Performing the Sacra

Priestly roles and their organisation in Roman Britain

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Preface

This publication is the revised and updated version of my doctoral dissertation completed in January 2018 at King's College London. The original title *Performing the ritual. A study of religious performers and their activities in Roman Britain* was changed to offer a more direct connection with the studies of priests in the Roman provinces and to highlight the two main aims of this work: tracing a model of priesthoods' organisation and the embodiment of priestly authorities in Britain and its contextualisation in the Roman provincial environment.

For the first time, a methodical investigation of the objects identifiable as regalia and ceremonial tools was integrated into an assessment of historical, epigraphic, and iconographic sources on the matter. The study of religion in the Roman provinces has seen a recent change in perspective from a centre-periphery model to that of a spectrum of cultural responses, however, the study of religious performers in Britain has been somehow left aside in academic investigation, with the exclusion of the ever-green fascination with the Druids.

Following the suggestion of my examiners and the later advices of John Pearce and Ian Haynes, I decided to publish my thesis within a short time since its completion. This has had the significant advantage of not requiring a substantial update of data sources and bibliographical references while still offering me the opportunity to include those publications that were marked as 'forthcoming' in the dissertation. Among these, the catalogue and discussion of the Ashwell Hoard by Ralph Jackson and Gil Burleigh, which I was just given the opportunity to review for the journal *Britannia*.

Compared to the dissertation, this publication sees a slimmer discussion of the general theoretical themes in the first chapter as well as shorter descriptions of some of the finds in chapter three which have been moved to Appendix two. It was not possible to include all the images originally used in the dissertation, but a URL has been provided to still allow a direct access to the pictures, when available.

Chapter 1

Introduction to the study, assessment of the sources, and research questions

1.1 Introduction

This work researches the institution of priesthoods in Roman period Britain by collecting and interpreting a rather disparate, not previously critically reviewed data of archaeological evidence, literary sources, iconography, and epigraphy. The study of ancient priesthoods, in general, is mostly considered a historical topic, whose main sources are ancient writers and epigraphy (Beard and North 1990; Richardson and Santangelo 2011). However, this approach is mostly inapplicable for the study of Britain, because of the limited quantity of both these types of evidence. The literary sources are scarce, with single instances in Tacitus mentioning the existence of provincial *sacerdotes* at Camulodunum[1], and a *flamen rusticus* in the *Historia Augusta*.[2] Ancient writers were in fact more concerned with the Druids, whose narrative has overshadowed the discussion of other priestly figures, to the point where the latter have been largely ignored in modern academic publications. Similarly, epigraphy, a crucial tool for similar types of investigations, as demonstrated in the study of Rome and other provincial contexts,[3] is limitedly attested in the province, a characteristic which also affects inscriptions concerning priests and related figures (e.g. cult attendants).

This work thus offers a shift in attention from this classical methodological approach to one that considers more prominently the markers of priestly activities, i.e. objects priests wore or carried as badges of offices as well as objects they used during ritual performances, i.e. ceremonial tools. The former evidence will especially allow us to address instances of embodiment of religious authority. To offer a more complete account of these instances, iconography is also used to assess the range of visual representations of religious performance in Britain, particularly representations of rituals and of ceremonial tools.

Further discussion will address depositional practices related to priestly regalia, as some of them are found in structured deposits, as well as instances of regional distribution and, consequently, cultural affiliation. Despite their limited numbers, epigraphic sources will be used to initiate a discussion on the awarding of priestly functions as a means to encourage local integration in the Roman organisation of power, as well as the pursuing of these positions by the local elite for personal and communal promotion.

The study area considered by this work includes almost exclusively sites from England, especially the east and south-east regions. This is a consequence of this work's strong reliance on to the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) database, which only applies to England and Wales. A significant percentage of the archaeological evidence used in this work has been obtained from this source and it seemed methodologically fair to exclude regions that do not provide a comparable collection of data.[4] However, the reader will find that the other types of evidence used in this study (inscriptions recording priests' names and/or titles and religious architecture) are also found almost exclusively in this area.

The first half of this chapter comprises three sections introducing some key themes related to the study of priestly figures and the impact of the Roman conquest on the organisation of these personalities in the north-western provinces. First, I will summarise the development of the theoretical discussion related to Britain after the Roman conquest (1.2), then move on to presenting academic approaches to the study of provincial religion (1.3) and of priesthoods in the north-western Roman provinces (1.4) and conclude by focusing on Britain (1.4.1).

The second half of the chapter surveys the different sources available for the study of Roman priesthoods in order to assess their value for the study of Britain (1.5). As mentioned, literary and epigraphic sources have been considered for a long time the foundation blocks of the study of Roman religions in general. This is mainly because they provide primary, fundamental information for the reconstruction of ancient religions, like the names of deities, the titles of priests and cult personnel in general, as well as the names and institutions involved in religious actions (Rives 2014). However, these same sources have proven to be less helpful, especially for the regions far from the imperial centre, in analysing other important features connected to the study of religion, like the performative aspects of ritual activities, which is one of the central aspects of this work.

1 Tac. *Ann.* XIV, 31.
2 Hist. Aug. *Sept. Seu.* XXII, 6-7.
3 Rüpke 2008; Spickermann 2003, 2008; Van Andringa 2002.
4 On the biases of the PAS data collection see 2.4.

The literary accounts that survived for these far territories never had a purely descriptive aim: rather, their narrative was often biased by the political agenda and intents that prompted their writing in the first place (1.5.1). This notion, together with the socio-cultural difference between the 'Romans' and the populations they encountered often resulted both in a simplification of local religious customs and in a colourful rendering of local ritual practices. The former was likely a way to make these practices more understandable by the Roman reader, while the latter would inspire awe and horror towards those, often hostile, populations, an expedient not uncommon even in modern anthropologic literature (Webster 1996). The Roman historians deployed it to depict the Iron Age populations of the north-western territories and it was crucial to the creation of an image of the 'culturally other', to whose barbarity the Romans opposed their 'restraint' (*ibid.:* 115-7).

An assessment of epigraphy as a source for ritual practices follows in section 1.5.2. For what concerns Britain, the number of inscriptions recording priestly titles is limited. The most common type of religious inscriptions recorded consists of votive texts carved on altars, a trend also attested elsewhere in the north-western provinces (Derks 1995). The information contained in this type of text allows important socio-cultural analyses of the dedicators (i.e. gender, social status, cultural background) (Zoll 1995). Other inscriptions considered in this work are the curse tablets or *defixiones*: metal sheets often, but not always, inscribed with curses or incantations (Tomlin 1988; 1993; 2003). However, both the altars and the *defixiones* account for one type of ritual: the vow. No text from Britain or the northern provinces is comparable to the lengthy *leges sacrae* found in Greece and Asia Minor that contain the norms for the performance of cults and religious festivals (Guarducci 1977; Lupu 2005), of which a very limited number are in Latin (Richter 1911).[5]

Section 1.5.3 briefly addresses the contribution of iconography to this study. No stone representation of priests is available in Britain, however, discussions of the imagery of what can be identified as ritual performers contribute to the drawing of a landscape of rituals performed in Britain.

Finally, section 1.5.4 is concerned with the material evidence attesting the activities of priests: these comprise 'priestly regalia' (objects that were worn by the priests) and 'ceremonial tools' (objects that were used during ritual ceremonies). Only an overview of the objects is offered here, focusing on their past analyses and interpretation, while the in-depth discussion of this evidence is the topic of chapter 3.

1.2 Historical and theoretical debates concerning Roman Britain: a summary

Any exposition, however brief, willing to address how modern scholars have considered the processes that led the Late Iron Age communities living in England, Wales, and southern Scotland to become the Roman province of *Britannia* should at least mention the works of Haverfield (1924). His name now evokes the very paradigm of 'Romanisation', as his interpretation of Roman troops arriving in an unknown land inhabited by barbaric populations is at the very core of this scholarly tradition. His interpretation of this cultural encounter sees the Romans infusing the indigenous populations with a civilising spur that had a great influence on the elites, especially the urban ones, while also affecting the rural populations (*ibid.*). Similar theories were later adopted by Collingwood, for whom the encounter of the local 'Celtic' Britons with the Roman conquerors resulted in a cultural assimilation of the former to the latter (Collingwood 1932). The positions of these two historians represent the theoretical embodiment of their contemporary historical trends, which projected 19th/early 20th century imperialistic stances on the study of ancient civilisations. According to their reconstruction, the imperialistic force is characterised as a positive entity, carrier of cultural, technological, and economic improvement (Freeman 1997).

Attempts to progress Collingwood's model by extending the spotlight to include the native population, resulted in theoretical concepts like that of 'cultural synthesis' (Frere 1967: 203). According to Frere, the cultural encounter envisaged by Collingwood as a superposition of Roman values and power structure prompted the locals (i.e. the elites) to become Roman. However, he attempts to nuance this cultural encounter by introducing the idea of a complex relationship, in which the pre-Roman local element would survive by incorporating some aspects of the Roman tradition (e.g. the creation of *civitates*), without resulting in any major inner conflict or identity crisis.

During the second half of the 20th century, a change in approach emerged when a different narrative was established. The rise of 'post-colonial' theories deeply affected the interpretation of the cultural dynamics set in place by the arrival of the Romans in Britain.[6] This re-narration of Roman Britain would still exploit the polarisation between Romans and the local population,

[5] Norms about the cult of the *Numen Augusti* from Narbo (CIL XII, 4333; Cels-Saint-Hilaire 1986); regulations of the cult of Jupiter Optimus Maximus from Salona (CIL III, 1933).

[6] 'Post-colonialism' is considered here an umbrella term that covers several branches of theoretical historical speculation about Roman imperialism, which includes inspirations from different sources (whether philosophical, i.e. Marxism, structuralism; from social sciences: psychoanalysis) (Gardner 2013).

however this time the attention shifted from the Romans to the local communities, who become the protagonists of a narrative of resistance against the imperialistic occupation.

