconstruct much of the funerary ritual. The potential for reconstruction is not exclusive to cremation cemeteries, but the nature of cremation does give a wider range of evidence a preservational 'niche'. What follows is not intended to be a comprehensive survey but to indicate the range of evidence that should be available from well preserved and recorded cemeteries. This has been alluded to by previous writers (e.g. Black 1986) but not previously discussed at any length. Although literary evidence is mostly related to Italy, especially Rome, it does offer occasional insights into pre- and post-conquest practice in the provinces in question, as does epigraphic material (e.g. Hatt 1986). However, due to limitations on space, this paper confines itself largely to archaeological data.

The recognition of the possibility of extracting anthropological data from cremated human bone has been accompanied by a realisation that aspects of cremation technology and of pre-burial ritual could be inferred from the same material. The study of the cremations from the Spong Hill Anglo-Saxon cemetery (McKinley 1994a) provides a model for the study of pyre technology and ritual through cremated human bone, posing questions on the temperature reached by the pyre, the efficiency of cremation, the layout of the body on the pyre and the artefacts placed with it or the efficiency of collection of cremated bone. The study of cremated bone will not be considered further here, save to observe that, unfortunately, published examinations of cremated human bone in equivalent detail in the Roman period are still rare (see Wahl and Kokabi 1988 for an exception).

Pyre sites have been not infrequently observed during excavations but are often only

cursorily recorded, for example, Trentholme Drive, York (Wenham 1968), or St Stephens, St Albans (Davey 1935). Since they often consist of fragile, easily eroded deposits (see Gaitzch and Werner 1993 for an experimental example), the poor preservation of pyre sites, for example of that from Corbridge, Northumberland (Casey and Hoffmann 1995), is easily explained. The apparent absence of evidence for a pyre site from a cemetery must therefore take into account the overall degree of preservation of the site. While spreads of pyre deposits can survive, as at Septfontaines-Déckt, Luxembourg (Polfer 1996), or Vatteville-la-Rue, Seine Maritime (Lequoy 1987), pyre debris is more likely to survive when it has been dumped in pits or ditches (e.g., Destelbergen and Velzeke, Belgium; van Doorsaeler and Rogge 1985).

The other principal context from which pyre debris may be recovered is the grave itself, either where debris has remained in situ in the *bustum* grave or if deposited alongside the in-urned cremated bone (*Brandschüttungsgrab*), or if cremated bone and pyre debris were tipped pell-mell into the grave (*Brandgrubengrab*) (Bechert 1980). The presence of pyre material in graves has been more often and more completely recorded in provinces other than Britain. Pyre material was not only probably more frequently included in graves in other provinces but greater attention has also been paid to its recording because of its value as an indicator, albeit controversial, of the ethnic or cultural affiliation of the deceased or of the mourners (Nierhaus 1969). In view of the frequent deposition of pyre debris in cremation burials elsewhere, its absence from graves in Britain is surprising, although it has sometimes been noted in older excavations, again, for example, at Trentholme Drive, and more often in recent excavations, for example, the extensive cemetery excavations at Baldock, Hertfordshire (Burleigh 1993). Evidence for pyre goods may survive even when pyre debris is not deliberately deposited in the grave: cremated animal bone and small fragments of artefacts that have fused to bone may be accidentally extracted with the cremated human bone from the pyre.

The deposition of material in the grave not only provides information on other aspects of funerary ritual but also has a structure of its own (see further below). Care seems sometimes to have been exercised in the choice of back-fill of the grave. For example the 1.5m deep fill of grave 1 at Cucuron (Vaucluse) was composed largely of clean charcoal (Hallier *et al.* 1990:152), perhaps with a purificatory motive analogous to medieval charcoal graves. Other deposits may represent the product of funerary feasting, for example, the layers of broken ceramics above burials at Alton, Hampshire (Millett 1986:82). A combination of flagon or jug with bowl, in ceramic or glass form, was regularly deposited above the chambers within the tumuli from Esch, North Brabant (van den Hurk 1984:14), which the author argues to represent materials used in a purification ritual. The most obvious example of the 'vertical structure' of the grave is perhaps the 'pipe burial' (Toynbee 1971:51–2), a lead or ceramic tube projecting above the ground from the grave to allow libations to be poured to the dead.

