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Hybrid Bridges: An Exploration into how Traditionally 'Romanised' Elements of the Town Interacted with Meaning-Laden Pre-Historic Waterscapes

Jay Ingate

Introduction

The Roman town has proved to be something of a comfort to archaeologists studying Britain over the last century. It has provided a framework of assumption that has underpinned interpretation of large scale processes in the transition from prehistoric society into the Roman period. This change has often been labelled 'romanisation'. Yet, recent contributions have rightly proclaimed the concept as outdated (e.g. Hingley 2000; 2001; 2005; Creighton 2006; Mattingly 2006). However, this long held rationale has formed the backbone of traditional explanations for the creation of the 'Roman town' in Britain. As such, some of the seminal contributions to Romano British urban studies endorse a teleological link to our own time by emphasising supposedly common elements of urban civilisation, at odds with any prehistoric precedent (Wacher 1975: 48; Rivet 1958: 81-2; Frere 1987: 229; Wacher 1995: 59). Indeed, this line of analysis in respected, and widely consulted, works has propagated a comfortable familiarity with the Roman town. This prevailing attitude is perhaps one reason why there is a proliferation of recent work on the outskirts or defences of towns (e.g. Crummy 2003; Esmonde Cleary 2003; Magilton 2003; Manning 2003); archaeologists have assumed the central areas are a known quantity.

The contributions of Creighton (2006), Mattingly (2006) and Rogers (2011a) have recently moved the subject forward. However, even in Mattingly's model, we are presented with the idea that certain structures of the town were part of a Roman identity package (Mattingly 2006: 280) and the speed of their uptake could measure the success of urbanism (Mattingly 2006: 284). As such, the teleological elements of romanisation theory remain entrenched within the reasons for uptake of distinctly Mediterranean structures such as those involved with water (bathhouses possibly the most obvious). This paper aims to show that many structures that we have cast as cornerstones to this identity, could have maintained strong prehistoric associations that made them potent hybrid forms. This can be illustrated by analysing the flow of water and how we conceive it in the urban landscape. While many structures would have interacted with this element, the remit of this paper will be to explore the potential of bridges. The aim is to 'make strange' (Bradley 2007) such constructs of the Roman town; showing how many of them could have resonated with prehistoric associations as much as an incoming Mediterranean identity.

Water Theory

Perhaps one of the most troubling things about identifying the modern town with its Roman namesake is exposed in its relationship with water. Indeed, if one surveys the literature relating to Roman urban water supply the approach invariably casts it as a constant to our modern ideals. As such, the relationship of water to built structures is one based on a modern rationale; therefore bridges are most often seen in terms of supply/economic infrastructure (Rivet 1958: 75; Perring 1991: 6; Milne 1995: 42). As a result, with increasing regularity, we have looked outside archaeology for an understanding of water structures in the Roman world (e.g. O'Conner 1993; Burgers 2001). However, sociologists, such as John Urry, have identified the fact that our perceptions of nature have been far from consistent, representing many different 'contested natures' (Urry 1998). As such it is fundamentally wrong to attribute similar modern sentiment to water, without exploration of the evidence.

The relationship between nature and the modern town in the west, throughout much of the last century, has been one of dominance. There are many different natural elements that are focused into our towns and cities, sociologists have characterised these as environmental flows (Appadurai 1986; Urry 1998; Kaika 2005). Water is obviously paramount among these, and the careful management of its flow into the urban landscape fundamentally underpins modern life. There is more water running through our settlements than at any other point in history yet, somewhat paradoxically, it is nowhere to be seen. In Britain, despite regular rainfall throughout the year, only the most inclement weather will leave any long-lasting effect on the streets. Indeed, our water is, by and large, hidden beneath the ground, out of sight. This is a deliberate effort to make our life easier and more efficient. When we require water we merely turn the tap on and are provided with as much as required; when it rains we can usually be safe in the knowledge that a flooded street will not stop us in our daily routine.

