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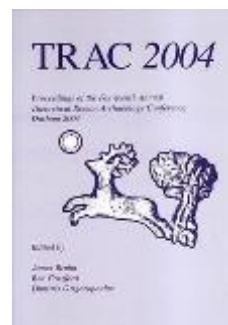
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Beyond the temple: blurring the boundaries of ‘sacred space’

Eleanor Ghey

Introduction

Landscape archaeological approaches have a contribution to make to the study of temple sites, demanding a shift of focus from the temple itself to the wider surrounding area. However, such approaches also have relevance to our understanding of the architecture of temple sites, here considered using Gallo-Roman examples. In particular, a breaking down of the opposition of nature to culture and the problematic definition of ritual in the archaeological record have implications for the concept of ‘sacred space’. The idea of discrete sacred spaces may conflict with interpretation of the landscape as a lived environment. It will be argued that the location of temples is highly significant for their interpretation and that their architecture is rendered meaningful only when situated in its landscape context. I wish to emphasise the problematic nature of this ‘landscape context’ and the cultural and individual specificity of its interpretation and experience, now and in the past.

Current approaches to landscape

Until the appearance of more critical approaches to landscape in archaeology, studies of landscape had tended to be descriptive, with interpretation being undertaken primarily as a means of setting the scene for monuments and human activity. The relationship between humans and their environment was seen as one of mastery, in which humans gained control over the environment (a theme found in discussion of later prehistoric agricultural intensification), or as one of determinism, with behaviour influenced and restricted by the availability of natural resources (for example processual theories of culture change in Andean civilisations). In both approaches, there remained a conceptual divide between nature and culture. Recent developments in human geography and philosophical approaches to the study of space have introduced a reflexive understanding of the relationship between people and land. These developments stemmed from rejection of the Cartesian duality of mind and body, leading to models of embodied experience of the landscape and the indivisibility of culture and nature. ‘Nature’ may be seen as a culturally constructed category of varying meaning (Daniels and Cosgrove 1988: 1). Interpretation of the meaning of landscape has moved from the analogy of landscape as text to a more reflexive understanding of the relationship between people and land. Landscape is created by the repeated actions of those who work within it and move through it. However, it also has an active role in the reproduction of society and culture. In the words of Ingold, ‘through living in it, the landscape becomes a part of us, just as we are a part of it’ (Ingold 2000: 191).

This concept of landscape as understood through inhabitation rather than as a setting in which action occurs, has had an impact on archaeological narratives (particularly in prehistory) which have sought to describe the landscape as experienced. The emphasis here has moved away from the ‘site’ to a wider spatial context for human action, as monuments are understood

by their location and interrelationship. However, these earlier post-structural narratives can be criticised for their under-theorisation of the body. The experience of landscape is necessarily subjective and cannot be accurately represented by a ‘disembodied’ body. There has also been an emphasis in these accounts on power and the agency of elites, which does not always allow for other experiences of landscapes (Brück 1998: 32; Thomas 1993: 29).

Although these ideas are frequently found in prehistoric archaeology, archaeologists working with the Roman period have less readily taken up the challenges that they present. In the study of temple sites, such challenges are to situate sites within their wider context in such a way that does not create an artificial distinction between the site and its surrounding area, and to attempt to convey the multiplicity of meanings that may be invested in a temple site. The subjectivity of landscape may be an opportunity to investigate culturally and individually specific interpretation and experience.

Approaching temple sites and architecture

I would suggest that there has been a past bias towards a certain understanding of ‘ritual architecture’ that has been based on classical and modern concepts of ritual structures. The historical accounts of pre-Roman shrines by classical authors tended to emphasise the use of natural places such as groves and islands. It may be that the lack of a familiar ‘architecture’ meant that indigenous shrines went unnoticed, and these accounts perhaps influenced early ideas of a lack of ritual structures in the Iron Age (Lewis’ ‘aniconic and atectonic’ religion (Lewis 1966: 4)), one that still persists in more recent work. This understanding of architecture rests on the need to have a conceptual division between sacred and profane represented in material form (Venclova 1993: 60). This has also had an effect on our understanding of the Romano-Celtic temple, emphasising the typology of the form. The evidence suggests that in reality there was less rigidity in what was perceived as an appropriate place for ritual action. For example the material culture associated with the spring site at La Douix in Châtillon-sur-Seine, Côte-d’Or (Coudrot 2002), is very similar to that of the nearby temple sites of Essarois, Côte-d’Or (Daviet 1967) and Le Tremblois, Côte-d’Or (Paris 1960). The site at Chamalières, Puy-de-Dôme (Romeuf and Dumontet 2000) is no less a ‘shrine’ although there does not appear to have been an architectural element to the site. It appears that the place itself (or perhaps the act) was more important than the associated architecture.