Other deposits are also often excavated, the formation processes of which are not always clear, nor their sequential relationship to other aspects of the ceremony. Wigg (1993) has for example isolated a group of deposits (*Aschengruben*) recovered from beneath barrows and from cemeteries in the Rhineland, Britain, and Belgium. They date from the mid-first to the early third centuries AD and take the form of oval, round or rectangular depressions 0.2–0.5m deep, 0.5–2.99m long and 0.75–2.6m wide, filled with ash, charcoal, burnt ceramics, glass and metalwork and cremated animal bone. Superficially their contents resembles pyre debris but, due to the lack of human bone, Wigg (1993) has interpreted them as the residue of funeral feasting which had been destroyed on the pyre or as pyre offerings placed far enough from the corpse to avoid contamination with cremated human bone. Larger deposits of this type, for example, from Roanne, Loire (Vaginay 1987:110–11) or Argentomagus, Indre (Allain *et al.* 1992:26–28, 38), must represent similar cumulative deposits associated with many funerals.

Other deposits seem likely to be the product of funerary feasting, again associated with individual graves, for example spreads of amphorae from Holborough, Kent (Jessup 1954) or Clemency, Luxembourg (Metzler *et al.* 1991), or with larger cemeteries, for example, the large dump of amphorae from Fréjus St-Lambert, Var (Béraud and Gébara 1987:25).

Certain types of deposit, such as the burials of part or whole animal carcasses that frequently occur on cemetery sites (Lepetz 1993:42), can perhaps be characterised as 'offerings' to the dead, although they are difficult to place chronologically within the sequence of funerary ritual. Sometimes stratigraphic evidence allows such deposits to be identified as the product of later ritual, for example, the burnt offerings deposited in pits cut into the burial mound at Clemency (Metzler *et al.* 1991).

The latest form of deposit was in some cases the memorial or marker. Evidence for any form of tomb marker is rare, although given the relatively infrequent intercutting of graves in many cemeteries, the majority were probably marked in some way. Memorials in permanent materials were probably erected over a small minority of graves only; in Britain this is a military rather than a civilian habit.

Finally the enclosure ditches or walls which divided up or divided off cemetery space, or even the non-funerary activities which took place amongst the tombs or cemeteries, should also be taken into account to give as full a picture of the 'life' of the cemetery as possible. On rural sites graves do not always lie within demarcated cemetery areas (Philpott and Reece 1993); the relationship of the burial to the rhythms of the use of rural settlement space needs much further attention (for recent approaches to Iron Age settlement space see Hill 1995).

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Sources of evidence</i>
Pre-pyre rituals	Cemetery structures, cremated bone
Pyre – location, orientation, construction, efficiency, pyre goods	Pyre and <i>bustum</i> sites, pyre debris, cremated bone
Pyre-side ritual	Pyre debris, <i>Aschengruben</i>
Collection from pyre	Cremated bone, presence/absence of pyre debris
Grave-size, orientation, arrangement and deposition of grave goods	Cemetery and grave plan, grave goods
Marker	Tombstone, mausoleum, barrow, enclosure and other markers
Commemorative feasting, sacrifice etc.	<i>Aschengruben</i> , animal deposits, ceramics, coin hoards etc.

Table 1. Death to Deposition

Table 1 relates these different types of deposit to a simplified sequence of funerary ritual. As well as the problems mentioned above there are a series of obstacles to reconstruction, which can only be briefly noted here. The most frequent hindrance is the usual cursory reference to non-burial deposits from most cemeteries. Deposits from the different stages of ritual are subject to differential survival, for example, if pyre debris is not deposited in a pit or ditch but lies on the surface. There are also preservational differences between deposits that have or have not been subject to cremation; for example, plant and other foods may be preserved by charring on the pyre (Marinval 1993) but they will not be preserved as grave goods save in exceptional circumstances. In an acidic burial environment cremated animal remains may be preserved but those deposited unburnt in the grave will not.

