

Chapter Eight

Roman Britain Religion

“The Ancient Sources for Early Roman History”

“Religion and Burial”

Objectives:

1. Understand what made Roman Britain religion unique
2. Define syncretization
3. Define Romanization
4. Understand why Roman Britain culture was unlike any other Roman province

The Ancient Sources for Early Roman History

Gary Forsythe

The history of Rome's regal period and early republic is highly problematic due to the fact that ancient accounts were written during the second and first centuries B.C., long after the events that they described.¹ Consequently, modern historians often disagree substantially in their interpretations and reconstructions, depending upon their presuppositions concerning the reliability of the ancient sources and the criteria by which ancient traditions should be considered accurate. Thus a serious study of early Roman history cannot be undertaken without a clear understanding and continual examination of the nature and veracity of the ancient sources that purport to record the history of Rome's distant past. The two most important ancient accounts of early Rome that have survived from antiquity are the first ten books of Livy's *History of Rome* and the *Roman Antiquities* of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, both of which were composed during the closing decades of the first century B.C. But since these two narratives came at the end of nearly two hundred years of a long and varied historiographical tradition, and were the authors' own synthesized redactions of earlier histories which are now lost except in fragments,² a survey of the ancient sources for early

1. For other treatments of this subject, see Raafaub and Cornell in Raafaub 1986, 47–65; Ogilvie and Drummond in *CAH* VII.2 1989, 1–29; Cornell 1995, 1–30; and Oakley 1997, 3–108.

2. The term "fragments" is used by modern scholars of ancient history to refer to a portion of a lost ancient historical account that now survives in another surviving ancient literary text. A fragment can be either a verbatim quotation from a lost work or a paraphrase of a portion of its content. See Brunt 1980. In some instances (e.g., Cincius Albinus, Posidonius Albinus, and C. Acilius), we possess only a few fragments from a lost work and are therefore almost entirely ignorant of the work's nature and content, but in other cases (e.g., Cato, Calpurnius Piso, Claudius Quadrigarius, and Valerius Antias), the fragments are sufficiently numerous to

Roman history may properly begin with an overview of Livy's and Dionysius's predecessors.³

THE ANNALISTIC TRADITION

As they did in many aspects of culture and literature, the Romans adopted the practice of historical writing from the Greeks, but the Greeks themselves did not begin to pay serious attention to Rome in their historical accounts until the Pyrrhic War (280–275 B.C.), when Rome was completing its subjugation of Italy and was involved in a war with the Greek city of Tarentum. Timaeus, a native of the Sicilian Greek town of Tauromenium, in his detailed history of the western Greeks from earliest times down to the eve of the First Punic War between Rome and Carthage (i.e., 264 B.C.), not only narrated the events of the Pyrrhic War but also treated Rome's mythical origin and early history in some detail. He visited Lavinium in Latium and made inquiries concerning the nature of the Penates worshipped by the Latins. He was somewhat familiar with the Roman yearly sacrifice of the October Horse, which he explained with reference to the Romans' descent from the Trojans. He dated the foundations of Rome and Carthage to the same year (814/3 B.C.); and he ascribed the invention of Roman bronze money to King Servius Tullius.⁴ Another Sicilian Greek, Philinus of Agragag, wrote a contemporary historical account of the First Punic War (264–241 B.C.), but it was the momentous nature of the Second Punic or Hannibalic War (218–201 B.C.) that apparently prompted two Roman senators, Q. Fabius Pictor and L. Cincius Alimentus, to write the first native

give us a fairly clear picture of the work's structure, overall reliability, and historical methodology. The fragments of the lost histories of Roman republican authors are set out in their Greek and Latin texts in Peter 1914. It should be noted, however, that Peter ignored as fictitious the numerous citations of republican writers in the *Origines Gentis Romanae*, a short Latin treatise of late antiquity concerned with Roman mythology from primordial times down to the city's foundation by Romulus. For the rehabilitation of this work's citations see Momigliano 1958. The Latin text of this treatise is published in Pichlmayr 1970. In recent years, other editions of the lost histories of republican Rome have been produced, usually accompanied with a detailed introduction, notes, commentary, and/or translation into a modern language: Chassignet 1996 for Q. Fabius Pictor, L. Cincius Alimentus, A. Postumius Albinus, C. Acilius, and the *Annales Maximi*; Chassignet 1986 for Cato; Samint 1995 for Cassius Hemina; Forsythe 1994 for Calpurnius Piso; and Walz 1997 for Licinius Macer.

3. For other surveys of some or all of these writers, see Badian 1966; Gabba in *Origines de la République Romaine* 1967, 135–69; Gentili 1975; Rawson 1976; Forsythe 1994, 25–73; and Forsythe 2000.

4. For Timaeus in general see T.S. Brown 1958, Momigliano 1977, and Pearson 1987. Concerning the Penates, October Horse, foundation date, and Servius Tullius, see Dion. Hal. 1.67.4; Polyb. 12.4 b 1; Dion. Hal. 1.74.1; and Pliny NH 34.43. All Timaeus's fragments are collected in Jacoby 1950, no. 566.

histories of Rome.⁵ Their works were written in Greek, the literary language of the Hellenistic world, and they did not simply narrate the history of the Second Punic War but also recounted Roman affairs from mythical times down to their own day. Fabius Pictor's surviving fragments suggest that the traditions of the regal period were already well developed and in large measure resembled what we find in Livy's first book. Yet Dionysius (1.6.2) indicates that although the histories of Pictor and Alimetus were relatively detailed concerning Rome's foundation and the period of the Punic Wars, they passed over the intervening time span in a summary fashion.

Two other Roman senators, A. Postumius Albinus and C. Acilius, composed similarly all-encompassing histories of Rome, but since we possess very few fragments from these works, their scale and nature are unknown.⁶ The first Latin narrative of Roman history was written by the poet Q. Ennius (239–169 B.C.), who composed his *Annals* in dactylic hexameter verse (see Skutsch 1985). This national epic—heroic, moralizing, and patriotic in nature—was a staple for educating Roman schoolboys and thus shaped the Romans' view of their past until its account of Rome's Trojan origin was supplanted by Vergil's *Aeneid* during the Augustan principate. The poem treated the Trojan connection and the regal period in the first three books, the early republic in the next two, and Roman affairs from the Pyrrhic War onwards in the remaining thirteen. The first Roman history composed in Latin prose was written by Cato the Elder (234–149 B.C.), and after that, with few exceptions, the Romans wrote their histories in Latin. Cornelius Nepos in his brief biography of Cato (3.3–4) describes the work as follows:

He set about writing history in his old age. It consists of seven books. The first book contains the deeds of the kings of the Roman people, whereas the second and third books describe the origin of each Italian community, and for this reason it seems, all the books were called *Origines*. The First Punic War is in the fourth book, and the Second Punic War is in the fifth book. All these matters are described in a summary fashion. He narrated the remaining wars in the same manner down to the praetorship of Servius Galba [150 B.C.], who plundered the Lusitanians. He did not mention the commanders of these wars by name, but he recorded affairs without names. In these books he set forth the events of Italy and the two Spains as well as what seemed marvelous in these areas. He expended much energy and care upon these books but no learning.