A key stage in the post-colonialist debate was crystallised in the milestone work 'The Romanization of Britain' by Millett (1990). He highlighted the contributions of the local elites to the process of transforming Iron Age Britain into a 'Romanised' Britain. These elites were the main actors, willing to take part in the Roman organisation of the provincial territory as a means to maintain and enhance their control on the local access to power. In this sense, Millett focuses on the 'continuity' of existence of local tribes and elite families between the late pre-Roman Iron Age and the post-conquest period. Similar theoretical approaches were adopted to explain comparable processes in other north-western territories, like Gaul. Here, Roymans argued that the local aristocracies would have been willing to be co-opted in Roman auxiliary units so to maintain their traditional warrior-like status within the Roman re-organisation of power (1990; 1996). Integration within the Roman 'system' was perceived by the local elites as carrying many benefits, among which was the implementation of agricultural values as expressed on funerary monuments (*ibid.*: 1996), as well as the adoption of classical-style education (Woolf 1998).

The end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century saw developments, amendments, and criticism seeking the abandonment of the concept of 'Romanisation'. The static dicotomy of this top-down narrative led to a search for a new theoretical structure, which would allow to explore other actors within the interpretation of Roman imperialism. Millett's model of syncretism was shelved in favour of more complex systems, which considered different factors and degrees of cultural engagement, resulting in constructing various 'identities'.

Crucial development on the post-colonialist discussion of interactions between different identities was offered by Webster and her introduction in the Roman historiographical debate of the anthropological context of 'creolisation' (1997). Drawing parallels between the Caribbean communities and the local tribes living in the Roman north-western provinces, Webster offered a nuanced reconstruction which allows for different degrees of cultural adoption. Instead of explaining the presence of Roman artefacts and constructions as a passive intake, she suggested that the locals enacted conscious choices when adopting beliefs and structures (both political and physical) from the conquerors. Webster's concept of resistance was expressed as an 'adaptive resistance', where the expressions of the material culture are polyvalent; the objects are invested by different, also non-Roman, meanings. The use of Roman material culture by other exponents in local societies implied not a desire for emulation but a negotiation between the Roman and the provincial cultures (Webster 2001).

This discourse on 'identity' has remained one of the key themes characterising the 'post-colonial' debate.[7] It has also benefitted from the works of Mattingly (2004; 2011), who popularised the concept of 'discrepancy' to stress the existence of different individual identities as well as different group experiences. His intent was to go beyond both the classical, ethnic divisions in Roman, Romano-British, and British, and the dichotomy elite/lower class. Researching these identities involved the individuation of behavioural patterns in the archaeological record and in the landscape analysis. He considered Roman Britain as animated by different characters: the Romans, the local Britons, and all the other cultures that arrived in Britain to fulfil military and administrative roles, as well as independent merchants and contractors. The presence of different characters would contribute to the creation of a complex landscape of identities, characterised by several degrees of cultural interactions and outcomes.

Related discussions of specific types of identities have also been initiated (i.e. gender: Baker 2003; local identities: Revell 2009), although not yet fully explored. These approaches have had certainly the merit to flag the variability of experiences present in the British province, however they failed to explore their numerous possible combinations (as also noted by Revell 2009), prompting doubts on the efficacy of such a concept for the study of archaeology (Gardner 2013).

More recent works have looked at the way in which ethnicities and identities are created in the Roman world. Gardner defined identities as 'the connection between the interactional and institutional dimensions of social life' (2002: 346). These connections operate on three levels: macro, meso, micro. 'Macro' incorporates aspects like ethnicity and State, 'meso' involves age, gender, and religion, finally the 'micro-level' is the *locus* of expression of the individual identity. All these elements contribute to the creation of various identities, and also work on a spectrum that moves between local and global factors.

This discussion of global elements in the Roman Empire followed one of the latest analysis of Roman imperialism exploiting the theoretical concept of 'Globalisation' (Hingley 2005; Hitchner 2008; Witcher 2000; focus on Roman Britain: Pitts 2008). This is, in itself, a

[7] The evolution of this theoretical debate has been documented by the proceedings publishing the yearly meetings hosted by the Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference (*TRAC* 1993-present).

diverse concept, whose origin is drawn from different disciplines mostly related to economics. Over time, however, it has expanded to include other topics, some also in common with instances of post-colonialism, like the discussion of hybrid identities. The main challenge posed by the very use of the term globalisation, as well as its theoretical implications in discussing the Roman world, remains that of using an essentially modern word, forged to express the creation of worldwide economic, cultural, and social connections (Giddens 1991). The introduction of this concept in the debate about Roman imperialism has had the advantage of highlighting discussions about large-scale processes of economical and information exchanges which resulted in the creation of new hybrid identities ('glocalisation': Scholte 2005). However, the profound differences between the Roman and the modern worlds (especially the possibility to immediately exchange information worldwide) have been highlighted to criticise the use of this model for the study of the Roman empire (Gardner 2013).

The general theoretical trends on the influence of the Roman presence so far summarised constitute a framework that is at the base of the discussion of several topics related to life in Roman Britain and in other provinces. Because of the aims of this work, the following section discusses the influence of some of these theories on the study of provincial religion, especially in Britain.

1.3 The development of the debate on provincial religion in the north-western provinces

From the first commercial and diplomatic contacts to the later invasions and conquests, the spread of the Roman influence in the annexed territories was characterised by the export of what has been described as a 'cultural package' (Whittaker 1997). This involved the imposition of the model of the city with its characteristic grid-structure and set of buildings. For what concerns 'religion', a whole range of different cults, either bound to military control or introduced by the individuals and groups moving to the new province, was added to those already existing in that region, consequence of the local religious development resulting in a power structure both externally imposed on and internally adopted by the local communities (Beard *et al.* 1998).

In a famous passage of the Gallic War, Caesar[8] recognised without apparent hesitation the main divinities worshipped by the Gauls as Mercury, Mars, Apollo, Jupiter, and Minerva.[9] This has been considered the result of a phenomenon labelled by historians of religion as *interpretatio romana*, adopting an expression used by Tacitus in his *Germania*.[10] When describing a divine couple worshipped by the Nahanarvali, a local Germanic tribe, Tacitus stated that this duo could have been interpreted (i.e. translated) in Roman terms as Castor and Pollux. This expression found tremendous success among modern scholars and has been generally used to point out how local divinities were 'translated' into Roman ones after the conquest (Webster 1995). The concept is a consequence of the general theory of a spontaneous emulation of the Roman culture by the provincial elites and, consequently passively accepted by the other strata of the local population.[11] On the one hand, the result was a 'syncretism' between the Roman and the local pantheons attested in both epigraphic and iconographic instances. Here the Roman deity either assumed a double name (Roman-local), a local epithet, or took a local goddess as consort (Birley 1986; Beard *et al.* 1998: 317). On the other hand, both local deities and Roman-local hybrids were worshipped following Roman rituals (e.g. vows, setting of inscriptions) and were depicted following Greco-Roman iconographic standards, although often reproduced by the 'less-skilled' local artisans (Toynbee 1964; Bianchi Bandinelli 1969). In a 'harmonious coexistence' between local religious beliefs and official Greco-Roman religions, the local deities were assimilated in an enhanced Greco-Roman pantheon thanks to their perceived common characteristics (Van Andringa 2011).

The theory of the *interpretation romana* has been particularly successful from the 1950s until recent years (Britain: Green 1983; Henig 1984; Gaul: Hatt 1989; Germaniae: Spickermann 2003: 135;[12] Van Andringa 2011). At its heart is the idea of a homogeneous response to 'Romanisation' depending on the homogeneity of the starting factors: the Roman element (considered as a coherent set of behaviours and beliefs) and a similarly homogeneous local element shared by all the communities of the north-western provinces. The result is a hierarchical and polarised construction of the religious scenario where local religions and Greco-Roman religions (the latter including also the cult of the emperor and the imperial family) are the main actors, while the roles of other cults (e.g. gods from other provinces; oriental cults;[13] Mithraism and Mystery Cults), also present in those same provincial territories, are often downplayed.

[8] Caes. *Gal.* VI, 17.

[9] Differently, Lucan (I, 446-7) reports the names of the Gallic gods Esus, Taranis, and Teutates.

[10] Tac. *Ger.* 43, 4.

[11] 1.2.

[12] '*ein Nebeneinander einheimischer religiöser Traditionen und der Religion der römischen Eroberer*' (A juxtaposition of local religious traditions and the religion of the Roman conquerors).

[13] The label 'oriental cult' is used in this work as a shorthand term, while aware that its use has proven misleading, conveying an idea of exotic beliefs and rituals, while in fact most of these cults were 'structured' in the Roman calendar and benefitted from official recognition (see on this topic, Van Haeperen 2006).

The main bias of this theory is the presumed existence of two homogenous starting elements: the local 'Celtic' population and the Roman conquerors. The employment of the word 'Celtic' itself is problematic as it suggests the existence of a uniform identity whose manifestations appear across a vast geographical area (Green 1995; Cunliffe 1997). However, the term 'Celt' is heavily biased by modern political views (Collis 2003) and is employed to describe different peoples who might have not perceived themselves as 'Celts' (Simon 1999). Rather than 'ethnic' tribes, sharing a set of cultural and religious traditions (Cunliffe 2005), it has been argued that these communities would merge when an occasional danger occurred, uniting around a charismatic figure (a leader or king) and represented therefore rather fluid groups (Millett 1990; James 1999; Mattingly 2006: 48). These instances have, of course, questioned the possible identification of a uniform 'Celtic religion', too. If some scholars have been confident in tracing 'Celtic' beliefs and practices already in the Bronze and Iron Ages that then survived in the 'Romano-British/Gallo-Roman' phases (Ross 1967; Green 1968; Brunaux 1988; Cunliffe 1997: 183-210), others offer a more sceptical reconstruction.

Collis has advocated that the silence of the Classical sources on most of the local religious practices in Gaul and Britain would suggest their similarities with Greco-Roman religious traditions (2003: 214-6). The only rituals that require descriptions would be the ones that appear to differ completely from the familiar ones (i.e. instances of human sacrifice).[14] The persistence in reporting and highlighting these 'odd' and extreme (in the Roman eye) rituals is better considered as a rhetorical device employed by the ancient writers to fulfil a propagandistic agenda with the aim to create a barbaric image of the 'other' (Webster 1996; Woolf 2011; Häussler 2014).

In contrast with a uniform 'pan-Celtic' narrative, other scholars have stressed the existence of networks between communities of Britain and Gaul in the Late Iron Age, the latter having already experienced contacts first and then conquest by the Romans (Webley 2015). The existence of networks across the Channel resulted in a reciprocal influence in the production and exchange of certain goods, although with some differences in the adoption of cultural devices (e.g. literacy) (Champion 2016). For what concerns the study of religious practices, Brunaux (1988) and Roymans (1988) approach the analysis of the local cults of Northern Gaul from a social rather than mythological perspective. Roymans emphasises the role of cults and cult places as structural elements of the Late Iron Age society, where tribes or communities from small *pagi*-like centres, gathered at cult *foci* as a way to define and strengthen their group identities (*ibid.*). As such, they would react in different ways to the Roman influence according to their regional background (Hingley 1997).