However, the whole process goes far beyond just simply convenience or practicality. Modernity has seen the progressive detachment from the process of procuring water from its origin in nature. Part of this has undoubtedly been the scientific advances in the arena of health, which have deemed river water unhygienic for drinking and interaction in general. In London, during the nineteenth century, there was an awareness of the pollution of the Thames, and efforts were made to alleviate the situation. Indeed, Laurence (1994) notes how the late Victorian and Edwardian view of the city targeted environmental conditions as the source of socially unacceptable behaviour, rather than poverty. As such, sterilising these influences would create a healthy and virtuous population. In addition to careful consideration of the Thames, over a dozen rivers were covered by streets. The Walbrook and the Fleet are prominent examples of this but the Westbourne River is perhaps the most startling. This formerly vibrant watercourse now runs in a metal culvert that is visible above the Sloane Square Underground station platform (Edgeworth 2011: 44). This logic has spread into the overall conception of river water in an urban setting. Obviously many watercourses still run through British towns, but they are largely seen as a marginal influence in the definition of urban space.

This mode of perception has been alluded to by Kaika and Swyngedouw (2000), who see the role of water in the urban setting as following a Marxist evolution of fetishisation. Indeed, they outline how we have become detached from the labour and social relations involved in the process of water procurement (Kaika and Swyngedouw 2000; Kaika 2005); we do not know how it is transported, where it originates or the processes to which it has been subjected. Essentially modernity has silenced water, transforming it into a homogenous substance known as H_2O (Kaika and Swyngedouw 2000). Within this setting the flow of water into the city is a hidden process that is given meaning by external influence (buildings etc.). There is an intrinsic fear and insecurity present when this silence is broken. As such, any real display of nature's power produces a negative feeling within the modern urban dweller (Kaika 2005: 65). This feeling of unease has been labelled the 'urban uncanny' (Kaika 2005) and in the context of water it is essentially when a silent flow is temporarily given resonance, thereby altering the familiar sense of place (e.g. a flash flood). The whole premise is based on the idea that nature is something that hinders human development and progress (Kaika and Swyngedouw 2000: 126). Yet, we have to understand that these sentiments should not be imposed on the analysis of settlement in the past.

Past Perception of Water

In contrast to the above, there is general consensus on the importance of watery locales to the people of temperate Europe throughout prehistory. Indeed, the special nature of water has been illustrated by high levels of activity and notable votive deposits in direct relation to springs, rivers, lakes, marshes and islands from the Bronze Age through to the Late Iron Age (Fitzpatrick 1984; Green 1986; Webster 1995; Hingley 2006; Yates and Bradley 2010). Such action often cannot be explained in a practical sense, thus archaeologists have looked to symbolism and ritual as a key aspect of the relationship between people and these areas. In addition to deposited artefacts, there has also been extensive work on the formology of prehistoric sites; megalithic monuments in places like Orkney and Scana were defined by surrounding water (Bradley 2000; Phillips 2004). As such, Rogers (2008: 63) has been quick to note how deposition was not necessarily a prerequisite of the significance these natural places held; constructing buildings that addressed these liminal areas could be just as important, considering the challenging nature of such watery environments. Indeed, it is largely agreed that, throughout prehistory, there is evidence to suggest similar attitudes towards the respect of watery landscapes in many areas of Northern Europe (Bradley 1990; Coles 2001; Larsson 2001). In other words, the uncanny 'audible' nature of water (that is feared in the modern town) was openly courted and amplified in the prehistory of temperate Europe.

Despite the aforementioned practical approach to water in Roman towns, the evidence from the Mediterranean is characterised by a remarkably similar relationship. Obviously the Tiber features heavily within the classical sources. Yet it is not portrayed as merely an object of veneration but, rather, a personified figure that commands respect. Virgil

reserves regal language for the river describing it is 'king of all the waters' (*Aeneid* VIII: 78) and also the force that drives Aeneas towards Latium (*Aeneid* VIII: 39). Similarly, Plutarch describes how the intervention of Tiberinus gently guided the infant Romulus and Remus downstream before safely depositing them to be discovered by the she-wolf (*Plut. Rom*: III).

Furthermore, this is not an isolated treatment specific to the Tiber, but a general trend in the presentation of rivers in Italy and beyond. For instance, Pliny (*Letters* VIII: 8) describes the Italian river Clitumnus (the Clitunno, Umbria) as a figure in a purple bordered toga. He also makes mention of shadowy groves and offerings dedicated to this figure. Similarly, Ovid (*Amores* Book III: 6) presents the river Anio as a ruler that offers Ilia (mother of Romulus and Remus) refuge within his 'kingdom'. Even Pliny the Elder makes prolonged reference to the rivers of Northern Europe as key determining factors in the formulation of identity and sense of place (Murphy 2004). Furthermore, even the numismatic and sculptural evidence is consistent with this, portraying rivers as reclining personified human figures. In the Roman tradition, we have an audible presence, with regal authority, that could inform the urban landscapes of Italy.