5. In addition to the modern works cited above nn. 2–3, see Timpe 1972 and Verbrugghe 1979 for two contrasting treatments of Fabius Pictor, and see Verbrugghe 1982 for Cincius Alimetus.

6. Since Fabius Pictor, Cincius Alimetus, Postumius Albinus, and C. Acilius wrote their Roman histories in Greek, their fragments were collected in Jacoby 1958 as historians nos. 809–10 and 812–13.

The numerous fragments from this work bear out Nepos' description. The second and third books seem to have resembled the kind of Greek ethnographic history found in Herodotus and the fragments of Timaeus. The fragments from the last four books are largely concerned with the military affairs of the middle republic, and the fragments from the first book treat the regal period. Thus there is a strong possibility that Cato ignored the traditions of the early republic altogether, or at least treated them in a very cursory fashion.⁷

Following Cato, L. Cassius Hemina wrote a history probably comprising no more than five books, the first of which seems to have resembled the second and third books of Cato's *Origines* in recounting the mythical origins of the towns and peoples of central Italy. The work's second book covered both the regal period and the early republic. The surviving fragments suggest that Hemina had relatively little interest in military affairs but was keenly interested in religion and cultural history.⁸ L. Calpurnius Piso Frugi composed a historical account in seven or eight books, which he probably published after his censorship of 120 B.C. Like Livy and Cato, Piso treated the regal period in his first book, while the events of the early republic were narrated in his second and third books. The latter, probably the most detailed account of the early republic written thus far, described events by using an annalistic framework and may have been the very first Roman historical account to employ this kind of structured narrative to depict the early republic (Forsythe 1994).

All histories of Rome written thus far by Romans had been composed by senators and were relatively brief accounts of names, dates, and major events. By the close of the second century B.C., however, detailed Greek histories such as that of Polybius, comprising thirty-nine books to describe in great detail Rome's conquest of the Mediterranean during the period 264–146 B.C., inspired Romans to write much lengthier works and to experiment with writing historical monographs on individual wars. Moreover, the writing of history was no longer a preserve of the Roman senator experienced in public affairs. It now became the occupation of men who possessed great literary skills, but who often lacked a practical knowledge of politics, diplomacy, and warfare. Thus, for example, Coelius Antipater (c. 100 B.C.), using earlier detailed histories written by Greeks, wrote a history of the Hannibalic War in seven books; and Sempronius Asellio, patterning his work after Polybius, devoted fifteen books to the period c. 150–90 B.C. Conversely, from this point onward other authors wrote greatly expanded

7. On this matter see Forsythe 1994, 46–48; 2000, 4. For a general discussion of Cato's *Origines*, see Asin 1978, 211–39 with Kierdorf 1980.

8. For Hemina see Rawson 1976, 690–702; Scholz 1989; Forsythe 1990; and Samdani 1995.

histories of Rome from its foundation down to their own day. The first such was Cn. Gellius, whose work comprised at least ninety-seven books. His first book seems to have been patterned after the second and third books of Cato's *Origines* and the first book of Cassius Hemina in describing the mythical origins of the various peoples and communities of Italy. Romulus's reign was treated at the end of his second book and the beginning of his third. The expansive scale of Gellius's history is apparent from the fact that he described events of the year 389 B.C. in his fifteenth book, whereas Livy treated the same matters in his sixth. This literary expansion was largely achieved through the inclusion of lengthy speeches and battle narratives, which—for early Rome—were entirely invented and were intended to enliven his work and make it more entertaining for his readers. Although Livy did not make direct use of Gellius's history, Gellius was a major source for Licinius Macer and for Dionysius, who was apparently attracted to his rhetorical incontinence and meticulous attention to fictitious details.⁹

During the 80s and 70s B.C., Q. Claudius Quadrigarius, probably in reaction against the fictional character of Gellius's treatment of early Rome, compiled a history whose starting point was not Rome's mythical origin but the Gallic capture of Rome in 390 B.C. Quadrigarius chose to begin his narrative at this point because he believed that during the Gauls' occupation of the city all written records had been destroyed, and all historical traditions concerning events prior to 390 could therefore be regarded as untrustworthy (see Plutarch's *Numa* 1.2). Livy paraphrased this sentiment at the beginning of his sixth book and used Quadrigarius as a source throughout his second pentad. The fragments suggest that Quadrigarius was almost exclusively interested in military affairs.

During the last generation of the Roman republic, major histories were written by C. Licinius Macer, Valerius Antias, and Q. Aelius Tubero, all of whom Livy and Dionysius used as sources for their own works (see Ogilvie 1965, 7–17). As tribune of the plebs in 73 B.C., Macer was a staunch proponent of the populist politics of the day, which sought to restore full, traditional powers to the plebeian tribunate by overturning the restrictions placed upon the office in the recent constitutional reforms of the dictator Sulla.¹⁰ Macer's fragments clearly display his keen interest in the struggle of the orders during the early republic. In fact, three fragments (Livy 7.9.3, 9.46.3, and 10.9.7–13 with 10.11.9) demonstrate that Macer was not averse to outright fabrication in order to enliven his narrative with spurious

9. For Gellius see Rawson 1976, 713–17 and Forsythe 1994, 163–64 and 229–32. For the practice of literary embellishment in ancient historiography see Wiseman 1979a, 3–40.

10. For Sallust's rendition of Macer's fiery political oratory during his tribunate, see Sallust *Historiae* III.48.1–28 = pp. 420–31 of the Loeb Classical Library edition of Sallust. For a detailed analysis of this speech see Wall 1997, 11–28.

conflicts between patrician and plebeian officials. But perhaps the most sensational and shameless fabricator of the Roman annalists was Valerius Antias, who probably composed his history, consisting of at least seventy-five books, during the period c. 65–45 B.C. His work is frequently cited by Livy, who complains of his unreliability and indicates that he enjoyed inventing both major occurrences and minor details.¹¹ Thus by the time that Livy and Dionysius came to write history, Roman historiography had a complex development of nearly two hundred years behind it, and there were numerous sources at hand from which they could fashion their own works.

THE ANTIQUARIAN TRADITION

In addition to this rich and varied historiographical tradition, antiquarian scholarship, a similar but separate literary tradition, likewise arose and flourished during the last two centuries B.C., and the results of its research often provide modern scholars with valuable information about early Rome. Like the ancient historical accounts just surveyed, however, the antiquarian literature of the Roman republic survives almost entirely through its use by later extant authors. Roman antiquarians were not directly concerned with reconstructing and narrating the political and military history of the Roman state. They were interested in the history of the Latin language, including the original meaning and history of words. Nonetheless, since much of their research involved investigating the language, meaning, and terminology of religious and legal documents surviving from earlier times, their writings often devoted considerable attention to the history of Roman social, political, military, religious, and legal institutions and practices. The Roman antiquarian tradition can perhaps be said to begin with the publication of a treatise on the Roman religious calendar, written by M. Fulvius Nobilior, consul in 189 B.C. and a patron of the poet Ennius.

