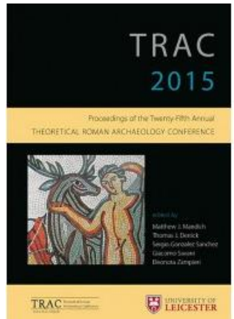

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A Context for Roman Priestly Regalia: Depositional Practices and Spatial Distribution of Assemblages from Roman Britain

Alessandra Esposito

Introduction

The recent discovery of a deposit containing votive and ritual objects dating to the Roman period in Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk (Worrell *et al*. 2011) offers a chance to re-discuss priestly regalia and the possible reasons behind their deposition. Priestly regalia are the objects characterizing the apparel of priests and priestesses, especially sceptres and head-dresses. This evidence has found favour in publications concerned with religion in Roman Britain (Henig 1984; Bird 2002), but is limited to those dealing with religion in the North-Western provinces.

Generally, the possibility to reconstruct the original apparel of Roman priests is based mainly on iconographical sources such as reliefs, paintings, and mosaics. Clothing in general is more susceptible, by its nature, to decay, and is therefore far less visible in the archaeological record (Sebesta and Bonfante 2006). The classic aspect of the Roman priests and priestesses consists of a person wearing a toga *capite velato*, an element indicating piety toward the gods and thus shared also by 'common' people performing sacrifices and libations (Stone 2001: 17, 20). Different cults were sometimes reflected in particular clothes and accessories used during religious performances, thus underlining a specific religious identity (Sommer 2012: 261). This was a prerogative, for example, of the oriental cults or specific religious offices, such as the *flamines* (Rüpke 2011). The particular aspect of some of the regalia from Britain (particularly the head-dresses) has been used to justify a connection of these objects to practices pre-dating the Roman conquest at various stages (i.e. the Iron and Late Iron Ages), and to relate them to the survival of druidic practices in the province (Aldhouse-Green 2011). Surely, this evidence as a whole provides several problems for this interpretation. Owing to the fortuitous, or sometimes not-well documented, circumstances of the first discoveries the excavation data, if they exist, were often poor, leaving scholars to focus mainly on iconography such as with, for example, the chain head-dress found at Stony Stratford, Buckinghamshire in 1789 (Lyson 1817; Walters and Smith 1921). Consequently, most publications of these objects from the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century considered these items casually and individually, with brief mentions of objects typologically similar, as is the case for the 'head ornaments' from Cavenham Heath, Suffolk (Layard 1925). It is possible to add to this evidence, which was discovered at an early stage of the use of modern archaeological methodologies, some regalia found in the 1960s and 1970s. The publication of these provides a richer set of information, as with the crowns from Deeping St. James, Lincolnshire (Painter 1971) or the exceptional finds from Wanborough, Wiltshire, which are both addressed with a more modern approach to documentation (Bird 1996). Thanks to the interrogative potential of the extensive database of the Portable Antiquity Scheme and the published evidence, I was able to create a substantial dataset containing deposits, single finds, and stray finds of priestly regalia with the express aim to provide better typological and contextual basis for this evidence.

Priestly regalia form a somehow particular group of material, falling in both the categories of 'offerings' and 'objects used in rites', depending on their archaeological context. In this paper, I will focus on the regalia found in deposits, as they provide richer contextual information than single and stray finds. In this sense, I intend to join a renewed interest in structured deposits demonstrated by present and forthcoming publications about the deposition of coins (undergoing joint project between the University of Leicester and the British Museum, http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/archaeology/research/projects/hoarding-in-iron-age-and-roman-britain [Last Accessed: 30/12/2015]), pewter objects (Poulton and Scott 1993), vessels (Lundock 2015), and precious metals (Hobbs 2006). Presenting some preliminary results of my current PhD research, which includes a Geographic Information System mapping the archaeological evidence for ritual practices, I aim to contribute to the improvement of our understanding of priestly regalia, and specifically, their key performative aspect, which offers useful data to approach the hybridity of cultural change, allowing speculations on depositional practices in southern/south-eastern Britain in the Roman period.

A Step Back: 'Ritual' and the Definition of Ritual Objects

Among the first theoretical assumptions about ancient religions and their system of beliefs is that they stand on the highest step of a 'ladder of inference' (Hawkes 1954), implying their inaccessibility for (i.e. understandable by) the modern archaeologist (Wilkins 1996: 2; Whitehouse 1996: 9–10). A strong opposition to this sceptical definition was offered by the profound revision of archaeological methodologies generated during the theoretical debate between processualists and post-processualists.

The pioneering work by Renfrew on the sanctuary at Philakopi (Renfrew 1985) gave the basis for the 'Archaeology of Cult Practice', which was later developed in the creation of a cognitive-processual approach to the study of ancient ritual behaviours (Renfrew 1994). The archaeologist was asked to be as 'objective' as possible, implying the use of a personal cognitive map or *mappa* which, together with the analysis of the archaeological record could eventually 'allow inferences' about the cognitive maps of the ancient minds (Renfrew 1994: 10–11). However, even if the theoretical approach stressed the importance of the material record to reconstruct beliefs and rituals, some scholars noted a lack in the application of this suggestion on the actual analysis of ritual objects by Renfrew and the processualists, usually choosing to discuss religions and rituals that could rely on the 'safer ground' provided by written sources (Whitehouse 1996: 19; Osbourne 2004: 2, 5–6).

With the rise of post-processual positions (Hodder 1986; Shanks and Tilley 1992) and the proposal of an actual 'Archaeology of Ritual', the archaeologist was now expected to 'move beyond the material residue...to consider the cultural conditions which the code [that is the material culture] once addressed' (Barrett 1991: 1). Ritual is described as a genuine social phenomenon implying an interaction between human agents and super-natural 'authors' interacting through ritual practices (Barrett 1991: 5). To fully understand a ritual and its dynamics, it is fundamental to analyse the social context in which it developed. Even if it is perceived as sacred and thus apparently fixed in its characteristics by the people performing it, the ritual follows changes in its contemporary society, and it is subject to inventions (introduction of new practices) and transformations (Wilkins 1996: 3). In this regard, the analysis of ritual practices allows the reconstruction of the organization and functioning dynamics of ancient societies, or even specific social groups. Bell stresses that ritual is a relational and context specific concept objectified in practices of ritualization. Its specific characteristics permit one to separate ritual practices from everyday activities (Bell 1992). From a practical point of view though, it has been noticed how a difference between ritual and everyday activities may have been not clear in the past and thus it does not always provide an obvious distinction in the archaeological record (Hill 1995; Kyriakidis 2007).

