

Iron Age religion in Britain

Classical texts versus archaeology

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Abstract

Iron Age religion in Britain – classical texts versus archaeology (Religion i Storbritannien under järnåldern – klassiska texter contra arkeologi)

In this essay, material and written sources are compared in an attempt to learn more about the Iron Age religion in Britain. Classical texts and archaeological evidence concerning the Iron Age religion in Britain are presented, after which a comparison is made of the two to try to find out whether the classical authors statements could have been true. The conclusion drawn is that much of the facts in the classical texts are substantiated by material remains, but some information cannot be proved. Furthermore, the archaeological evidence provides us with facts of the Iron Age religion which was not mentioned by the classical authors.

Keywords: Iron Age, religion, Celts, classical authors, archaeology, burials, votive depositions, sacrifice, rituals, comparison.

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Abstract

Denna uppsats berör religion under järnåldern i Storbritannien. Den består av en jämförelse mellan klassiska källor och arkeologiskt material. Målet är att få reda på huruvida påståenden av klassiska författare om religionen i Storbritannien under järnåldern kan ha stämt. Mycket av det de klassiska författarna skrev kan stödjas av arkeologiska bevis, men en del har inget stöd i det arkeologiska materialet. Dock ger oss materiella lämningar information om religionen under järnåldern i Storbritannien, som inte nämndes av de klassiska författarna.

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1. Purpose and questions

Since my teenage years, the Iron Age people in Britain and their religion has fascinated me. They are a mystery to many, in the grey zone between pre-historical and historical research - and often studied from these different perspectives. When reading about these people, I often happened upon Caesar's descriptions of them and wondered if they were actually true. Therefore I chose to write about this question and it has been exiting to analyse it.

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate whether the classical texts that concern the Iron Age religion in Britain can be confirmed by archaeological findings. This is done by examining scientific texts about the archaeological material and comparing that information with the classical texts. The main questions of the thesis are:

- What do the classical texts infer about the Iron Age religion in Britain?
- What does the archaeological material infer about the Iron Age religion in Britain?
- Do the classical texts and archaeological evidence correlate?
- Based on the archaeological material, could the information in the classical texts have been true?

These questions form the basis of the thesis, which begins with a presentation of the classical texts and archaeological material in which the first two main questions are answered. A discussion follows wherein the two sources are compared and the third question is answered, and the thesis ends with the result in which a response is given to the last main question.

1.1 Sources and methods

The thesis is based on a qualitative method comparing classical texts and archaeological findings interpreted as tied to Iron Age religion in Britain. The literature used consists of books, scientific articles and information from webpages. Some researchers take a prominent place since they have excavated and published much about the subject. Cunliffe, Green (or Aldhouse Green) and Ross are the archaeologists whom have dominated the archaeological research on Iron Age religion in Britain during the last decades.

Cunliffe (1997) has a special knowledge of pit burials, sacrifices and seasonal festivals since he has spent many years excavating the Danebury hill fort and the thousands of special deposit pits discovered there. Green/Aldhouse Green (1989:1992:1996:2001) has an extensive publication about the Iron Age religion in Britain and is an expert on the subject. However, her theories that are based on ethnographic methods were not included in the thesis since I did not consider them relevant for the purpose of the study. Ross (1999) has extensive publications on the druids, some of them popular. Information was taken from her works that was based on archaeological findings.

It would have been optimal to make distributional maps over the archaeological findings, but it was not possible since no complete database exists over Great Britain's archaeological findings. A map over Britain and its counties is to be found in the appendix to provide the readers with a general idea of the area discussed. In addition, the religious art is also included in the appendix to give the readers a chance to make their own mind of the representations.

The aim when writing about archaeological evidence in the thesis is only to use texts based on archaeological sources. The archaeological material analysed was divided into four categories:

- Burials
- Sacrifices
- Art, rituals and religious customs
- Votive depositions

These categories were chosen to facilitate a systematic study and to make it easier for the reader to comprehend the material. The categories also include the statements made by the classical authors and represent the Iron Age religion in Britain. This study is based in a comparison between text – interpretations by ancient Greeks and Romans, and archaeological material – objects dated to the Iron Age found in Britain. The former could be interpreted as more subjective than the latter

In the study, objects are compared with text - which is an interesting angle since objects in themselves cannot be subjective or lie but texts can. This comparison was

done to learn whether the texts by classical authors – with all their personal opinions and aims for writing their texts, actually can be correlated with archaeological findings. Material remains cannot give us a final answer to the question, but might indicate an answer to the main question of the essay: is the information found in classical texts accurate or not?

Some archaeologists say that religion cannot be studied by the use of archaeology, and written sources are needed to find out the meaning of objects found in ritual contexts or with religious aspects. I do not agree, and think that material remains in themselves can tell us of ancient religion - especially with the aid of their contexts. The classical sources help us understand the archaeological evidence of the religion in Iron Age Britain, but since the texts are subjective the comparison with the material remains is carried out as a critical evaluation of the texts.

1.2 Criticism of the sources

To make the thesis as accurate as possible, ethnographic interpretations or analyses not based on material remains were not used. Many stray finds in Britain (included in literary works) are found by amateurs using metal detectors, who do not often register the contexts. This makes interpretations difficult and the material less reliable. Archaeological material in itself and our interpretational models of it also suffers from aspects that can make it unreliable: bad preservation, damages and so on. When older literature is used, it could affect the quality of the archaeological information, since it was based on older scientific methods. Relevant archaeological reports from Great Britain were not accessible.

Classical texts that concern the Iron Age religion in Britain written in Latin, French or that was unattainable were not used. All classical texts were collected from webpages, and the translations would have been more trustworthy if gathered from books. The ones included in the thesis are well-known and often used in research about this subject.

A fact that one has to be constantly aware of when using the classical texts is that the authors lived in an entirely different society and had another view of the world and religion than the people in Iron Age Britain. They did not possess the same amount of information that we do today of the people they wrote of, which makes the texts less

reliable. Furthermore, these aspects together with the fact that the Romans were at war with the Gauls and occupied Britain around the time that the texts were written, means that the Classical authors probably had an aversion against the people in Iron Age Britain.

Most classical texts were also composed to commemorate famous Romans, and written from the Classical perspective with widespread prejudices of the people outside the Roman Empire. The fact that religious beliefs from the Bronze Age and the Romans were present in Iron Age Britain also makes it difficult to discern specific Iron Age religious aspects (Cunliffe 1997:183f:189).

Archaeologists and historians have discussed the Iron Age religion in Britain for at least a century, which made it impossible to include all previous research and theories concerning it and discuss all material remains within the given time-limit. When studying religion – archaeologically or historically, it always encompasses interpretations which are subjective. According to me, this is a risk we have to take to be able to research religion.

1.3 Definitions and abbreviations

This thesis concerns the Iron Age inhabitants of Britain, who for a long time have been referred to as Celts. During the last decade, this label is not used anymore since it is hard to know whether they actually identified themselves as Celts. Another term often used when talking about their material culture is La Tène, which is a definition rarely used in this thesis. In my study, I refer to them as the Iron Age people of Britain. This is done to avoid unnecessary confusion with the Continental people and to avoid ascribing an identity to a people which might not be accurate.

In the quotes included from the classical sources, the Iron Age people of Britain were referred to as Celts, Gauls and insular Celts – but to clarify, these terms can in most cases be translated to the Iron Age people of Britain. The classical texts included were limited to those written as near in time as possible to the Iron Age, to get an accurate picture from people that lived around the time they were writing of.

The United Kingdom, except for Northern Ireland is the area analysed in this thesis. This area was chosen so that the study would not be too extensive. All archaeological findings mentioned in the texts as British have been found in this

area. In addition, this area is referred to as British even though it was not Britain in the time discussed. This label is used since “the area that now is Britain” would have been a too long term to use in the text.

One of the most important definitions made is that almost no Romano-Celtic archaeological material has been used. That decision was made because the Romano-Celtic material may show a Romanized picture of the British Iron Age religion, since the Roman world-view had already been closely intertwined with the indigenous religion in the later part of the Iron Age.