This diversity of the pre-conquest provincial scene suggests different responses to the introduction of the Roman element, where 'resistance, adaptation, and acceptance...may occur simultaneously' (Webster 1997: 167). The idea of the *interpretatio romana* as 'Roman translation' of characteristics and attributes of local deities proves to be one-dimensional as it fails to consider the point of view of the local populations (*ibid.*; Hingley 2011: 752; Häussler 2012). Derks successfully continues Roymans' tradition of the study of religion in Roman period northern Gaul by introducing the term 'cult community' to identify 'a group of people who support the cult of a certain god [...] and share the use of a cult place for their personal or collective rituals' (Derks 1998: 81). These cult communities could be different in size, thus recognising small local groups and regional ones, whose cults would be linked to a *pagus* or a *civitas*. Once moved to a more regional scale, the cult came into the public domain as the territory where the temple was built and the cost for the rituals and the associated religious personnel was carried 'by the *res publica*' (*ibid.*). This encounter of local/regional needs and the re-structured state in Roman form was identified as the main arena where the real 'Romanisation' took place.

Scheid (1999) indeed underlines the role of municipalisation as the deepest transformation introduced by the Roman conquest. In Scheid's reconstruction, the local senate and the first magistrates had the duty to indicate which deities will be considered official from that point onwards, providing a legal status for both those deities and the rituals involved.

The necessity to overcome the idea of a peaceful coexistence between the two streams of provincial religiosity in favour of a new religious combination has been more recently affirmed by Van Andringa through a proposal for re-analysis of the 'Pillar of the Boatmen' and other epigraphic evidence from Gaul (2011). The local gods are no longer considered as exclusively 'Gallic' but, receiving Roman forms of cult, they are absorbed in the civic structure of the community (*ibid.*). A similar approach based on the model of '*civitas*-religion' was also applied to the study of religion in Germania Superior and Inferior (Spickermann 2003; 2008)[15].

[14] *Caes. De Gal.* VI, 16: human sacrifices and 'wicker man'; Plin. *Nat.* XXX, 3: human sacrifice and cannibalism; Tac. *Ann.* XIV, 30: human sacrifice.

[15] On this topic, see chapter 6.2: The organisation of religion in *provinciae* and *coloniae.*

The idea of a 'Roman element' as the other factor in this 'Celtic/Roman' dichotomy is also problematic. Current approaches to Roman religion in the north-western provinces have underlined its peculiarity compared to 'the' Roman religion performed in the capital (Woolf 2009). On the one hand, different ritual dynamics and a different audience resulted in simpler performances (that did not involve for example the use of sacred books) and an emphasis on sacrifice and offerings. Moreover, the complexity of cults and cult places present in Rome, connected to its mythical past and geography, found limited place in the performance of religions in the provinces (*ibid.*). On the other hand, the performers of this Roman 'provincial' religion, carrier of their own identities, in terms of social position, ethnicity, gender (Webster 2001; Mattingly 2004), modified the 'Roman-style' rituals.

Overall, the impact of the Roman presence on religion in the provincial territories was characterised by both instances of change and continuity (De Blois *et al.* 2006). Changes were recognisable in the building of temple structures and the emergence of dedication in stone for both local and Greco-Roman deities (Millett 1995; Frere 1999: 321-2). Consequently, there is considerable room to argue that the flourishing of temples does not only constitute a change in architecture, but also a modification in ritual performance at these sites (Smith 2001).

For what concerns Britain, Millett (1995) identifies two promoters of religious changes that affected the province: the native elite aspiring to be Roman and the Roman army appropriating native gods, underlining a general trend of continuity but also innovation in native traditions. These two streams are not however two parallel streams, but more two 'overlapping trajectories' (*ibid.*). For the native elite, the construction of Romano-Celtic style temples became the symbol of the adaptation of a continental way of worshipping.

The army, on the other hand, introduced a 'truly' Roman form of worship by the use, for example, of dedicatory inscriptions on altars, where the presence of local deities is often attested. The reasons behind the employment of this religious behaviour by the Roman army are still questioned, but the answers may include the 'perception' of an unfriendly and unfamiliar environment, which made necessary to secure the goodwill of the local gods and an attempt to control an area through their *evocatio* (Zoll 1995), as well as the absorption into the religious dimension of military society. A further aspect of this dedicatory habit has been highlighted by Haynes (1997, drawing on Stoll 1992): the selection of different gods by the military personnel seems to partly reflect a military structure formed by different corporate groups within the army which would focus on different deities, a methodology successfully applied by Roymans to the analysis of the Batavian deities linked to soldiers of Batavian origin (Roymans 2004).

A shift in attention from the elite and the military as main actors in the process of Roman acculturation through the model of 'creolization' (Webster 2001) has resulted in the discard of the concept of emulation in the practices of local religion. These were adapted rather than adopted and thus involved a dynamic 'negotiation' rather than a static emulation (*ibid.*). This adaptation was attested in several expressions of material culture (e.g. inscribed altars, curse tablets, votive deposits in water), which together with the presence of temples and shrines in certain areas highlighted the existence of different cult identities (Mattingly 2004; Revell 2007; 2009). Continuity in ritual practices was suggested by the persistence of depositional habit, through different types of deposits dating to the post-conquest period, often well into the Late-Roman era (Poulton and Scott 1991; Millett 1995; Galestin 2001; Hobbs 2006; Lundock 2015; Crease 2015), with however a few changes regarding the contexts depending on the introduction of new factors, unrelated to the original ritual significance. For example, it has been usually assumed that the Roman period marked an interruption in the deposition of weapons in wet contexts, a practice well attested in the Bronze and Iron Age, while this behaviour continues for other types of votives (coins, images of deities, jewellery). This was explained claiming a ban on carrying weapons for civilians and their replacement cost for soldiers (Haynes 1997: 118). If the general practice of deposition was not abandoned, however the people practicing it over the span of almost four centuries of Roman presence were certainly changed, expressing different identities than their ancestors. Although some ritual markers were found across different sites in different provinces (e.g. dedications, processions), some other were more localised (e.g. *defixiones* at major religious sites). These differences resulted in the creation of a religious practice that, although not expressed in all the territories according to the same parameters, would have been understood on a more global level (Revell 2009).

1.4 Priesthoods in the western provinces

The general reorganisation of political structures implemented by in the conquered territories also affected the organisation of local priesthoods. The Roman tendency to restrict the power of local priesthoods was mostly due to their original organisation, in which they were not perceived as civic officials and could thus pose as an 'alternative system of power' (Beard *et al.* 1998: 340). This was evident especially in the eastern provinces, where priesthoods could rely on significant wealth and territorial and political influence associated with major temples (*ibid.*).

For need of better control, local priesthoods were assimilated into a Roman organisational pattern, observable in the adoption of the Latin titles of *flamen* and *sacerdos* (*ibid.*) and the introduction, in the imperial period, of a Roman-style priesthood (i.e. modelled on the traditional Roman priesthood of the *flamen Dialis*) in charge of the cult of *Roma* and the deceased, and later living, emperors (Fishwick 2002). A recent volume edited by Richardson and Santangelo collected contributions discussing the relationship between priesthoods and state in Rome and the Roman provinces (Richardson and Santangelo 2011). Highlighting the relationship between these two institutions allowed the authors to shift the discussion from aspects of ancient theology to more practical (and achievable) issues, discussing the presence of priestly institutions, their organisation, and the actual functions the priests were expected to carry out.

1.4.1 The transition from pre-conquest to Roman organisation of priesthoods in the North-West

As mentioned,[16] one of the main shifts in the study of provincial religion marked the role of communities in the construction of a shared religious identity (Derks 1998). These communities would have had their own religious organisations with related traditions, calendars, and rituals. Following the Roman conquest, these institutions would have often been incorporated in a re-organisation of the local *sacra*, involving the local elite and other influential strata of the population (De Blois *et al.* 2006; Rüpke 2007)

From a political point of view, access to priesthoods was an invaluable tool for members of the elites in Rome and in the provinces to acquire social prestige and boost their political careers on a local and then provincial level, leading to an internal competition for those appointments. These aspects are evident in the laws regulating the access to priesthoods and their organisation in Rome and in the provinces (e.g. *Lex Domitia;*[17] *Lex de flamonio provinciae Narbonensis;*[18] *Lex Genetiva Ursonensis*)[19], and have been highlighted for the city of Rome in the edition of its *Fasti* (Rüpke 2008). How important these institutions were, is probably best shown by the measures taken by Augustus, once he became *princeps*, to control them, with a focus on the regulation of *auspices* (North 2011).

The pre-conquest north-western territories did not display a uniform system of priestly organisation, as it existed in the East (Beard *et al.* 1998). The reaction to the implementation of the Roman reorganisation of priesthoods was there twofold, characterised by continuity and resistance.

Elements of continuity are identifiable in the survival of local organisation of cults as seen in the Coligny Calendar, written in Gaulish well into the late 2nd century AD (Olmstead 1992). Similarly, the use of the title *gutuater*, a Gaulish style priesthood, offers an example of municipal co-optation of religious power, previously controlled by the Druids (Scheid 1999; Van Andringa 2002). Druids are the only Iron Age priesthood known in Gaul and Britain via literary sources, but have unfortunately found so far an ephemeral, at best, and disputed correspondence in the archaeological material.[20] Nonetheless, a rich literature on the topic is available, employing varying academic standards.[21]

The fact that the Druids are the only Iron Age priests mentioned in the ancient sources led some scholars to interpret most of the ritual practices emerged in the archaeological record datable to pre- and conquest periods as Druidic activities (Ross and Robins 1989; Cunliffe 1997; Aldhouse-Green 2010). Extensive works by Anne Ross and Miranda Aldhouse-Green, in particular, have looked for potential information on the Druids in ancient sources and medieval Irish literature and collected a diverse archaeological evidence. Starting from the functions mentioned in the literary classical sources, they created a chronology-free (timeless) image of Druids and Druidesses as priests, healers, magicians, philosophers, scientists, witch-doctors, and prophets and comparing these figures to other religious specialists attested among a diverse range of ancient and historical populations. Their recollections employed sometimes the use of a politically-charged language, where the Druids are considered the focus of British nationalism (Aldhouse-Green 2010).