Although not openly adhering to any theoretical movement, Merrifield (1987) significantly contributed to the debate about the definition of ritual. He noticed how archaeologists studying prehistoric periods were more inclined to offer a 'ritual' or 'magical' interpretation to objects, buildings, and behaviours. Archaeologists concerned with literate, historical periods, instead, appeared to him to be affected by a 'ritual phobia' (Merrifield 1987: 5), which would sometimes prevent them from leaning towards any ritual interpretation. To clarify the use of a vocabulary that he felt confusing, whose words were sometimes overlapping in their meanings, he provided some still relevant definitions. Religion is defined as the 'belief in the supernatural or spiritual beings'; Magic concerns the use of practices intended to bring occult forces under control so to influence events; Ritual is used for those 'prescribed or customary behaviours, that might be religious'. The fact that any object, whose primary use was not immediately clear, would have been labelled as 'ritual', has long been considered a joke in the archaeological literature (Renfrew 1985: 15; Whitehouse 1996: 9). Studies based on object classification in the last two centuries usually focused on the intrinsic features of the objects to obtain a typology, often involving scattering original assemblages with a consequent loss of information about the archaeological context (Osbourne 2004: 3). This makes it difficult now to interpret them as original ritual deposits (Barrowclaugh and Malone 2007: 3).

One attempt to combine a typological study with general information about the context is the work published in 1996 by Whitehouse (Table 1). She divides the 'ritual objects' in six categories, each one characterised by three archaeological indicators; physical attributes, the specific archaeological context, and the broader geographical and social contexts. Her examples are here tailored according to the chronological and cultural contexts of Romano-British religions.

Whitehouse's analysis attempts to limit the 'subjectivity' affecting the identification of ritual objects. On a practical level, it is necessary to consider the ritual objects not individually but always with their spatial archaeological context and consequently the broader social framework (Wilkins 1996: 3; Barrowclaugh and Malone 2007: 2–3; Gerrard 2011). Recent approaches underline this tendency to 'objectify some artefacts as ritual' (Collis 2001; Chadwick 2012) and are actually more concerned with the biographies of these artefacts, the reasons why they were chosen, and the actions and practices through which they became 'ritual' (Morris 2008; Serjeantson and Morris 2011). In this sense, the analysis of the priestly regalia appears as an interesting on the function of these artefacts, once their case study. On the one hand, it offers the possibility to analyse objects that are 'intrinsically' considered ritual, but are not always found in an archaeological context that can be defined as such. This condition hence allows room for speculations initial purpose was over.

Table 1: The six categories of ritual objects (data after Whitehouse 1996: 13–28).

Sacra	'Actual objects of worship'. Cult statues, mostly found in the typical religious enclosures (temples, shrines).
Votaries	Representations (usually statuettes or *stelae*) of generic worshippers or specific individuals sometimes associated with inscriptions. They are mostly found at temple and shrine sites but, unlike the previous category, they are usually more significant in number. This category also includes the anatomical *ex-voto*.
Offerings	'Food items or objects intended for the deity's use or glorification', found in typical religious environments or cult sites as high or wet places or sacred sites as woods. Foundation deposits also fall in this category, together with offerings made at burial sites. They usually include: a) human and/or animal sacrifice c) figurines b) food d) other artefacts (objects made of valuable materials or appropriate for a particular deity) Whitehouse interprets the prehistoric hoards of bronze objects found in North-Western Europe as votive offerings.
Objects used in rites	Equipment used in religious rituals ('libation vessels, incense burners, knives'). Whitehouse argues how difficult it is sometimes to distinguish in the archaeological evidence those items used in rites from votive offerings of practical objects. She suggests relying on three characteristics pointing to an interpretation as ritual objects: a) rare material c) maintenance of functionality b) complex decoration
Grave goods	'Objects placed in graves'.
Amulets	'Personal possessions used for ritual purposes'. This category usually overlaps with personal ornaments and it falls in the sphere of magic and superstition.

A Further Consideration: Structured Deposits

Structured deposits, containing ritual objects considered here, were found at eight sites. This kind of archaeological context is highly significant as it provides a chance to understand which objects might be considered 'bury-able' with priestly regalia. Moreover it provides a chance to possibly analyse the reasons why these objects have been buried.

However, in the scholarly literature, structured deposits are usually defined as 'hoards' and 'treasures', thus emphasizing the act of deposition for safekeeping, or as 'offerings' or 'dedications', stressing their role in a ritual (Osborne 2004: 5). The term 'structured deposit' was introduced in the archaeological literature by prehistoric scholars Richards and Thomas (1984) and it was later adopted by Clarke (1997) for the Roman period pits at Newstead. It offers a more neutral way of addressing assemblages of objects, highlighting the depositional practice rather than any alleged motivation (Garrow 2012).

Works on prehistoric cultures and pre-literate societies in general have also been the first

Table 2: The four criteria to identify ritual hoards (data after Whitehouse 1996: 13–28).

