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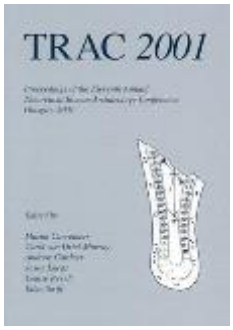

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Considering Continuity of Deposition on Votive Sites in Northeastern France from 200 BC to AD 100

Imogen Wellington

Introduction

Recent studies of religion and the nature of religious behaviour in the northern provinces of the Roman Empire, looking at the area in late prehistory and the early Roman period, have concentrated on decidedly different aspects of votive activity. However, the divide between prehistorians and Roman archaeologists is masking some significant areas of continuity in the field of centralised ritual activity in the period 200BC to 100AD, which I shall discuss below (Figure 1).

In north-eastern France, an area broadly (but not exclusively) denoted by the modern administrative divisions of Haute-Normandie, Picardie and Champagne-Ardennes, there are several traditions of votive deposition in this period. Key amongst these are the sites referred to in (prehistoric) Continental literature as '*sanctuaires*'. This term is used to describe a group of broadly comparable sites, and the term is generally taken to represent a site with evidence of structures and a central focal point with distinct enclosures, but not domestic or agricultural in nature. These sites are usually (but not always) in prominent geographical positions, and invariably have a high density of small finds deposited in a ritual nature (coins, brooches, weaponry, bones etc.). Prehistorians looking at these sites concentrate on the act of deposition itself and the presence of structured deposition (by which I mean deposits deliberately placed in meaningful contexts) (e.g. Brunaux 1987).

In contrast, much recent work on Roman period sites shows the different tradition of research pursued by Roman archaeologists working in the field of religion in the northern provinces. The contextualisation of artefacts has traditionally been eschewed (with a few exceptions, e.g. Blin 2000; Derks 1998) for studies based on epigraphy and statuary. The predominant view amongst prehistorians of material culture as an active part of relationships with the gods is only slowly gaining credence.

Architectural criteria come into play during the first century AD, with the presence of a 'gallo-roman cella and fanum' being taken as unquestioned evidence of a cult complex. This was considered the most convincing means of identification until recently,