Even where deposits have been properly recovered and recorded, analysis faces further

obstacles. Whilst grave deposits are normally the product of only one depositional episode, pyre deposits, with the exceptions of *busta* and 'one-off' *ustrinae* (Witteyer 1993), are the cumulative deposit from many burnings (e.g. Destelbergen, Septfontaines-Dëckt). When pyre debris is placed in the grave, material from previous cremations may contaminate the deposit if the same pyre site was in use, illustrated by the frequent observation of sherds from the same vessel in several different graves. It may only be possible in some instances to compare pyre and grave goods as general categories rather than as related to individual graves. Whether pyre debris is the residue of artefacts placed with the dead on the pyre or those destroyed after use by the mourners is a problem well illustrated by the varying interpretations offered for *Aschengruben* (Wigg 1993). The difficulty of making this distinction also calls into question our classification of funerary behaviour as well as our understanding of formation processes. A terminology of 'goods' may not do justice to the complicated relationship between the mourner, the artefact and the deceased. An examination of the 'presentation' of the dead at different stages is perhaps a more appropriate perspective. Other evidence also suggests that the funeral is most appropriately investigated as a series of 'presentations' or 'representations', as we cannot know the relative order in which choices were made. Indeed, the contents of wills suggest that the order of some ceremonies, at least if the wishes of the deceased were respected, had been pre-ordained long before (e.g. the Testamentum Lingonum, CIL XIII, 5708). Table 1, therefore, describes the order in which the pyre goods, grave goods or monument were presented rather than the order in which decisions about them were made.

Finally, this full sequence may not have been accorded to the majority of the population even in areas where cremation has been assumed to be the majority practice, for example south-east England in the first and second centuries AD. In this area, in this respect perhaps not atypical of much of the north-western provinces, most of the large cremation cemeteries are associated with urban or small town sites. The treatment of the rural dead, especially of the early Roman period, remains poorly understood (Philpott and Reece 1993). Increasingly recent large-scale excavations suggests that not only infant but also adult bodies were buried on settlement sites in a diversity of deposits, grouped or single burials in formal cemeteries, graves alongside or within settlement or field boundary ditches, or isolated burials in parts of a compound no longer occupied by other features. Bodies may also have been treated in mortuary rituals that have left no archaeological trace save perhaps for the occasional occurrence of individual skeletal elements on settlement sites. The distribution of graves at Owslebury illustrates well the diversity of grave types on rural settlements (Collis 1977). Therefore whilst cremation cemetery deposits offer an underexploited opportunity to reconstruct funerary practice, our access is only fragmentary and partial, and we should take care to identify the fraction of the population which was subject to the full treatment from pyre to grave.

Examples

The most obvious benefit of proper recovery of non-burial as well as burial deposits is a reconstruction of funerary rituals in much greater detail and thus a reduced dependency on the literary accounts for pre-burial ceremonial that relate mostly to Italy, particularly Rome itself, but which have been applied to the Roman world as a whole (Toynbee 1971). Of the hitherto neglected aspects of mortuary practice I can give only two examples here.

The spatial organisation of the Roman cemetery is a topic often considered, for instance, the relationship between the monument or grave and the street frontage, the division of the cemetery into family, status or professional/*collegium* based groups, or in the later Roman period the orientation of inhumation graves and its relationship to Christianity. The organisation of the

cremation grave has however received little attention. The importance of within-grave 'vertical organisation' has already been alluded to, but cremation burials have also yet to be explored in the horizontal plane. Where grave shape permits, a comparison of the orientation of cremation burials with inhumations will allow a better understanding of the relationship between the two burial types. The internal layout of the grave sometimes displays striking patterns, although these have rarely been examined. The position of the cremated bone on the forty-six published grave plans from King Harry Lane (Stead and Rigby 1989) is displayed in figure 1. It should be noted that only the larger graves were published, and examination of the site archive has shown that in most cases the grave was the minimum size necessary to accommodate cremated bone and grave goods. Nevertheless two trends are worthy of note in these larger graves. First, there appears to be a preference for placing the