The British Iron Age

800BC – 600BC Earliest Iron Age

600BC – 400BC Early Iron Age

400BC – 100BC Middle Iron Age

100BC – 50BC Late Iron Age

50 BC- AD 100/43 AD Latest Iron Age/Romano-British Iron Age

1.4 Earlier research

Barry Cunliffe’s work from 1997 is much used in this thesis. Cunliffe is an Emeritus Professor of European Archaeology at the University of Oxford, and has a background in archaeology and anthropology. He became an authority on the Iron Age people of Britain with his extensive excavations of the Danebury hill fort, and has published many works about the people of Iron Age Britain (see 1988:1993:1991:2001) (University of Oxford, 2012).

The work by Cunliffe (1997) included in this text concerns many aspects of the Iron Age people in Britain and their religion. He has written about votive depositions, sacrifices and graves and much of his knowledge seems to derive from the excavations of Danebury. He presents several theories of the special pit depositions found there - that they were burials, sacrifices, votive depositions or storage for grain used in religious festivals. The different theories are though trustworthy according to me since Cunliffe always bases them on analyses of archaeological material. With

his interpretations, he also indirectly agrees with the classical authors about sacrifice and votive depositions.

Another author whose works have been used in this thesis is Miranda Aldhouse Green. She is an archaeology professor at Cardiff University. Her research is focused on the British Iron Age, especially Romano-Celtic iconography and the Iron Age religion in north-western Europe. She has published numerous works about iconography, sacrifice and other religious aspects in Iron Age Britain (see 1986:1995:1996:1997:2001:2004) (Cardiff University, 2012).

Works by Aldhouse Green (formerly Green) (1989:1992:1996:2001) used in this thesis concerns human sacrifice, religious art and animals in Celtic religion. She is not afraid of presenting theories, in many cases based on ethnographical and other post-processual methods. When using her texts, information and theories were chosen that mostly were based on material remains. She has contributed much to the research about Iron Age religion in Britain, and seems very eager to find proof in the archaeological material for this. She believes that the classical authors were correct about that human and animal sacrifice was performed in Britain.

Another author's works used in this thesis is Ross who has written numerous books about druids, in Britain and on the continent during the Iron Age (see 1991:1996:1998:1999:2010). As the classical authors, she is of the opinion that druids existed in Iron Age Britain (Ross; 1999).

A scientist, active in the first half of the 20th century worth mentioning was Jacobstahl. He was a German scholar who had knowledge of Greek vase painting and revolutionized the research about Celtic art. In the late 1940's, he was a university reader of Celtic archaeology at Oxford University (see 1935:1944). His archaeological methods are today somewhat outdated, but his results are still used in archaeological research (Robertson: 1958).

2. Presentation of the material

2.1 Classical texts

Posidonius was a stoic philosopher, historian, geographer and ethnographer who lived from ca. 135-51/50BC. He knew the Iron Age people of Britain through travels

and his ethnographic descriptions of them are still used. Posidonius gave a more complete image of the Iron Age people in Britain than previous accounts and created an image which became well known in the classical world. Strabo and Diodorus Siculus based their writings about the Iron Age people of Britain on his texts.

In 69BC Cicero wrote *Pro Fonteio*, in which he provided us with details of the insular druidic doctrine (Benvenuti 1991:38f). He wrote that the Gauls propitiated their gods with human sacrifices on altars and in temples in his lifetime (Cicero: *Pro Fonteio* 39 from Perseus, 2009). A new method of research on the Celts was possible after Julius Caesar's military campaign in Gaul in 58-51 BC. In Caesar's memoirs of these campaigns he devoted some chapters to the Iron Age people in Britain. He was an expert on Gaul and a good ethnographer.

"*De Bello Gallico*" by Julius Caesar is a famous and well used classical work in research about the Iron Age people of Britain and their religion. Caesar mentioned the custom of human and animal sacrifice and the beliefs behind it, and that the Iron Age people of Britain performed many superstitious rites. Human sacrifices were done to placate the gods with another human life instead of your own and for the benefit of the nation. Druids performed the rite for people going in to war or that were exposed to danger.

A sacrificial rite was described by Caesar, which is later mentioned in more detail by Strabo –here referred to as the basketry rite. Among the British Iron Age people, the most severe penalty was to be sacrificed. People selected for it were avoided, nobody spoke to them and they did not have rights or dignity any longer. In the Iron Age people of Britain's minds, the sacrifice of criminals was more suitable to the gods than innocent people – but those were also sacrificed if no criminals were available (Caesar: *De Bello Gallico* 6:13:16 from *Corpus Scriptorum Latinorum*).

De Bello Gallico also contains information about the Iron Age people of Britain's gods and rituals:

"One of their leading teachings are that souls do not become extinct but pass after death to another body and by this men are much excited to do valorous things and not afraid of death. Druids also teach the young about the stars and their motion, the extent of the world and our earth, about the nature of things and the power and majesty of the immortal gods" (Caesar: *De Bello Gallico* 6:14 from *Corpus Scriptorum Latinorum*)

Caesar described the British Iron Age gods with Roman names, making them understandable to readers in the empire. He mentioned Mercury as inventor of all art, guide on journeys, with power over treasure and merchant dealings and as particularly worshipped. Mars, Apollo, Minerva and Jupiter were also revered. Mars was a war god, Apollo diverted disease, Minerva taught the invention of manufacture and Jupiter was the sovereign over the heavenly powers. The Iron Age people of Britain counted the seasons, kept birthdays and the beginning of months and years with the night preceding the day because the druids said that the people descended from the god Dis (Caesar: De Bello Gallico 6:17:18 from Corpus Scriptorum Latinorum).

A ritual of votive deposition was described by Caesar:

“They often make vows to give their booty to Mars and when they stand victors, they sacrifice captured animals and collect the other things into one place. In many places you may see piles of these things leaped up in their consecrated spots and very seldom people dare to disregard the sanctity of the place and keep or take away deposited things and torture awaits the one that does that.”(Caesar: De Bello Gallico 6:17 from Corpus Scriptorum Latinorum)

Finally Caesar described one of the funerary rites in Iron Age Britain: When the wife of a powerful man died, her funeral was rich and excessive. Her dependents and slaves, things, animals and humans she held dear were cast on the funeral pyre (Caesar: De Bello Gallico 6:19 from Corpus Scriptorum Latinorum).

During the imperial period, those who wrote ethnographies of the Iron Age people of Britain based their works on three sources: Posidonius and Caesar’s texts and the Roman surveys carried out under imperial rule in former “Celtic” areas. The geographer Strabo and Diodorus Siculus wrote very detailed ethnographical and geographical descriptions of Gaul and Britain. Both based their writings on Posidonius’ as well as enriching his material with newer accounts (Benvenuti 1991:39f).

Strabo like Cicero and Caesar described the custom of human sacrifice, and claimed that the druids had to be present. The druids devoted a human to death and struck him in the back with a sabre and then foretold the future from his death struggle. They could also sacrifice humans by shooting them to death with arrows and impale them in temples. In addition, Strabo described the “basketry-rite” mentioned by

Caesar: cattle and wild animals were together with humans, thrown in a large constructed figure of straw and wood which was set on fire as a burnt-offering (Strabo IV 4:5 from Thayer).

A custom described as barbarous and exotic by Strabo was the taking of enemies' heads:

"..when they depart from the battle they hang the heads of their enemies from the necks of their horses, and, when they have brought them home, nail the spectacle to the entrances of their homes...The heads of enemies of high repute, however, they used to embalm in cedar-oil and exhibit to strangers, and they would not deign to give them back even for a ransom of an equal weight of gold." (Strabo IV 4:5 from Thayer)

Siculus also wrote of the custom of taking enemies heads and relayed it the same way as Strabo did in the quote above (Diodorus Siculus: Histories V 29:4 from Thayer). In addition, Diodorus brought up the custom of foretelling the future through the death struggle from a sacrificed human (Diodorus Siculus:Histories V 31 from Thayer).

Diodorus Siculus, Strabo and Caesar all wrote of various groups of holy people among the Iron Age people of Britain.

"Among all the Gallic peoples, generally speaking, there are three sets of men who are held in exceptional honour; the Bards, the Vates and the Druids. The Bards are singers and poets; the Vates, diviners and natural philosophers; while the Druids, in addition to natural philosophy, study also moral philosophy." (Strabo IV 4:4 from Thayer)

Siculus mentioned bards, druids and seers and added that the bards sang and played in honour or dishonour of a man. The diviners were people high in rank that divined the future by interpreting the cries or flight of birds and the slaughter of sacred animals (Diodorus Siculus:Histories V 31 from Thayer).