The elusiveness of the archaeological evidence for Druids has long been lamented (Marco Simón 2014) and some of the objects discussed in this work have been considered as possibly pertinent to Druids (Allason-Jones 2011b): however, any indisputable connection (i.e. an inscription) is still missing. The most plausible evidence so far was discovered in a Roman-period house in Gaul in 2004, where the find of an incense burner with a lacunose inscription reading '*dru*', has been interpreted as the possible reference to a Druidic office held by the owner (Joly 2013). This find, together with the aforementioned existence of the Gallic calendar, whose arrangement respected some of the theological elements of Druidic religion known from the classical

[16] 1.3.
[17] North 2011.
[18] CIL XII, 6038.
[19] CIL II, 5439.

[20] 1.5.1.
[21] An up to date collection of the vast scholarly production on Druids has been recently collected by Marco Simón (2014, note 1).

sources, pointed towards a survival of the Druidic element of local religion restructured in the Roman period (*ibid.*), while the social prestige associated with claiming a Druidic ancestry is still attested in late antiquity.[22]

The second aspect of the reaction to the implementation of the Roman reorganisation of priesthoods is the 'resistance'. This element developed following the Augustan ban for Roman citizens from becoming a Druid or partaking in Druidic practices, later strengthened by Tiberius and then Claudius (Marco Simón 2014: 329-30). This measure had been often applied by the Romans to practices considered subversive, like becoming a priest of Bacchus (*s.c. de Bacchanalibus* BC 186, Beard *et al.* 1998: 93-6) or a priest of Cybele (Pinto and Pinto 2013). The enforcement of these bans was most likely the main reason behind the decline of Druidic practices as well as of the social and political prestige of this priesthood, at the same time creating a career void for members of the local communities seeking social and political recognition.

This shift in importance of political and religious authority opened the way to the introduction of new religious roles meant for the local elites as elected magistrates entrusted with the organisation of ritual activities and associated spaces and buildings, (Marco Simón 2014: *loc. cit.*). The immediate results of this reorganisation were evident in the transfer of ritual activities from the *locus consecratum in finibus Carnutum*, known to Caesar as the place where all Druids would convene to discuss juridical and legal matters, to the Altar of the Tres Galliae, the meeting place of the Gallo-Roman assembly, as well as the ritual centre of the imperial cult in these provinces (Fishwick 1987).

The aftermath of the imperial decrees was one of loss of power for the Druids in both religious and political matters. From a ritual point of view, Latin authors increasingly refer to Druids in negative terms (Hofeneder 2008; Häussler 2014) depicting them as figures whose role is downgraded to secluded figures living in woods[23] and devoted to magic practices,[24] actvities that had a negative connotation in the Roman imperial period (Beard *et al.* 1998: 231-4). This apparent exile (Pailler 2008) is however challenged by the instances of Druids taking part in, and even instigating, active resistance. Examples are the revolt of Sacrovir in AD 21,[25] an individual probably connected to a sacral office because of his name (Marco Simón 2014), as well as the one promoted by Maricus,[26] whom Zecchini (1999), followed by Aldhouse-Green (2010), identified with a *gutuater*. In Britain, a famous episode recorded by Tacitus involved the provincial governor Suetonius Paulinus, who engaged the Druidic stronghold at Anglesey in AD 60 in an attempt to suppress the Druidic order.[27] These protests have been interpreted as having an 'end of the world' connotation (Webster 1999; Aldhouse-Green 2010), a character also found in the Druidic prophecy of the end of the Empire, following the Capitoline fire.[28]

If the continental study of Roman priesthoods in the provinces has focused on their duties and functions (Scheid 1999; Rüpke 2008), these historiographic analyses have not found adequate parallels for Britain and the absence of a chapter on Britain when discussing the provincial priesthood of the imperial cult in the West is a telling example (Fishwick 2002). Only a brief attempt to collect some of the evidence linked to priests was offered by Allason-Jones (2011b), while most relevant, and in fact widely used by the former, is the concise discussion of priesthoods in Roman Britain by Martin Henig in his handbook on religion in Roman Britain (1984). The reason behind this gap in the academic accounts is likely the aready noted limited number of literary sources and inscriptions mentioning priestly titles and the associated activities. For this reason, the combination of these sources with the analysis of the archaeological evidence for priestly presence, as well as the interpration of the depositional practices associated with it from a contextual and geographical perspective will significantly improve our understanding of both elements.

1.5 The sources for the study of priesthoods and priestly practices in Britain: an overview

Past studies attempting to explore priestly figures and their activities in Roman period Britain have often lamented the scarce number of primary sources available and their intrinsic biases, an aspect that certainly caused the minimal fortune of this type of reaserch.

The limited numbers of literary sources and their accuracy are a phenomen that affects most of the territories on the north-western boundaries of the Roman Empire. Moreover, when present, these sources address themes that were distant from their authors culturally, geographically (e.g. Greek and Latin authors) and often chronologically (e.g in the cases of early Christian writers).

The Greek and Latin authors referencing ritual performers and their activities were not members of the communities they wrote about and, were often

22 Aus. *Prof.* 5, 7-10
23 Mela, III, 19.
24 Plin. *Nat.* XI, 249.
25 Tac. *Ann.* III, 43.
26 Tac. *Hist.* II, 61.
27 Tac. *Ann.* XIV, 30-1.
28 Tac. *Hist.* IV, 54.

culturally biased in their descriptions, which usually lacked first-hand investigations. The early Christian authors, despite often living in the regions they describe, were however chronologically far and distant for beliefs.

Nonetheless, it will be useful to offer an overview of these literary sources. They are mostly related to Druidism, likely because of its perceived peculiarities compared to the Roman practices, useful to promotoe a specific political agenda.[29]

The scarcity affecting the number of literary sources for priesthoods in Britain similarly applies to epigraphy, normally a staple in similar studies in the north-western provinces (Van Andringa 2002; Spickermann 2003; 2008). Nonetheless, British inscriptions recording priestly titles or religious activities will be considered as scholars have used inscriptions and their material support in general to identify different ritual behaviours and their distribution in the province.[30]

The last part of this section offers an introduction to the archaeological evidence discussed in later chapters via a selection of discoveries of ritual objects and assemblages and a discussion of past methodologies used to approach this corpus of material.

1.5.1 Assessing the value of the literary sources for the study of pre-Roman priesthoods and ritual practices in the north-western territories

The literary sources describing pre-Roman priesthoods in the north-western provinces are quite limited in number and are mostly concerned with Druids and their practices.31 The most complete accounts are found in Caesar, Suetonius, and Pliny the Elder; while other authors also mention this priesthood, however briefly.32 The reasons behind the writing of these accounts differ, however, some scholars have traced them to two main purposes (Webster 1999; Hutton 2009). Historians like Diogenes Laertius, who wrote in the 3rd century AD but referred to much earlier sources (like Sotion and Antisthenes Rhodius),33 were driven by the intention to write a historical account, different from the more politically-driven expositions like the ones written by Caesar, Lucan, or Tacitus, which ended up having a limited historical value.

A more in-depth analysis of the historical sources for Druidism has highlighted three historiographical currents (Zecchini 1984; Marco Simón 2014) positioned on a spectrum spanning from a '*filoxenia idealizadora*' and a '*clara xenofobia*' (Marco Simón 2014: 324). On one end of the spectrum are the 3rd/2nd centuries BC authors Sotion and Antisthenes, who considered Druids, together with other wisemen-like figures, on the same level as Greek philosophers. This tradition is also found later in the Republican (Alexander Polyhistor) and imperial periods (Clement of Alexandria and Iamblichus). A second, 'neutral' tradition is attested by the work of Posidonius of Apamea, who allegedly travelled to Gaul around BC 100, and whose research interests were more purely descriptive (*ibid.*). The third is represented by the work of Timagenes of Alexandria, later followed by Ammianus Marcellinus, who records a trip of Pythagoras to Marseille, where he would have preached his doctrines influencing Druidic beliefs. It is not the aim of this section to discuss all the instances for Druids and their practices in the ancient sources (recent analyses of this 'raw material' have been presented by Webster (1999), Hutton (2009: 1-48), and Marco Simón (2014, with previous bibliography). Nevertheless, it is interesting to note here, even in passing, which ritual practices the ancient authors and their earlier sources considered to be typical of the north-western territories before, and sometimes after, the Roman conquest.

Caesar is considered the primary source for Druidism in Gaul and Britain (Hutton 2009; Aldhouse-Green 2010), and his account is inspired by that of Posidonius. However, the main difference between the two accounts lies in the fact that while Caesar talks of 'Druids' as being those who 'engage in things sacred, conduct the public and the private sacrifices, and interpr*et all* matters of religion',[34] Posidonius presents three categories of religious professionals: Druids, bards, and *vates*.[35]

This difference has been explained by considering that the situation described by Posidonius at the end of the 2nd century BC had changed by the time of the Caesarean account of his Gallic campaigns, where the Druids mentioned would be a relic of the past (Brunaux 2006). Contrary to this interpretation, it has been argued that the information reported by Caesar painted an accurate picture for his time as he could rely on direct sources, probably Divitiacus or someone from his entourage (Pailler 2008; Marco Simón 2014).

This would imply that Caesar used 'Druids' as an umbrella term to indicate different performers invested with ritual responsibilities as well as interpreters of the divine will. They were also in charge of public and private sacrifices and had the power to forbid wrongdoers from sacrificing,[36] a ban often found also on curse tablets in the Greek world (Versnel 1985). Their prominence and

[29] Also in 1.4.1.
[30] 6.4 and 6.5.
[31] For a complete list of Latin and Greek sources on the topic, see Kendrick 1927; Koch 1997; Hofeneder 2005; 2008; 2011.
[32] Appendix 1.
[33] D.L. I, 1.
[34] Caes. *De Gal.* VI, 13.4.
[35] Diod. V, 31, 2-3. Strab. IV, 4, 4-5.
[36] Caes. *Gal.* VI, 13.

prestige within their communities meant that they were consulted in all private and political issues.[37]

Caesar states that they were organised in a *collegium*-type structure, of which one Druid was in charge for life after being voted or having seized the role by force. They were also excluded from military service and the payment of taxes. These characteristics are also shared by the Roman municipal priesthoods, prompting the idea that Caesar consciously depicted them as having customs similar to the Roman ones and thus worthy of conquest/assimilation (Dunham 2003; Maier 2003). Britain is given a central role in the Druidic organisation as both birthplace of the Druidic discipline and study-destination for would-be future Druids.[38] Their annual meeting was held at 'the borders of the Carnutes' (modern Chartres), identified as the geographical centre of Gaul.