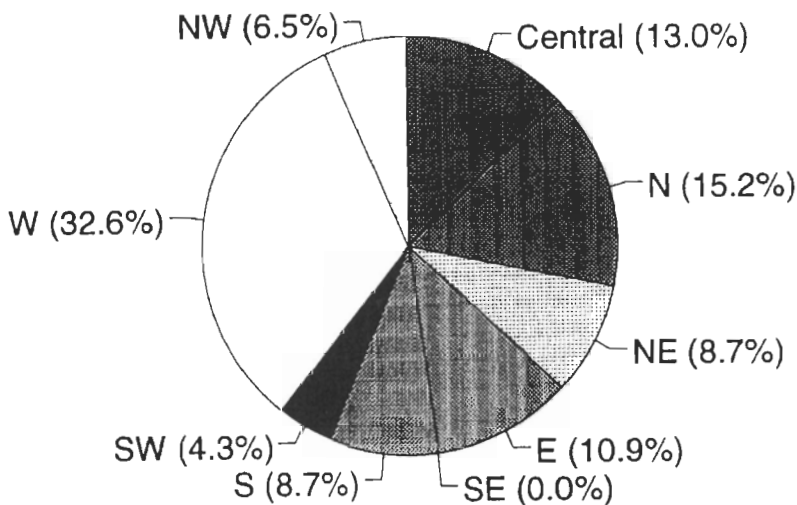


Figure 1. Place of Cremated Bone in Grave Plans from KHL (no. 46).

cremated bone in the western and northern part of the grave. Second, the south-eastern part of the grave is avoided, although it is the favoured location for round house entrances. Whether the location of cremated bone related to the prescribed position of the mourners around the grave or to the organisation of the grave itself, its placing was undoubtedly related to the cosmological schemes that have been detected in the layout of settlement space in the Iron Age and the Roman period (Haselgrove 1995; Oswald 1997).

The relative importance of the pyre vis-à-vis the grave is perhaps the most obvious issue to benefit from the proper recording and retrieval of all types of feature from a cremation cemetery. McKinley (1994b) has recently argued that the pyre may have featured more prominently in Anglo-Saxon than in Romano-British cremations, but this assessment is based on only the fragments of pyre debris which have been collected with what are mostly 'clean' assemblages of cremated bone. The same difference in collection practice also perhaps accounts for Philpott's observation (1991:220-1) that the pyre rather than the grave received greater emphasis as a location for display in northern and military Roman Britain than in the south-east. This impression is based, however, on a very small number of cemeteries from northern Britain. In southern Britain the pyre may appear to be relatively unimportant because of the collection of 'clean' assemblages of cremated bone, whereas in northern Britain *busta* and *Brandschuttgräber* are more frequent. Where pyre debris has been preserved and recorded from southern Britain, from beneath barrows, for example, Holborough, Kent (Jessup 1954) or from relatively modest graves, for example, Victoria Road/Hyde Street, Winchester (Winchester Museums VR Tr VIII-XV), substantial quantities of artefacts were recovered. Judgement on both period and regional distinctions in Roman Britain are better deferred until a larger sample of pyre deposits is properly recorded. The best current characterisation is perhaps of local diversity.

A case can also be made for a structured relationship between the pyre and grave. Polfer (1996:108-13) has demonstrated significant differences in the pyre and grave ceramic assemblages from Septfontaines. For example samian constitutes 37.6 % of the pyre assemblage but only 4.2% of the grave goods and forms related to eating dominate the pyre assemblage in contrast to a majority of drinking related forms among the grave goods. This example suggests a difference in the activities presented at the pyre and at the grave. For the final part of this paper I wish to explore an alternative hypothesis, that these differences in part reflect the changing construction of the identity of the dead by the living during the course of the funeral.

The funeral is not the only context in which the relationship between living and dead is acted out, either in the Roman period or any other. Nor is the structure of the funeral the only area in which the concepts of time and death can be profitably discussed. The idea that death rituals are structured through time is hardly new but is still regarded as an indispensable explanatory framework (Metcalf and Huntington 1992). Metcalf and Huntington have applied a developed form of van Gennep and Hertz's interpretation and schematization of the structure of the rite of passage to a series of ethnographic and historical case studies. They propose that cross-cultural death rituals are organised in three stages, rites of separation, transition and incorporation. The mourners are initially separated both from the rest of the society and from the deceased. Through the course of ritual they rid themselves of the pollution of death and re-order the relationships among the survivors. Conversely the deceased through this sequence becomes one of the dead, integrated with the ancestors and no longer a source of potential harm to the living. The rituals often draw on the symbolism deployed in other areas of life, for example, in practices associated with the promotion of fertility. By its integration in a broader symbolic network the treatment of the dead participates in wider classificatory systems that contrast living and dead, domestic and wild, culture and nature, group members and strangers etc. in order to control potential sources of danger or contamination. Absolute states in this relationship

between living and dead are never achieved. Instead the relationship is negotiated and 'fixed' periodically through the calendar. Roman festivals of the dead provide a clear example of this recurring relationship (Scheid 1984).