Several significant antiquarian writers flourished during the second half of the second century B.C. Besides writing histories of Rome, Fabius Maximus Servilianus (consul 142 B.C.) and Numerius Fabius Pictor (a descendant of Rome's first native historian) both wrote treatises on pontifical law. Junius Gracchanus, who received his surname from having been a close friend of the revolutionary politician C. Sempronius Gracchus (died 121 B.C.), wrote a work entitled *De Potestatibus*, which concerned the history of Roman customs and institutions and the powers of

11. For example, see Livy 5.5.12–13. For Antias and Livy in general, see Howard 1906, and for a discussion of Antias' influence upon the late annalistic tradition in his glorification of members of the Valerian family during the regal period and the early years of the republic, see Wiseman 1998, 75–89.

the various magistrates.¹² L. Aelius Stilo (c. 150–80 B.C.) published works on the archaic language of the hymn of the Salian priests and on the Law of the Twelve Tables. Atticus (110–32 B.C.), intimate friend of Rome's greatest orator, Cicero, not only shared his antiquarian learning with the latter (whose voluminous extant writings were thus enriched), but his Book of Chronology (*Liber Annalis*) outlined the whole of Roman history in a single volume and set forth its chronology in such a definitive and convincing manner that the scheme was adopted by Varro, and from the Augustan age onward this so-called "Varroian" chronology was the official chronology of the Roman state (see the Appendix).¹³

The greatest Roman antiquarian of all was M. Terentius Varro (116–27 B.C.), who throughout his long life wrote at least fifty-five treatises on a wide range of subjects.¹⁴ According to one ancient source, Varro had completed the writing of 490 volumes by his seventy-eighth year. Unfortunately, the only one of his works that has survived to us intact is a treatise on agriculture (*De Re Rustica*), but substantial portions of his twenty-book examination of the Latin language (*De Lingua Latina*) have come down to us and contain much valuable information on early Roman institutions. In addition, a considerable amount of his scholarship, especially in the area of religion, has been preserved for us indirectly in the writings of later ancient authors such as Pliny the Elder, Aulus Gellius, Servius, Macrobius, and the Christian writers Tertullian, Lactantius, Arnobius, and Augustine.

The last major Roman antiquarian important for the study of early Rome is Verrius Flaccus, who flourished during the Augustan age and was therefore a contemporary of Livy and Dionysius. A significant portion of his scholarship, like Varro's, has been preserved indirectly in the writings of later surviving authors. One of his most important treatises, *De Significatu Verborum*, was a kind of antiquarian dictionary, in which archaic Latin words and phrases were arranged in alphabetical order, and their meanings were discussed and explained. Although this work has not survived, we possess a later abridgement of it by Sex. Pompeius Festus (c. 200 A.D.). A substantial portion of Festus's text (A–L) has been lost, but this loss is partially remedied by the survival of an eighth-century A.D. summary of the work by Paulus Diaconus. Despite the unfortunate state of its preservation, Festus's text contains much valuable information for the modern student of early Rome.¹⁵

12. For the fragments see Bremer 1896 I, 37–40.

13. For Aelius's life and scholarly activity, see Münzer 1905 and Perle 1999.

14. For an evaluation of Varro see Eiler 1997.

15. Modern scholars normally cite Festus according to the pagination of the Teubner text edited by W. M. Lindsay; and in order to signify the fact that this text, rather than some other earlier edition, is being used, *L* is placed after the relevant page number.

Religion and Burial

Kim Woodring

Roman Domination, Celtic Acceptance, or Mutual Understanding

During the reign of Emperor Claudius in AD 43, the moment the Romans invaded Britain, it was the end for the native Celtic religion. Or was it? When Rome invaded, it established dominance in every aspect of the culture. Generally, Roman invasion meant that the native culture was wiped away and Roman culture adopted by the native people. The reasoning behind this attitude is that the cultures of the conquered people seemed very different to the Romans, so there was no room for compromise in the eyes of the Romans. Historians and archaeologists accepted this idea for years simply because the evidence did not exist to support another scenario. This scholarship persisted up through the turn of the twentieth century, when archaeology began opening doors to a new way of looking at the past. These authors and their views form the foundation of the research for a larger topic in which the practices, including religion and burial, of the Celtic and Roman cultures will be examined to see if they changed after the invasion.

Archaeologists and anthropologists have been studying the use of burial practices since the 1800s. Some anthropologists, like E. B. Tylor in 1871, argue that belief in spiritual beings existed in dream context and the disposal of the dead was related to primitive religion, and those beliefs were the reason behind mortuary practices in society. In 1886, James Frazer maintained that mortuary ritual was motivated by fear of the deceased soul or ghost, and those practices were an attempt by the living to control the ghosts of the dead.¹ These anthropologists were the beginning of the scholarship on mortuary practices, but the use of burial practices to differentiate cultures is still not used by many anthropologists, archaeologists, and historians. Burial customs have not been considered by many scholars, but some have used them as some type of indicator in their research from the early 1900s.

Statements by British antiquaries like Stuart Piggott suggest that it was strongly considered an important factor. Piggott wrote to E. J. Rudsdale at the Colchester Museum in the summer of 1928 discussing a site called Knighton Hill. This site produced fragments of a burial and pottery and was initially assigned to the Hallstatt period. Piggott did not agree and suggested "Although I do not for

¹ Lewis Binford, "Mortuary Practices: Their Study and Their Practice," *Memoirs of the Society for American Archaeology* 25 (1971): 7.

a moment think that all of a sudden there was a terrific invasion of Hallstatt people, all bringing new methods of pottery making, burial, etc., yet I do think that towards the end of the Bronze Age in England there was a steady trickle of new ideas and possible new inhabitants from the continent, bringing with them new cultures. The change from barrow burial to burial in flat urnfields, or as multiple secondaries in earlier barrows, the introduction of the leaf-shaped sword, which has clearly a foreign ancestry, points to a new lot of people."² Antiquaries like Piggott obviously considered evidence found in burials an important piece of information. The use of this type of information has continued until the present, where it is being included in research by not only archaeologists, but by historians to support their ideas on cultural changes.

One of the first historians to take archaeology and incorporate it into his writing about the invasion was R. G. Collingwood. In his work *Roman Britain and the English Settlements*, Collingwood proposes that although the Romans considered Celtic art incompatible, they viewed the Celtic religion in a different light. Both religions were polytheistic, which made for an easy adoption or transition on both sides.³

Collingwood believed the reason the Romans tolerated the Celtic religion is because they did not perceive a threat to the state policy. The only threat they viewed was Druidism, and since Claudius abolished this part of the religion in Gaul, a threat thus did not exist. Rome did not require the Celtic people to worship Roman gods and by doing so opened the door for any practice of religion. According to Collingwood, the Romans and the Celts accepted the fact that their religions were similar and eventually melded them together as one religion, with the Celtic religion being the dominant one.⁴

As one example of many about the syncretizing of both religions, Collingwood notes that the god Mars was a duality god for the Romans and the Celts. The Roman soldiers made small altars to Mars in their camps because he was the god of war. The Celts identified Mars with several Celtic gods like Belatucadrus and Camulus. Collingwood uses Mars as the support for his idea that the mixing of the religions was smooth and did not cause any problems between the Romans and the Celts.