A tendency to overlook natural features perpetuates a cultural evolutionary approach to the study of religion, with the Roman ‘achievement’ of temples seen as having progressed from a culture without permanent ritual structures. Other similarities and continuities between sites may be overlooked. The apparent relative uniformity of the built form of the Romano-Celtic temple also masks the fact that different landscapes will create different meanings for places. Excavation has tended to reinforce a limited perception of architecture by focusing on the building itself. I would suggest that a broader definition of architecture might be helpful when looking at these sites. Architecture can be seen as constructed space, the division and creation of space and manipulation of landscape. In a broader understanding of the architecture of temple sites, the zone of the ‘building’ would include the surrounding environment, watercourses, ephemeral structures, pathways, boundaries and open spaces. Apparently natural elements such as water may be ‘constructed’ in some way; the diversion of watercourses

creates other foci and influences the passage of people through space. These things are integral to an understanding of how this architecture functioned in providing a setting for action.

The relationship between landscape and ritual is an active and reflexive one; 'landscape and material culture do not provide merely a stage setting for human action but create a set of locales integral to that action' (Gosden and Lock 1998: 4). Shrines in the Roman landscape were appropriate places for communication with the gods and brought their presence to mind. These appropriate places may have been chosen because of their pre-existing associations, or the suitability of their location to become part of regular ritual practice through the presence of roads or route-ways.

The whole Roman period landscape could in fact be seen as a ritual landscape, and the desire to distinguish specific 'sacred spaces' is arguably not universal. The layout of a Roman town had religious signification, which extended by implication throughout the surrounding area. In the rite of *inauguratio*, described by Livy (I.18), great importance was placed on the priest's lines of sight, which encompassed the landscape as far as he could see and allowed landmarks and directions to be identified and fixed. The concept of the *templum* related to the diagram drawn by the priest during this ceremony, inscribing these lines of sight into the soil (Rykwert 1976: 45). It was therefore more of a conceptual space than a physical one, although it was given spatial form in the layout of military camps and cities. The cardinal directions determined the position of the roads that extended beyond the town and connected it to others, as well as the division of the land itself. Ritual served not only to establish the town but also to reinforce its boundaries through festivals and processions (*ibid.*: 27).

Ritual in daily life

The identification of sacred space touches on the same theoretical issues as the recognition of ritual practice in the archaeological record. The issue of whether it is possible to distinguish 'ritual' from the 'mundane' in the archaeological record has been raised in work on the Iron Age (for example Hill 1995), with the suggestion that such a distinction might be inappropriate for the period. As Brück argues (1999: 317), one of the defining characteristics of ritual in archaeological and anthropological theory has been its non-functional nature, leading to difficulties of recognition when there is no clear distinction in the material record. Ritual may not only be defined as something 'out of the ordinary', elements of ritual derive from the context of daily life. Brück suggests that a distinction between 'practical' and 'ritual' actions may not exist in all societies. She considers the concept of ritual to be of no value for the study of archaeology:

'it would seem unhelpful to apply a functionalist approach to certain aspects of prehistoric life (for example subsistence) while admitting that others (such as religious beliefs) cannot be explained in this way. Rather, prehistoric peoples applied an historically-specific logic to the world around them. This comprised a set of culturally-specific values, aims and rationales which shaped their practical interaction with the world' (Brück 1999: 327).