Fusion zones – Heightened Meaning?

The consequence of conceiving rivers as meaning-laden flows, disseminating diverse messages to those dwelling in the landscape, is that places of confluence or parting of waters may be of pivotal importance. Indeed, areas of confluences and islands (within the flow of the river) correlate strongly with the occurrence of Iron Age shrines in Britain. Willis (2007: 120) notes the significant proportion of such ritual areas that were in close proximity to points of tidal and freshwater confluence (Elms Farm, Heybridge; Hayling Island; Lancing Down, West Sussex; Worth, Kent). There is also seemingly a link between these areas and prehistoric burial rights; the barrows at Cossington are an interesting example of this, placed within a setting defined by numerous confluences (Thomas 2008). Similarly, at the confluence of the Tas and Yare there is evidence for Neolithic monuments and Bronze Age barrows (Rogers 2008: 93).

Added to this, there is much evidence for the general form of islands being venerated in prehistory. The aforementioned example of Hayling Island is the site of a large Roman temple complex, but it is thought to have been just as important in the Late Pre-Roman Iron Age (King and Soffe 2001). Another prominent example is found at Fiskerton (Lincolnshire); nearby Lindsey was an island during the Iron Age and between the two sites there is evidence for extensive ritual deposition (Parker Pearson 2003: 191–192). This sort of activity is also mirrored at places like Llyn Cerrig Bach and Flag Fen Basin (Pryor 2001). Parker-Pearson also notes that many of the concentrations of metalwork we find in the Thames occur close to islands such as Wallingford, Runnymede and the islets in Syon Reach (Parker Pearson 2003: 193). These examples show the continued prominence of such locations from the Bronze Age down to the Late Iron Age, underlining the importance of their consideration in later eras.

It is worth noting that there is also a marked significance for these zones within the

Roman tradition. The city of Rome is a good example of this with the Isola Tiberina woven into the core narratives of the city. Livy (*History:* 2.5) notes how grain sown by the tyrant Tarquinius was cast into the Tiber and created the island. As a result, this links the creation of the Isola Tiberina to the founding of the Republic – the beginning of Rome's ascent to world power. Furthermore, and perhaps more significantly, the island also seems to have been a central place for cult worship. There is reason to believe that Aesculapius, Tiberinus, Faunus, Jupiter (Jurarius), Veiovis, Semo Sancus and Bellona were all worshipped in some fashion on the island (Brucia 1990). Isola Tiberina lies at the heart of a lowland zone which would have once been a point of confluence for many different waters (Ammerman 1990). With the Forum Romanum and Campus Martius nearby, this area became the heart of Roman symbolism and ideology. The extrapolation of such an arrangement to the provinces, where veneration of such forms is so prevalent, is something worth considering.

Upon a Bridge

The most common structures found in association with these watery fusion zones are bridges. It is easy to see the practical advantage of such an association, a river island presents an easier place to create a crossing point and confluences often further the creation of these mid-stream landforms (accumulation of material from two combining rivers etc.). However, while the awareness of such situations would have certainly been acute in the past, the scientific causation would surely have been lacking. As such, especially in cases of rapid island creation, an explanation would probably have involved a consideration of the local river deity. Added to this, bridges were far from merely practical structures within the Roman tradition. Indeed, Holland (1961) notably made reference to the bridges of archaic Rome being the original source of the important god Janus; blessed crossing points that allowed one to traverse the watery landscape of the Tiber floodplain. In turn, this rather magical importance is obviously reflected in the religious office of *Pontifex Maximus* or 'Greatest Bridge Builder' (Dilke 1971: 33).