Additionally, Collingwood uses archaeology to support his thesis by giving examples of local Celtic cults who made inscriptions in Latin that "testify to the easy relations that existed between Celt and Roman in the matter of worship."⁵ He also suggests that the Celtic gods were the prevailing deities in most of the Roman Britain religious practices. Archaeological discoveries support this belief by using the discovered temples in Britain, which the Celts and Romans constructed at the time Christianity became a popular religion. Collingwood's perspective is unique for its time for two reasons. He challenged the idea that Rome came in and took over without a

² Philip Laver, manuscript letter from Stuart Piggott to E. J. Rudsdale, 2 July 1928, Laver Family Collection, reference codeD/Du 888/11, Essex Record Office, Chelmsford, UK.

³ R. G. Collingwood and J. N. L. Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 261.

⁴ Collingwood and Myres, 261.

⁵ Collingwood and Myres, 266.

thought for the native people, and he also tried take his vantage point from the Celtic side—not from the Roman side—which most of his colleagues did in the past. His innovative idea stood in the eyes of his contemporaries until the early and mid-1960s.

The 1960s brought another change in how historians viewed the religious relationship of the Celts and Romans. The first of two historians to discuss this aspect of religion in Roman Britain was Peter Blair in *Roman Britain and Early England 55 B.C.–A.D. 871*. In this work, Blair approaches a new view on how the Celts reacted to Roman religion. He believes the burden of the cost for the temples and the festivals of the Roman religion overwhelmed the native Celts, and this is what spurred the Iceni revolt in AD 60 led by Queen Boudicca.⁶

If this rebellion was against the state religion, then Blair's theory contradicts not only the original theories of the ancient historians, but it also displaces Collingwood's theory of peaceful mixing of religions. He also describes another theory: when the Romans pulled out of Britain, they essentially took their religion with them and left no traces in Britain. This theory also goes against Collingwood because his whole theory is centered in the idea of the mixing of the religions. If the mixing occurred, when the Romans retreated, it would be difficult to separate the religious practices.

Blair acknowledges that a comparison of the Roman and Celtic religions reveals that some of the gods are similar, but he never discloses a solid opinion on the mixing theory. The second historian who shares Blair's view is Anne Ross. In her work *Pagan Celtic Britain: Studies in Iconography and Tradition*, she supports Blair's view that in the early days of the Roman occupation, the native people opposed the practicing of the Roman religion, especially the Imperial Cult. Ross moves forward and poses the idea that after the military operations had calmed down against the Celts, they began to mix their representations of Roman gods like Mars.⁷

Ross's theory agrees with Blair's in relation to opposition, although eventually it does agree with the post-conflict melding theory as well. But by doing so, Ross's theory conflicts with the ancient historian's theory of complete domination. Ross also believes there was not a disagreement between the Romans and the Celts on artistic representation. She proposes a slow learning curve for the Celtic artists, especially in the transition from wood to stone.

In Ross's view, the Romans were tolerant of Celtic art and allowed artists to learn how to produce art in the Roman style. Ross also incorporates archaeology into her work as a way to support the mixing theory. She does this by using what is termed iconography, or the representation of the gods, in sculpture and art found by archaeologists. Ross takes into consideration that the Romans naturally introduced foreign deities into the Celtic religion, but she believes that "it is oversimplifying the problem to suppose that the coming of Rome meant a sharp severing of the beliefs and attitudes of the natives."⁸

⁶ Peter Hunter Blair, *Roman Britain and Early England 55 B.C.–A.D. 871* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1963), 136.

⁷ Anne Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain: Studies in Iconography and Tradition* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), 200.

⁸ Ross, 383.

This view agrees with Collingwood's theory because he supported a gradual change over time. The artifacts found represent the detties of the Roman religion, but Ross proposes that by examining these artifacts closely with the native traditions in mind, one can extract the native beliefs from the Roman "stereotyped exterior"⁹ of the artifact. Ross's use of archaeology to support the mixing theory and the iconography theory is an excellent example of how through the years scholars continue to use archaeology as an intricate part of their research and as a tool to produce a "more balanced attitude toward the interest in the Celtic population"¹⁰ of Roman Britain.

The late 1960s brought some fresh looks at how the religion of Roman Britain may have changed or become a melting pot of Roman and Celtic religion. Two authors in particular present information on this subject. The first author is the previously discussed Anne Ross. The work *Everyday Life of the Pagan Celts* reveals a more in-depth study of the Celtic people and touches on religion by including it as part of the everyday cycle. However, in this work, Ross changes how she views the expression of Celtic religion. Originally, in *Pagan Celtic Britain: Studies in Iconography and Tradition*, she supports the mixing theory, but in this work she is more supportive of the idea that there was a rise in the Roman religion, then the mixing, and finally a rise in the native religions. Her support for this change in theory is related to the new discoveries in archaeology during the late 1960s.

The next author who wrote during the late 1960s was Sheppard Frere. His work *Britannia: A History of Roman Britain* proposes a fresh new idea of how religion functioned during the Roman occupation of Britain. Frere suggests that there was a mixing of religions, but it was on an individual scale. He said the individuals chose how much or how less of a variation existed in their worship. The reason for this individualism is because the Roman Empire was "very tolerant of religious variety."¹¹ Observance of the state religion was the only demand the empire made of its subjects; according to Frere, the Celts were free to "worship what they chose."¹² The only change to this policy was if Rome believed that the religion was a threat to the state; for example, Druidism. If this occurred, the Roman Empire outlawed the religion.

This observance supports Collingwood's original theory previously mentioned. Along with individualism, Frere stresses the localization of detties as being more common than previously thought by scholars. According to archaeological artifacts, worship of detties occurred in small amounts and occasionally only existed in one area of Britain. This evidence supports Frere's individualism theory on a local scale because the localization of the detty proves the worship centered on a single tribe or community. Frere does continue in his work to support the melding theory by recognizing that "there is no doubt that religious practice tends to be conservative, and

⁹ Ross, 383.

¹⁰ Ross, 2.

¹¹ Sheppard Frere, *Britannia: A History of Roman Britain* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), 361.

¹² Frere, 361.

in Roman Britain many primitive Celtic cults and customs continued to be observed side by side with the newer modes of worship."¹³

The next change in scholarship concerning religion in Roman Britain did not occur until over a decade had passed from the time Frere wrote *Britannia: A History of Roman Britain*. H. H. Scullard's theory in *Roman Britain: Outpost of the Empire* contains some of the same opinions of the past, but with two differences. The difference Scullard contributes is his belief that after the invasion, there was a division of where the change occurred according to the location. He proposes that very little change occurred in the distant districts of Britain, but in more settled areas, the melding began more quickly. This theory holds to parts of all the previous scholarship except to that of Collingwood.

Scullard not only argues against Collingwood's initial theory, but he strongly disagrees with his theory on the art in Roman Britain. Scullard suggests that there were "two very different streams of artistic tradition that were represented—the native Celtic and imperial Roman."¹⁴ He takes a very strong stand on Collingwood's theory of art and even calls it an "extreme view."¹⁵ He disagrees with the view that portrays the Romans as suppressors of the Celtic art. He expresses disbelief in this argument and with the argument that Celtic art suddenly returned after Rome left Britain.

Scullard believes that there was a mixing of the art styles and the style presented was predominantly Roman but contained some Celtic representation. However, Scullard's summary of religion in Roman Britain is, in the end, the same as the other theories in that at some point, the Roman and Celtic gods were "worshipped side by side"¹⁶ by the natives and the Romans. The only change that occurred, according to Scullard, was the name of the deity.