The theory of 'ritualization' developed by Bell (1992) may be a more productive way of looking at the relationship between what we perceive of as ritual and space, without creating a rigid and permanent distinction between the sacred and the profane. Bell does not go as far as

Brück in abandoning the concept of ritual but considers the way in which action marks out activity as 'ritual'. Bell sees ritualization as a strategic form of social action through which these distinctions are created and privileged (1992: 74). By emphasising the embodied nature of ritualized action, this approach would suggest a dynamic interpretation of 'sacred space' through action and movement. 'The strategies of ritualization are particularly rooted in the body, specifically, the interaction of the social body within a symbolically constituted spatial and temporal environment' (*ibid.*: 93). This recognises the materiality and performative nature of ritual practice. By the creation of certain settings and use of certain objects and gestures, the ritual nature of the action is established. The material culture used in such circumstances is not necessarily distinct from that found in a mundane context; indeed, it may gain power from its domestic associations.

So ritual activity does not take place in a vacuum but is part of daily life. Ritual and secular spheres may converge or at least overlap. However, this is not to suggest that the landscape is experienced in the same way in the context of ritualized action. The same landscape can take on a completely new set of meanings and be perceived as *another place* during religious contemplation, pilgrimage or procession. The layout and topography may reflect aspects of another place; its architecture may be replicated (Loosley 1999: 19), or the other place may be alluded to by signification alone. Space can be used to represent aspects of historical or mythical stories, for example in the Stations of the Cross in Christianity. Conceptual distance therefore need not equate to physical distance (Coleman and Elsner 1994: 77). The architectural similarity between places of worship within a religion can also deny place in a sense, replicating a similar use of space in many different places. It is the differences between these buildings that attest to their unique histories.

Sacred places are created through the process of pilgrimage and repeated visiting keeps them in individual and collective memory. Places gain significance through stories built around them and the practices into which they are incorporated. Sacred places are therefore linked to the everyday world by means of this process, and renewed and transformed by it. The act of pilgrimage extends the boundaries of sacred space, so that ritual landscapes exist as layers within those lived in daily life. For example, in rural France people may visit a church on a regular basis, but a 'pilgrimage' might be made only once a year on pre-determined festivals. The act of *ritualized* movement brings additional meanings of a place to the fore through visible performance.

Bounded space?

This emphasis on movement brings another dimension to archaeological study of landscapes. Routes connecting locales can be as significant as the sites themselves (Stoddard 1987: 450), as it is through these routes that people experience and interact with place. It may be helpful to look at these routes away from a site-based archaeology. Although centred on a bounded space, the cult may have had an impact outside of this space, perhaps with markers or stopping points such as roadside shrines, which create a sense of purpose and destination and help to fill journeys with meaning. Certain features appear prominent and significant either through their visual impact or through pre-existing knowledge about them. The reactions of the visitor depend on the visitor's cultural background, social standing and physical attributes. Conceptual connections may also have been created between relatively distant places, forming a wider

network of meaning. It could be argued that extramural temples extend their realm into the city; there is mutual implication through routes, orientation and sight. The notion of a discretely bounded sacred space is therefore at odds with the experience of a temple site, whether or not there was a physical boundary or *temenos*.

In the case of Mâlain, Côte-d'Or, at least three sanctuaries have been identified, with that at Les Froidefonds, Ancy (Roussel 1969) placed some distance away from the centre of occupation and looking away to the east. This may however have been linked to the settlement by means of an aqueduct and lines of sight might have been created between the theatre and the temples on the higher ground to the east and west. The streets lead up to this place from the area of theatre, suggesting that cult buildings are central to the articulation of the settlement. Indeed, they may have been the reason for its existence, as they appear to predate the area of settlement excavated at La Boussière (Roussel 1975) and go out of use in the same period.

The temple complex at Sanxay, Vienne (Formigé 1945) provides a good illustration of how temple complexes can make use of landscape on a large scale. Here connections between the temples, theatre and baths were made through lines of sight. The passage of water was rendered visible by the use of open basins and the whole complex is situated above the river Vonne. Although the theatre was separated from the remainder of the complex by the river valley, it was clearly part of these same articulations of space. To reach the temple from the theatre, a visitor would have had to cross the river. The experience of visiting the temple would therefore not have taken place in isolation from its surroundings, and would have required significant engagement with its topography.