Perhaps a key realisation in gaining the true meaning from these structures lies in seeing them as features that add to natural power, rather than something purely designed to overcome it. That is not to say bridges did not have clear practical aims, merely to acknowledge that was not their only role. In many ways bridges form a theoretical fusion point between islands and confluences. As with both natural features, a bridge is essentially a liminal experience in the landscape; it signals the transition from one place to another, there is often no alternative route available. Indeed, one's range of movement is reduced to a singular plane; like with an island, the individual is limited by the surrounding presence of the river, but our perspective of the water flow is heightened in this constrained position. Furthermore, the characteristics of flow, that may have defined the 'voice' of a river, would have been fundamentally enhanced for the individual. From a bridging point one could appreciate the coming together of waters; the parting of waters; the depth of water; the speed of water; the sound of water. Rather than the traditional ideas of a bridge taming the river, one could see such a structure amplifying the inherent power of the watercourse.

This idea that a river bridge has a deep relationship with its surroundings is something touched on by Heidegger. In 'Building Dwelling Thinking' (1971: 153), he makes sustained reference to bridges so as to explain his sense of dwelling; he notes that the bridge is a 'thing' which 'gathers to itself a fourfold of earth, sky, divinities and mortals'. The bridge has an intimate relationship with the earth, bringing together two banks of a river and providing a stable platform (in imitation of land) across the water. At the same time, as mentioned above, the bridge is suspended in the air above the river – creating a new relationship between man and the sky. Furthermore, the acknowledgement of 'audible' water flows can quite comfortably be placed in Heideggerian sense of divinity experienced on the bridge. In a sense then, Heidegger's description represents the bridge as a type of confluence in itself, pulling together all elements of the 'fourfold'. Heidegger (1971) debates that bridges can actually serve to create locations; perhaps through the fusion of perspectives we can see how the perception of a town could be linked to, perhaps legitimized by, an intertwining relationship between what we term 'natural' and 'man-made'.

The essential point to grasp is that, while they are often portrayed as purely practical structures, bridges are in fact almost hybrid constructions that straddle many definitions. Edgeworth (2011) has made reference to the combination of both natural and man-made identities to river flows in the modern world. Scarpino (1997: 5) reinforces these sentiments noting how rivers have become 'heavily modified, cyborg-like environments', going beyond a natural or man-made definition. The bridge has been shown to share many characteristics with both river islands and confluences. Furthermore, it can interact and enhance the power of both of these natural features, while relating them to the perception and experience of a nearby urban landscape. An understanding of the less obvious value to these structures could be important in comprehending their overall impact on nearby settlements.

Case study – Roman London

With the above ideas in mind, a closer look at Roman London can provide some tangible evidence for this approach. Underlying the modern city, Londinium was placed within a landscape fundamentally defined by water. In this area the Thames is known to have been joined by at least three minor rivers – the Walbrook, the Fleet and the Lorteburn. In addition, one must note how the Southwark area was formally composed of many low lying islands. Added to this, the mouth of the Fleet and Walbrook would have been characterised by a number of eyots. As a result, Roman Londinium possessed all of the water features to which this article has given prominence.

It is often said that Londinium was a new site built for commercial purposes with no origin in the Iron Age (Todd 1989: 79; Perring 1991: 1; Rowsome 1998: 35). This is a somewhat misleading description as, while no recognizable 'town' like settlement was in existence, there was certainly activity on the site dating back to the Bronze Age. By the first century A.D., this location on the Thames was seemingly a point on the border of around five tribal territories; therefore its meaning does not necessarily need to be

quantified in terms of structural remains. The clearest archaeological evidence from prehistory is in the form of structured deposits relating to the water of the Thames and the marshy islands of Southwark. The amount of human skulls and metal finds (Bradley and Gordon 1988) recovered from the Thames seems to denote ritual meaning for the area. Furthermore, Southwark also harbours evidence for Late Bronze Age and Iron Age activity; close to the later Roman bridging point a ring ditch was discovered in association with the cremations of at least 8 children or juveniles (Heard *et al.* 1990: 610; Brigham 2001b: 10). There is little evidence of *in situ* burning, but the numerous spreads of charcoal and cremated bone suggest nearby pyres (Brigham 2001b: 10). In addition, an area of 'compact silty loam' may represent the last remains of a mound covering this central feature. Later Iron Age evidence is also apparent, with an unusual inhumation burial found at 124 Borough High-street (Heard *et al.* 1990: 610). The position of the body, with legs drawn apart and head raised, seems to be a carefully structured arrangement. Other examples of unusual positioning of burials have often been seen as evidence for heightened significance (Lambot 1998).