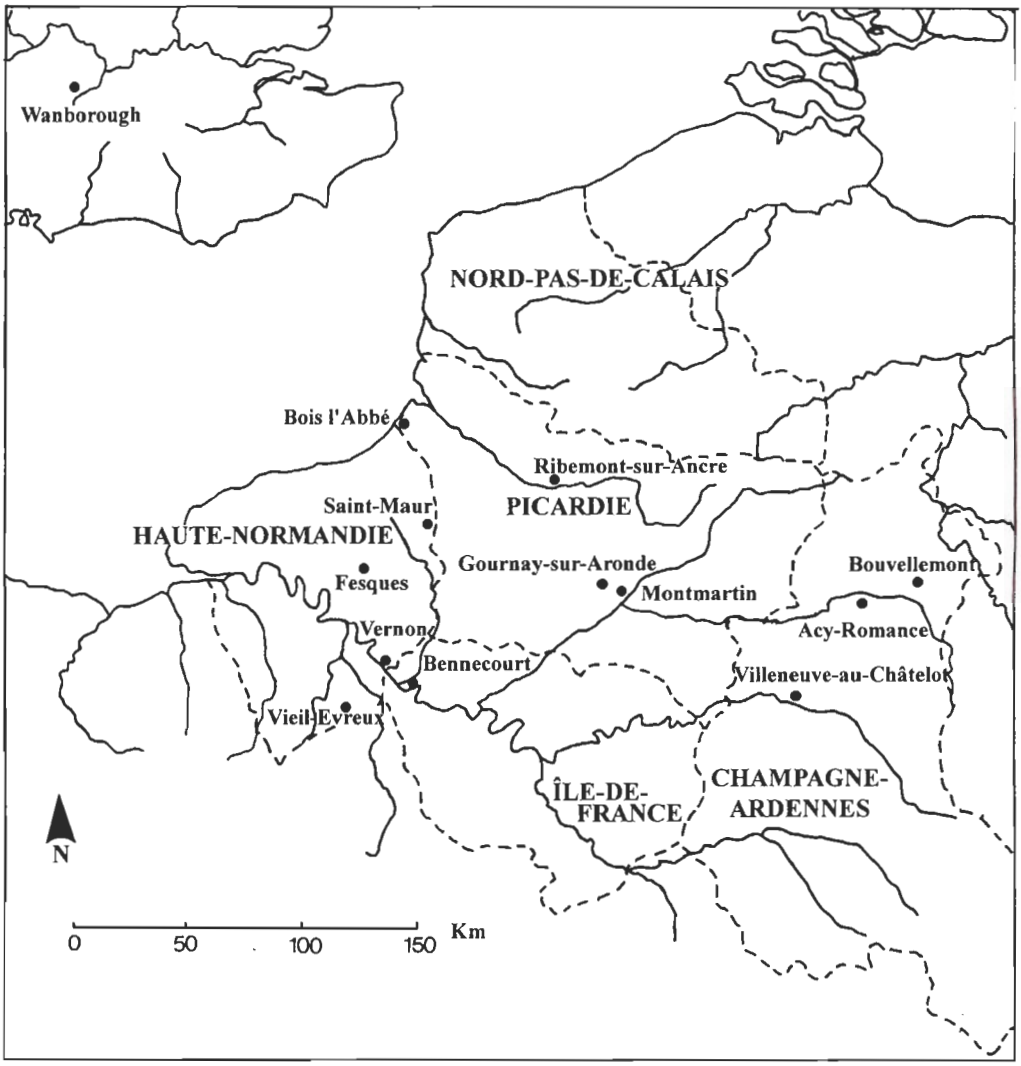

Figure 1. Map of study area, with sites mentioned in the text

although the latest research is beginning to question these assumptions. Another major problem is the assumption that all centralised sites have been influenced by Roman activity or interaction (an idea which has particular support in Britain). However, this is not supported by the archaeology, as there is a lack of architectural parallels in late prehistory (Derks 1998) which could suggest Roman influence pre-Conquest.

The use of architectural terms has recently been challenged (Dubourdieu and Scheid 2000; Gros 1996) as it has been pointed out that they were used with some vagueness and interchangeability in antiquity and the definite identification of individual words

with architectural styles is false (Dubourdieu and Scheid 2000: 78). In many studies the use of heavily laden terms such as *templum, fanum* and *cella* persist, and they have taken on a rather precise modern meaning which is not equivalent to what we know of the ancient usage.

However, returning to the sites themselves, how much actual change is there in this three hundred year period? Does the nature of votive activity actually alter enough to denote such a difference in approach? We need to look at the material evidence from these sites in an attempt to consider continuity and change.

Archaeological background

Considering the actual artefacts on these sites is problematic, as we know from the ancient authors that, although there were penalties, votive sites were robbed in antiquity (Caesar BG 6.17). Modern stripping is becoming an increasing problem. Many of these sites are discovered by metal detector, and although their use plays a vital role in bringing these sites to light, it is sometimes problematic – as the clandestine stripping of the temple site of Wanborough in southern England shows (O'Connell and Bird 1994). How representative published sites are is questionable, as they often tend to concentrate on the spectacular. However, with the recent increase in the quantity of excavation, patterns are becoming clearer, and more minor sites are being identified with modern standards of excavation.

One thing that must be emphasised early on is the diversity of these sites. Although I group a series of sites here in this paper, they do differ greatly, both in size and quantity of artefactual evidence. The north-east of France appears to have been highly regional in the later Iron Age, and this regionality does seem to have continued into the early Roman period, reflected in the different types of ritual activity (Wellington, in prep). The identification of a hierarchy of sites has been proposed by Roymans (1990), and it seems likely that sites functioned on a local, tribal or regional basis. Not until the second century AD can any kind of truly pan-Gallic religious practices be identified, and it seems that in the northern provinces much of the religious activity in the early Empire continued to be highly regionalised in nature. The continuity of rural sanctuaries is clear in certain areas, while the Jupiter columns in the Rhineland are another example of this regional tradition (Derks 1998).

Interpreting votive sites, and the use of semantic boundaries

But what was actually going on on these sites in this transitional period? The study of epigraphy from later periods indicates that local individuals were donating significant quantities of money for rites, festivals and buildings, but the earliest epigraphic evidence does not appear until the mid first century AD. I believe that the key to understanding the role of these sites in the early Roman period lies in the latest Iron Age, and the artificial separation of the Roman conquest does not assist our understanding of them. It is clear from the artefacts themselves that the nature of

deposition on these sites undergoes a more significant change in the early to mid first century BC than after the traditional milestone of the conquest of Gaul.