The next significant literature about Roman Britain religion arrives only five years after Scullard's work. Martin Henig's *Religion in Roman Britain* is one of the most thorough works on Roman Britain religion since Collingwood's *Roman Britain and the English Settlements*. Henig gives a complete survey of the religion in Roman Britain and agrees on some points with the previous theories, but he adds his own innovative ideas into the work. He also relies heavily on archaeology to support the previous theories and his own. He agrees that the Romans were very relaxed in their acceptance of other religions that came into the Empire, but intolerant of any religion like Christianity, which threatened the function of the state.

Henig also has high regard for the work of Anne Ross's theory of iconography as proof that the worship of the Celtic gods continued separate from the Romans. He also produces an idea that the Celts and Romans not only combined deities, but their religion shared the "deep sympathy felt with the natural world."¹⁷ This idea recognizes the mixing of the religions, which is in agreement with the previous authors. However, Henig takes it a step further and supports a common thread between both religions in the form of nature. The previously mentioned authors obviously support

¹³ Frere, 369.

¹⁴ H. H. Scullard, *Roman Britain: Outpost of the Empire* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 1979), 150.

¹⁵ Scullard, 150.

¹⁶ Scullard, 157.

¹⁷ Martin Henig, *Religion in Roman Britain* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), 20.

the theory of the mixing of religions, but they support the idea that the Celts did not have a choice. Henig also supports this theory, but he believes that during the time the Celts and Romans spent together, the "compromise was not sought; it happened largely by chance."¹⁸ This theory adds a new lens through which to look at the invasion and subsequent "Romanization" period in Britain. Henig suggests the mixing was spurred by the Romans. He also makes his final relation to the previous scholarship by agreeing the religion became localized and evolved accordingly.

It is after this that Henig discusses his final theory on religion in Roman Britain. He believes not only that the religion demonstrated localization, but that class was a factor in how it changed. Henig takes inscriptions found by archaeologists and examines them by using the form of the inscriptions, such as the formation of names of gods. He says the inscriptions that are not complete in name form are because people did not know how to write the name in proper Latin.¹⁹ Therefore, literacy affected the expression of the religion and is the reason Henig believes that "we would like to know more about these cults which may have remained more primitive and less affected by Roman ways than others, but for that very reason their worshippers lacked the means of communicating theology or ritual to future ages."²⁰

Henig takes this idea of class even further by saying the classes controlled religion. Literacy affected how the people expressed their religion, but it was not the only way that the classes controlled religion in Roman Britain. The fact that Romanization happened became inevitable, but the fact that "governing classes from the time of Augustus decided that religion was a useful basis for demonstration of loyalty to the Roman State"²¹ is a remarkable and new theory for the field. The Celts demonstrated their loyalty to the Roman State through the Imperial Cult.

The aforementioned authors also discuss the Imperial Cult, but they do not connect the cult with the classes in control of the religion in Roman Britain. Henig expresses a new way of looking at the control the Romans had over the Celtic people pertaining to religion. Boudicca, the Celtic queen, revolted due to the forced worship of the Imperial Cult, and although this is mentioned by the previous authors as well as Henig, it is never fully developed into discussion by them. Henig's additional views on the religion in Roman Britain look skewed to the side of the Romans, but the next author shifts and looks at all three periods.

Two years after Henig published *Celtic Religion in Roman Britain*, Graham Webster produced *Celtic Religion in Roman Britain*. Webster's first opinion expresses disagreement with the ancient historians, just like his colleagues previously mentioned. Webster goes further to explain that this view "completely neglects the timescale of six centuries or eighteen generations, from the first contact with Rome through Julius Caesar, to the moment when the five provinces of Britannia became independent."²² He also relies heavily on archaeology for support of his theories, but instead of incorporating just one type of artifact—for example, wood—Webster examines artifacts of stone,

¹⁸ Henig, 36.

¹⁹ Henig, 62.

²⁰ Henig, 63.

²¹ Henig, 67.

²² Graham Webster, *Celtic Religion in Roman Britain* (New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1987), 13.

Sacred Places

The Celts believed all of nature contained spirits but certain places were more sacred than others in the natural world. Greco-Roman writers are the only link to the Celtic belief of sacred groves being used for worship and sacrifice to the gods. Along with Strabo, Lucan's *Pharsalia* produces a classical view on Celtic usage of groves that were "untouched by men's hands from ancient times, whose interlacing boughs enclosed a space of darkness and cold shade."³³ Lucan also describes what the Romans thought to be a barbaric practice of human sacrifice where the altars and the trees were covered with the flesh and blood of the sacrificial victim.³⁴ Trees specifically, singly or in groves, seemed to be important to the Celts in their religious practice. A tree symbolized a connection between the world in which the Celts lived and the Underworld. The branches of the tree were in their reality; they opened up to the sky, and the roots of the tree led beneath their reality to the Underworld. The tree was also a symbol of long life, wisdom, and fertility to the Celtic people.³⁵ The oak tree was especially important; according to Pliny, "They esteem nothing more sacred than the mistletoe and the tree on which it grows. But apart from this they choose oak-woods for their sacred groves, and perform no sacred rite without using oak branches."³⁶

Water was also important to Celtic religious practice. Springs, lakes, and bogs are the most documented water sources. Evidence for the usage of springs is sparse before the Roman conquest. They were thought to be used for healing purposes by Celts and associated with powerful healing cults. These Celtic cults and gods continued up through the Roman period by combining the native gods with the Roman gods as evidenced by places like Bath.³⁷ Bath is one of the best-known

³¹ Miranda J. Green, *The Celtic World* (London: Routledge, 1995), 465.

³² Graham Webster, *The British Celts and Their Gods Under Rome* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1986), 23.

³³ Barry Cunliffe, *The Ancient Celts* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 198.

³⁴ Cunliffe, 198.

³⁵ Miranda Green, *Celtic Myths* (London: British Museum Press, 1993), 50.

³⁶ J. A. MacCulloch, *The Religion of the Celts* (London: Studio Editions, 1992), 198.

³⁷ Anne Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), 30.

examples of the use of springs as a religious site. Although no evidence exists of Celtic worship at the springs, there are several clues left by the Romans that tell us the Celts also used the sites for religious purposes. Sculptured stones found at Bath in 1790, obviously done in classical style by the Romans, also exhibited Celtic influence. The temple pediment consisted of a shield surrounded by wreaths of oak leaves with the depiction of a Gorgon, which is "normally a female in classical mythology, here in Bath he is shown in the guise of a male with the wedge-shaped nose, the lentoid eyes, moustaches and beetling brow of a Celtic god" and "was a perfect example of the conflation between a Roman and native deity."³⁸ There are also inscriptions dedicated to the goddess Sulis Minerva, a combination of the Celtic and Roman goddesses of healing. These hot springs clearly played an important role in the Celtic religious practice before and after the Romans came to Britain.