The main Roman site of London was located on the opposite shore of the Thames. However, this island area of Southwark was certainly addressed by Roman building and occupation. Excavations at Tabard Square, Long Lane, have uncovered a large religious precinct immediately adjacent to the southern island of Southwark (Durrani 2004). Furthermore, there is a potential religious function for the monumental structures at Winchester Palace (Rogers 2011b: 213).This is supplemented by interesting finds including a marble figure of Neptune plus limestone figures of a Genius and a native hunter god (Merrifield 1983: 188).The figure of Neptune is also relatively early in date, possibly being a first century example of sculpture. In addition, an inscribed altar, part of a tombstone and the lid to a funerary chest were also uncovered (Heard *et al.* 1990: 617). These were found under the Southwark Cathedral which has a long history and could potentially be an example of a Christian place of worship directly overlaying an earlier Roman religious structure. Finally, there are also numerous Roman wells that were associated with extraordinary metal finds, unusual animal bone assemblages and complete pottery vessels (Merrifield 1987; Beasley 2006; Seeley and Wardle 2009).The evidence of these wells and the Neptune sculpture serve to illustrate the watery meaning of Southwark throughout the Roman period.

The Roman Thames bridge seemingly had three incarnations (representing different phases of the structure), but they all occupied the same area close to the modern London Bridge (Brigham 2001a: 30). The early evidence for this ancient crossing was actually found as a result of the nineteenth century building project. The work of Smith (1841), to both retrieve and catalogue the evidence dredged up in the modern building process, has left us with a significant record of archaeological material associated with the ancient crossing. Most of the work regarding this structure has centred on the practicalities of construction (Milne 1985). However, Smith noted a series of wooden piles and a concentration of Roman coins associated with the apparent supporting structures of the bridge. Rhodes (1991) extrapolated this antiquarian evidence and produced a reconstruction of the likely site of deposition along the ancient bridge. He notes how

this scene bears an uncanny resemblance to the archaeological evidence recorded at the crossing of the Liris at Minturnae, suggesting the change in depth and location of a shrine being potential reasons for the deposits of London.

It seems the acknowledgement of a Roman bridge to have ritual meaning is, in many cases, the end game for analysis. In fact, the interpretation of bridge deposits seems to largely isolate the phenomenon, never really considering what this type of activity could be referencing in the wider landscape. Rhodes (1991: 184) offers the location of a shrine as the *reason* for the coin deposits. But what is the reason for the shrine at this point? Curiously the change of water depth is offered as an alternative to the shrine, when it is surely feasible to see this natural reference point as the beginning of any ritual. Moreover, this point on the bridge would seem to be a place where both the complete waterscape and the urban constructions either side of the river could be appreciated (Fig. 1). In terms of the natural vista, one would surely have been able to appreciate the confluence of all three smaller watercourses (Fleet, Walbrook and Lorteburn) with the larger Thames.