There are also problems with the separation of votive activity from other aspects of the archaeological record (see Hill 1995: 97). It is clear from the archaeological and numismatic evidence that there are significant links between the earliest votive sites and oppida in northern France and western Germany (Fichtl et al. 2000) and that there is evidence for votive activity on these sites before they were occupied as oppida.

Perhaps one of the major roles of oppida was ritual, with the elaborate fortifications representing elaborate boundary delimitation? Certainly, at sites such as Gournay and Manching the sanctuaries placed at one end of the fortified areas are of an earlier date than the enclosing walls and the other activity on the sites (Fichtl et al. 2000). Recent work on the oppida of northern France (e.g. Fichtl 2000) has shown the sheer quantity of 'ritual' activity present at oppida. Many deposits, such as the finds from the gate area at Vernon 'Camp de Mortagne' (Dechezleprêtre et al. 1996, 1998) are votive in nature, such as the deliberately destroyed weaponry found at this site.

As is the case in so much recent work in late prehistory and the early Roman period, with these French votive sites it is becoming clear that a distinct delimitation of votive and secular is simply not possible, and that the different categories of site have much overlap. This is widely accepted in prehistory and in other fields, but in the study of religious sites the actual definition of the concept is so often avoided (Derks 1998). The sacred: profane dichotomy has not been fully considered in relation to these sites – it has always been taken for granted that they were solely votive centres. However, few have had any excavation outside of the inner *'temenos'* enclosure, and most have had the central *'temple'* and no more excavated. The cropmarks from Ribemont-sur-Ancre shown in a spectacular aerial photograph by Agache (1970) show the quantity of other buildings that can appear on these sites. Recent work at Le Vieil-Evreux (Eure) has shown the scale of some of these ancillary buildings, as excavation has concentrated on the baths rather than the temples (Bertaudière and Guyard 2000).

Consideration of the other roles of these sites is limited by the lack of full excavation, but many of these sites cover a huge area, and it seems likely that they had many facets. The integration of votive sites into their landscape is a point which needs further work (with the exception of the work of Derks on the Roman period, 1997, 1998: 134–44). Although much work on the integration of prehistoric cosmologies and sacred landscapes has been done for earlier periods (e.g. Bradley 1993, 1998; Barrett 1994) this is an aspect which needs further emphasis in the consideration of sanctuaries. The adoption of a landscape based approach to religion in the late Iron Age and early Roman period, rather than a site based analysis is important.

The issue of seasonality is one that has rarely been addressed in the published literature, but must be considered. With the prehistoric sites the evidence for deposition appears sporadic on many sites such as Gournay-sur-Aronde (Brunaux et al. 1985) and Ribemont-sur-Ancre (Brunaux 1999), and the probability of seasonal, or less frequent, deposition is high. Infrequent deposition indicates that these sites remain important, and are remembered, but depositional rites are not taking place for long periods of time. Perhaps they are the focus for non-depositional activity for large periods of their use, with the placing of objects in liminal contexts being an occasional

sporadic rite, and some other non-archaeologically visible form of activity being the norm?

The chronology of votive sites

The appearance of sanctuary sites in the Iron Age can be grouped into three broad phases. There is evidence of stratified deposition on settlement sites dating to the late Bronze Age which is beginning to be identified in the archaeological record (Blaizot et al. 2000), but the true origin of centralised votive sites in this area lies in the burial record of the mid and late Iron Age in Picardy and the Champagne-Ardennes. Sites such as Acy-Romance (Lambot and Méniel 1992, 2000) show proto-ritual structures in the spatially delimited cemeteries (such as 'La Croisette').

This combination of structures, surrounded by a ditch containing offerings such as bones and weaponry, often in conjunction with burials, is clearly linked to the emergence of a distinct rite. All through the late Iron Age and early Roman period in this area there are significant links between cemeteries and sanctuary sites which are not fully understood and need further study, as it is in these links that the origins of the *grand sanctuaires* lie. In the mid third century in Picardy we do see a change in the archaeological record. We see the emergence of the earliest of these sanctuary sites (Table 1).

The earliest sites date to the La Tène C1 to early C2 period (around 250 to 175 BC). They have highly unusual ditch and boundary deposits, consisting of large quantities of bone, both animal and human. The best known, and most extensively published of these sites are Ribemont-sur-Ancre, and Gournay-sur-Aronde (both in the Somme). The former went on to become a major provincial cult centre in the Roman period, although recent interpretations are suggesting that it was originally founded in the LTC1 period (250–200BC) as a trophy erected after a great battle, sacrificing the losing side (Brunaux, 2000: 238–40). The main difference between these sites and the cemetery sites is the different treatment of human remains; they are not buried individually in the manner of earlier grave deposits, but in greater numbers. The quantities of material culture on these sites are unusually great; the boundary ditch at Gournay contains a vast number of animal remains.