Druids were described as high in rank with religious and political power by Strabo, Diodorus and Caesar (Diodorus Siculus:Histories V 31: Strabo IV 4:4 from Thayer: Caesar: De Bello Gallico: 6:13:14 from Corpus Scriptorum Latinorum) .

"Druids are men of rank and dignity. They are engaged in sacred things and perform the public and private sacrifices and interpret all matters of religion...The druids decree rewards or punishments regarding public and private things –crimes, murders, disputes about inheritance or boundaries. If any

person does not submit to their decisions they interdict that person for the sacrifices.”(Caesar: De Bello Gallico:6:13 from Corpus Scriptorum Latinorum)

Diodorus added that they had to be present at sacrifices, since they were experienced in the nature of the supernatural, spoke the language of the gods and could seek blessings from the gods (Diodorus Siculus:Histories V 31 from Thayer). Strabo wrote that the notion of immortal souls and an indestructible universe were believed and spoken of among the druids and other people (Strabo IV 4:4 from Thayer). Strabo and Diodorus like Caesar, mentioned that druids were held in great respect and judged private and public disputes and mediated in cases of war (Strabo IV 4:4: Diodorus Siculus:Histories V 31 from Thayer).

Caesar mentioned that one person lead all druids with sovereignty and was succeeded by a chosen devotee or after equal druids had battled for the post. Large meetings were held at holy places in the central region of Gaul at a specific time in the year, at which the druids decided over disputes people submitted to them. Caesar also wrote that the institution was allegedly developed in Britain and later brought over to Gaul.

Druids were excused from military service, did not pay tribute or go to war and had an allowance in all matters - and many therefore chose the profession. To become a druid did though take up to twenty years since they had to learn many verses by memory. This was the rule because the druids were not to depend on written texts, and so that the doctrine would not spread freely among the people (Caesar: De Bello Gallico: 6:13:14 from Corpus Scriptorum Latinorum).

In the 1st century AD, Valerius Maximus described the Iron Age people of Britain’s belief in an afterlife and Lucan wrote of Gallic cults that worshipped various deities. Pliny the elder handed down important information about the Gauls, including details of druidic practices (Benvenuti 1991:40f).

“The Druids...held nothing more sacred than the mistletoe and the tree that bears it...they perform none of their religious rites without employing branches of it...it is the notion with them that everything that grows on it has been sent immediately from heaven, and that the mistletoe upon it is a proof that the tree has been selected by God himself as an object of his especial favour” (Pliny the Elder: Nat.Hist. 16:95 from Bostock et al.)

Pliny the Elder also described the rituals performed when mistletoe was gathered:

"The mistletoe...when found, is gathered with rites replete with religious awe. This is done more particularly on the fifth day of the moon... This day they select because the moon, though not yet in the middle of her course, has already considerable power and influence; and they call her by a name which signifies, in their language, the all-healing. Having made all due preparation for the sacrifice and a banquet beneath the trees, they bring thither two white bulls...the priest ascends the tree, and cuts the mistletoe with a golden sickle, which is received by others in a white cloak. They then immolate the victims, offering up their prayers that God will render this gift of his propitious to those to whom he has so granted it. It is the belief with them that the mistletoe, taken in drink, will impart fecundity to all animals that are barren, and that it is an antidote for all poisons." (Pliny the Elder: Nat.Hist. 16:95 from Bostock et al.)

At the end of the 1st century AD Tacitus wrote "Agricola", where a short passage gives important information about the insular peoples' religion (Benvenuti 1991:41):

"But a general survey inclines me to believe that the Gauls established themselves in an island so near to them. Their religious belief may be traced in the strongly-marked British superstition" (Tacitus: Agricola: 11 from Corpus Scriptorum Latinorum)

2.2 Burials

A number of Iron Age burials have been found in Britain, but according to Cunliffe (1997), Harding (2004) and Sørensen (2007) they are too few to be accepted as a common burial rite for any region. The exceptions are the cemeteries of the Arras culture in Yorkshire and the cist burials of the southwest peninsula. From the 4th to the end of the 2nd century BC, inhumation was the most common burial form. The dead were given grave goods according to their status, mostly warrior equipment with prestige value. Richly furnished burials have also been excavated in Britain from the 1st century BC/early 1st century AD. A shift in belief is implied by the change to cremation as the norm in much of north-western Europe in the 2nd/1st century BC (Cunliffe 1997:208f).

Crouched inhumations were found in wooden coffins at Arras, Yorkshire, but in the southern peninsula stone cists were used. The stone cist burials have been found at Devon in Mount Batten, Harlyn Bay in Cornwall, Trelan Bahow, Trevone and in the Isles of Scilly. Common funerary gifts were personal ornaments such as pins, brooches and bracelets, as well as mirrors and bronze vessels. The cist burials date from the entire Iron Age (Sørensen 2007:407f). Iron Age cist burials have also been

excavated in Torwoodlee, Selkirkshire and Burnmouth, southern Scotland and were by artefact association dated to the later pre-Roman times.

Ten burials were uncovered at Dryburn Bridge in southern Scotland, too few and spread out in date to compare with even more than a small part of the population in the area. The grave forms were flexed inhumations in pits and might have been boundary associated. One group was aligned with a former limit of a palisade enclosure and another was placed within the enclosed area (Harding 2004:79f). Inhumation burials in pits have also been discovered within settlements at many places in SE England (Sørensen 2007:406).

Burials in pits were excavated in a small cemetery outside the ramparts of Brownmouth hill fort (southern Scotland), C¹⁴ dated to the 2nd half of the 1st millennium BC. The pit-graves were different in shape and construction. All graves were inhumations in mostly NNE/SSW or diametrically equal directions and none contained grave goods. There were just nine graves in the cemetery, a minimal number compared to the size and occupation time of the hill fort – which points to a selective use of the graveyard. In Iron Age Britain, it was quite common to scatter body parts in settlements, shown by single findings of human bones in such contexts – for example inside Brownmouth hill fort. There is also evidence of reuse of Bronze Age barrows in southern Scotland in this time (Harding 2004:79f).

The best known Iron Age regional burial tradition comprises inhumation cemeteries with thousands of burials in east Yorkshire, called the Arras-tradition. The general burial custom seems to be crouched inhumations in wooden coffins under barrows surrounded by ditches. The burials are dated between at least the 4th century BC and the 1st century BC. Some graves were oriented in a N/S direction and others in an E/W. The funerary gifts were objects like personal ornaments, mirrors, decapitated chalk figurines and animals (Megaw & Simpson 1979:408f).

Finally, several richly furnished chariot burials were found in the Yorkshire area and a few north of that region (Harding 2004:80; Sørensen 2007:409). They are known for example from the sites of Arras, Danes Graves and Garton Slack. When excavating Garton Slack, the remains of a man were found laid on the wheels of his dismantled chariot with his whip, full harness and a pig's head. In two burials discovered further

north at Pexton Moor, the vehicles were buried complete with slots for the wheels (Megaw & Simpson 1979:409).

Save for these regional burial traditions, relatively few graves have been found from the Iron Age in Britain. The most obvious theory for that so few graves have been discovered, is that the regular way of disposing of dead bodies was to place the bodies in a separate area chosen for that purpose. That would explain the absence of graves and the human bones scattered in settlements (Cunliffe 1997:209). Burials in cemeteries may have been the exception and burials ritually integrated in the functions of settlements the norm (Harding 2004:81). Archaeology shows us that human bones were used in very different ways, for example in rituals of marking boundaries which was a practice that became more common during the later Iron Age (Cunliffe 1997:334,336). A common consistent burial tradition cannot be discerned until in the 1st century BC in Britain (Megaw & Simpson 1979:410).

Animal bones found in graves may have been food offerings for the dead on their journey, tribute to under-worldly powers or reflect funerary feasting. Many Iron Age chariot/cart-burials contain bones with signs of consumption. Animals like horses and dogs were placed in graves to accompany their master to the next world, and their bones were also made into personal ornaments. A single animal bone in a grave may have been put there to symbolize the whole animal (Green 1992:107).