Water and rivers

The most common location for a temple is on high ground on a spur of land overlooking a river valley. In some cases, they appear to be oriented to face the river, as in the case of Crain, Yonne, which faces southeast down to the river Yonne, and Montmartre, Yonne, which overlooks the river Cousin (and its confluence with the Cure). There also appears to be a preference for a position at the confluence of two rivers, typically with a view of both valleys, as at Alésia. Temples are also situated at confluences when these are not on higher ground, as in the case of the sites of Prégilbert, Sainte-Pallaye, Trucy-sur-Yonne and Cravant, all located at the confluence of the Yonne and the Cure, Yonne. The confluence appears to have had particular significance, possibly because of the way in which rivers were bound up with tribal identity in the naming of peoples and gods (for example the Sequani and the Seine, with its eponymous goddess Sequana). This is demonstrated by the positioning of the altar of the Three Gauls at the confluence of the Rhône and Saône in Lyon, where imperial ideology appears to have appropriated this emotive imagery.

Those building temples appear to have manipulated watercourses in the immediate area, possibly to allow access to them or to incorporate them into the temple site for ritual purposes. A deliberate selection of marshy ground appears to have been involved for example in the siting of temples at Entrains-sur-Nohain, in the marsh of Saint-Cyr, Nièvre. The site of Les Fontaines-Salées, Yonne, may have been surrounded by water. It is possible that the baths and spring catchments were on an island, with the ancient bed of the river Cure passing between them and the building to the northwest. The whole area was almost an island, being bounded by a watery landscape with marshes to the north ('les marais de la Bazaine') and south (known

as ‘les marais de la Morte’), and the river to the east (Louis 1944: 42–3). This area was drained in the fourteenth century. Similarly, the temple at Les Bolards, Côte-d’Or, appears to have been built on a low-lying gravel bed between two oxbow bends of the river Meuzin (Pommeret 2001: 9).

At some sites, there appears to have been considerable manipulation of the terrain in order to maximise visual effects. The terracing at the sanctuary of Apollo Moritasgus at Alésia/Alise-Sainte-Reine, Côte-d’Or (Rabeisen 1992), would have created distinct levels between the baths and the temple, allowing maximum impact of the view eastwards upon reaching the temple. This makes use of natural ruptures in the limestone plateau, but may also have been enhanced artificially. The different levels of terracing at Sources de la Seine, Côte-d’Or, may have also operated to control movement of people in stages of a ritual sequence or according to social groups (Aldhouse-Green 2001: 68). Deliberate levelling of the site at Essarois was proposed by the excavator and may have been intended to manipulate the relationship between the temple and the stream (Daviet 1963: 4).

At Alésia, a spring was incorporated into the temple complex and the presence of water flowing through the temple foundations appears not to have been disguised, giving a natural character to its architecture. By their placement at the head of springs and the sources of tributaries (as at Sources de la Seine), it could be argued that temples and shrines acted to control or sacralise these sources (or vice-versa). The power of the associated deity was thus extended over the whole landscape by means of this water, which traversed bounded space (Ghey, forthcoming). Their impact therefore would have been felt over a wider area than may be apparent.

A number of temples appear to have been visible from roads, for example, the temple at Les Bolards was aligned with a long approach from an offshoot of the Agrippan way. This may be significant given the ideological implications of roads outlined by Witcher, who emphasises their colonial nature and impact on previously inhabited space, and suggests that they are ‘part of an imperial dialogue articulated in time and space’ (Witcher 1998: 60). The roads facilitated imperial domination and brought the landscape into the military arena. Even if they used pre-existing routes, they were named anew and made straight. Perhaps like the temples themselves, the roads suggest an ambiguous attitude to past landscapes, ‘both a maintenance and as a subversion of pre-existing conceptions of space and place’ (*ibid.* 1998: 67). The same could be said of sanctuaries located on pre-Roman road networks, which would indicate the significance of these places in the pre-conquest landscape. In the case of Les Bolards, the earliest phase of the sanctuary was located at a juncture of pre-Roman roads that bore no relation to the later urban plan (Pommeret 2001: 80), so the later road network could be said to have been constructed with relation to this pre-existing cult site, even if this was partly complicit with a new ideology.

The significance of rivers in Roman imperial ideology may have been similar to that of roads. They were undoubtedly important communication routes, particularly in mountainous and forested landscapes such as that of the Morvan. The visibility of temples from rivers may thus have created an impact in the same way as temples visible from roads. However rivers were also conceptual and physical boundaries, perceived as such from pre-Roman times.