The second group of sites are very different in their nature. They are chronologically

Table 1. Chronological temple groups in northern France

	Date	Characteristics
Group 1	La Tène C1/C2, c. 250–175 BC	Rich in weaponry, human and animal remains. No coinage
Group 2	La Tène D2a/D2b, c. 70–50 BC	Pre-Roman structures, often underlying Roman stone votive buildings. Coin finds and other archaeological remains, e.g. brooches, pottery, bones, from the early first century BC onwards
Group 3	Early Roman, 50–20 BC	No pre-Conquest deposits apart from coinage. No traces of wooden structures preceding the later stone ones. Early coinage appear to be residual when deposited.

distinct from the early sites, and on sites which have activity in both the first and second phase, there does seem to be a recognisable hiatus in deposition between the end of the LTC2 period and the LTD2 period. The majority of the second group of sites appear to date to either side of the La Tène D2a/D2b transition (around 70–50 BC). These sites show a significant increase in the quantity of artefacts deposited, especially coinage, which was available in much greater quantities during this period.

Many of these sites have later activity, and it has been a problem trying to separate the identification of earlier activity on these sites from later votive activity. It is conceivable, in many cases, that the Iron Age evidence is not ritual in nature, but merely shows the foundation of Roman period votive sites above normal Iron Age settlement sites. This is a problem that is not fully resolved, especially for the earlier excavations. On some sites continuity of cult practice is indicated by the evidence of buildings under the Roman ones, or buildings in isolation such as those at Fesques (Mantel 1997) and Bouvellemont (Squevin 1988), as well as the quantity of early pre-Roman coinage which is present, linked with diagnostically pre-Roman deposits (such as weaponry).

The third series of sites is difficult to separate precisely from the second. This group consists of those sites which have no apparent pre-Roman structural evidence and seem to date later than the 50s BC. Some of these sites do have pre-Roman material evidence (largely brooches and coins), but no evidence of earlier structures. The uncertain dating of many of the small finds from this period is problematic, and the rapidly changing pottery, numismatic and brooch typologies is unhelpful in any attempt to date these sites with precision. Numismatic evidence has been seen as the main way of dating these sites in the past, but it is becoming clear that there is significant residuality in the coin pool, and the coin chronologies as a whole are currently under review for this period (see below).

The introduction of large stone built temples in urban contexts does not appear at an early date in this area. The use of rural sanctuaries continues until the mid first century AD, and we see the monumentalisation of these sites from the reign of Augustus and (more often) Tiberius. The monumentalisation of rural votive sites is chronologically early compared to the appearance of stone buildings in the early towns (Haselgrove 1996), and the concentration of resources in these sites in the earliest Roman contexts shows the continuing importance of rural votive sites. The archaeologically visible activity changes from the deposition of bones, weaponry and dress objects to the erection of stone buildings and the deposition of coins. However I would argue that the form of behaviour underlying this does not change (as suggested by Woolf 1998: 206), with a continued focus on the offering of objects to the gods.

Urban sanctuaries never seem to become as numerous in this area of the Roman Empire, and in many cases semi-urban sites seem to have been an acceptable compromise. Le Vieil-Evreux, 'Terres Noires' (Eure) seems to have started life as a rural religious centre, and became the cult centre to the Roman city of Evreux in the way that we see in several other places in Gaul (such as Lisieux/Vieux-Lisieux and Le Mans/Allones; Bertaudière and Guyard 2000: 25). The resurgence of temples in the third century AD is very different in nature, and is more homogenous over a larger geographic area, not just this part of France.

Deposition and artefactual analysis

Actually considering the artefacts themselves is sometimes difficult, and the contextualisation of finds from earlier sites is largely impossible beyond a site list. However, it is clear that the deposition of objects in liminal contexts is one which starts very early, and continues until at least the mid first century AD without interruption. Several points stand out when looking at the sites from this area, and chronologically there are distinct phases of deposition (although the body of data is not as homogenous as these broad suggestions would indicate). The initial deposits of weaponry and bones are replaced by smaller and more portable finds in the mid to late second century BC onwards. These deposits are dominated by coinage, but also include brooches and later on more exotic objects (e.g. lead wheels).