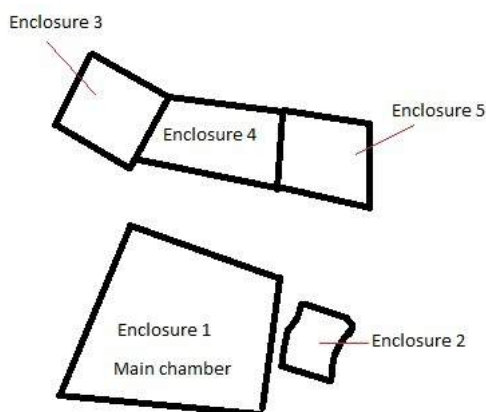
There are several examples graves which may be interpreted as druids' or religious clergy's graves. In Kent, a burial of an Iron Age nobleman was excavated near two Iron Age cemeteries and a shrine. The nobleman was inhumed with a sword, shield and a decorated bronze headband that was placed on his head. The headband has been interpreted as a crown or ritual headdress. The shield was in a shape entirely new in Britain at the time. The nobleman's sword was also in bronze and he had a scabbard attached to his belt and a ring, both very finely decorated with pink coral. A superbly ornamented bronze brooch with pink coral was placed near his legs. The grave goods date to around the 2nd century BC and were indigenously made. The very fine and unusual funerary gifts point to that the man was very highly ranked in society (Ross 1999:74ff).

Five cemeteries excavated at Baldock in Hertfordshire from the 1st century BC to the 6th century AD could have been the resting place of religious clergy. One contained

mostly older adults, more than 45 years old and their life expectancy was much higher than normal. That cemetery could have been exclusive to certain people in the community. The women showed almost no signs of having carried children and a theory is that the cemetery was the burial ground of a large celibate religious community. The special status of the graves is also supported by the wealth and elaboration of the graves together with exotic burial rituals (Aldhouse Green 2001:182-187).

2.2.1 Case study

A site often is mentioned in discussions of the evidence for druids in Iron Age Britain is a mid-1st century AD grave, excavated in 1996 in a quarry at Stanway near Colchester. The grave was placed near an Iron Age settlement. It was a part of rectangular burial enclosures with a central burial pit and minor pits inside the enclosures. The mid-1st century grave was found in enclosure 5.



(author's picture based on colplan, n.d.)

The grave goods in the burial were placed in two wooden boxes. The first one contained drinking equipment – a bronze saucepan and strainer and outside it were a dinner set and an amphora containing wine placed. Those objects were dated to ca. 50 AD. The second box held a foldable gaming board with white glass gaming pieces and blue glass beads. On top of the board were bronze and iron rods placed, probably medical instruments indicating that the buried man practiced medicine in life (Current Archaeology:2007). The gaming board could indicate nobility and other archaeologists believe that the rods and rings were used for divination purposes - which support a theory that the man was a druid (Sørensen 2007:73).

2.3 Sacrifice

2.3.1 Human sacrifice

Possible victims of human sacrifice from the British Iron Age frequently show signs of unnecessary violence, called overkill – which speaks for that many of them were ritually sacrificed. Extreme force, much more than necessary to de-functionalize or kill was also in some cases used on animals and objects found in ritual contexts. Several of the human remains in the pit burials in Danebury hill fort show excessive injuries, women buried at the Romano-Celtic site of Dunstable and Lowbury Hill had mutilated faces and at Wandlebury hill fort, possible sacrificial victims had extreme damages (Aldhouse Green 2001:50ff).

An example of a potential human sacrifice was found in an eroded sand cliff in the island South Uist. A group of four pits were excavated partly underlying a wheelhouse with associated deposits. The pits held bones of animals and a single human spread out in them. The skeleton was that of a (probably) 12 year old boy with a much disarticulated skeleton with deep cuts from a sharp implement in 20 of the backbones. The context, structure and damages to the body imply that this was a case of human and animal sacrifice. Another theory is that the boy had been found after drowning and was buried (Ross 1999:64)

There is some archaeological evidence for attendant sacrifices in Iron Age Britain, which means that a human or humans were sacrificed to accompany another in death. A pit burial from the Iron Age near Basingstoke in southeast England contained two women entombed together. The grave goods accompanying them was in most cases paired, one set less costly than the other, which points to that one woman was inferior to the other. So does the position of the bodies, the older woman lay crouched over the younger one's legs with her head on the other's pelvis and the younger woman lay in an extended position. This burial may represent a high ranking woman with her older helper.

Double-burials from the Iron Age have also been found in Westhampnett and Latchmere in southern England. Three women were interred together in an enclosure ditch around the cremation burial of a chieftain from ca. 55 AD in Folly Lane, St. Albans. The women's bodies were placed in the entrance to the funerary precinct at

the time when the ditch was dug, and the evidence points to attendant sacrifice (Aldhouse Green 2001:163ff).

The context of deposits that have been interpreted as human sacrifice in certain cases provides us with clues to the intention of it. When human remains from the Iron Age were deposited under structures or buildings, they probably were foundation sacrifices. Evidence for this has been found in hill forts. At the hill forts of Danebury, Sutton Walls and South Cadbury, the bodies of young men were deposited within or behind the earthen defences. At Hod hill a woman had been buried crouched below the small outer bank of the hill fort. Another example was found at Harlyn Bay, Cornwall where an adult and a child were buried under the foundations of a circular stone structure at an Iron Age cemetery (Aldhouse Green 2001:166).

2.3.2 Animal sacrifice

The context of deposits interpreted as animal sacrifices likewise at times tells us about the intention of them. They have been found in many disused grain pits within settlements, in sanctuaries, graves, at watery deposition sites and underneath structures as foundation offerings from the Iron Age (Green 1992:95). Animal sacrifices were frequently performed in contexts together with human remains, and could have been substitutes for human sacrifices since they share many traits (Aldhouse Green 2001:41f). Most animal sacrifices consist of domesticated species that shared man's work and played a large role in humans' lives (Green 1992:96). Human and animal remains were treated very similarly in sacrificial and depositional contexts (Aldhouse Green 2001:47ff).

In Danebury hill fort, many probable animal sacrifices were deposited in pits mostly combined with humans as if the two were interchangeable. An infant was buried together with a new born calf, and human heads were several times found buried with horses' heads. Furthermore, a repeated depositional association between humans, horses and dogs indicates a ritual significance between them. At an Iron Age site in Blewburton, Berkshire a man, dog and horse were interred together in a pit deposition, and in London a man and his horse were buried together in the 3rd century BC (Aldhouse Green 2001:43ff).

The material remains of animal sacrifice provide us with information about the rituals surrounding them. There were probably several individuals involved in animal sacrifice since different skills are warranted for the task, and the rituals might have been complex. The key person or group was the ones´ providing the sacrifice, and they were probably also the central beneficiaries. The person or persons performing the sacrifice were also very important and high in status, since they handled sacred objects (Green 1992:96f).

Proof of ritual feasting have been discovered on many sites such as graves and sanctuaries as well as the offering of food to the dead in graves or to the gods in sanctuaries. Osteologists analysing animal remains in sacrificial contexts, distinguishes between consumed and unconsumed animals (Green 1992:71:92:95:98f). In ritual feasting, meat could only be eaten within the ritual behavioural context and certain ways of slaughter and preparation of meat might have been a part of that. Material remains points to that the killing often took place in the sanctuaries. Bones of wild animals are rarely found in sacrificial deposits (Green 1992:41:95:100).

The age, species and sex of sacrificed animals can be asserted from faunal accretions in religious contexts in Iron Age Britain, and established with osteological methods. The diverse aspects preferred seem to have differed in various regions. Dogs may have been associated with water, and possibly sacrificed dogs have been excavated for example at Ivy Chimneys. There a dog teeth necklace was deposited near a sacred pond. The trend seems to have started in the late Bronze Age, when dogs may have been sacrificed at the watery sites of Caldicot and Flag Fen. Herds of cattle were a measure of wealth and symbolized prosperity in the British Iron Age society. Cattle sacrifices were performed in pits, graves and sanctuaries for ex at South Cadbury and Uley and were common components in ritual feasting (Green 1992:97:111:119:121).