Lakes and bogs were also venerated by the Celts, especially for deposition of swords, other battle supplies, and votive objects. Several lakes in Britain have produced objects considered to be offerings to the gods. Both Llyn Cerrig Bach and Llyn Fawr have revealed a large amount of ritual deposition, including weapons, iron tools, chariots, and cauldrons.³⁹ These deposits are extensive and show a long period of time in which the Celtic people used the lakes. The act of submerging items into the lake may well have represented an offering to the god of the lake, or it also might symbolize a simple wish of good luck similar to our wishing wells today. Bogs also served as places to deposit metalwork, but they were possibly used as human sacrifice locations. The Lindow bog body found in Cheshire suggests that bogs might have been used for ritual sacrifice. The Lindow man showed signs of ax blows, strangling, and throat cutting.⁴⁰ Although Anne Ross in *Lindow Man: The Body in the Bog* suggests these acts are part of a ritual death, it has not been proven that the bog bodies found in Britain are actually human sacrifices.

Sacrifice

Sacrifice—human or otherwise—played an important role in Celtic religion. This practice was so important that "when a private person or a tribe disobeys their ruling [the Druids] they ban them from attending at sacrifices. This is their harshest penalty. Men placed under this ban are treated as impious wretches; all avoid them, fleeing their company and conversation, lest their contact bring misfortune upon them."⁴¹ Caesar and Lucan are among the ancient writers who discuss what the Romans considered to be the most "barbaric" part of the Celtic culture. They comment on the sacrifice of animals after a victory. Caesar mentions the practice of human sacrifice, but notes that "criminals were preferred as being more pleasing to the gods, but that, failing them, others were

³⁸ Barry Cunliffe, *Roman Bath Discovered* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing Inc., 2000), 26, 41.

³⁹ Miranda J. Green, *Dictionary of Celtic Myth and Legend* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1992), 130.

⁴⁰ Miranda J. Green, *The Celtic World* (London: Routledge, 1995), 450.

⁴¹ Caesar, *Gallia War*. VI, 13: quoted in Tierney, J. J., "The Celtic Ethnography of Posidonius." *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 60 (1959/1960): 271.

chosen.”⁴² The Celts appeared to practice four forms of human sacrifice: hanging, cremation, drowning, and live burial. All of these forms seem to correlate with the four primary elements of earth, fire, wind, and water. These types of sacrifices correspond to some festivals, especially the feast of Samhain. The human sacrifices were supposedly used by the Druids, the priestly overseers of the Celtic religion, for some type of divination, both of which will be discussed later in the chapter.⁴³

The Celts also practiced animal sacrifice. The animal sacrifices also relate to Celtic festivals and are thought to be the majority of the sacrifices made to the gods. A variety of animals was used for sacrifice, including bulls, horses, dogs, and pigs. Usually, as in other cultures that used sacrifice, the head and other extremities like hooves were removed and the meat provided food for the festival feast. The hides of the animals performed a function in rituals as well, such as to protect or induce some type of trance for seers of the cults.⁴⁴

Druids and Divination

According to the ancient commentaries, the Celtic elite class was divided into three orders: Druids, Vates, and Bards. The Druids controlled the religious aspects such as sacrifice, but they also functioned as philosophers, magicians, doctors, teachers, and historians.⁴⁵ This elite class was the main focus of the ancient writers, including Cicero, who supposedly acquainted himself with a Druid named Divitiacus. Cicero said that Divitiacus claimed the Druid “discipline was first instituted in Britain, and from thence transferred to Gaul, for even at this day those who desire to be perfect adepts of their art make a voyage thither to learn it.”⁴⁶ The most commonly discussed Celtic religious practice was sacrifice. This practice seems totally disgusting and barbarous to observers like Strabo and Caesar. Both writers comment on a ritual sacrifice now known as the Wicker Man. This ritual consisted of filling a large wicker container, often shaped in the form a man, with animals and human beings. Then, the Wicker Man was set ablaze, constituting a fire sacrifice to the gods.⁴⁷

The Druids were a central part to all Celtic religion, but especially the performance of the sacrificial gift to the gods and divination. Prediction of the future and knowing the will of the gods formed an integral part of most ancient religions. The Celtic divination practice used animal sacrifices and augury (divination from auspices or omens observed from animal behavior such as birds in flight) to see the future, but they also used human sacrifice. This use of human sacrifice is once again what made the Celts and their religion seem strange and barbarous to other cultures, especially Rome’s. Although some of the practices of the Druids were outlawed by Rome, some of

⁴² Myles Dillon and Nora Chadwick, *The Celtic Realms* (Edison: Castle Books, 2003), 15.

⁴³ Caitlin Matthews, *The Celtic Tradition* (Great Britain: Element Books Limited, 1995), 43.

⁴⁴ Green, *Celtic World*, 439.

⁴⁵ Green, *Celtic World*, 426.

⁴⁶ Lewis Spence, *The Mysteries of Britain* (New York: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1970), 19.

⁴⁷ Miranda J. Green, *The World of the Druids* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997), 75.

them lasted up through the second and third centuries.⁴⁸ Sacred places, sacrifices, and divination, as we have seen, were all a part of the Celtic religious experience and controlled by the Druids.

Gods and Goddesses

If the Druid priestly class of the Celts, comprised of the elite, the educated, and well trained in their art, survived for so long, then what kinds of gods did they worship? The Celts had many gods; most are unknown, and only around two hundred have been documented. Of those documented, the gods discussed for this purpose will fit into three categories. The first will be those represented in iconography found in Britain; second, those found in inscriptions only; and third, those who clearly show a religious syncretism during the Roman period.

Before the Celts produced images of the gods we recognize from the Roman period, they created representation of sacred animals such as the divine bull and boar found in tumuli like the ones at Lexden Tumulus, which predates the Romans. They provide some of the only evidence for pre-Roman Celtic worship in Britain. The zoomorphic images of the bull and boar represented "strength, ferocity and invincibility in a war-oriented, heroic society such as that of the Celts" and are even seen frequently on Celtic coinage.⁴⁹ The boar symbolized war, hunting, hospitality, and feasting for the Celtic people.⁵⁰ The bull embodied strength, power, and ferocity.⁵¹ Both of these animals are depicted in art forms of the Celtic culture. Many other animals, like the stag, dog, and horse, are seen in the Celtic iconography. Along with these animals, there are some "hybrid" animals that appear prominently in Celtic worship. These animals are a mixture of two sacred animals which, according to the Celtic belief, increased the potential power of the animal. One example is the ram-headed serpent, which appears early in Celtic contexts and survives in religious representations up through the Roman period. The ram-headed serpent is depicted with three other gods in the Roman period, including the Roman gods Mercury and Mars and the Celtic god Cernunnos.⁵²

The Celtic religious transition moves from non-representation of gods to the existence of iconography that represents some of the gods like Cernunnos. The Celts considered this god, whose name means horned or peaked one, to be very powerful.⁵³ In most of his representations, he is in human form, with the exception of the stag antlers that extend from his head. The most widely recognized depiction of Cernunnos is on the Gundestrup Cauldron from Denmark. Cernunnos is sitting cross-legged as if mimicking the Buddha.⁵⁴ He also is shown with several torques, a Celtic neck ring, and a large purse or sack. The position in which Cernunnos is sitting alludes to the

⁴⁸ Green, *World of Druids*, 88.

⁴⁹ Miranda J. Green, *The Gods of Roman Britain* (UK: Shire Archaeology, 2003), 8.