Shanks and Tilley (1982) have argued that social relationships can also be expressed through these classificatory schemes and can borrow the same qualities of being given, natural and fixed. A tension may however also exist between the different conceptions of an ideal social order held by the different groups participating. Mizoguchi (1993) for example, suggests that different groups use their reserved knowledge of behaviour appropriate at specific times during the ceremony as a resource in the re-ordering of social relationships that follows death.

The identity given to the dead therefore changes through the mortuary rite. It is not easy, perhaps even impossible, to correlate the features of the archaeological evidence specifically with any of the different stages of separation, transition and incorporation. However, this approach can be given an archaeologically usable format by exploiting the source material described in the first part of this paper, through which we are allowed at least partial visibility of the funerary process. Unlike the anthropologist we cannot observe the living; however their concerns are accessible through their presentation of the dead.

To illustrate the application of this approach I wish to explore the treatment of men and women and of adults and children at two 'slices' through the funerary sequence, via the pyre goods that were collected with the cremated bone and via the grave goods from the cemetery of King Harry Lane, St Albans (Stead and Rigby 1989) [1]. The principal period of use of the cemetery is from c.10 BC to 60 AD, although the end of phase 3 may have been ascribed too late a date. The majority of graves in this phase probably date to the pre-conquest period (Haselgrove and Millett 1997:291). Only the sample of aged and sexed burials, including definite and probable identifications, is examined here (table 2). Changes in ritual between the different phases of the cemetery are not studied in detail, as further subdivision of sample of aged and sexed burials would render an already small number of burials almost impossible to exploit. In any case there does not appear to be a change in practices relating to different age or gender groups between phases. For example, the relative proportions of the different age and gender groups change little, although the number of sexed burials declines over time (Millett 1993:261). Nor does the general reduction over time in the numbers of grave and pyre goods (copper alloy, glass, worked bone) (Millett 1993:266), affect age or gender groups differentially. The proportion of graves with animal bone remains constant (Pearce 1994). In fact this process might equally well be characterised as homogenisation (see below).

<i>Category</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Number of individuals</i>
Male	Adult	74
Female	Adult	24
Adult	17+ yrs	280
Sub adult	c.12-17 yrs	15
Child	Birth-12 yrs	23

Table 2. Ages and sexes of burials from King Harry Lane cemetery, St Albans.

Of artefacts placed on the pyre, there was some differentiation between the treatment of male and female burials. Although there was no difference in the species associated with either group, male burials are more likely to be associated with pig skulls, and female with the hind parts of the animal (Gleghorn 1992). The percentage of child burials with animal bone is much lower

than that of adults. Other pyre goods were represented primarily by unidentifiable fragments of copper alloy, worked bone and glass, although where recognisable these artefacts were amongst the 'finest' recovered from the cemetery. These goods were associated almost entirely with adults. Niblett (1997) has also pointed out that these molten fragments are also primarily associated with the 'founder' burials at the centre of some of the enclosures. In contrast there was little difference related to age or gender in the main categories of grave goods, ceramics and brooches, although the number of brooches deposited with female burials was slightly higher than that deposited with males. Of graves associated with the more rarely occurring grave goods, very few were sexed, but those that were sexed upset normal expectations: possible male burials were associated in different instances with a mirror, bracelets, and toilet instruments. However, the overall impression was of an absence of strong gender or age patterning in grave goods.

Crudely summarised therefore, while distinctions between age and gender are still visible on the pyre, there was little difference in the numbers and types of goods deposited in the grave. Through the funerary process the presentation of the dead individuals increasingly related less to their age and gender characteristics. This process of uniformity perhaps represents the increasing distance of the deceased from the living and their increasing assimilation of ancestral status. Although the treatment of the dead was in part a process of homogenisation, the apparent gender 'neutrality' of grave goods is unlikely to imply equality among the society of the living (*pace* Foster 1993). Instead the process which started from an initial bias towards selecting adult males rather than females or children for this type of mortuary ritual further erased gender and age distinctions to endow the ancestors with a stronger adult male identity. Alternatively the unequal relationships of the living may have been disguised by the neutrality of treatment. This cemetery community, of which the age and gender imbalances are true both of the individual enclosures (especially of the enclosure centred on grave 241) and the cemetery as a whole, could scarcely have existed biologically but instead may have represented an idealised closed form of adult male ancestors which contrasted with the group's interaction with and permeability to outsiders and the possible dilution of rights to resources. Of course, age and gender need not have been the primary determinants for selection of this type of burial rite. Choice based on primogeniture, for example, might produce a similar cemetery 'population profile' (J. Taylor pers. comm.).