Remains of sacrificed horses are found all over the Celtic world from the Iron Age. Especially the horses´ heads seems to have carried ritual significance. There are several examples of this from Iron Age Britain. One of the shrines at South Cadbury hill fort was associated with pits containing horse and cattle skulls. In the chariot burial at the King´s Barrow, a horse team accompanied the dead man. In Newstead,

southern Scotland, skulls of horses were found deposited in pits. Several storage pits in southern England holds remains of horses. At Danebury horses and dogs were at several occasions buried together in pits. Horse skulls were often placed at the bottom of the pits, the same place as human bones. Horse and dog bones are overrepresented in ritual pits contexts in southern England (Green 1992:95:114ff: MacCulloch 1911:214f).

Pigs were also frequently sacrificed and deposited in pits as gifts to the gods, placed in burials as food offering to the dead or consumed in ritual feasts at burials. Many chariot-graves in Britain contain parts of pigs, and pig-joints were placed in late Iron Age graves in Dorset near the individuals' heads as if to be consumed by the dead. In the Iron Age sanctuaries in Hayling Island and at South Cadbury there is evidence for pigs being sacrificed. In some cases, sheep were chosen for sacrifice but they are often underrepresented in ritual pit contexts, perhaps because they were not preferred sacrifices or too economically important. Sheep-skulls were cast into wells and remains of sheep as meat offerings or part of ritual feasts have been discovered in shrines and graves (Green 1992:117ff:123f).

In the rare cases traces have been found of sacrifice of wild animals, the species have been goats, cats, deer, bear, fox, hare and birds. The wild animals were rarely eaten. They were in some cases foundation sacrifices, found for example in Hockwold in Norfolk. Chickens were part of ritual feasting next to graves, and in the late Iron Age domestic fowl and geese were sacrificed. Ravens may have had a ritual meaning and were overrepresented in pit. Several ravens were deposited in the Danebury pits and a pit at the Winklebury hill fort contained the remains of a pig and a spread-eagled raven (Green 1992:125ff).

2.3.3 Case study

The probably most well-known archaeological evidence for human sacrifice in Iron Age Britain is the so called Lindow Man. The Lindow Man was discovered in a peat bog in Cheshire in 1985. The man was ca. 25 years old, well-muscled and had trimmed fingernails which suggest that he was a man of some status.

He was left face down in a shallow pool of water after being killed (Connolly 1985:15) in around the 2nd or 3rd century BC (Parker Pearson 1986:16). His body show severe

signs of bodily damages, some clearly post mortem – some not. A possibly blunt instrument was used to strike his head and neck, that both had a large soft tissue wound under which the skull was smashed and had a large fracture. His throat was slit, presented by a split on his neck.

The blow to his head would have stunned him and led to death and the neck injury would have caused instant death. He also had a thin cord of twisted sinew knotted around his neck which is proposed to have been used as a garrotte in a ritual murder, but the body does not show signs of garrotting. Several reasons for his death are proposed by Connolly: ritual sacrifice, judicial slaughter, combat, accident, murder (Connolly 1985:15ff). No comparison can be made with Lindow Man's death and standard funerary rites of the local population since no burials have been discovered from his time in the region (Parker Pearson 1986:17).

2.4 Art, rituals and religious customs

2.4.1 Religious customs

The British Iron Age belief-system was focused on solar and lunar cycles. The tradition of deposition of valuable items in pits, rivers, springs and bogs started in the late 2nd millennium BC and intensified during the 1st millennium BC. This points to a more earth-related belief-system connected with the organization of land and its production capacity. A greater interest in marking the seasons would have grown with the greater reliance on crops and herds and a seasonal calendar may have begun to replace the solar and lunar calendar (Gosden 2007:142-151).

Thousands of grain pits in the Danebury hill fort together with evidence found by archaeobotanists and archaeozoologists indicates that religious festivals were celebrated there. The pits were used to keep grain in, and the theory is that the grain from the different pits was used at seasonal festivals connected to the agricultural year. Archaeobotanists have analysed the remains of the grain and weeds in connection to the pits.

Their results point to that the grain was taken from different fields, maybe by individual households but was communally processed. In the later occupational phase of the hill fort, a crop processing arrangement was established - a regulated movement over generations within the hill fort, respecting its symbolic landscape.

This indicates that the grain processing was ritual in some way. There is also no evidence for that the crops were distributed to the surrounding households after being processed. That might mean that it was consumed or used within the hill fort (Gosden 2007:142-151).

As mentioned, an emphasis on solar and lunar cycles was part of the Iron Age belief system in large parts of Iron Age Europe, including Britain. The Fiskerton causeway might provide evidence for this as well as for astronomical knowledge in Iron Age Britain. The causeway consisted of a walk-way or track-way that was the focus for votive depositions in the late Iron Age. The preparation of timber for the post rows in the causeway matches observable total lunar eclipses in the 5th and 4th centuries BC. Dendrochronological analyses of the causeway posts indicate that they were felled at midwinter lunar eclipses. The people raising the causeway must have had astronomical knowledge to be able to match its construction phases with lunar eclipses (Field & Parker Pearson, 2002:136f:147f).

2.4.2 Art and iconography

The Battersea shield, Waterloo helmet, Loughnasade trumpets, Llyn Cerrig Bach hoard and other precious objects with decorations were deposited into watery locations in Iron Age Britain. Weapons, jewellery and feasting equipment were common grave goods and all sorts of objects with art on them were also deposited in pits. The deposits consisted of numerous objects like at Snettisham and in other cases single or a few objects were buried. The art on the objects probably enhanced their economical and religious value (Green 1996:145ff). Liturgical items such as sceptres or vessels may have been seen as holy and holding power. Personal ornaments and items might have had combined sacred and secular functions and meanings (Green 1989:6).

Through the Roman influence in the late Iron Age, the custom of representing gods in art, naming them and creating divine concepts was adapted by the people in Britain. Some British divinities can be traced to the time before Roman influence through stonework, coinage iconography and images from healing springs (Green 1989:6f). Only those are discussed here.

British Iron Age art did not include many human-shaped figures until in the pre-Roman and Roman period, then often associated with sanctuaries. The imagery and symbolism of cult expressions in the art tells us that the dominant religious powers were the sky, sun, weather and fertility of the land - the things the people relied upon. Goddesses were also represented, often linked to healing and regeneration. In addition, there were local spirits connected to certain villages, springs, trees and other features in nature.

Clues to functions and identities of the pre-Roman gods in Britain are given in their symbols and attributes. Some attributes like fertility and prosperity functions were general and others were specific for certain gods - for example the wheel of the sun-god or the hammer of the hammer-god. In some cases, the divine symbolism lay within the depiction of the god itself – like the triple-headed image or the antlered Cernunnos. Religious imagery may have had several functions, depending on in which context it was placed. A depiction of a god in a temple may have been seen as the place where the god resided or as a symbolic representation. It could also have been the focus for worship to channel the attention of the devotees (Green 1989:1-5:9).

Animals in British Iron Age art were sometimes portrayed alone in religious images or as companions to gods, but they were often zoomorphic and may have been part of a mythology. A wooden-bucket covered with bronze was placed in a cremation-grave from the 1st late century BC in Aylesford, Kent. On the bronze there were images of triskeles, whirligigs and two pantomime horses with human knees, antler-like forms on their heads and thick lips. The sacred nature of the bucket was shown in the handle-mounts in the form of human faces carrying leaf crowns (Green 1992:126:135:137f).

The Iron Age people of Britain held certain animals as sacred and worshipped some. Cremated swine-bones were put in graves, the serpent had divine attributes in iconography and bears and stags are frequent aspects in place names and personal names in areas where the Iron Age religious traditions persisted for a long time (see image 2, appendix). Animal cults seem to have merged into anthropomorphic cults in the late Iron Age (MacCulloch 1911:208-213).