Special location	**Special objects**	**Association with food**	**Arrangement**
Wet contexts	Predominance of (personal) ornaments and weapons	Animal remains	Inside vessel
Deposition at a considerable depth or covered by a stone	Cosmology-related objects (axes, horse gear, vessels)	Pottery likely used to contain food	Encircled by a ring
Grave mound (non-related with the burial)	Complete or near complete objects	Sickles	Parallel objects
-Ancient- groves or forests (mainly recognisable thanks to toponyms)			

to address the problems related to the correct identification of ritual deposits. In her work on Bronze Age ritual deposits in Denmark, Levy suggests that ethnography can carefully be used to distinguish between ritual and non-ritual assemblages and can also help to reach a useful definition of ritual offerings or deposits. Ritual offerings/deposits are recognisable in the archaeological record as they are usually organised in a 'stereotyped way' and the objects themselves are understood to be valuable in a symbolical and, sometimes, material way (Table 2). They communicate requests – petitioning, blessing, propitiating – or they thank the supernatural world (Levy 1982: 20). Combining two 'direct-historical' accounts for Bronze Age Denmark (Tacitus' account in the *Germania* about the customs of German tribes of Northern Europe, and Danish literature from the medieval period describing wells and springs), with ethnographic information, she points out four criteria to identify ritual offerings, based on the location, the characteristics of the objects, their association with food remains, and their arrangement.

The criteria to identify non-ritual hoards plays on the lack of the characteristics indicated above: tools, raw materials, or fragmented objects deposited at a shallow depth in dry land without an association with food, nor special arrangement. Not every ritual deposit will present all of the aforementioned criteria and sometimes the features characterizing ritual and non-ritual assemblages overlap (Table 3). It is thus important to identify those combinations that clearly

Table 3: Possible combinations of ritual and non-ritual hoards (data after Whitehouse 1996: 13–28).

Ritual Hoards	**Non-Ritual hoards**
Complete, Personal/Cosmology-related objects Wet contexts	Diverse objects – complete or in fragments – Raw material Wet contexts; Grave mounds; Groves
Complete, Personal/Cosmology-related objects Considerable depth Grave mounds; Groves	Diverse objects – complete or in fragments – Raw material Dry contexts
Complete, Personal/Cosmology-related objects Dry contexts	
Complete diverse objects Wet contexts; Grave mounds; Groves	

defy a hoard as ritual or non-ritual. In Levy's sample, non-ritual deposits are mainly interpreted as craftsmen's deposits or wealth deposits not retrieved by their owners (Levy 1982: 44).

Bradley generally agrees with Levy's distinction, underlining that the primary difference between a ritual and a non-ritual deposit is the actual chance to retrieve what was buried. The ritual hoard might be found in both wet areas and dry land. The latter include grave goods, assemblages of elaborate artefacts, usually isolated from the main settlement or structures, for example on hill-tops or caves (Bradley 1990: 9–10). Single finds are considered as chance losses and therefore non-ritual, while multiple finds are presumed to be deposited together in a single event. In this case though, some deposits were never 'closed' but objects might have been added or removed; consequently, what today appear as single finds might be an intermediate or final stage of this type of assemblages (Bradley 1990: 4). Alternatively they may have lost associated objects through decay of organic materials.

For Roman period studies, initial scepticism was expressed by Crawford. He stated that the act of interment of wealth had a direct relationship with violent events and judged as 'pure illusion' the possibility of hoarding for reasons other than later recovery (Crawford 1969). At the same time, proposals for a different interpretation of the phenomenon of hoarding and of structured deposits were forwarded for the analysis of Iron Age and Roman metal deposits. In his discussion of ironwork hoards from Britain, Manning implies that the reason for deposition might be votive, even for those hoards not found in wet places (Manning 1972).

However, during the 1980s, the interpretations of deposits generally remained in accordance with the interpretation of hoards buried for security reasons in times of political instability (Willingham Fen, Cambridgeshire - Evans 1984). Nonetheless, it is interesting to record an initial attempt to provide an alternative significance for burying precious objects. Among the different explanations proposed for the Thetford Treasure, for instance, Johns and Potter (1983) considered the possibility of a religious commission behind the deposit. However, Henig suggested that the jewellery hoard could have consisted of religious regalia produced following the request of a nearby temple of Faunus. (Henig in Johns and Potter 1983*:* 32). A more cautious interpretation prevailed: a merchant concerned with the safe-keeping of his goods in the late forth-century Britain (Johns and Potter 1983*:* 74).

A sceptical position is again provided by Reece, who questioned the use of the term 'hoard' and its limitations (Reece 1988: 260). Fundamental for his definition of hoard was the understanding of its 'intent and belief', why it was deposited and never recovered, hence providing a theoretical definition, according to contents and functions, more than a linguistic suggestion. The word 'hoard' is used to identify variously collections of coins, figurines, silver plate, jewellery, and bronze and pewter vessels. But he believes that 'no hoard can ever have within it any ideas of why it was buried or why it was not recovered'; this impossibility to understand the circumstances of deposition and the original purpose of a hoard actually provides, according to the author, 'an impediment to classification'. Historical and written sources might be used, along with the material evidence, in interpreting the hoards. However, it is almost impossible to understand if a specific act of hoarding involved just a burier willing to re-appropriate his own goods in the near future or it also included a 'third party' – a dedication to a god. These strict theoretical assumptions are partly softened in his analysis of some famous deposits. Safekeeping seems to be the main reason for hoarding, particularly for those collections of precious metal objects. According to Reece, this is due to the idea that these types of material (gold and silver, carved or not) always kept a (monetary) value in every 'European' society, no matter the period (Reece 1988: 263). Even for the Thetford and the Water Newton treasures, whereas it is possible to identify the collectors as devotees of Faunus or early Christians, a clear element of perpetual dedication to the god is missing. We can finally assume that a definition of a hoard according to Reece might be a collection of precious objects, buried with the intention of future recovery.

Nonetheless, the idea that the act of burying objects could be interpreted as a ritual behaviour, besides being a mere attempt to hide precious objects for security reasons with the intention of further recovery, started to gain ground. This theory has initially been persuasively applied to the examination of coin hoards (Aitchison 1988) and of hoards containing pewter objects (Poulton and Scott 1993) or metalwork (Merrifield 1987; Clarke 1997; Fulford 2001); in this case, it is important to consider a religious or votive intent together with the will to preserve the real value of the coins and of the metal. Even if aesthetic merits can be supposed for the selection of objects to bury, particularly for jewellery and silver tableware, usually the iconographic themes show religious subjects (Poulton and Scott 1993). The distinction proves to be much more productive, for example, for those coin hoards found in rural districts or in areas on the edge of the empire (Galestin 2001; Hunter 2007). Recently discovered coin hoards, like the Frome Hoard, Somerset, have been interpreted as a collection of votive offerings collected from the local community (Moorhead *et al*. 2010). This is also one of the assumptions of an important ongoing project of the British Museum in collaboration with the University of Leicester, intending to map and study 3rd century coin hoards from Britain (http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/archaeology/research/projects/hoarding-in-iron-age-and-roman-britain/what-can-coin-hoards-tell-us-about-iron-age-and-roman-britain [Last Accessed:09/12/2015]).