⁵⁰ Green, *Dictionary*, 44.

⁵¹ Green, *Dictionary*, 51.

⁵² Ross, 430.

⁵³ Green, *Dictionary*, 59.

⁵⁴ Graham Webster, *Celtic Religion in Roman Britain*. (New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1986), 55.

possibility that his worship existed in the pre-Roman period and is therefore not part of the "aniconic deities of the Celts who first found artistic visualization under the impact of Roman civilization."⁵⁵ Images of him existed in Cirencester on a stone relief with the ram-horned snakes used to represent his legs. In Hampshire, he appears on a silver coin with a solar wheel between his antlers.⁵⁶ Cernunnos represented nature, fertility, and prosperity. He is seen in varied forms with mixtures of symbolism across Europe in all of the Celtic territory.

Cernunnos may have existed earlier in the Celtic religion, but he was not the only powerful god with roots in early Celtic religion. Taranis also existed in Celtic worship before the arrival of Rome. He was the Celtic sky/thunder god and one of the three gods mentioned by Lucan in his *Pharsalia*. He said that the worship and sacrifice for this god was "more cruel than that of Scythian Diana" because of the use of human sacrifice. Lucan even describes how the victims were to be offered, according to the preference of the god. Taranis preferred his sacrifices to be made by fire.⁵⁷ The fire sacrifice could be a link to his longevity, since Taranis existed before the coming of Rome in Celtic religion. He seems to be a natural occurrence, such as lightning that was transformed into human form when the Romans came to Britain. His name means thunder and implies that the act of nature he represented was thunder, lightning, or even a storm.⁵⁸

The second of Lucan's references is to Teutates, the Celtic tribal god. Teutates's role consisted of tribal protection, but he also was related to warfare. Additionally, he is represented on the Gundestrup Cauldron holding a sacrificial human above a bucket and then drowning the victim. The preferred way to sacrifice victims for Teutates was drowning.⁵⁹ Although Lucan's writings referred to the Celts of Gaul, these gods were also represented in Britain by inscriptions and iconography, so it is possible that the same sacrificial rituals were performed in Britain.

The goddess Rosmerta is another shared deity with Celtic Gaul. Her name means the Great Provider because most of her images include a cornucopia, a *patera*, and mixing buckets. These objects were used to symbolize prosperity and good fortune. She is often shown partnered with a god in Britain to form a divine couple. The Roman god Mercury was most often depicted as her companion on reliefs. This pairing of a goddess and a god may "imply divine marriage and therefore consequential fertility."⁶⁰ The large number of reliefs and inscriptions pertaining to Rosmerta alone and with Mercury suggests that she was a very popular goddess with the natives and the Romans. The divine couples are prominent in Britain and provide a very important clue to the effect of Romanization in Britain, which I will discuss in a subsequent chapter.

The Suleviae are also shared deities with other Celtic areas and are most commonly seen as a triad in Britain. They are also referred to as the Triple Mothers or Goddesses and are connected

⁵⁵ Phyllis Fray Bober, "Cernunnos: Origin and Transformation of a Celtic Divinity," *American Journal of Archaeology* 55, no. 1 (Jan. 1951): 14.

⁵⁶ Green, *Dictionary*, 59.

⁵⁷ Cunliffe, *Ancient Celts*, 191.

⁵⁸ Green, *Dictionary*, 206.

⁵⁹ Cunliffe, *Ancient Celts*, 191.

⁶⁰ Miranda Green, *The Gods of the Celts* (UK: Sutton Publishing, 1986), 95.

with healing and sun worship. But their representations clearly show that they were also worshipped by the Celts for an ample supply of fertility and general prosperity.⁶¹ The Suleviae seemed to be used in a more personal worship style because they have been found in burial context. Evidence also exists that they were a part of the Roman military devotion in the area around Hadrian's Wall. Representation varies and includes them being depicted with things like *paterae* for prosperity, but most often they are seen suckling infants.

Another important sun deity in Celtic religion is Sulis. She was a healing goddess and was worshipped at the hot springs of Bath. The location was important to the Celts as a natural place of worship and healing.⁶²

Triplism and military reverence are both seen with Coventina. A Celtic water goddess, she was worshipped in the Carrawburgh area of Hadrian's Wall. This area is located around a spring which was used to supply a cistern. The use of the cistern and pool eventually became a place for people to worship Coventina. The visitors would throw things like coins, as we do today with a wishing well, jewelry, and figurines into the well. These offerings were given with the hope of healing or possibly a wish for a prosperous rain for the crops. She was very popular and therefore well represented in reliefs, inscriptions, and altars. It has also been suggested that many of the gifts were from women who were pregnant and hoping for a healthy, safe pregnancy and childbirth.⁶³ The Roman soldiers at the Wall probably made dedications to Coventina in thanks for the supplication of water or for a safe military tour or battle.

The goddess Epona was another Celtic deity who became popular with the Roman soldiers, but her origin is in Gaul and other continental Celtic areas. Her worship originated in the tribal areas of Aedui and Lingones in Burgundy, which are known for the propagation of fine horses. On the continent as well as in Britain, she was linked to fertility and Earth's bounty. Epona is often represented riding a horse side-saddle and carrying fruit in a *patera* or a cornucopia.⁶⁴ In *The Gods of the Celts*, Miranda Green discusses K. Linduff's suggestion that Epona's representation in the rural areas is more prominent because the Celts used mares to do the farming work and farming was the work of the women. Green also explains that the popularity of Epona with the soldiers was because it was a "personal, beneficent nature which imposed no restrictions and offered protection both for the cavalryman himself and his horse."⁶⁵ Epona's horse also represented fruitfulness and a symbol of life for the Celts, which support the finding of many horse burials on the continent and in Britain.⁶⁶

The last martial and civilian Celtic god was the Genus Cucullatus. Images of these gods are centered in the area of Cirencester for the civilian portion and Hadrian's Wall for the military.

⁶¹ Green, *Gods*, 82.

⁶² Green, *Dictionary*, 200.

⁶³ Green, *Dictionary*, 67.

⁶⁴ Green, *Dictionary*, 91.

⁶⁵ Green, *Gods*, 94.

⁶⁶ Graham Webster, *Celtic Religion in Roman Britain* (New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1986), 71.