The change in tone is evident when moving on to the description of Druidic ritual practices. These are contemptuously reported by Lucan as *barbarici ritus* and *mos sinister sacrorum.*[39] Tacitus uses a similar tone in his horrific description of the women who participated in the defence of the Isle of Mona, the later obliteration of the Druidic sacred places, and the destruction of the altars that Druids are used to cover with the blood of their prisoners (*cruore captivo*) and interrogate the gods by inspecting human entrails (*hominum fibris consulere deos fas habebant*).[40] In fact, human sacrifice is probably the ritual practice most famously associated with Druids. In general, sacrifices would involve offerings of food, objects, and the killing of animals, however humans were also sometimes killed, especially, but not exclusively, prisoners of war. Ultimately, the performance of human sacrifices could involve the building of an extraordinary man-like hollow structure made of osiers, filled with men and finally set on fire.[41]

This colourful account is attested only by Caesar and appears to be in contradiction with what is reported in these same years by Cicero, when narrating the arrival of Divitiacus in Rome.[42] Divitiacus arrived in Rome as an ambassador of the Aedui and was a guest in Cicero's home. The Roman orator describes him as a Druid whie, interestingly enough, in his account Caesar mentions his role as chief-magistrate of the Aedui and not as a Druid.[43] There is clearly a political reason behind Caesar's omission of Divitiacus' role as he was an important Roman-ally and he could not therefore appear as a Druid, figures otherwise so negatively portrayed in Caesar's own account (Hutton 2009: 5).

Modern scholars commenting on the ancient sources about Druidic ritual performancehave positioned themselves varyingly when confronted with the practice of human sacrifice. On one side of the spectrum, Ross (1967), Cunliffe (1997), and Aldhouse-Green (2001; 2010) consider human sacrifices central to the activities of the Druids that they interpret as tribal priests.[44] Brunaux accepts the existence of these sacrificial practices among the Gauls, but contends that the Druids, although present, would have not actively performed them (Brunaux 1988). Finally, Davidson considers the mention of human killing an exaggeration made by the classical authors (Davidson 1993).

The sources available to us only allow for cautious interpretation of the Druidic performances and it is unmistakable that the tone in the mentions of human sacrifices is strongly weighted for political reasons. Mainly, this is to convey a sense of Roman cultural superiority vis-à-vis the cultural and religious practices of other populations (Rives 1995; Webster 1996; Hutton 2009: 17-8). Actually, reports on practice of 'human sacrifice' could be an interpretation of (consciously or unconsciously) misunderstood burial rituals practiced in Britain and elsewhere in the north-western provinces as late as the pre-Roman Iron Age (Davidson 1993; Harding 2016). Placement of parts of the body of the deceased to be buried or displayed in meaningful spots in the natural landscape, following rituals of de-fleshing and/or disarticulation, could have been interpreted as the consequences of human sacrifices to an unfamiliar audience (*ibid.*). Rather than pinpointing a single motivation, the stress on this practice in the sources is a combination of different factors like the existance of what were perceived as unusual rituals and the politically driven need to construct an image of the'barbaric' other.

In the decades prior to the conquest of Britain, two bans were introduced to contain Druids political influence and directly attacking their social prestige. First, Augustus forbids Roman citizens from taking up the office of Druids and even partecipating in Druidic ceremonies.[45] This measure is clearly meant to create an identity crisis stressing the dicothomy of being a Druid/associated with Druidic activities versus being a Roman citizen and the social advantages related to this status.

This line of policy continues under Tiberius with a decree targeting Druidic practices together with those of diviners and physicians, the latters invested of a

[37] *ibid.*
[38] *ibid.*
[39] Luc. 1, 450-1.
[40] Tac. *Ann.* XIV, 30.
[41] Caes. *Gal.* VI, 16.
[42] Cic. *Div.* I, 90.
[43] Caes. *Gal.* I, 16.

[44] 1.4.1.
[45] Suet. *Cl.* XXV, 5.

negative connotation in the Roman public discourse. This ban brings forward the policy of discrimination against Druids from a status that is opposite to that of a Roman citizen to one that is associated with the most negative actions as ritual practices go. This policy naturally culminates under Claudius with the abolishment of Druidic offices and practices.[46]

The development of a limitating and finally outright banning policy on Druids and their practices is not only the result of a long-term careful plan of removing potential political enemies that the Romans knew capable of rallying popular consensus, but it is also the product of a conscious political choice of shifting power from local/regional priesthoods to the emperor as the sole legal propagator of *religio*.[47] The natural consequence of this policy is the need to re-structure the *sacra* in the affected province(s), achieved through the introduction and promotion of priestly civic institutions as well as a re-organisation of the local cult activities.

After the outright ban on Druids and their activities, however, later historical accounts still mention Druids, where they are described as experts in magic, healing and oracular practices.[48] These are associated with traditions that the Roman narrator presents to us as 'minor' and in a negative light. However, their true relevance and distribution have proven to be quite the opposite and far more intertwined with what we consider 'official' religion (Gordon and Marco Simón 2010; Piranomonte and Marco Simón 2013). At the start of late antiquity, Druids are relegated to be an entity of the past, whose negative/violent character is forgotten in favour of a connection to a quasi-mythical, illustrious ancestry.[49] Later, Druids and mentions of their activities are found in Irish hagiographic literature and in other instances of Medieval Irish literature until the late 6th century,[50] while legal texts reference the existence of Druidic beliefs until the 8th century AD (Ross 1995). In the latter texts, Druids are characterised by prestige derived from their magic knowledge and abilities, and although somewhat revered, they are considered sorcerers-like figures (*ibid.*). According to Ross, Druidic activities recorded at such late date proves the survival in this late period of an 'alternative belief-system' despite the centuries of Roman influence (*ibid.:* 424), a position also shared by Green (*varia*). However, a critical assessment of these late sources is currenlty missing, and we are left to consider whether these references to practices in religious and legal texts reference a contemporary reality or are rather collections of past references, based on earlier Latin legal literature, not too differently from Diogenes Laertius' (3rd century AD) use of Sotion and Antistenes (3rd/2nd century BC) accounts.

Apart from the references to Druids, very little is known about other ritual practices performed in Britain from the literary sources. Anecdotal accounts include the notice by Cassius Dio when reporting on the events of the Boudican revolt that during the address to her people, the queen of the Iceni took a divine omen by letting go of a hare she kept in her dress.[51] Later, after the first victories, a number of atrocities against women are reported (including mutilation, corpse manipulation, and impaling), all practices performed together with sacrifices carried out in different sacred places.[52] On the opposite side of this narrative of conquest, in the biography of his father-in-law Agricola, who held the office of governor of Britain in AD 77/8, and again from AD 83 to 84, Tacitus mentions that Agricola promoted the building of temples,[53] which soon became the target of violent protests and following distructions.

With regard to the priestly figures, again Tacitus provides a reference to the institution of a civic priesthood in Britain, mentioning '*sacerdotes delecti*',[54] the religious personnel associated wth the temple of Colchester, house of the emperor's cult and dedicated to Claudius (Fishwick 1987). The only other mention of a Roman style priestly title is in the Historia Augusta, where a *haruspex rusticus* led Septimius Severus to visit the temple of Bellona in York.[55]

If Cassius Dio's account of the atrocities associated with the Boudican revolt seems to perpetuate the stereotype of the 'savage practices' already noted when discussing the references to Druidic practices, the brief mentions provided by Tacitus hint to a reality of temple-building actvities and related priestly officers. Finally, the passage in the Historia Augusta, too casually informs us of the existance of *haruspices* likely associated with rural shrines, as we will see, a staple in the ritual landscape of Britain in the Roman period.[56]

Overall, the literary accounts we have discussed so far offer an extremely limited evidence for understanding what priesthoods were present in the province, with the sole exception of the imperial cult, although rather limitedly, and what their roles might imply from a performative point of view. As we have mentioned, there is probably a complicit silence on the spread of

46 Plin. *Nat.* XXX, 3; Suet. *Cl.*, *loc. cit*.
47 See Herz 2007 for the role of the emperor as *soter* and *euergetas* inspired by Hellenistic predecessors.
48 SHA *Alex. Sev.* LX, 6-8; *Numer.* XIV, 1-3; *Aurel.* XLIV, 4-5.
49 Aus. *Prof.* 5, 7-10; 10, 22-30.
50 e.g. *Cormac's Adventures in the Land of Promise*, *The Adventures of Connla the Fair.* But also, religious literature like *Penitentials* and *loricae*.
51 Cass. Dio LXII, 6, 1-2.
52 Cass. Dio LXII, 7, 2-3.
53 Tac. *Ag.* 21, 1
54 Tac. *Ann.* XIV, 31.
55 SHA *Sev.* XXII, 6-7. For a discussion of *haruspices* in Britain see 6.4.2.
56 7.3

rituals that were in line with the Greco-Roman style performative behaviours,[57] and we should not assume from this silence of the written sources that priesthoods had a marginal role in the panorama of the province, or similarly in other provinces which share this same lack of written accounts.[58] Moreover, the report on Boudicca taking omens offers an invaluble insight in the performative knowledge of rituals associates with members of the regional elites. In the end, these reports offer unbalanced hints at the complexity of a varied landscape of ritual perforers and practices however encouraging us in the analysis of other types of sources to tackle the topics at the heart of this research.

1.5.2 An overview of the epigraphic sources for religious activities and priestly roles in Britain

If literary sources are dominated by various mentions of Druids and their ritual practices, no reference to them has so far been found on inscriptions from Britain or any other province.59 This is likely due to the fact that most British inscriptions date to the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, a period when Druidism was definitely out of the socio-political spotlight if not almost extinct.60 At the same time, most of the ritual practices recorded on inscriptions have no mention in our literary sources. The fact that Roman authors rarely mention widespread ritual practices like animal sacrifices and vows, well fits in the theory that only the unusual and 'barbarian' behaviours are reported as a means to construct an identity of the 'other'.