The two theories on the possibility, or impossibility, of providing an explanation for depositional behaviours beyond safe-keeping reasons, were crystallised during the Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference of 1994. An interesting exchange took place between Millett and Johns about *inter alia* what was, at the time, the current consideration of the hoards, especially of precious material, and the reasons for their deposition.

Millett's definition of hoard is bound to the element of 'value' (1994). The term 'hoard' might not then be applied to a group of pottery nor bones, and in general to all those objects that lack of a noticeable importance, which would better constitute a 'cache'. But the concept of 'value' may vary depending on the different societies applying it. Considering only the tangible, the monetary value of a hoard is the foundation of the modern interpretation of this type of context, and of the reasons for its deposition. Beyond this intrinsic value of the objects, Millett suggests the existence of other elements that might be involved in the process of selection of objects to bury: a votive or ritual action or the appreciation of aesthetic merits. The key to a correct interpretation of the intent of the burier may be in the analysis of the objects in the deposit, and in the location where the deposit was buried. Eventually, Millett considers reconstructions and interpretations of prehistoric and Iron Age depositional contexts as material for comparisons in a Roman scenario.

In response, Johns (1994) systematically criticizes Millett's positions. For what affects us in this discussion, we take note only of the points made on the debate of the definition of 'hoard', and the reasons for its deposition – with reference also to a later work (Johns 1996). Johns proposes to use 'hoard' as a general term defining an assemblage of different types of material (precious, but also comestibles, base-metal objects, glass, ceramic, etc.) 'evidently stored or hidden together'(Johns 1996*:* 2). 'Treasure' may indicate instead a specific type of hoard, namely a collection of high-value objects. Three kinds of material identify three types of treasures: coins; jewellery; plate. This last category appears incredibly rich, including domestic tableware, *Hacksilber*, and even statuettes, which might have probably better formed a class on their own.

She is also very critical of considering the possibility of using Bronze and Iron Age contexts as comparisons for Roman period depositional behaviours (Johns 1996: 1). The main reasons for deposition are safekeeping and storage. Votive or ritual actions may be implied in depositional behaviours without excluding a safekeeping intention. Collections deposited in waterlogged contexts may be considered votive, following proto-historic behaviours, only if they would have been completely unrecoverable, otherwise they will fall in the first category. 'Aesthetic merit', the third category suggested by Millett is declined as highly 'subjective' and impossible to prove archaeologically. The most recent analyses (Chadwick 2012; Garrow 2012) underline how difficult it is to distinguish between rubbish disposals and 'ritual' structured deposits. Both agree that everyday practice (material culture patterning) and 'odd' deposits (result of a clear ritualised practice) may constitute two opposite ends of a continuous spectrum, where every structured deposit may find its place and hence its most correct interpretation.

The chance to join this active debate is made even more appealing by the further analysis of deposits with an apparently clear ritual content. The pattern highlighted by the deposits of priestly regalia will join this study with the most recent works on structured deposits from military areas (Clarke 1997) or secular contexts (Fulford 2001) in Britain, contributing to new readings of the cultural landscape (Galestin 2001; Evans and Hodder 2006; Hingley and Willis 2007; Hunter 2007; Moorhead *et al.*2010; Chadwick 2012).

A different interpretation for some of these deposits is that they might have been 'temple treasures'. Again, there is no complete accordance among the scholars on this type of assemblages. Generally, this type of 'treasure' is referred to as ' the accumulation of valuable, mobile goods resulting directly from the generosity of the faithful and indirectly from the income of their liberality' ('*l'accumulation de biens mobiliers de valeur résultant directement de la générosité des fidèles, ou indirectement du revenu de leurs largesses*'. Baratte 1992: 111). These objects may have been stored in the temples for a time and would have been used to provide support to the structure and its activities. According to this first definition, it would seem that none of our contexts could fall under this category. To be such, a temple treasure could only include valuable votive goods offered to the deity by the faithful. The deposits considered in this research, however, might contain ritual but also votive objects (metal sheets – 'leaves' or 'feathers' – or bronze statuettes). As already pointed out (Baratte 1992; Künzl 1997), 'temple treasures' usually appear to be not completely homogeneous in content, leaving space to interpret them also as the results of looting activities accumulating objects of different origin.

Another possible hypothesis is provided by the fact that not only objects with a strong, intrinsic religious element (i.e. an image of a deity) could be offered in the temples. Even a 'profane' object is coveted once dedicated to a religious significance; a change of status occurs during the 'life' of an object when it is deposited in the ground, modifying its biography (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986; Whitehouse 1996). An ultimate interpretation of our contexts is not possible at this stage of the discussion, but it is nonetheless useful to adopt this wider definition of 'temple treasure' to possibly provide a more correct standpoint.

The deposits found, apparently isolated from any known structure, though, allow several hypotheses but provide few answers. If the objects deposited have a religious significance, like in this case, the assemblage is usually interpreted as 'ritual'. In my opinion, even if the content allows a connection to a religious background (ritual and votive objects), the archaeological context still is the key to offer a conclusive interpretation. On the one hand, these 'isolated' deposits might have been connected to shrines or sacred natural spots that are no longer intelligible in the modern landscape; in this case, although unintelligible to us, they would keep their 'ritual' significance. On the other, the religious element might be a signal of the provenance of these objects (shrine or temple site), but their 'life' changed when they were stolen and deposited, for example, or hidden for security reasons.