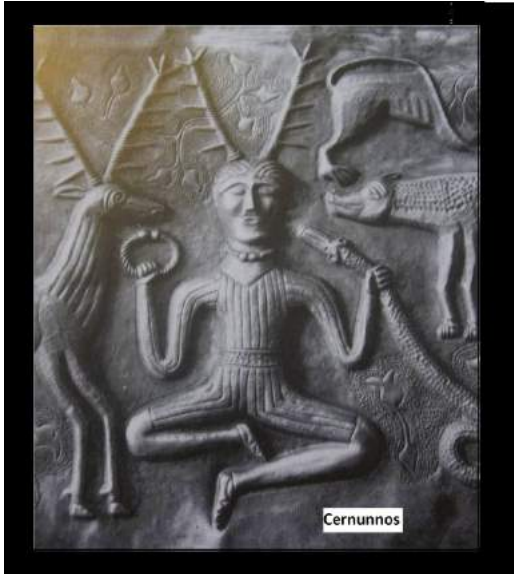
The site of Machair of Drimore, South Uist provides some evidence for the reverence of stags and pigs. A wheel-shaped house near the site of a possible human sacrifice contained a complex hearth with a setting of lower jaw bones of red deer thrust into the ground. Another south Uist wheel-house also held a similar arrangement with pig jaws instead (Ross 1999:65). Iron Age headdresses with animal aspects like the antlered headdress from the Romano-British site at Hooks Cross might have been used for assuming animal personae in rituals (Aldhouse Green 2001).

From the 5th to the 1st century BC and beyond, heads, masks and faces were often depicted abstractly in British Iron Age art. The symbolic importance of the head was shown by the fact that it was often exaggerated in size, for ex in a little stone mother goddess statuette from Caerwent in Wales. Some heads, faces and masks on precious metalwork and monumental stone carvings bore leaf-crowns, which might have been a mark of divinity, earthly status or a symbol of death.

Heads with dressed beards and flowing moustaches may have been seen as magical, and were pictured in single form or with triple faces, the number three representing divinity. Heads and masks were repeatedly elusively worked into decorations on metalwork – for example on the shields from Wandsworth and Battersea or on the back of mirrors. On the mirrors, the faces were minimalistic with distant and impassive expressions which may have been a divine aspect, for ex on mirrors from Great Chester and Aston. Faces were often represented on personal ornaments, where they might have held a talismanic function (Green 1996:139-142).

2.4.3 Case study

Cernunnos “the horned one” is a god which we know the Celtic name of and can trace to the time before the Roman influence over Britain and northern Europe. He was represented in monuments from the pre-Roman Iron Age in France and Italy, on the Gundestrup cauldron from Denmark and on British Iron Age coins. The monuments from France implies that he might have been an anthropomorphication of an earlier animal god, that he was associated with the underworld from ca. the 5th century BC and with fertility from the pre Roman Iron Age.



(Based on: Jope E.M: 2000)

On the Gundestrup cauldron he was depicted surrounded by other animals, which indicates that he could have been seen as the lord of the animals. Cernunnos' characteristics were a seated position with crossed legs, large stag antlers that grew from his temples, one or several torcs and a heavy sack or purse. They were not as a rule combined all together in single representations but he was always depicted with some of them. His female counterpart was sometimes included in images of him and usually holds a cornucopia. Cernunnos was repeatedly accompanied by a ram-horned serpent which was associated with the sphere of the dead (Fray Bober 1951:14,25f).

Certain general conclusions can be drawn of Cernunnos' origin. He probably went from an earlier deer-deity to an anthropomorphic form in the 4th century BC. The ram-horned serpent accompanying Cernunnos was associated with the god holding the sacred cosmic wheel, sacrifice and Teutates. It was represented alone on Iron Age coins from northern Europe. The snake symbolized the underworld in many religions from this time and could have done that among the Iron Age people of Britain too. The ram might have been associated with the cult of the dead (Fray Bober 1951:14,25ff).

2.5 Votive depositions

2.5.1 Watery depositions

Numerous valuable objects from the Iron Age have been found deposited in watery places such as rivers, springs, bogs and lakes in Britain (Megaw&Simpson 1979:405: MacCulloch 1911:181), for example in the Witham River at Fiskerton, Flag Fen in Norfolk and in the Llyn Cerrig Bach lake on Anglesey. Weapons, tools and various other objects were thrown into the water from a timber platform between 1600-200BC at Flag Fen. In the late 1st century BC/early 1st century AD, swords, shield ornaments, horse harnesses, vehicle fittings, a trumpet, cauldrons, gang chains and other various objects were deposited in Llyn Cerrig Bach from a rock outcrop. Prestige armour, swords, shields and imported things were frequently deposited in rivers (Cunliffe 1997:194: Megaw & Simpson 1979:405f).

The depositions could be onetime events or take place over a long period of time, perhaps in some cases on a seasonal basis or when an event demanded an offering. A great amount of fine artefacts from the Iron Age have been retrieved from rivers all over north-western Europe with no specific concentration. This could mean that a tradition of deposition of objects into the river itself from river banks or boats existed – the river being the sacred place. A good example of this is the recurrent findings of prestige weapons in the Thames, ranging in date from the late Bronze Age to the end of the Iron Age. The tradition of votive deposition in water was long lived and lasted from ca. 1600BC – the Roman conquest of Britain (Cunliffe 1997:194f).

2.5.2 Deposition in occupied contexts

A long lived practice of votive deposition took place with a focus in SE England in grain pits where fine artefacts such as small tool collections, horse gear, whole pots, grain and quern stones(Cunliffe 1997:196) were deposited, sometimes together with sacrificed animals and humans. Evidence for this is found on numerous sites such as Ashville, Maiden Castle, Meon Hills, Camulodunum, Twynell, Danebury and in Wessex. These special deposits were always performed within the interior of occupied settlements. In the late Iron Age, the tradition decreased in open settlements and increased in hill forts.

At Danebury, numerous of these deposits have been found in grain pits. The offerings contained for example animal bones and sling-stones (Green 1992:100-104), and were placed at the bottom of the pits. Some pits contained a secondary deposition (Cunliffe 1997:197). The storage of grain might have been a sacramental action, the grain given to safe keeping by the underground gods during the dormant period.

The special deposits might then have been done to ensure a good harvest and the secondary depositions been part of thanksgiving rituals (Green 1992:103f: Cunliffe 1997:197). The depositions were generally separated by months and years and might have been related to seasonality or seasonal festivals. Societies that relied on flocks and herds would have developed different systems, like in Scotland where bog depositions of butter were common - offered by a pastoral society perhaps to get a good milk return (Cunliffe 1997:197: Hill 1995:95-102).

Material remains show us that shafts and wells were sites of votive deposits involving animals. Birds were mostly deposited in Iron Age shafts, which were connected with perceptions of natural and domestic fertility (Green 1992:104). Some iron objects have been found deposited in caves, locations likely to have had special significance (Hingley 2006:224).

2.5.3 Iron object deposition

From ca. 400BC-AD 400, iron was an important metal in Britain and had ritual associations. Iron objects were mostly deposited in rivers, settlements and caves during the middle Iron Age and became focused to settlement boundaries during the pre-Roman Iron Age. There are several theories for the reasons for depositing iron objects, the dominant positions are the pragmatic versus the symbolic reasons, which are often in opposition against each other.

The varied intensity of deposition of iron objects indicates that iron's meaning or worth changed during the Iron Age. Only a few findings of deposited iron objects have been found from the late Iron Age in Britain, which suggests that it then was a valuable and symbolically charged material. In the 2nd century BC, the depositions intensified and several large hoards including currency bars from this time have been found. Depositions of currency bars were related to settlement boundaries, maybe to

symbolize identity or status of the individual or community that deposited them (Hingley 2006:214-221).

Several Iron Age iron deposits were buried under buildings and features within settlements, for ex at Houghton Down, Old Down Farm and maybe at Worthy Down. Iron hoards are occasionally discovered within roundhouses in hill forts, for ex at Hod Hill 1, 2 and 3, which may have been ritual contexts. Seen from a ritual perspective, weapons, agricultural tools and such practical iron objects could have had secondary symbolic meanings. For example, the deposition of agricultural objects might have been linked to their reference to fertility and creational power (Hingley 2006:217f).

Many iron object deposits were performed in enclosure entrances from the 1st century BC - the 1st century AD, together with disarticulated human remains, weapons and personal objects. These are thought to have been massacre deposits or traces of battle in and around the hill forts. Such depositions have been found for example at Bredon Hill, Ham Hill, Maiden Castle, South Cadbury and Spettisbury. Human skulls have also been discovered in hill fort boundaries at Stanwick and Bedon Hill. They might have ended up there after being displayed on poles by the entrance. This explanation is likewise thought to be accurate for some weapons and other objects.