On a general level, inscriptions referencing religious performances are usually referred to as 'sacred dedications' (Bodel 2009). Based on the 'principle of reciprocity' between the dedicator and the god (*do ut des*), they express a religious as well as a legal commitment to the ritual exchange (*ibid.*: 20). The inscriptions from Britain record different acts, mainly the fulfilling of vows made to a deity, but also thanksgivings or commands received from the gods through visions or dreams.[61] They provide a fundamental insight into the display of both private and public religion, particularly linked to the military presence as most of these inscriptions are found on votive altars from military areas or dedicated by military personnel. The setting of this type of altars and the associated votive rituals do not explicitly require the presence of a professional priest and in fact placing the altar in a sanctuary is not mandatory and many are found in areas not apparently connected to religious structures (Bodel 2009: 23-34). In these cases, the altar performs a dual function: it is the *object* dedicated to the deity, but also the *place* where the ritual takes place. Nonetheless, the setting of these altars required at least three binding elements. One is the choice of a place (consecrated by men through a ritual –*consecratio*- or by the deity itself, perhaps with an extraordinary act);[62] the appropriate time (according to an official calendar for festivities or following the prescriptions for a particular deity), and the correct ritual, involving libations, music, and, eventually, animal sacrifice (Rüpke 2009: 33).

After the publication of the first volume of the Roman Inscriptions of Britain in 1965 by Collingwood and Wright, Biró offered the first analysis of the British epigraphic evidence, discussing the characteristics of the inscriptions and their contents while also providing several thematic maps (1975). When commenting on the votive altars, he suggested that only certain social categories would have felt the need to erect them, mostly soldiers, while the remaining larger part of the population would have maintained the worship of the local divinities following the 'traditional cult' (*ibid.*: 42). The altars dedicated to local deities are more numerous than the dedications to Roman deities in some areas, like the Severn Estuary and in Yorkshire. Greco-Roman deities are instead found more often at *coloniae* and legionary forts (*ibid.*).

The first comprehensive study of all the epigraphic evidence related to religious performances from Britain was attempted by Hassall (1980). He included the inscribed altars, which make up for most of his data, and inscriptions on metal (feather plaques, figurines, amulets, and *defixiones*). His approach was mostly descriptive, nonetheless, his discussion highlighted some cultural behaviours. He recognised five different occasions that could prompt the setting of an altar: the fulfilment of a vow, thanksgiving, 'divine instigation', 'divine consultation', and anniversary dedications (*ibid.*). He divided this epigraphc evidence in three categories: votive gifts, charms and amulets, and curses. Hassall did not linger on the identities of the dedicants or on the vast array of deities mentioned in the inscriptions, however his conclusion hinted at the roles of the religious personnel that would have been employed at a temple site (mentioning RIB I, 155 and 1129).[63] He also postulatd the existance of 'professional scribes' as authors of the curse tablets, who would have orbited sites like Uley, Lydney, and Bath. Moreover, he identified figures secondarily involved in ritual

57 This limited amount of information on ritual performances as found in the literary sources is not unusual, even for areas of central Italy, and is overall common also for other performative aspects of Roman life, like gladiators (Rüpke 2006).

58 E.g. indigenous priests in Germany and millenarian figures (Webster 1999).

59 With the possible exception of the incense burner mentioned in 1.4.1.

60 On this aspect and the issue of the number of inscriptions surviving in Britain, see chapter 6.

61 RIB I, 319 (*monitu*), 760 (*ex viso*), 1022 and 1024 (*ex iussu*), 2091 (*ex imperio*); III, 3149 (*ex visu*); 3499 (*ex nuntio*).

62 RIB I, 1426 (*fulgur divom*).

63 Discussed in 6.3.4 and 6.3.1.

practices, like the craftsmen producing the votive objects sometimes recording themselves, as in the case of the Mars from Foss Dyke[64] and participating in a 'gift shop' environment the places of worship (*ibid.:* 88).

The evidence of inscribed altars from Hadrian's Wall is later used by Amy Zoll (1994; 1995) in order to identify 'patterns of worship'. She applied a methodology already proposed by Derks for similar inscriptions from Lower Germany (Derks 1991) although reaching different conclusions for Britain. Presenting a statistical analysis of the altars, she focused on the double-named deities, often considered by previous scholars as one of the main incarnations of the 'Romanisation' of local religion and crucial evidence used in the 'happy syncretism' model.[65] Her results showed that only 8% of all the deities mentioned in British inscriptions have a double name. Moreover, the areas with a higher presence of soldiers, and consequently often considered more 'Romanised', like the ones in the immediate proximity of the Hadrian's and Antonine Walls, had an even smaller percentage (3%) of instances of double-named deitites than the rest of the province. Her conclusions contributed to toning down the 'Romanising' action of the army in religious matters and, as Mattingly (2011) more recently highlighted the discrepancies between the religious habits of the military compared to the civilians.

Although not very significant in number, inscriptions continued to be used as the main marker for ritual activities. Millett combined the distribution patterns of votive altars and temple sites (Millett 1995) and observed that religious inscriptions are mostly found at military sites, clustering around the lines of Hadrian's and Antonine Walls, as well as at other major military settlements whereas they are scarcely represented in the areas of south/south-east England, apart from some of the main urban centres. By contrast, this area clearly presents a major concentration of 'Romano-Celtic' temple sites (*ibid.*).[66]

This difference in the spatial distribution between inscribed altars and Romano-Celtic temples has been noted in Gaul and Germany as well (Mattingly 2004). Rather than a local scarcity of stone (Millett 1995), the limited number of inscribed altars in Britain has been convincingly related to a difference in religious practices in the areas where they are attested, compared to those where Romano-Celtic temples were built (Woodward 1992; Mattingly 2004). In these areas, the use of inscribed altars might have not been considered a necessary means to express devotion. Nonetheless, dedicatory inscriptions are found on a different set of objects in east/south-east England: metal and ceramic vessels, rings, amulets, spoons, and curse tablets (Tomlin 1999; 2011),[67] disproving the idea that this area was less literate than the others or that communicating with the divine necessarily involved writing in stone.[68]

The limited number of inscriptions recording priestly roles in Britain, a means so commonly used in Rome and in the eastern provinces for this purpose, appears then to follow a more general trend related to the presence and cultural use of epigraphy within the province. Nonetheless, the few mentions of priestly roles in stone attest to the need, if only on a personal/local scale, to use this specific media for some instances of self-representation.

1.5.3 The contribution of iconography to the study of ritual performances in Britain

The use of iconographic evidence in this study will be limited to the survey of the imagery of ritual performances found in the province. It does not aim to be an exhaustive collection of all the British representations of rituals, but rather focuses on the meaning behind certain iconographic choices.

No formal representation of a priest or priestess is available in Britain; however, a few instances exist of individuals performing a ritual action, almost exclusively a libation. In general, the classic aspect of the Roman celebrant, both male and female, consists of a person wearing a toga *capite velato*, i.e. with a covered head (Edmondson 2008). This element indicates piety toward the gods and thus was adopted by both emperors (Fejfer 2008) and 'common' people performing sacrifices and libations (Stone 2001: 17, 20). This habit was peculiar to the Roman way of celebrations and was not shared by the Etruscan or the Greeks, who performed *capite aperto* (Schilling 1992). If the performance *capite velato* was the norm for the Roman officiant, however, different cults often required peculiar clothes and accessories to be used during the religious performances. Clothing becomes in this sense the indication of a specific religious identity (Sommer 2012: 261). A classic example is that of the performers of some oriental cults, such as the *galli*, whose portraits on funerary reliefs often depict tools and clothing items peculiar to their cultic affiliation (Turcan 1989).

In Britain, most of the iconographic evidence for ritaul imagery is found on metal vessels and metal figurines

[64] RIB I, 274.
[65] 1.3.
[66] Although these distribution maps were produced more than two decades ago, the overall distributional trend still applies (Eckardt, key-note address at TRAC 2017) as confirmed by the recent epigraphic discoveries in London, Tabard Square (Killock *et al.* 2015) and the two altars in Inveresk (Hunter *et al.* 2016).
[67] Curse tablets will be discussed in 6.6 to consider the 'professional knowledge' needed for their writing (Tomlin 2003).
[68] For a study of literacy through inscription in Britain, see Raybould 1999. The topic of literacy in Britain is discussed in 6.2.1.2.

reproducing individuals performing libations. To this, we will add the images reproduced on Late Iron Age coins which, as it has been suggested (Creighton 2000), imply the understanding and, likely, performance of Roman-style rituals in the years before the formal conquest.[69]

1.5.4 Discoveries of priestly regalia and ceremonial instruments in Britain and their current interpretations

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, 'priestly regalia' and ceremonial instruments are the main material evidence for priests and their related practices. These objects will be discussed at length in two chapters according to their type and style (chapter 3), and context of discovery and geographical location (chapter 4), while in this section they are introduced according to past methodological approaches used for their study. Interestingly, because of some peculiar characteristics (mostly type and style) compared to other, more commonly found, Roman objects, they have been relatively often mentioned by scholars interested in the religion of Roman Britain (Henig 1984) and in its material evidence (Toynbee 1962; Green 1976; Bird 2011). Nonetheless, a comprehensive study of this material has not been undertaken until now, while previous analyses have focused on short descriptions and only brief references to their chronology or contexts of discovery (Allason-Jones 2011b; Bird 2011).

The first finds of priestly regalia date to the late 18th century (deposit of Stony Stratford, Buckinghamshire: Lyson 1817; Walters 1921: 62-64) and 19th century (deposit of Willingham Fen, Cambridgeshire: Babington 1883). The Willingham Fen deposit sparkled later continental interest and was discussed by Rostovtzeff, who interpreted it as evidence for the existence of a Hercules-Commodus cult in Britain (1923). Later finds failed to attract similar continental interests, important finds, like the head-ornaments from Cavenham Heath, Suffolk, came to light a few years before 1924 (the exact date of the find is unknown) and published soon after (Layard 1925). A small corpus of priestly regalia was forming and the different objects, mainly headdresses and sceptres, were used as parallels for the new finds, like the sceptres from the burial at Brough-on-Humber, Yorkshire (Corder and Richmond 1938) and the publication in the same year of a sceptre-binding originally found at Farley Heath, Surrey in 1848 (Goodchild 1938).