The Deposits of Regalia

Past Studies

Among the first finds of 'priestly regalia' was the discovery at Stony Stratford, Buckinghamshire in 1789 of a chain-crown and several votive plaques placed in an urn (Lyson 1817; Walters and Smith 1921: 62–64). The peculiarity of the objects did not lead, at the time, to any further consideration besides their description until 1925, when Layard published two bronze crowns and two 'head ornaments' that she had purchased few years earlier after their discovery at Cavenham Heath, Suffolk (Layard 1925). In a later excavation, conducted on the site by Layard herself, she also found a bronze feather plaque which allowed her to draw a direct parallel with the assemblages from Stony Stratford, Buckinghamshire and Barkway, Hertfordshire and to hypothesize that the metal plaques could be applied on the crowns worn by 'pagan' priests.

The Willingham Fen, Cambridgeshire hoard attracted immediate attention after its first publication (Babington 1883). Containing mainly sceptres, it was immediately interpreted as a votive assemblage and considered a fundamental proof for the identification of a cult of Hercules-Commodus in Britain (Rostovtzeff 1923). It created a precedent and became a reference for further findings like the interment from Brough on Humber, Yorkshire which returned two sceptres and a bucket (Corder and Richmond 1938). The two scholars were in doubt about the identification of the owner, a priest or a layman, while agreeing on a local iconographic tradition. Less attention was paid to the discovery of a sceptre at Farley Heath, Surrey in 1848, published for the first time only in 1938 (Goodchild 1938); the complex iconography of the object immediately allowed the scholar to identify a religious significance carved in a 'Celtic' design.

The only find from a coherent context of excavation for this period is a 'bronze object' from Lydney Park, Gloucestershire, found at the shrine of the god Nodens during Wheeler's campaign in the years 1928–29 (Wheeler and Wheeler 1932). The modernity of Wheeler's approach is shown in the quality of publication as well as in the discussion of the findings. The metal-work consists of a half-moon foil decorated with deities which initially (Wheeler and Wheeler 1932: 42) allows room for doubts in the interpretation (part of a head-dress or portion of a bronze vessel?) while later, in the catalogue (Wheeler and Wheeler 1932: 90, n.137), it becomes definitely an example of a plaque to apply on a priest's head-dress. A circular sheet of bronze and some bronze chains found during earlier excavations are interpreted as part of a ceremonial head-dress on the example of the ones from Cavenham Heath, Suffolk (Wheeler and Wheeler 1932: 91, n.143).

The accidental find of five diadems and a crown from Hockwold-cum-Wilton, Norfolk in 1956–57 sees a first publication, besides an early brief description (JRS 1957: 211), in Toynbee's handbook about the art of Roman Britain (Toynbee 1962: 339). Toynbee readily ascribes the designs of the decoration on the diadems from Hockwold to a 'native Celtic hand', with the small plaques depicting an unidentified local god. The content of the cache is considered a treasure of a possible nearby temple, buried for safety reasons. Together with these is a discussion of some of the previous discoveries, in particular those from Lydney Park and Cavenham Heath. The complete diadem from Lydney is explained, without doubt, as an element of a headdress, classical in content and native in manufacture. A similar origin (part of another diadem/diadems) is hypothesised for small fragments of the same kind, while no mention is made of the chain headdress (Toynbee 1962: 338).

Excavators and commentators of priestly regalia in this first stage of discovery manifest no particular problem in identifying the original use for this kind of objects, even if no specific comparison is recalled to support it (Lysons 1817; Layard 1925). The context of the material or the area of discovery (close to temples or shrines) is enough to provide a link to priesthood or to religious behaviours. Regalia are mainly related to the cults of local, native Celtic gods, while some, particularly the ones found together with votive plaques, are linked to classical Roman deities (i.e. Vulcan and Mars for the Barkway hoard. Walters and Smith 1921). Attempts at dating are extremely rare and are often based exclusively on iconography.

The first attempt at a coherent collection and discussion of the priestly regalia is the concise paragraph 'Priests and Regalia' in Lewis' synthesis about the Roman temples of Britain (Lewis 1966: 137–138). After complaining about the extreme scarcity of the epigraphic and iconographic evidence for priesthood in Britain, Lewis goes on to describe the better-known religious regalia. The interesting aspect of his approach resides in the identification of a specific area of origin (East Anglia) and a suggestion of the first typology for this kind of evidence. First he discusses the sceptres, identifying four types; unfortunately no clear description is given for each type but only a reference to specific objects. On the other hand, a more unambiguous typology is given for the headdress, which suggests three types: sheet-bronze crowns, sheet-bronze circlet diadems, headdresses consisting of discs connected by chains or strips (Lewis 1966: 138). Proof of the effectiveness of this first typology is its use by Painter in discussing the three crowns found at Deeping St James, Lincolnshire, between 1965 and 1968 (Painter 1971).

Subsequent studies do not seem to follow the analytical approach suggested by Lewis. In 1976 Green published a general work on the religious material from Roman Britain, but a very limited space is given to the discussion of priestly regalia (Green 1976: 45–46). She offers a choice of ritual objects from southern Roman Britain, but does not discuss the iconography; nonetheless they allow her to hypothesize the presence of a 'clergy' expressing Celtic religious beliefs (Green 1976: 119).

Henig's monograph on religion in Roman Britain contains a brief account of 'religious paraphernalia' (Henig 1984: 136–141). Here metal crowns or diadems are considered specific ornaments used by priests in the whole Roman world, and not specific to the 'Celtic' area, and consequently the ones from Britain can be easily included and related to the most classical cults. The two crowns from Hockwold-cum-Wilton are interpreted as part of the apparel of the Eastern cult of Cybele and Attis' officiating priests (according to the contextual material), while the ones from Stony Stratford are related to Mars officiants. He also includes in the paraphernalia the rattle from Felmingham Hall, Norfolk and several sceptres. The latter are grouped by the iconography: heads/busts or animals (mainly birds), on the top. The sceptres with representations of heads (gods and emperors) are here related to the Iron Age specific cultural habit to use human-headed sceptres, which continues, through the Roman period, to the Saxon phase.