These gods are depicted as three small male deities always dressed with a cloak, or *cucullus*.⁶⁷ They are also seen accompanying the mother-goddess, which would connect them to fertility. Also, they are seen holding eggs that link them to fertility, death, and regeneration. In continental Europe, including Gaul, they are seen in singular form, but they are exclusively portrayed with triplism in Britain. Since they are constantly cloaked, they are thought to have a connection to the Otherworld.⁶⁸

Death and the Otherworld

The belief in life after death in another realm is present in many ancient cultures and religions, including that of the Celts. They believed that the Otherworld was a transitional stage in life and death. The Druids taught that the soul transmigrated at the point of death. Transmigration of the soul is simply transference of the soul from the dying body into another body. The Celts believed the switch did not occur immediately, but that the soul became indistinct and displaced for a period of time. Diodorus Siculus suggests that the Celts are not afraid of death because "the belief of Pythagoras prevails among them, that the souls of men are immortal and that after a prescribed number of years they commence upon a new life, the soul entering into another body."⁶⁹ Immediately after death, they existed in a void, and if the deceased was not cared for properly at the time of burial, the soul would be lost forever in this void. If they succeeded in having an appropriate burial, then the soul passed into the Otherworld and awaited the time of the rebirth in another body.⁷⁰

The Otherworld existed in Celtic religion as a special, almost joyful place where they feasted and celebrated. If the living traveled to the Otherworld, they would not age while there, but upon returning, they aged the exact amount of time they existed in the Otherworld. This made the Otherworld a dangerous place for the living to go, since it was considered a wonderful place the living might get caught up in the celebrating and not want to return or lose track of time. Anne Ross believes the revealing of the Otherworld "inspired warriors to bravery and to hold their lives in small regard" and caused the Celtic people to be so warlike.⁷¹

Celtic Burial

Societal beliefs affect the way in which a society deals with things like birth, marriage, and especially death. The Celtic culture was a tribal-based culture which practiced polytheism. The tribal

⁶⁷ Webster, 66.

⁶⁸ Green, *Gods*, 91.

⁶⁹ Diodorus Siculus, *Diodorus of Sicily*, trans. C. H. Oldfather (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939), 171.

⁷⁰ Green, *Celtic World*, 495.

⁷¹ Ross, 80.

component imposed a societal hierarchy that was visible in the Celtic burial practice along with the religious beliefs of an Otherworld and reincarnation. Although evidence for Celtic burial is scant and complex in Britain, it does exist and can provide some valuable information about the Celts. The burial practices during the Bronze Age of the ancient Britons, before they became known as the Celts, were in mounds or barrows. Mounds or barrows are earthen structures that are round or elongated that have been formed over one or more burials.⁷² Llewellynn Jewitt suggested in *Grave-Mounds and Their Contents* that "barrows were not infrequently surrounded by a circle of stones, set upright in the ground. These circles, in many instances, remain to the present day in different parts of the kingdom, and, the barrow itself having disappeared, are commonly called by the general appellation of Druidical circles."⁷³

The barrows were considered community monuments. The dead were either inhumed or cremated, with the burnt remains being placed in urns. Placement of the deceased and the inclusion of grave goods were determined by the status of the individual in the community.⁷⁴ Jewitt provides many examples of barrow burials, including those at Roundway Hill, Wiltshire, and Hitter Hill, Derbyshire. At the end of the Bronze Age in Britain, archaeological evidence of burial practices declines to the point of invisibility.

Some scholars suggest that the absence of archaeological evidence for burial before the Early and Middle Iron Ages in Britain could be a result of excarnation. Excarnation is exposure of the body so it can be defleshed—as opposed to inhumation, where the body is buried, or cremation, where the body is burned.⁷⁵ Rebecca Redfern, curator of Human Osteology at the Museum of London, suggests that the existence of four-post structures and pits containing disarticulated human remains advocates that Celtic people practiced excarnation. She also proposes a time line, which begins from the Early Iron Age (700 to 450 BC), when excarnation was the primary burial practice of the Celts. In the Middle Iron Age (450–150 BC), they continued to practice excarnation, but also began to practice inhumation. Finally, during the Late Iron Age (150 BC–AD 43), they continued the practice of inhumation even after the arrival of the Romans.⁷⁶ When this chronology is compared to the archaeological evidence for this time period, it clearly shows the transitions of burial types for the Celtic people in Britain.

Exposure of the body by the ancient Celts is thought to be the first step in a complex funerary ritual. The next step involves the dismemberment of the body, with the long bones and the cranial bones being the most important. According to Redfern's research at Gussage All Saints and Maiden Castle, these disarticulated parts of the bodies are used in secondary burial rituals, which include placement in structured deposits composed of animal bones, pottery, and other cultural objects

⁷² Warwick Bray, "Barrow," in *A Dictionary of Archaeology*.

⁷³ Llewellynn Jewitt, *Grave-Mounds and Their Contents* (London: Groombridge and Sons, 1870), 10.

⁷⁴ John C. Barrett, "The Monumentality of Death: The Character of Early Bronze Age Mortuary Mounds in Southern Britain," *World Archaeology* 22, no. 2 (October 1990): 183.

⁷⁵ Warwick Bray, "Cremation," "Inhumation," in *A Dictionary of Archaeology*.

⁷⁶ Rebecca Redfern, "New Evidence for Iron Age Secondary Burial Practice and Bone Modification from Gussage All Saints and Maiden Castle, Dorset England," *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 27, no. 3 (2008): 281.

located at various locations like hillforts. These secondary burials are also thought to be performed for rituals relating to the farming cycle and fertility.⁷⁷

The secondary burials are the beginning of the transition from complete excarnation to inhumation. Inhumations occur in various forms in Britain, but the remains are usually crouched or extended. A crouched or extended inhumation refers to the position in which the body was placed at the time of burial. The body is in the crouched position when the hip and knee joints are bent more than ninety degrees, sometimes referred to as the fetal position.⁷⁸ Commonly, the bodies are placed on the left side, with the head situated between the north and southeast positions.⁷⁹ The aforementioned Roundway Hill and Hitter Hill barrow burials discovered by Jewitt in 1862 are examples of crouched burials.⁸⁰

An extended inhumation is when the spine and leg bones are in a straight line. The body can either be lying on its back or on its face and occasionally on the side.⁸¹ Inhumation continued to be practiced in Britain, even after the Roman invasion; it was "deeply rooted" in the area controlled by the Celtic Durotrigian tribe.⁸² A shift in burial practices back to cremation is not seen until around 50 BC before the Roman invasion, and it is only prominent in the southeast area of Britain. Cremations are hard to identify archaeologically and are usually found by the identification of the pyre site. Fragments of burnt bone, charcoal, and occasionally some ironwork/metal artifacts survive and become incorporated into the deposits.⁸³ There is one tradition that is not necessarily typical of the Celts in Britain as a whole but is worthy of discussion. This rite was practiced in the area of Kent, at that time the territory belonging to the Celtic tribe known as the Cantuarii. This particular burial type has been named the Aylesford-Swarling after the two cemeteries in which these burials are found. Scholars generally break it up into two phases. The earlier phase is the Welwyn phase, which dates to 50–40 BC. The later Lexden phase dates to 15–10 BC. The body is usually cremated at a site different from the actual burial site.

Then, the remains are collected and put in a ceramic pot, a bucket with metal bands, or in a pit. The container is then buried, frequently with other grave goods. Some of the later Lexden phase included up to five pots, metal-banded buckets, and brooches of the La Tène style. The more extravagant burials of this type also included bronze or silver drinking and eating containers and imported amphorae (Figure 1).⁸⁴

⁷⁷ Redfern, 282.

⁷⁸ Warwick Bray, "Inhumation," in *A Dictionary of Archaeology*.

⁷⁹ Green, *Celtic World*, 492.

⁸⁰ Warwick Bray, "Inhumation," in *A Dictionary of Archaeology*.

⁸¹ Barry Cunliffe, *Iron Age Communities in Britain* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 294.

⁸² Mike P. Pearson, *The Archaeology of Death and Burial* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2000), 7.

⁸³ Green, *Celtic World*, 497.