These first accounts are characterised by a mostly descriptive approach, with a focus on style: the chain-headdresses from Cavenham Heath were considered 'Gallo-Roman' (Layard 1925), while the Brough-on-Humber sceptres were deemed the product of a 'local stylistic tradition' (Corder and Richmond 1938), similarly to the Farley Heath sceptre-binding described as produced in the 'most Celtic style' (Goodchild 1938).

Initial interpretations regarding the individuals who would have used these regalia were suggested by Layard, who identified the Cavenham Heath and Stony Stratford headdresses as used by 'pagan priests' (1925), and from Corder and Richmond, who wondered whether the individual buried at Brough-on-Humber might have been a 'priest' or a non-professional figure (Corder and Richmond 1938).

With the exclusion of the Brough-on-Humber burial, all these initial discoveries were not the result of archaeological excavations, but chance finds in farm land often made by landowners or their employees. Only at Cavenham Heath, Layard conducted an excavation around the find-spot following her purchase of the headdresses, in search for a possible temple (Layard 1925). The only finds from a coherent context of excavation for this period are three 'bronze objects' from the shrine of Nodens at Lydney Park, Gloucestershire, during the Wheelers' archaeological campaigns between the years 1928-29 (Wheeler and Wheeler 1932). The modernity of the Wheelers' methodological approach emerges through the quality of their publication of the archaeological operations at the site, as well as in the discussion of the findings. The three 'bronze objects' consist of a whole bronze sheet and two fragmentary ones (*ibid.*: 42). The main metal-work consists of a half-moon sheet decorated with deities which prompted different interpretations of the object -and the other two fragments belonging to a similar one- included it being an element of a headdress, or a portion of a bronze vessel. However, when discussing these objects in the catalogue, the metal-work is identified with certainty as an example of a plaque to be applied on a priest's headdress (*ibid.:* 90, n.137).

After the pause imposed on archaeological activities by the Second World War, an accidental find of an assemblage of headdresses was unearthed at Hockwold-cum-Wilton, Norfolk in 1956-57. This was briefly mentioned in the Journal of Roman Studies in the 'Sites Explored' section (Wright 1957: 211) and later discussed in Toynbee's handbook 'Art in Roman Britain' (1962). Toynbee ascribed the decorative style of the headdresses as the product of a 'native Celtic hand' (*ibid.:* 339). The content of the deposit was interpreted as a 'treasure' buried for safety reasons but pertinent to a hypothetical nearby temple. The discussion of the objects from Hockwold-cum-Wilton offered Toynbee the opportunity to discuss some of the previous discoveries, including those from Lydney Park and Cavenham Heath, classical in their design but native in craftsmanship (*ibid.:* 338).

[69] 3.2.2 and 5.2.2.

The first coherent collection and discussion of Britishpriestly regalia is the concise paragraph 'Priests and Regalia' in Lewis' synthesis about the Roman temples of Britain (Lewis 1966: 137-138). After lamenting the extreme scarcity of the epigraphic and iconographic evidence for priesthood in Britain, Lewis proceeded to describe the 'much more known' religious regalia (*ibid.*). He noticed that regalia were mostly found in East Anglia and also introduced a first typology for sceptres and headdresses. Four types of sceptres were identified by listing the actual exemplars, while a more descriptive typology was offered for the headdresses. These were divided in three types: a) the sheet-bronze crowns; b) the sheet-bronze circlet diadems; c) the headdresses consisting of discs connected by chains or strips. Lewis' collection and systematic discussion of priestly regalia enjoyed a brief success and it was in fact used by Painter when publishing three crowns found at Deeping-St-James, Lincolnshire between 1965 and 1968 (Painter 1971). However, later analyses rarely shared a similar methodology.

Two general catalogues on the religious material from civilian and military areas of Roman Britain were published by Green (1976; 1978). Her discussion of ritual objects included model objects, temple furniture, ritual pottery (i.e. face urns and triple vases), amulets and charms, *defixiones*, and miscellanea (e.g. votive figurines and anatomical *ex votos*), however no attempt at classification nor search for parallels was attempted.

In Henig's monograph on religion in Roman Britain, metal crowns *or* diadems were interpreted as special ornaments used by priests in the whole Roman world and not specific to the 'Celtic' area (Henig 1984: 136-141). Therefore, the British examples can be included in and related to any of the cults present in the province, rather than being associated exclusively with the local ones as it was done in the past. For example, the crown from Hockwold-cum-Wilton[70] was compared to the *apex* traditionally worn by the *flamines* as they share a similar terminal, but the presence of a flagon whose handle was decorated with an Attis head found on the site led Henig to interpret the crown as part of the apparel of a priest of Cybele and Attis (*ibid.*: 137). The exemplars from Stony Stratford[71] were instead allegedly used by priests of Mars, as hinted at by the discovery at the site of a Mars figurine and related *ex votos* (*ibid.*). Among the regalia, Henig also included a divination device part of a metal assemblage found at Felmingham Hall, Norfolk, and several sceptre-heads, which he grouped by iconography in human heads/busts or animals. The existence of sceptre-heads decorated with heads of gods or emperors were however explained according to the Iron Age cultural habit of displaying human heads extending in the Roman period (*ibid.*).

Excavations at the two temple sites of Wanborough and Farley Heath, Surrey added a substantial amount of material to the corpus of regalia. Five chain-headdresses and several sceptres were discovered at Wanborough (Bird 1994; 1996b; 2007c), paralleled in design by the exemplars from Farley Heath (Bird 1996a; Bird 2007b) prompting Bird to recognise a design specific to the Atrebatic region (Bird 1994: 93-4).

Stead's publication of the grave goods of a 'warrior' from Mill Hill, Kent, who was buried wearing a copper-alloy crown, gave him the chance to comment on the other headdresses emerged up to that date in Britain and dating to the Iron Age and the Roman period (Stead 1995). Stead's typology was later employed in a more recent discussion of the Farley Heath headdresses by Bird (2007a), although a few years later, she proposed her own typology including two types of headdresses (crowns and diadems) and three types of sceptres-heads (human/divine, animals, and birds) in the most recent account of British published regalia to date: the chapter 'Regalia' in the 2011 volume 'Artefacts of Roman Britain' (Bird 2011: 274-80).

This excursion through the methodological approaches used in studying the priestly regalia from Britain have highlighted two consistent trends. One is the genearl lack of a research for parallels beyond the British examples. New discoveries were always, and only, compared to similar British objects found in the past, in a continuous cross-reference. There seem to be only two exceptions to this trend. One is Layard's early account of the Cavenham Heath chain-headdresses functionally compared to 11th century AD Lithuanian and Estonian exemplars from funerary contexts (Layard 1925: 259-60). Although these comparisons were not explored further than their design, as well as being considerably later in date than the ones from Cavenham, they offered an interesting parallel for her initial identification. The second is offered by Green's discussion of some of the regalia in her later publications (Aldhouse-Green 2004; 2010). She collected and discussed a heterogeneous group of objects connected to ritual behaviours from different regions of the world to highlight cultural patterns shared by some European societies, and their presence in Iron Age and Late Iron Age Britain. However, her aim often resulted in a collection of evidence too disparate, both in terms of geography and chronology, strategically selected in order to support the existence of certain religious behaviours (e.g. shamanism).

The second trend is the tendency to relate regalia to priests of local cults. Although often neither the regalia nor the contextual material found with them offered any indication of the identity of the gods whose cult

[70] 1B.HOC1.
[71] 4.2.7.

required that apparel, some scholars indulged in the hypothesis that their styles better fitted in the attire of an officiant of a local cult (Aldhouse-Green 2010; Allason-Jones 2011b). Some iconographies, like the one on the 'diadems' from Lydney, were recognised to be 'classical' in inspiration (Wheeler and Wheeler 1932). The main exception to this trend is offered by Henig, who drew parallels with regalia used by priests of Roman cults (as for the *apex*) and sometimes proposing a Roman cult as candidate for the titularity of the priests using these objects (1984). More recently, Joanna Bird also adopted a more cautious position on the matter (Bird 2011).

This tendence in overcoming a brisk associaton of the British priestly regalia with local (i.e. non-Roman) cults and their associated personell and the relative dicothomy of local versus Roman ritual performances has also been challenged more recently by the discovery of the '*Senuna* Treasure' at Ashwell, Hertfordshire (Jackson and Burleigh 2007; Jackson and Burleigh 2018). This deposit contains several metal 'feathers' and a silver statuette of a female goddess depicted in the Greco-Roman style of Fortuna, whose name *Senuna* is an *unicum,* and is not paired with any Roman goddess' name (as, for example, in Sulis-Minerva). The combination of a votive offerings like the 'feathers' (exemplars of which are well-known in Britain and in all the Roman world)[72] and a local goddess (*Senuna* whose name was carved on some of the plaques) suggests the combination of the worship of a local cult with more widespread Roman practices. This constant exchange between the use of Greco-Roman ritual objects (feathers, but also altars and ritual vessels) and local deities points towards a hybridity of cultural response that sees the use of local-style ceremonial tools and ritual practices used for different gods, both local and not.

Priestly regalia have been introduced here within the framework of British archaeology, highlighting their interpretational strengths and weaknesses. The bottom line is the necessity of addressing this material as a whole, without falling into an insular discussion, and joining it to similar evidence from the continent, a crucial aspect which has been often missing in previous analyses. This cannot be achieved through a fossilisation on typological or stylistic analyses, rather through an approach to these objects as 'objects in action' thus considering both their materiality and function, discussing their original context of use and the possible reasons behind their interment. Joining the discussion of these materials with considerations derived from the analyses of the other types of evidence will allow us to offer a conclusive discussion of the users of these objects and how they marked their religious authority within their communities to offer a crucial contribution to the reconstruction of priesthoods in Roman Britain.