Boundaries around hill forts and enclosed settlements had ritual and symbolic significance, shown by the iron depositions found in them - especially of iron currency bars in the pre-Roman Iron Age. At Ditches and Stanway, iron objects were found deposited in hill fort boundary earthworks like ditches and banks. Hill fort boundaries may have possessed symbolic importance as border spaces. At Danebury, 4 iron hoards were placed just behind the ramparts within roundhouses in quarry hollows. None of the other houses in the interior of the hill fort produced hoards, which show the significance of the area next to the ramparts. Finds of objects at Hod Hill 4 and maybe Bredon Hill 2, indicates that this context was a common place for depositions.

The areas between defense works and immediately outside the boundaries also appear to have carried significance. At Breedon Hill 6, currency bars were deposited between the interior and exterior defences of the hill fort. They may also have been deposited just outside a boundary ditch at Totterdown Lane. There is more archaeological evidence that supports this theory. Some currency bar depositions

were made in pits inside settlement enclosures and sometimes in unenclosed settlements. Spearheads have been found deposited in a defining ditch around an Iron Age shrine at Uley. Currency bars, spearheads and pins were deposited with human bones on the boundary to a temple on Hayling Island (Hingley 2006:221-229).

2.5.4 Hoards

In the late Bronze Age, the custom of hoarding increased greatly and continued during the entire Iron Age. It decreased in intensity in the early and middle Iron Age, but augmented again in the late Iron Age. Mixed depositions of torcs, arm-rings and coins occurred widely across Europe during the Iron Age (Cunliffe 1997:195f). A very informative site about the hoarding custom in Britain is Salisbury.

The Salisbury hoard entails a huge collection of Bronze Age and Iron Age artefacts in bronze and iron of very different dates, which were assembled and deposited in prehistoric times. The hoard was probably buried around the 2nd century BC, judging by the youngest artefacts in it. It was placed in pits in the middle of a settlement. A secondary hoard held parts of a trumpet and other objects. Both hoards have indications of ritual activity. There were around 535 objects in the hoard, which contains one of the earliest metal axes in Britain dating to ca. 2400BC. The most distinctive Iron Age objects in the hoard were unusual miniature shields and cauldrons, which probably were votive objects. The earliest piece in the hoard was made around 2400BC and the latest around 200BC or later, and the other objects represent almost all centuries in between.

Very few hoards have been discovered that include objects from such different times, but there are some examples. At Danbury Hill fort a probable hoard of weapons and personal objects with dates between 1800-600BC was excavated. At Hagbourn Hill in Berkshire a similar mixed group of artefacts from the Bronze Age and Iron Age were buried together. The closest parallel to the Salisbury hoard is the Batheaston hoard that contains any similar objects ranging from 1600BC to 300BC, buried in two pits in south Wiltshire. It was made up of 301 objects dominated by personal ornaments (I.M. Stead 1998:118-123).

Late Iron Age hoards consisted of iron objects occasionally mixed with bronze objects, and were perhaps not connected to the earlier hoards. They are found

concentrated to northern and southern Britain, save for the Llyn Cerrig Bach hoard in Anglesey. Many of these hoards only consist of currency bars, and are therefore called “currency bar hoards” and their distribution is south-western (Manning 1972:224-228,237f). The currency bar hoards began to be deposited in the 1st century BC/1st century AD (Manning 1972:240).

The main one’s were found at Holme Chase, Hod Hill, Milborne, Stileham, Salmonsbury, Crawley, Danebury, Worthy Down, Frodingham, Ham Hill, Meon Hill, Minety and Malvern. Almost all the currency bar hoards appear to have been buried quite shallow in or near hill forts, except the Llyn Cerrig Bach hoard. The late Iron Age hoards not dominated by currency bars were deliberately buried shallowly, some of them in the tail of hill fort ramparts (Manning 1972:224-228:237f).

2.5.6 Case study

Fiskerton is one of several Iron Age votive sites in Britain associated with water, located at the edge of an island close to a river. Notable offerings have also been found in similar contexts at the sites of Lisnacrogher, Llyn Cerrig Bach and Flag Fen. Fiskerton was a causeway raised in 436 BC and added to at different dates - with its final repair by 321BC. It was located at a river crossing between mainland Britain and the former island of Lindsey, and could have had ritual associations due to its liminal position(Field & Parker Pearson 2002:136:179).

The causeway was a track-way or raised walkway over a river crossing. Numerous deposits of objects, animals and perhaps a human were made in association with it during and after its usage. Most of the metalwork was deposited in the 3rd century BC. The usage of the causeway and the depositions may have been separate events, since it was raised two centuries before most of the deposits were made. The causeway may have been visible for centuries after its usage as a track-way or walkway. The deposition of Iron Age artefacts and a chronological discrepancy between the posts felling dates indicates that the causeway was not initially built for votive deposition, but turned into such a place 100 years after its secular usage (Field & Parker Pearson 2002:133:136).

152 artefacts have so far been discovered deposited under and next to the causeway. There were two main periods of deposition: the Iron Age and the Roman Iron Age. Weaponry, possible military items, iron and bronze objects, ceramics, coins, tools, bones and antler artefacts were deposited in the Iron Age. The Fiskerton deposits contain more tools than usual in similar contexts. The swords and spears were placed under and close to the causeway in a westward spread and the tools to the east. This spatial patterning shows that the places of deposition were chosen, perhaps a categorization in relation to the causeway and points to different moments of deposition (Field & Parker Pearson 2002:173ff).

Many of the bone spearheads had been used before deposition. They may have had multiple uses which ended with their deposition as symbolic or actual spearheads. The metal tools also bear signs of usage before deposition; no metal objects were deliberately broken before deposition – which is uncommon for this context and time.

The wooden parts of the weapons were though probably broken off and the bone spearheads were dismantled. A jet ring and amber beads are the only deposited objects that can be associated with women. Much of the ceramics objects were unique and maybe prestige items. A sword had coral decorations and other objects were decorated with curvilinear La Tène style – which together with the uniqueness of the objects point to the special status of the depositions. A human skull fragment with a deep fissure caused by a heavy blow was found at Fiskerton, C¹⁴ dated to the Iron Age (Field & Parker Pearson 2002:175fff).

3. Discussion

3.1 Burials

“When the wife of a powerful man dies, her funeral is rich and excessive. Her dependents and slaves, things, animals and humans she held dear are cast on the funeral pyre” (Caesar: De Bello Gallico 6:19 from Corpus Scriptorum Latinorum).

This quote tells us that cremation was a burial way used in Iron Age Britain. The archaeological evidence confirms and denies this. There was no general burial tradition in Iron Age Britain. The largest findings of burials are the inhumations in the Arras culture, Yorkshire and the cist burials of the southwest peninsula (Sørensen 2007:407f; Megaw & Simpson 1979:408f). Inhumations in pits or scattering of body

parts were also a common way of disposing of bodies. The fact that so few Iron Age graves have been found points to that the most common way of discarding of the dead was through exposing the bodies in an open space, or some way did not leave any archaeological trace (Harding 2004:79f; Sørensen 2007:406). Caesar's statement seems to be accurate for the late Iron Age Britain, when much of Europe started to cremate their dead (Cunliffe 1997:208f).

Caesar also mentioned that wealthy people were given grave goods in the form of objects and animals. Proof for this has been discovered on numerous Iron Age sites in Britain. The southwest peninsula stone cist burials contains personal ornaments, mirrors and bronze vessels (Sørensen 2007:407f). The inhumations in the Arras tradition held funerary gifts such as personal ornaments, animals, a few mirrors and decapitated chalk figurines. In addition, the cart-burials from the Yorkshire area were richly provided with grave goods such as the chariots, animals and warrior equipment (Harding 2004:80; Sørensen 2007:409; Megaw & Simpson 1979:408f).

There are though examples of graves that did not contain funerary gifts, for example all the graves in the cemetery outside Brownmouth hill fort from the 2nd half of the 1st millennium BC. Animals or parts of them were placed in many Iron Age graves, maybe as food offerings or company for the dead on their journey, payment to underworldly powers or eaten in funerary feasting (Green 1992:107; Aldhouse Green 2001:43ff). These material remains then confirm Caesar's statement that animals and elaborate objects were given to wealthy people as funerary gifts.