The number of graves made per year in the cemetery using Stead and Rigby's dating increased from 1.95 in phase 1 to 7.55 in phase 3 (Pearce 1994), an increase which would be even steeper if Haselgrove and Millett's revised dating of phase 3 is accepted. The explanation of this increase may be that access to this type of mortuary rite became available to an increasing proportion of the population, or that the population of the area increased through immigration. However through phases 1 to 3 the cemetery population remained predominantly adult and male.

The social context to which this representation of the dead should be related is the development of the Iron Age settlement and Roman town at Verulamium (Haselgrove and Millett 1997) with which the use of the cemetery coincided. The dispersed settlement landscape around the cemetery underwent a series of shifts during the first century BC and first half of the first century AD, on the slopes around what was later to become the forum of Roman Verulamium. For these dispersed settlements, the cemetery provided a central, though not exclusive, focus for the representation of a 'collective' identity, perhaps almost an idealised adult male 'citizenry'. This idealized representation in burial perhaps anticipated and also influenced the later expression of this notion in the social and architectural fabric of the *municipium* and its public spaces.

This homogeneity should not be exaggerated. There were other small groups of graves or single burials dated to the first half of the first century AD (Anthony 1968; Frere 1983:273) dispersed across the valley of the Ver, most obviously the Folly Lane enclosure and grave on the opposite side of the Ver from King Harry Lane (Niblett 1992), perhaps the burial place of a member of a family of regional or tribal rather than local importance. The cemetery itself was also subdivided into a series of 'family' enclosures, between which differences have been noted in the numbers of artefacts deposited in graves (Millett 1993). Millett has interpreted these differences as the reflection of different degrees of embeddedness in the social networks of the early Roman town. However in both the enclosed and unenclosed areas the number of grave goods declines over time (Pearce 1994); it is instead possible to characterise depositional practice as less lavish but more homogeneous over time.

In three areas therefore, topographical position, the sequence of the ritual of individual funerals, and the development of funerary practices during the 50–60 years in which the cemetery was in principal use, mortuary ritual can be characterised as providing a 'collective' identity at least among several of the families or clans that made up the local population, albeit a 'collective' identity that was largely defined by only one section of it.

Conclusion

Excessive emphasis should not be placed upon the interpretation of this one site. King Harry Lane permits a variety of interpretations (Millett 1993; Pearce 1997), and the human bone data on which this example is based provides a foundation of which we must remember the frailties. It may be that the missing women are to be found amongst the unsexed adults. This interpretation is offered rather as an example of an approach that responds to some of the demands made at the beginning of this paper. From this type of perspective we can begin to respond to the call to incorporate ritual and religion into current approaches to Romanization. In this case study it is argued that ritual was not only the product of social relations but also contributed to their shaping in a new form in that the agglomeration of the population in Verulamium already had a blueprint in the cemetery of King Harry Lane. This form was however of the social body as it was ideally conceived, not as it actually existed.

This final example has used only a limited range of the considerable body of data which are already available from cemetery sites. The first part of this paper directed attention to pyre sites and to debris deposits, to the structure of the grave itself, and to the residues of 'commemorative' activity, as well as to the potential information to be derived from the cremated human bone. The proper excavation of 'non-grave' deposits as well as the graves themselves should be a priority for future excavations of Roman cemeteries. To consider the funeral as a process allows us to expand our appreciation of what is accessible to us from provincial Roman mortuary practices. The organisation of grave space and the deposition of artefacts on the pyre are only two examples used to illustrate this potential. Not only can we explore further dimensions of mortuary practices; as has been noted elsewhere (Morris 1992), the rich data from the Roman period is particularly appropriate for contextual analysis of mortuary practice and further case studies can surely contribute to the development of general archaeological theory.

Note

[1] I have already examined the sequence of ritual in this cemetery in detail elsewhere (Pearce 1994; 1997) and only a summary account is given here, although with some difference in emphasis.

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