Before moving on to the next section spelling out the different research questions of this study, a mention is needed for other objects that often appear in iconographic representations of ritual performances (e.g. jugs, *paterae*, and knifes, usually reproduced on the sides and backs of votive altars) or found in the archaeological evidence (e.g. butchery equipment -cleavers, axes, and hammers-, vessels -both for carrying and pouring liquids-, musical instruments, incense boxes and burners). Although they were crucial to conduct religious rituals, they are omitted here because of their archaeological invisibility and/or difficulty to differentiate them from 'secular' objects.[73] A good example in this sense is offered by knives. Green reported a copper-alloy 'sacrificial knife', decorated with an incised 'x' near the tip of the handle, found at Findon, Sussex (Green 1976: 220, pl. XXVg). Its design is characterised by an elongated triangular blade made as one with the handle terminating in a small knob. This is not the classic cleaver-like design of a sacrificial knife, instead characterised by a wider blade, as often attested in iconography (Siebert 1999) and in material evidence (e.g. see the exemplar from Brittany, now in the British Museum).[74] The interpretation of the Findon knife as a ritual object would be proved by its discovery at the site of the Romano-Celtic temple (Lewis 1966). However, the same design is also attested in iron in non-ritual contexts (Manning 1986: 113, type 8-Q27, pl. 54). If not the shape, then the occurrence of this type in copper-alloy could substantiate its interpretation as ritual object (Henig 1984: 131). Moreover, two iron knifes from Higham Ferrers, Northamptonshire were interpreted as cultic objects because of their discovery in the local shrine's assemblage together with traces of animal sacrifices (Scott 2009: 202-3, 220-1, figure 5.28, nn. 81-2). It appears clear then that the context of these objects is the crucial aspect in interpreting them as ritual objects, rather than their type.

1.6 Research questions

The following research questions are expressed as main guidelines for the discussion of the different types of evidence for priestly figures, which are considered in chapters 3 to 6. These questions will be the backbone of the conclusive chapter 7.

[72] See the examples from Stony Stratford (4.2.7), Barkway (Walters 1921), and Water Newton (Painter 1977). For British and continental examples, see the recent catalogue by Birkle (2013).

[73] However, we refer to occasional finds of these objects or of their representations when discussing the iconographic evidence (chapter 5).

[74] BM inv. n. GR 1941.3-21.1.

1.6.1 What was the model of priesthoods' organisation in Roman Britain?

This question addresses the main concern of this study, which is to explore different types of evidence to identify the institution of priesthoods in Britain, of which we might otherwise doubt the general significance because of its limited profile in traditional sources. We argue that priestly regalia offer a fundamental supplement to ancient literary sources and epigraphy in the investigation of priestly roles.

Priestly regalia are considered here primarily as markers of authority, and they attest to the importance to show the wearer's role within the community on certain occasions. On the one hand, local individuals would pursue these positions as a means to personal and communal promotion. On the other hand, the awarding of priestly functions was a fundamental way to encourage the integration of local individuals in the Roman re-organisation of the province. Finally, as regalia are connected to office holding, discussing their deposition prompts questions about the significance of putting them aside. Because of their function as badges of authority, it is worth reflecting on why they fall out of use; whether it is because the institution which they represent is declining (e.g. the final act of the last pagans in Roman Britain), or because when a religious site is renewed, this renewal includes an architectural renewal, which required a new set of garments and regalia and new sets of ceremonial tools. In either case, the regalia needed to be buried reverently: they could not be discarded as rubbish, but they were carefully disposed of, as their connection to the divinity is significant enough to not be able to recycle them, however, they must remain dedicated.

The mapping of the archaeological evidence will highlight the distribution of priestly markers both in terms of type of location and of geographical settings. For what concerns location, two main types (rural or urban) and two sub-types (temple/shrine, unknown) will be used. Objects like priestly regalia would logically be found at temple sites (rural or urban), however, the fact that they are also found at sites whose vocation is unknown will be considered in the framework of ritual ceremonies in the rural landscape. Examination of the geographical distribution of regalia in the province will highlight patterns of use linking to socio-cultural choices, in particular which communities chose to use these objects.

1.6.2 How do priestly regalia contribute to our knowledge of the embodiment of provincial priestly authority?

The analysis of types and styles of priestly regalia allows one to reflect on how the role of the priest was marked out in rituals in Roman period Britain, linking this work to other recent discussions of the apparel of provincial priests (Rumscheid 2000; Rüpke 2011; Raja 2016) and more general studies on dress and status in the Roman period (Rothe 2009). The analysis of the regalia will discuss elements of typology and style to highlight instances of continuity of authority markers from the Late Iron Age to the Roman period in Britain, with parallels from other north-western territories. Regalia prompt questions regarding their culural affiliation (e.g. were they used for Roman-style rituals? Indigenous ones?), while decorative aspects might indicate connections with the local iconographic traditions and/or instances of innovation.

1.6.3 What information do the different depositional contexts offer about priestly activities?

The study of priestly regalia is enriched by discussions of the depositional contexts where they were found. These are of three different types: structured deposits, burials, and single finds, the latter being divided between stratified and unstratified finds. Each one of these contexts offers different types of information regarding the use of that object/objects, re-connecting this analysis to the biographical approach.

The mention of deposits containing priestly regalia opens the way to the discussion of the meaning of ritual deposition, which is considered in the following chapter 2 together with general discussions of the meaning of 'structured deposit' as an effective label.[75] These discussions acquire further significance when added to the occasion of a particular ritual action, the deposition of the regalia in the ground, either in the ground or in graves, which implies a change in the status of these objects occurring during their 'life' (Garrow and Gosden 2012). The performative aspect will be explored through the analysis of aspects of objects' biography (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986; Whitehouse 1996), flagged in the regalia by signs of use and object modifications.

The examination of the academic literature on regalia[76] has shown that a detailed investigation of the archaeological context of these objects was offered only in few cases, often without challenging previous interpretations and consequently biasing research results. For example, assemblages from temple sites are often interpreted as temple treasures (Baratte 2005; Künzl 1997) or foundation deposits (Bird 2007b; Williams 2008). Deposits found apparently isolated from any known structure, although allowing several hypotheses, provide few answers. If the objects deposited have a religious significance, as in the case of priestly regalia, the assemblage is usually interpreted as

[75] 2.2.1 and 2.3.3.
[76] 1.5.4.

'ritual'. On the one hand, these 'isolated' deposits may have been connected to shrines or sacred natural spots, e.g. votive deposits or temple treasure, that are no longer intelligible in the modern landscape; in this case, although unknown to us, they would keep their 'ritual' significance. On the other hand, these ritual objects might be deposited in a way that was never meant as ritual, for example, they were stolen and hidden, or viceversa (i.e. hidden to prevent their theft). As mentioned, the analysis of the contents of the deposits, and their study together with their archaeological context and location, will provide a more nuanced interpretation, based on explicit criteria. Finally, the deposits of regalia will be considered in relation to structured deposition as a whole, to compare whether they are an isolated phenomenon or follow the more general provincial trend. Chronology is potentially significant: a lot of the present discussion is based on a particular depositional practice that seems to have some chronological limits.

Burials are also considered here, although only one grave clearly contains priestly regalia (from Brough-on-Humber, Yorkshire); nonetheless, other burials have been interpreted in the literature as pertaining to priestly figures, because of the combination of grave goods. The discussion of burials enriches our survey of voluntary deposition of objects in order to 'create' social identity as perceived in the community (Pearce 2016), in a mortuary context where intentions may be clearer than for structured deposits.

While a significant number of priestly regalia is recorded from structured deposits, many are also found on their own, either as stratified or unstratified finds. These two sub-categories present different problems. The automatic notion implied by an object found during an archaeological excavation is the possibility to analyse contextual material useful for dating and the discuss the object in the general context of the site. As for the many unstratified finds, these are the result of chance discovery or often metal-detecting without any archaeological investigation at the time of discovery, although this does not exclude, and it is actually sometimes the case, that excavations might have been carried out at a later stage.[77] The existence of both types of single find prompts discussions regarding the possibility of an accidental or casual loss of these objects. Their ritual significance seems to clash with the possibility of a chance loss, and this argument, as we will see, can be used against an 'easy' identification of some of the regalia (almost exclusively sceptre-heads) as such and rather as more commonly found, everyday objects (e.g. knife handles).

1.7 Book structure

This study comprises seven chapters.

The present chapter has offered a summary of the development of general historiographical trends regarding Roman Britain, necessary to frame the debate on religion and priesthoods in the north-western provinces. At the same time, we have explored the sources used in this study to identify priestly performers. Finally, we have delineated the main research questions guiding the discussion of the different types of evidence used in this work.

The following chapter (2) offers a methodological framework used for the analysis of these different forms of evidence. It starts with exploring issues of terminology, especially the labels 'ritual' and 'structured deposit'. Then it will move on to illustrate the research methods used in this study intertwining with an indication of the main *corpora* used to collect information.

Because of the central importance of priestly regalia and ceremonial tools in this work, chapter 3 considers this evidence at length to assess several instances. First, we will describe the objects and organise them in types. Then, we will discuss their function in terms of ritual apparel and embodiment of authority.

Chapter 4 focuses on the contexts of discovery of priestly regalia and ceremonial instruments to collect further information about their use, starting from their find-spot then moving on to the context of their discovery considered on multiple levels. These will include the association of the find-spot in relationship to the activities documented on the site; the issue of context (urban, rural), and, finally, aspects of regionalism. The discussion will focus on depositional contexts, discussing issues of structured deposition: consequences of a voluntary (structured deposits, burials) or involuntary depositional act (stratified finds). This will allow to analyse aspects of the 'biography' of these objects: from their performative life to the transformations occurred at the time of their deposition.

Chapter 5 discusses the iconographic evidence for ritual performers and performances in Britain, comparing it to similar evidence from other Roman provinces. It includes a discussion of scenes of ritual performances divided by material (stone and metal). The evidence in metal is diverse and includes representations of ritual performances (mostly libations found on metal vessels) as well as performers (figurines).

[77] A recent example is the metal-detector find of a Roman bronze jar-handle at Whitchurch, Buckinghamshire that prompted an archaeological excavation leading to the discovery of a casket burial (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-31373885; Last accessed 20/10/2018). Also 5.2.2.1.

Chapter 6 analyses the epigraphic evidence for official ritual performers. Although limited in number, the existence of this evidence allows the exploration of general themes linked to the provincial epigraphic habit such as the level of literacy and the availability of stone for inscriptions. Moreover, the discussion of the evidence for *collegia* expands our topic of the official organisation of religion in the province. To the instances recording the titles of religious performers, we also add the 'indirect' evidence for these religious personnel implied by the discovery of curse tablets and related evidence found at several sites in South Britain.

The overall conclusions are drawn in chapter 7, structured following the research questions expressed above and suggest further developments for the study of priestly performances.

References have been made to the database numbers of the objects discussed. The numbering system of the finds is explained in the introduction of chapter 3.

The database containing the archaeological evidence can be found at the end of the volume as Appendix 2, while Appendix 1 collects the ancient literary sources used in the text (original and translation).