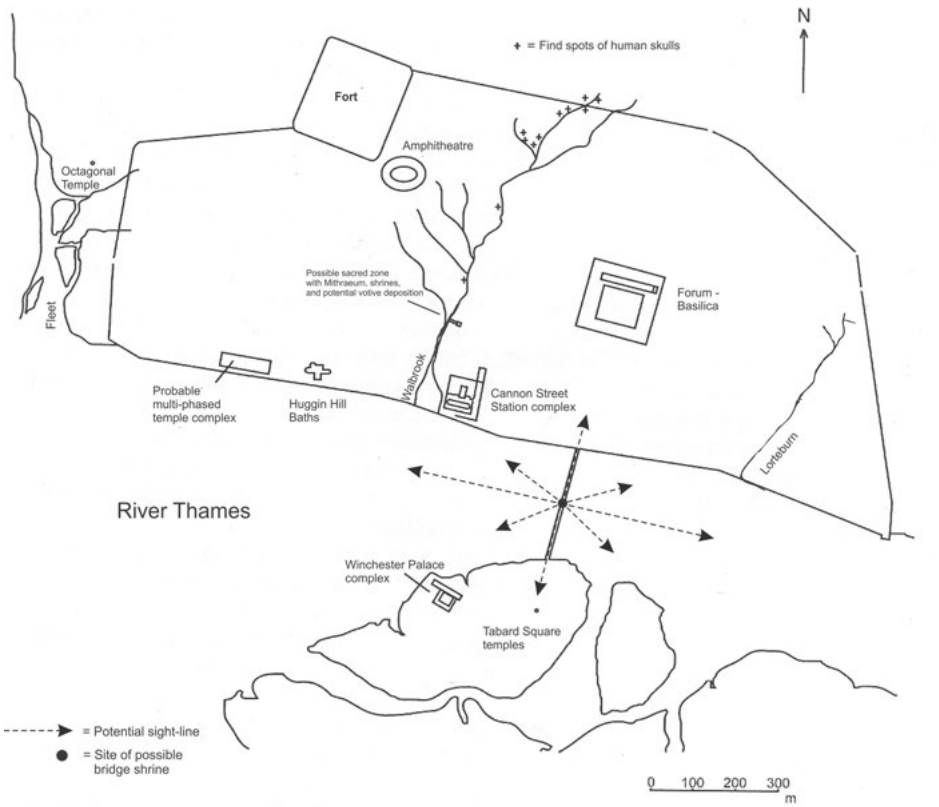

Figure 1: Multi-phased plan of London with sight-lines from the Roman bridge (from Rogers 2011b, with additions by author)

Furthermore, increasingly our picture of the Thames waterfront in the Roman period is one characterised by monumental constructions. Rogers (2011b) has argued how the port structures of London were far more than simply practical constructions. He referes to how the timber quay at the St Magnus House/New Fresh Wharf site was a monumental construction with five tiers of large oak beams held in positions by a framework of braces and piles (Miller *et al.* 1986: 8). Also in the fill of this building was a find of over 400 unused Samian vessels including cups, bowls and lion head *mortaria* (Miller *et al.* 1986: 49).

Another monumental feature that would have been apparent from the bridge was the Cannon Street Station complex. The archaeological evidence relates to numerous components of different dates including some kind of pool and temple structure (Milne 1996). This is coupled with the nearby Huggin Hill bath complex and the later 'Allectan Palace' development. At the latter, the evidence for free standing structures, such as a monumental arch relating to various deities, reflects the importance of the waterfront (Hill *et al.* 1980; Williams 1993). It has been noted that the first structure in this area was a temple; of similar size and layout to the example dedicated to Sulis Minerva in Bath. The entrance to this enclosure would have been facing east (towards the forum) but the monumental riverside facade made it a presence on the waterfront (Bateman 1998: 49). This would have created a link towards the forum from the waterscape, the latter of which could feasibly have been part of veneration in the complex. Thus the area lining the Thames had a potent mix of religious and ideological meaning, which would have been central to the conception of the town.

All of these disparate elements of the waterscape/waterfront could feasibly have been appreciated from the bridge; even if this was simply a matter of association from one's own knowledge of the town (so even if the Fleet could not be directly seen, people would have known when looking upstream that it joined the flow of the Thames). However, there is also the aforementioned straight line perspective that the bridge would have given the individual. Some 300 metres north of the bridge, the road continues straight to the Roman forum and basilica. These constructions were truly monumental in their scale, the second incarnation of the basilica was 52.5 metres wide and 167 metres long (Marsden 1987: 38). However, the building work also involved the deliberate dumping of around 20,000 cubic metres of materials to elevate the structure (Marsden 1987: 39). This would have been a gargantuan undertaking and has been portrayed as an effort to dominate the surrounding landscape. For instance, Creighton (2006: 106) notes how the intervisibility between the forum and bridge could have emphasised official procession; with ceremonial crossing symbolically re-conquering the territory. However, it seems plausible to suggest such a procession could be less about aggressive domination of the landscape, and more related to an exhibition of acceptance and legitimacy. This spectacle could be more about producing a functional hybrid identity (respected by the majority), rather than simply repeatedly proclaiming the victory of Rome.

With this in mind, when we consider this bridge its special nature cannot be limited to simply acknowledging the mere act of ritual deposition. Rather, it is what this represents on a wider scale. The act of ritual deposition implies a moment of stillness

and reflection on the bridge; an individual must prepare and execute the physical action, but also contemplate the reason for it. The latter undertaking would surely centre on the long-held importance of the waterscape. The former hints at a moment when one would appreciate the wider visual associations of the bridge. As such, the experience of the bridge potentially creates ideological unity; it links the traditional areas of Iron Age significance such as the Walbrook and Southwark into the Roman scenography of the monumental waterfronts and the nearby forum. Indeed, even if an individual is solely concerned with the waterscape during the act of ritual deposition, the subsequent movement towards the monumental Roman town would hybridise the experience.