Bird's chapter (Bird 2002) on 'Priestly regalia' is the most recent attempt to provide an updated list (including the finds from the two temple sites of Wanborough and Farley Heath). She gives reasons to be doubtful in identifying a relation between the headdresses and the apparel of priests; nonetheless if the assumption can be considered true, they will be then associated with local cults. She offers a generic typology for the headdresses, identifying two main kinds; crowns and diadems and at the end she discusses the sceptres. Even recently then, the evidence for religious performers has been discussed mainly using a descriptive approach. This study aims to reconnect this material with the rest of the evidence for ritual practices, discussing the methods of discovery, the material context in which it was included, and the depositional practices involved. Unlike earlier studies where the regalia were considered simply as objects, almost appendices of the 'Romano-British priests', in the present study they were used to map the presence of specific ritual behaviours. Moreover, the general lack of consideration of the archaeological context of both objects and assemblages in the previous literature strongly biased their interpretation. For example, assemblages from temple sites might be interpreted as temple treasures (Künzl 1997), or foundation deposits, like the one from Wanborough (Williams 2008). The deposits found apparently isolated from any known structure though allow several hypotheses but provide few answers. If the objects deposited have a religious significance, as in this case, the assemblage is usually interpreted as 'ritual'. In my opinion, even if the content allows a connection to a religious background (ritual and votive objects), the archaeological context still is the key to offer a richer interpretation. On the one hand, these 'isolated' deposits might have been connected to shrines or sacred natural spots that are no longer identifiable in the modern landscape; in this case, although unintelligible to us, they would keep their 'ritual' significance. On the other, the religious element might be a signal of the provenance of these objects (shrine or temple site), but their 'life' changed when they were stolen and deposited, for example, or hidden for security reasons. I am confident that in the course of my research I will be able to shed light on this particular aspect, thanks also to the use of continental comparanda, in order to overcome the general insularity of previous approaches to this evidence.

The Present Analysis

There are eight deposits of priestly regalia known in Britain so far:

Table 4: Deposits containing priestly regalia from Britain.

Location	County	Date (C.E.)	Year of Excavation	Archaeological Context
Barkway	Hertfordshire	early 3rd century	1743 (Walters and Smith 1921)	(Temple?)
Cavenham Heath	Suffolk	1st/2nd century	1920 (?) (Layard 1925)	(Temple?)
Deeping St James	Lincolnshire	late 2nd/ 3rd century	1968 (Painter 1971)	Temple
Felmingham Hall	Norfolk	2nd half 2nd century (after 225)	1844 (Guide to the Antiquities 1958. Gilbert 1978)	(Temple?)
Hockwold-cum-Wilton	Norfolk	Late 1st century or 2nd–3rd or late 4th	1956 (Journal of Roman Studies 1957: 211. Toynbee 1962. Gourney 1986)	Temple
Stony Stratford	Buckinghamshire	3rd century	1789 (Lysons 1817)	(Temple?)

Wanborough	Surrey	*c*. 160/170	1985–86 (O'Connel and Bird 1994. Williams 2008. Bird 2008)	Temple
Willingham Fen	Cambridgeshire	2nd century	1857 (Babington 1883. Fox 1923. Rostovtzeff 1923. Alfoldi 1949).	(Temple?)

The deposits containing regalia are not numerous but they offer a fair variety of objects. No one is similar to another: we cannot identify sets of objects, as it is usually possible for vessel deposits. Nonetheless, we can identify elements that get repeated. There is, in most cases, a mix of objects that were worn and used during the performance of rituals, and votives that were dedicated in temples or shrines (Stony Stratford and Willingham). This aspect might offer a hint to the interpretation of these deposits.

Some of the deposits were found at well-known temple sites, as in the cases of Wanborough and Hockwold. In these cases, we can go a step further and, by implying the religious nature of the deposit, suggest a function of foundation deposit, as in the case of Wanborough (Bird 2007). The majority of these items were found in the rural landscape. There is no evidence of this type of deposit from urban sites. In these cases, the deposits, although found not very far from known religious structures, were not found at the religious sites known so far. We may assume that these deposits were involved in a ritual not taking place at a major structure that we can recognize today or hidden for safe keeping with the intention of future recovery.

The New Deposit from West Stow, Suffolk

A deposit containing priestly regalia was found in 2010 by a metal-detectorist at West Stow, north-west of the town of Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk (Fig. 1). It briefly appeared in Britannia, in the annual discussion of the most important finds recorded by the PAS (Worrell *et al*. 2011). It also has a concise entry in the PAS database (SF-D4D044).

It includes a total of 61 objects organised in two separate groups: some were deposited in a grey ware vessel while the others have been placed beneath or around it. Buried within the vessel were 15 copper-alloy and one iron object. At the base of the vessel were staff terminals shaped as birds, a triangular staff terminal, then a folding strap or belt. On the top was the crown, whose discs were piled on each other. The last objects were three copper-alloy metal plaques shaped as 'feathers', folded to fit into the top of the vessel. The finder removed these objects and unfolded the metal plaques. The second group comprises a copper-alloy tankard (in several fragments including the handle and two nails) and a copper-alloy crest, both buried under the vessel. Others objects include a bone fragment, three nails (an iron one and two in copper-alloy), a fragment of an iron blade, and more than 20 fragments of sheet copper-alloy.