This change happens at broadly the same time as we see other significant changes in society. The settlement pattern becomes increasingly centralised, *oppida* appear, and the quantity of imported objects (such as the classic example of amphorae) increases dramatically. The sanctuaries are clearly reacting to this, but is it just a case of what was available being deposited or is there a definite change in the depositional practices on these sites? The change from episodic to continual deposition would indicate a more important shift in the way in which these sites were used.

Episodic deposition giving way to continual deposition is an important change. The earliest ritual deposits on sites are placed in a structured manner, and appear to denote occasional large-scale acts. The pattern of later deposition consists of smaller assemblages but more frequent deposition. We find coins all over these sites, as well as in the features, and all of the votive sites in this area have a large number of unstratified coins found fairly indiscriminately over the area of activity. We do find occasional hoards, such as the deposit of c.1200 coins (mostly Augustan) in the boundary ditch at La Villeneuve-au-Châtelot, Aube (Piette and Frichet 1975), but the majority of deposits are spread over the site, largely in ditches and pits, and with some bias towards the centre of sites. However, this practice differs dramatically from third century BC deposits, such as the structured human remains at Ribemont.

What do these changes in deposition actually denote? I believe that these sites are one of the strongest indicators of how the individuals who used these sites in the period 200 BC to AD 100 actually responded to the significant changes which were taking place in their world at the time. These sites seem to have played an important role. We find such large quantities of finds on them in relation to settlement sites that significant levels of investment are implied. While there are 'rich' settlements such as Montmartin (Brunaux and Méniel 1997), these rapidly disappear in the second century BC; at around the time that the sanctuaries start to show evidence for increased deposition of artefacts. At this period there is a marked downturn in the number of sites which have a significant quantity of coinage. This does imply that there is a change of focus, which has traditionally been interpreted as a move to oppida (e.g. Collis 1984). I believe that sanctuaries play a more significant role in this process, and that they are suffering by being considered separately from the rest of the archaeological record.

Micro-analysis: the case of coinage

The numismatic evidence is perhaps the most tractable. Due to the chronological problems of the later Iron Age (discussed by Duval et al. 1990; Pion 1996; Colin 1998) and the quantity of excavation which has been carried out in the last five years without major pan-regional syntheses, I have concentrated on coinage below. The Iron Age coinages of northern France have been the subject of ongoing chronological debate, with two main camps. The traditionalist one, following the work of the great mid 20th century scholar of Iron Age coinage, Colbert de Beaulieu, takes a late chronology (e.g. Delestrée 1996). Although this school has held sway in mainstream French archaeology until recently, it has been challenged in the last decade by scholars using coinage in conjunction with other archaeological evidence. Modern archaeologists agree that Colbert de Beaulieu's work relied too heavily on the Gallic Wars (noted as early as 1975 by Nash) and recent excavations have proved that potin coinage is in fact one of the earliest types of coinage in Belgic Gaul (see Haselgrove 1999 for a summary of the French archaeological evidence relating to coinage).

Gold coinage seems to have been introduced at the end of the third century or the start of the second century BC, but it plays a very small role on sanctuaries, most finds being from hoards. The earliest stratified coins on sites are potin coinage, although they are rarely found in large numbers in early contexts. The site of Bennecourt (Yvelines) has a significant number of potin coins in Iron Age layers (Bourgeois 1999).

Although silver plays a part in other areas (notably to the west of this area) the quantity on north-eastern French sites is generally quite low, with only a few sites having silver present in any quantity (Saint Maur has 10% silver, while the numismatically unusual site of Bois l'Abbé has 127 silver coins, just under 20% of the total Iron Age coinage). On all sites the bulk of non-Roman coinage is struck bronze, which is late in date, the majority of types being struck from the mid-first century BC till the early first century AD. Potin does seem to be the main form of pre-Roman deposit, and it is also found in some quantity, particularly on earlier sites such as Bennecourt (Bourgeois 1999) and Fesques (Mantel 1997).

This use of coinage in the early first century BC at sites like Bennecourt is echoed in the following decades, and we see large quantities of coinage deposited in the mid first century BC, often at the expense of other types of artefact. Roman coinage starts to appear in the Augustan period, and it gradually takes over from the indigenous coinage during the final decades of the first century BC. The use of coinage on votive sites is clearly important, and becomes of increasing significance in the first century AD.