However, the Thames and its bridge are just one part of a dynamic waterscape within the town. As mentioned previously, there is a tradition of votive deposition within the Walbrook that stems back to the Bronze Age. The special nature of this watercourse seems to endure throughout the Roman period. The third century Mithraeum (Shepherd 1998) is thought to be one of a cluster of temples that would have been present in the Middle Walbrook valley (near modern Bucklesbury House); demarcating a religious presence up to Late Antiquity. A sculpture of a river god was recovered from this area; according to Toynbee (1962: No 29, Plate 35), the style suggests it was made in the reign of Antoninus Pius or Hadrian. Added to this, charred remains of arcaded timber panelling and deposition of a face urn were also recovered from the area (Wilmott 1991). In addition, Henig (1998: 232) has suggested a shrine of the Dioscuri; plus Bird (1996) has shown evidence for cult worship of other exotic deities such as Sabazios. The worship of both Mithras and Sabazios often involved water, with snake imagery linking to more traditional deities like Aesculapius (Bird 1996: 120). Furthermore, a great deal of metalwork has been recovered from the Middle Walbrook area, with a strong preponderance of dress/personal items deposited throughout the first and second centuries (Crummy and Pohl 2008: 212). Merrifield and Hall (2008) have seen this as evidence for a continuation of the aforementioned votive tradition.

It is important to note that this area required extensive and continuous land reclamation during the Roman period; meaning that the Mithraeum would have been built on rather insecure ground (Rogers 2011b: 212). In addition, the Middle Walbrook represents the tidal head of the watercourse, so it would have been an area where there was visible difference in flow. Progressive reclamation of the area could have led to braiding of the river channel and the creation of island type areas; it is possible that the Mithraeum itself was bounded either side by water. Intriguingly, this zone of activity is framed by the creation of two Roman bridges over the Walbrook (Fig. 2). Merrifield and Hall (2008) have connected these structures with the on-going ritual activity of the area. They portray the role of the bridge as reactive – people would have made offerings to placate the deities of the river (perhaps to prevent against the destructive tidal forces). Yet, as there is an established history of deposition/veneration in this area in the Pre–Roman period, it would make more sense if we conceive the bridge as an active structure, manipulating and possibly enhancing the perspective of this meaning-laden environment.

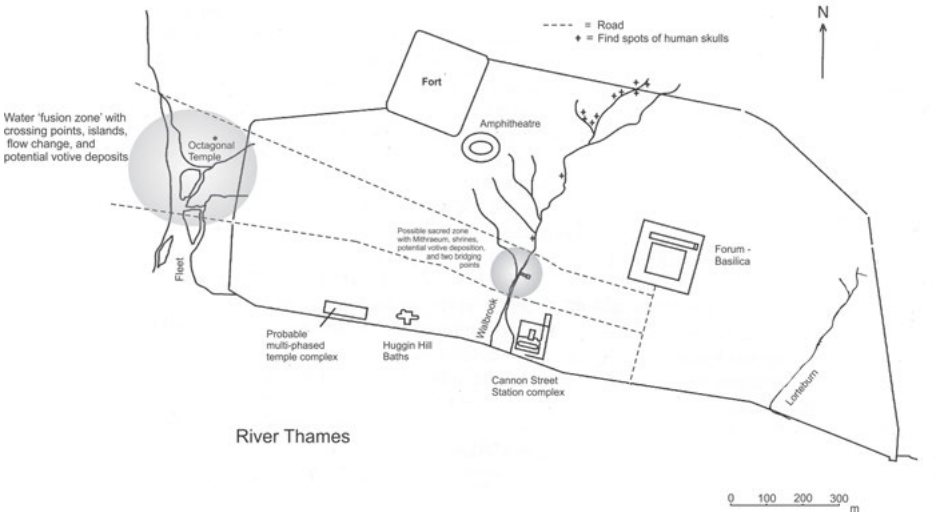

Figure 2: Multi-phased plan of Roman London with crossing points of the Walbrook and the Fleet (from Rogers 2011b, with additions by the author)