Some of the objects in the West Stow deposit were in a vessel. The only other case of these types of objects found in an urn is the deposit from Stony Stratford. In the other cases, they are usually deposited in the ground without any container, or in a container made of perishable material which does not survive. The objects in this deposit can be easily compared to those found in the other assemblages (this type of chain-linked headdress is well known in the province). The copper-alloy discs were held together by small chains and possibly attached to a leather

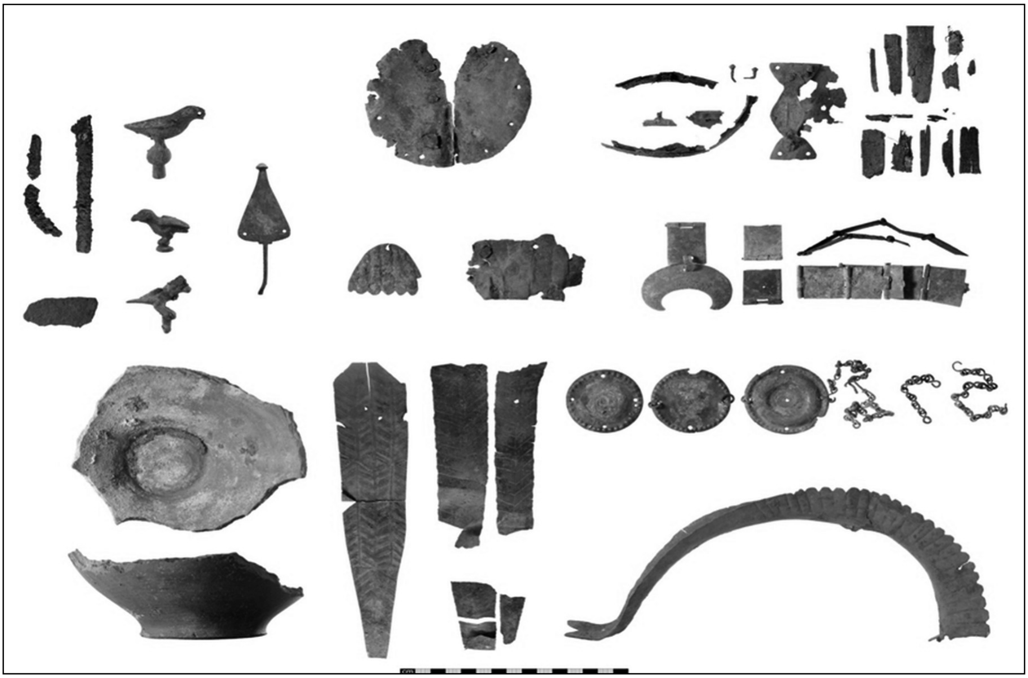

Figure 1: West Stow assemblage (photograph by A. Brown © Suffolk County Council; http://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/417497 [Last Accessed: 09/12/2015]).

Table 5: Grouping of the objects from the West Stow deposit, according to their function.

Priestly regalia	One copper-alloy chain headdress (crown). Three copper-alloy sceptre-heads shaped as birds. Incisions fulfil anatomical attempts at realism for two of them. The third is more crudely modelled. One 'pole tip'. It is a copper-alloy sheet shaped as a spearhead. It has two small holes at the bottom, possibly for hanging rings. One crest. According to the PAS entry, this might have been part of a head-dress. But I share the first publishers' interpretation of an element of a Corinthian helmet, likely pertinent to a statue (cult statue?) of Minerva. This is the only object that might allow a speculation the connection of this assemblage to a specific cult.
Votive objects	Three copper-alloy feathers/ votive plaques decorated with chevrons.
(Apparently generic) items of personal clothing.	One belt/ strap (in several fragments) and a crescent moon shaped pendant. Traces of textile. It might, of course, have featured in hypothetical priestly apparel.
Other objects	One tankard, again an apparently generic item that might have been involved in a ritual. Among the sheet copper-alloy fragments, there is one round sheet, pierced around its rim with small holes. The holes suggest that this sheet might have been sewn to cloth, rather than a rattle-like object (we have some round examples in iron from London) as this is extremely thin and, although worn, does not seem to have had a handle. It also appears to have been intentionally folded.

cap. Equally, the staff terminals shaped as birds are present in the deposits from Felmingham Hall and Willingham Fen. The triangular staff terminal ends with a small sphere and has two holes pinched at the base, these likely held small rings to produce a rattle-like sound. Similar examples in copper-alloy and iron were found in Brigstock, Northamptonshire (Greenfield 1963) and in iron from London (Green 1976).

The importance of the West Stow deposit compared to others lies in the number of objects retrieved and also in their variety. Usually these types of deposits contain exclusively (Cavenham Heath, Hockwold, and Wanborough) or mainly (Deeping St James) headdresses or exclusively sceptres (Willingham Fen). They rarely contain so many different objects and never reach the same number or variety (i.e. the Felmingham Hall Hoard contains 11 objects and the Stony Stratford hoard contains five objects plus 30 fragments of silver votive plaques). With 61 objects, the West Stow deposit is the most conspicuous one among the deposits containing regalia. Moreover, thanks to the modalities of its discovery and in the involvement of archaeologists and specialists since its finding, it is possible to retrieve a larger amount of information. Currently ongoing analysis on the deposit will shed light on both the archaeological context and the materiality of the objects, aspects that cannot be considered for those deposit found in an earlier date.

Spatial Distribution of the Deposits

The deposits of regalia cluster in the area of eastern England. The individuation of the find spots of the deposits is one of the elements of my doctoral thesis' Geographic Information System. It will also include geographical data about the single and stray finds of priestly regalia and sites connected to religious activities. I am also considering the inscriptions recording priestly roles, although they are not copious (only 11 instances). The importance of combining different types of evidence is the key to better reconstruct the presence of religious specialists in the province. The spatial distribution of the deposits of regalia shows a concentration in the area of eastern England. If we add the presence of the stray and single finds I was able to track so far, we can see that this type of evidence has a wider distribution. They are attested also in areas where the deposits are not present (Fig. 2).

What could it mean? Of course, we need always to consider the biases that may have affected the evidence we have today. For example, the fact that until 200/250 years ago, structured deposits were rarely reported as the materials would have been reused, the changes in modern agricultural techniques which did not affect Britain uniformly, those deposits successfully recovered in the past (Johns 1996), and finally the area of activity of the PAS.