Relationships between sites

In his work on Romano-British temples, Smith proposed the intentional visibility of groups of temples in the Cotswolds and Southern England (Smith 2001: 150). This could have been significant in reinforcing their interconnection and created visual goals for those travelling between them. It may be possible to see groups of Burgundian temples clustering in the same way. Even in a wooded landscape, it is probable that these temples were visible landmarks. The visitor to a site such as Mont de Sène (Santenay, Côte-d'Or) may have been aware of several of these. In addition, if temples themselves were not visible, distant peaks would have been instantly recognisable and their religious significance is likely to have been known.



Figure 1: Chassey seen from Mont de Sène, Santenay (Côte-d'Or)

From Mont de Sène it is possible to see Mont Beuvray, Mont Saint-Vincent (both with known temples), Mont Rome, and Chassey (Saône-et-Loire), opposite across the Dheune valley where another temple was located. The flint assemblages at Chassey and Mont de Sène suggest contemporary pre-Roman occupation of both sites (Bulliot 1874: 139) and the sculptures of Mercury found at both sites indicate a later connection. Artificial terracing enhanced the position of the temples on Mont de Sène; a bed of rubble was found underneath them, making them slightly higher than the other buildings situated just below the ridge (Bulliot and Thiollier 1892: 155). Interestingly, the orientation of the two temples at Chassey and Mont de Sène suggests that they were not primarily intended to face each other, although they were intervisible. The unusual orientation of the temple on Mont de Sène gives it a wider view of the Dheune valley further east of Chassey, into Santenay itself and an area known for its springs; Roman coins and a piece of gold leaf were found in a Roman well in this area (Thevenot 1971: 267). The temple at Chassey (de Coynart 1869: lxviii) is located in a position that commands a view up the Cosanne valley towards Mont de Rème, and overlooks the confluence of the Cosanne with the Dheune.

Past and present

Landscape is in part a creation of past human action, and experience of landscape involves interaction with and negotiation of this past. The preservation of monuments and other features will ensure that they enshrine and continue to create memories. However, these memories will have been selected and socially sanctioned, while others may be forgotten or retained by fewer individuals. Original meanings will be lost and features created by human activity may be seen as ‘natural’, ‘part of the landscape’. The role of associated memories and oral histories in lending significance to a place cannot be underestimated (Bradley 2000: 157; Meade 2004: 87–88) and so it is necessary to bear in mind the invisibility of this aspect of the landscape.

While the continuing social significance of prehistoric monuments tends to be a standard assumption, similar continuities in the Roman period are more often questioned, despite the fact that the chronological scale is much shorter. A longer-term perspective is necessary if we are to give meaning to the Gallo-Roman landscape and continuity of place is perhaps to be expected rather than treated as something unusual. It does not necessarily indicate continuity of an entire belief system. Cooney writes:

‘Continuity at the ideological level can be accommodated within a changed world view. Continuity of place may be the essential ingredient, particularly in a world of narrative tradition where connections with the landscape are regarded as history’ (1999: 60).

The landscape surrounding Alésia is a good example of a landscape that cannot be considered as neutral space. The area surrounding the hillfort was an arena of war, the scars of which are still visible today. The physical traces of this could have been extremely emotive features of the Roman period landscape, with many associated memories that differed greatly from Roman and indigenous perspectives. It is hard to be certain of what meanings were intended to be read in the construction of a temple in this particular spot, but it was potentially ideologically charged.

The careful placing of Gallo-Roman temple sites shows an awareness of the way in which landscape informs the experience of ritual sites. In turn, the experience of landscape was irreversibly altered by the construction of these distinctive monuments. By their presence, they gave a new aspect to towns and journeys, and to the horizon seen on a daily basis by local inhabitants over a wide area. Although on a local level, those constructing and visiting these monuments may have been sensitive to the indigenous ‘gods of the place’ (Millett 1995: 99), the conspicuous uniformity of the Gallo-Roman temple could represent linkages between distant places, those visible and those beyond. The gods of these places were seen and looked out over rivers, valleys and roads, attracting pilgrimage and inspiring awe. However, any visitor to the temple would be experiencing it through its immediate context in a very physical sense, and in a unique way, by the effort of walking up or down to the site, becoming aware of new perspectives from a theatre seat, and hearing the sound of running water, for example. It was through these experiences that the visitors made sense of their surroundings and in this way that the gods of the place revealed themselves.

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