This interpretation is reinforced by the two roads beyond their crossing of the Walbrook. Their passage over the River Fleet also coincides with key features of the watercourse (Fig. 2). The northerly road crossed the river at the point the channel widens, which again would seem to be a tidal head; the more southerly road would have crossed between two eyots that had formed in the mouth of the Fleet. Again these points represent places where the flow of water would have been visibly affected. Added to this, Crummy and Pohl (2008: 219) have highlighted a series of possible structured depositions involving toilet instruments, similar to those found in the Middle Walbrook, close to a jetty on the southern eyot of the Fleet. Such small items are known to have been used as *ex votos*, and their good condition suggests they were seemingly not discarded as rubbish (Crummy and Pohl 2008: 218). Furthermore, there is also a later construction of a large octagonal structure, thought to be a temple, on a hilltop overlooking this area of the river (Crummy and Pohl 2008: 219). It seems possible then to consider these bridges as structures that are enhancing the meaning of an area already conceived of in special terms. Indeed, as with the Thames bridge, the crossing points of the Fleet and Walbrook could have played a significant role in the ideological unity of the settlement.

It has often been highlighted how the street plan of Roman London is uneven west of the Walbrook (Perring *et. al.* 1991); something which has been touted as reflective of the mixed population of London (Millett 1996: 36). However, a contributory factor to this arrangement could have been a conscious decision to build these bridges at significant points, as part of an overall ideological scheme. As a result of this, the primary routes into the centre of the settlement would have woven the prehistoric associations with water into the emerging monumental scenery. In this regard, it is also worth noting that

these two roads would have been littered with some of the most impressive buildings of the town. Blagg (1996: 45) has made reference to this fact that the 'Allectan Palace' and the Huggin Hill bathhouse would have been experienced on the southerly road; while the Cheapside Baths and Amphitheatre could have been readily apparent on the more northerly route. We cannot underestimate the powerful effect that such a combined experience could have had on an individual. Indeed, it is possible to see how this could create a sense of legitimacy for a new foundation like London, with architectural elements of the town intertwining themselves within the historical ethnoscape of the region.

Beyond London

It must be noted that the association of watery landscapes and settlement goes far beyond London. In the Roman period, many of the major towns are located within these 'fusion zones' of watery significance. Sometimes this relationship is in opposition to any modern logic of practicality; the establishment of Cirencester (Corinium) on a small island between the Churn and Daglingworth Brook is case in point (Reece 2003; Broxton and Reece 2011). Furthermore, three of the most important towns of the province, St Albans (Verulamium), Lincoln (Lindum) and Colchester (Camulodunum) could all be seen to have similar close ideological ties to their surrounding waterscape. Indeed, the first two towns in particular, have an uncanny similarity to London; with crossing points potentially unifying the ideological potency of the surrounding landscape in the act of entering the settlement. Clearly a consideration of this 'soft city' (Raban 1974; Laurence 1997), born of a potent mix of associations, is pivotal if we wish to get close to a true understanding of how people experienced settlement in the Roman period.

Conclusion

The orthodoxy of the Roman town is still worryingly informed by outdated ideas such as romanisation. This paper has sought to 'make strange' Roman settlement through an analysis of urban interaction with water. The intertwining relationship between bridges and the meaning-laden flow of water hints at an urban experience defined by hybrid principles. When one approached the town of London, this experience was not characterised by our simple dichotomies; natural or man-made; Roman or native; practical or ritual. As such, it is wrong to merely talk about structures such as bridges in black and white terms of economic need or ideological domination. Indeed, the mutual recognition of meaning in water makes it possible to see such structures as more complex multifaceted urban elements, which would have been respected by people from many different backgrounds. Therefore, by primarily treating urban bridges as something concerned with a 'Roman' identity we have underestimated their value for comprehending the perception of towns. Of course, a discussion of bridges only forms a starting point for such analysis. If water can be characterised as an 'audible flow' of meaning, the mundane elements of 'man-made' supply and drainage surely warrant

attention beyond a treatise of technical achievement. This means that well known urban amenities such as aqueducts and bathhouses could have been perceived in very different terms than traditional interpretation would suggest. Ultimately, by breaking down our self-imposed barriers between prehistory and the Roman era, we can begin to acknowledge an urban form that is a productive reflection of the multifaceted beliefs of its population.

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