All considered, this specific distribution of the deposits, compared to the regalia in general, might offer some hints for further interpretation, possibly connected with ritual requirements. These involved a final deposition of these objects in the ground, as i.e. *favissae* (a very convincing candidate is the Barkway deposit, containing almost exclusively votive objects), or generally deposits that were not meant to be retrieved. Maybe a similar interpretation can be offered for the deposit found at Hockwold. It has already been noted that the diadems are quite worn and adjustable in size. They were made to be used by different people, likely priestly/religious officers of some kind that changed annually or over an established period of time. This implies consequently that they were not a private possession of the 'priest' (Allason-Jones 2011) but maybe property of the temple (or the community?). At a certain stage of their 'life', these objects were deposited in the ground.

The West Stow find has been convincingly interpreted as an intentional deposit of votive and priestly material, but the reasons for burying it, whether for safekeeping or ritual/votive are

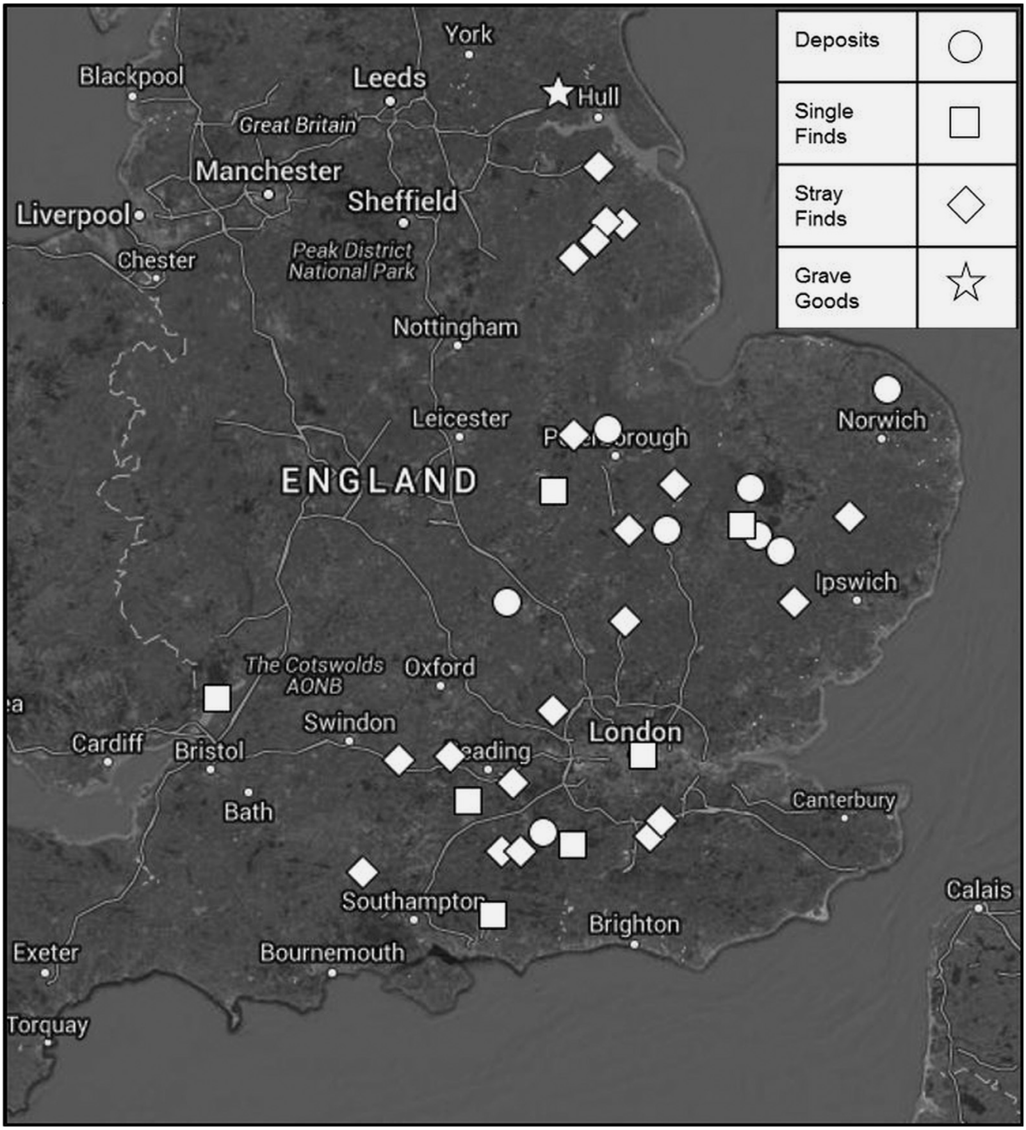

Figure 2: Preliminary map showing the distribution of priestly regalia in England, according to their archaeological context.

unknown at the moment. Proposed further examination at the site has already been planned, so I hope to provide more information in the near future. The importance of an archaeological survey following up this type of extraordinary find has been recently proved by the discovery of a votive hoard at Ashwell, Hertfordshire (Jackson and Burleigh 2007). In this case, the individuation of the deposit containing the Senuna statuette and silver votive plaques, led to archaeological excavations and the identification of the long-lived religious site (Burleigh 2007).

Conclusions

The final aim of this paper was to highlight the idea that priestly regalia were used as elements of apparel but also perceived as ritual objects that in some cases needed to be dedicated to the deity.

The archaeological documentation is generous but it usually comes from archaeological excavations pursued without the required awareness of the context. The selected recovery of artefacts of 'particular interest' led to the sacrifice of other objects, equally important for the definition of the archaeological associations and, possibly, the characteristics of the ritual practiced. The individuation, for example, of bone or wood fragments during the excavation of some of the deposits considered today, which did not led to proper conservation and analysis, possibly deprived us of a clearer interpretation of the function of such assemblages. Having remains of sacrifices, for example, we would be more likely inclined to consider them as ritual deposits, rather than just having them hidden for safe-keeping. Similar materials (fragments of wood and bone) have been found at West Stow and are currently undergoing study and analysis (Worrell *et al*. 2011: 423).

Many of the ritual materials traced in the publications and in the Portable Antiquity Scheme database, most of which remain unpublished at the moment, together with an updated geographical mapping of sacred sites offers an undeniable contribution to the reconstruction of the strategic territorial distribution of the these sites and of their internal organization.

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