Coinage is one way of reaching and interpreting the geographical links of individual sites. The concept of several different groups of votive sites, local cult places, those of regional significance and those which have a greater importance across a wider geographical area has been advanced (Roymans 1990; Derks 1998: 185–99). The coinage can also add a different dimension to the establishment of a site's significance outside its immediate geographical proximity. Most French cult sites have a proportion of exotic coinage, and this is much higher than any comparable contemporary sites. Theoretically, smaller sites ought to have a more local numismatic assemblage, while larger sites would have more coins from some distance away.

However, there are problems with this simplistic view. Many French sites have a significant quantity of material from some distance away, the example of amphorae (Poux 2000) being relevant from La Tène C2 (the start of the second century BC) onwards. The residuality of coinage in the general pool of circulation is also problematic (and applies across a wide geographic area, see Wigg 1999). Some series (such as Scheers 163 (1977)) are extremely long-lived, and many of the bronze types continued in use long after their initial circulation. Many of the 'Iron Age' coins at Empel (Roymans and Derks 1994) appear to be at the site due to the movement of Roman troops up the Rhine from the original areas of circulation- such as the coins ascribed to the Aedui and Sequani (ibid. 114).

The supposed 'Iron Age' coinage continues in use until the early first century AD (Wigg 1999; Haselgrove 1999) and its use on votive sites must also be considered as another factor of continuity. We do not see a large-scale 'dumping' of unwanted types of coinage on votive sites in the immediate wake of the Roman conquest. Instead, the quantity of non-Roman coinage in circulation seems to increase, and the later types of northern France such as those inscribed GERMANVS INDVTILLI L. (Scheers 216) and AVAVCIA (Scheers 217) form an important part of the coinage in circulation in the early Roman period. These types can be dated to the Augustan period with some level of certainty (Haselgrove 1999: 53). They typify the continuity on votive sites, which is apparent from the artefacts, and the way in which they are deposited in later prehistory and the early Roman period.

Conclusion

The significant levels of continuity on votive sites, apparent from the artefactual evidence, indicate that the consideration of pre-Roman votive activity is valuable when we are considering later developments (as advanced by Roymans, 1990). In recent discussions concerning the predecessors of the Gallo-Roman style of temple, the thorny problem of continuity in general has been an important factor (e.g. Derks 1998: 168–75; Woolf 2000: 622; Painter 1999). However, these arguments have largely been based on architecture and site morphology. The focus of this paper has been on the artefacts from votive sites. There are problems with attempts to identify personal performance and identity in the archaeological record (Revell 2000), but the micro-analysis of votive sites is clearly valuable on both intra and inter site levels.

It is evident from recent developments in prehistoric settlement archaeology (such as the excavations at Acy-Romance) that the boundary between sacred and profane in the late Iron Age (and increasingly the early Roman period) was far from distinct. The incidence of secondary grain silo deposits which are being discovered (Lambot and Méniel 2000) is now presenting a picture for the Iron Age in northern France in the fourth and third centuries BC which is more akin to that proposed for central southern Britain (Hill 1995). This links in with the initial deposits on these votive sites, and these special deposits are an important stage in the development of separate sites for votive activity. These deposits link to the large-scale (stage 1) votive sites, with a distinct gap then apparent in deposition before the large-scale appearance of the second stage of

sanctuaires. This returns closer to the long-term approach indicated by Bradley (1990), although I am not advocating the drawing of parallels outside of the immediate geographic and chronological framework. Consideration of the wider picture, using a broad range of non-specific evidence, differs from much modern work on Roman religious archaeology. We need to look at the wider archaeological record to truly understand these sites, which are too often considered in isolation.

Significant changes were taking place in northern France in the early to mid first century BC. Knowledge of the antecedents of the cult sites in the early Roman period is important to our understanding of the developments at this time. By looking at the artefacts on votive sites, we can see a clear tradition of episodic votive deposition emerging in the third century BC. This changes in the La Tène D2a/D2b transition (in the early to mid first century BC) towards a more continuous but smaller-scale deposition of artefacts, with a heavy emphasis on small objects such as coins and brooches. This perhaps denotes the rise of individual deposits over community based votive activity, and has implications for the broader archaeological record. This new type of deposition continues into the early Roman period, and forms a more distinct division than looking at the Roman period sites in isolation from their predecessors. We should consider votive sites of the first century AD in the context of those which pre-date the 'Roman Conquest'.

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