3.2 Human sacrifice

The custom of human sacrifice among the Iron Age people of Britain is mentioned by several classical authors (Perseus: 2009: Caesar: De Bello Gallico: 6: 13: 16: 19: Strabo IV 4:5: Diodorus Siculus: Histories V 31). Archaeological evidence for this is much discussed and ambiguous. It is hard to find certain material evidence for human sacrifice, and such cases are quite rare in Britain (Cunliffe 1997:192). The material remains consist of skeletons or parts of them, except in bog body cases when tissue occasionally is preserved. When analysing possible sacrificial victims, an important question is whether physical injuries occurred before or after death, as a result of an accident, warfare, disease or a sacrifice.

Almost all sacrifices can be translated into other things - like the human body-parts in the Danebury pits that could have been ritually treated post mortem after death in battle, and not in sacrifices. The bog bodies may have been executed criminals. Many theories and indicating evidence do though exist for that the remains actually were human sacrifices (Aldhouse Green 2001:50f) and is coming to light with technological advancements. Ross (1999:59) claims that there are clear cases of ritual death in the British Iron Age. A possible human sacrifice from the Iron Age was found on the island of South Uist, a boy divided into four pits together with animal remains (Ross 1999:64). In cases where the context suggests sacrifice is when human remains are found deposited under structures – possibly as foundation sacrifices. Such findings have been made for example in several hill forts (Aldhouse Green 2001:166).

The case of the Lindow Man is much discussed and many theories are provided for his death. The most probable explanation is ritual sacrifice or judicial slaughter according to Connolly (1985:16f), Parker Pearson (1986:17) and Aldhouse Green (2001:51). Aldhouse Green points out that he suffered three deaths: two skull-fracturing blows to the head, garrotting and a cut throat. She suggests that the excessive violence seems to have been a necessary part of the sacrifice (Aldhouse Green 2001:51).

Signs of excessive injuries are also the main argument that in many cases supports the theory of human sacrifice. As mentioned earlier, many possible human sacrifices bear remains of extreme violence. The violence may have been seen as beneficial ritual actions done to produce divine energy to the gods and the sacrificial recipient, and was connected to drama which could have been a central part in the ritual performance (Aldhouse Green 2001:50ff).

Caesar (De Bello Gallico 6:19) brought up the custom of sacrificing humans as company for the dead. There is some indicating evidence for attendant sacrifice in Iron Age Britain. Examples of this are double burials made in southern England and three women found buried together in an enclosure ditch around a chieftain burial. Another convincing example is the double pit burial found near Basingstoke interpreted as containing an older attendant buried with a high ranking woman (Aldhouse Green 2001:163ff).

Some of the classical writers mentioned the gods as recipients of the sacrifices (Perseus: 2009: Caesar: De Bello Gallico 6:16) - which there could exist some evidence for. Fertility rites may have been connected with the special depositions in disused storage pits at Danebury and similar sites. The pits might have been seen as threshold spaces, and the sacrifices may have been offerings to underworld-deities (Aldhouse Green 2001:167: Cunliffe 1997:192). Bog burials could also have been offerings to underworld/ death associated deities (Cunliffe 1997:192).

3.3 Animal sacrifice

Numerous classical authors wrote of animal sacrifice (Caesar: De Bello Gallico 6:16:17:19: Strabo IV 4:5: Diodorus Siculus: Histories V 31: Pliny the Elder: Nat.Hist. 16:95), and rich archaeological evidence exists for this being performed in Iron Age Britain. For example found in special pit depositions at Danebury hill fort (Aldhouse Green 2001:43ff), in graves and sanctuaries at South Cadbury and Uley (Green 1992:121), as watery depositions at for ex. Fiskerton (Field & Parker Pearson 2002:133:136) and at Hockwold and similar contexts as foundation offerings. Domesticated species were mostly sacrificed, but in rare cases there is also evidence for sacrificed wild animals (Green 1992:95f:114-119:121:123-128).

The classical writers stated that animal sacrifice was performed for divination purposes, as burn-offerings, as offerings to a war god and in the mistletoe rite. Most of these reasons seem possible, judging by material remains. Many motives have been suggested for animal sacrifice by archaeologists, and they probably varied for different contexts. Green believes that they could have been tribute offerings, divination or a way to communicate with the gods. A death released new life and force and the sacrifice created a connection between the worlds. Animals were probably considered important in religion because they played a central part in everyday life (Green 1992:94f:97).

According to the classical authors, the gods were the recipients of animals sacrifice (Caesar: De Bello Gallico 6:17: Strabo IV 4:5: Pliny the Elder: Nat.Hist. 16:95), which some archaeological evidence indicates. Animals have been discovered in pit sacrifices and watery offerings, which both could have been directed to the underworld or death gods (Green 1992:95:114ff: MacCulloch 1911:214f). Fertility symbolism may have been connected with pig offerings because pigs' manure

fertilizes the earth (Green 1992:117ff). The ability to fly could have given birds a special symbolic meaning and made them appropriate for sacrifice. Ravens may have been sacrificed because they were seen as communicators between the living and the dead and humans and underground powers (Green 1992:125ff).

3.4 Art, rituals and religious customs

The classical writers claimed that there were druids in Britain. According to Caesar and Diodorus, the druids had religious knowledge, were engaged in all sacred things and interpreted religious matters. Diodorus wrote that they spoke the gods' language and sought blessings from the gods, and Strabo added that they believed and taught to others the notion of immortal souls and indestructible universe. Furthermore, Strabo and Diodorus claimed that they were natural and moral philosophers (Caesar: *De Bello Gallico*:6:13: Strabo: *Geography* IV 4,4:4,5: Diodorus Siculus: *Histories* V:31).

The material evidence that indicates the presence of druids in Iron Age Britain derives from burials, the Llyn Cerrig Bach hoard, animal sacrifice and iconography in art. Two Iron Age burials that might have held druids were found in Kent and at Stanway (Ross 1999:74ff: Sørensen 2007:73). The burial in Kent from the 2nd century BC contained a high ranking man and very fine and unusual grave goods - for example a bronze headband interpreted as a ritual headdress or crown. Ross believes that he could have been a prince, king or druid (Ross 1999:74ff).

The grave found at Stanway contained a man, was dated to the mid-1st century AD and was part of a burial enclosure. His grave goods consisted of drinking equipment, a gaming board and bronze and iron rods. The rods could have been used as medical instruments (Current Archaeology: 2007), or divination tools. The fine grave goods points to that the man was noble (Sørensen 2007:73). These features –being of high rank, having religious knowledge and an understanding of nature were all properties possessed by the druids according to the classical authors(Caesar: *De Bello Gallico*:6:13: Strabo: *Geography* IV 4,4:4,5: Diodorus Siculus: *Histories* V:31) - and elements found in the graves.

Furthermore, in the Llyn Cerrig Bach deposition, a binding for a wand or staff and a part of a ceremonial trumpet were placed, which point to the presence of religious

clergy (Aldhouse Green 2001:182-187). Caesar, Strabo and Diodorus Siculus wrote that druids had to be present at sacrifices or that they performed them (Caesar: *De Bello Gallico*: 6: 13: Strabo: *Geography* IV 4, 4:4, 5: Diodorus Siculus: *Histories* V:31). The person performing the sacrifice probably was very important and high in rank as it handled holy objects (Green 1992:96f). There may have been professionals carrying out the task in addition to the druids (Green 1992:96f), since such a complex ritual behaviour pattern could not make sense otherwise (Aldhouse Green 2001:181).

Strabo and Diodorus mentioned two other kinds of religious people in Iron Age Britain: bards and vates (seers). Bards were singers and poets and vates high ranked diviners and natural philosophers. The vates divined by interpreting the flight or cries of birds and slaughter of sacred animals (Strabo IV, 4:4: Diodorus Siculus: *Histories* V 31).

Wands, headdresses and cult instruments have been found from the Iron Age in Britain which point to the presence of religious clergy (Aldhouse Green 2001:181). A cemetery found in Baldock, Hertfordshire used from the 1st century BC to the 6th century AD could also identify religious functionaries. Aldhouse Green (2001:182-187) suggests that the cemetery could have been the resting place for a celibate religious community, which she bases on the high life expectancy, wealthy graves and the fact that the women had not borne children.

Caesar wrote that druids taught the young of the stars and their motion, the nature of things, the majesty of the immortal gods and the extent of the world and our earth (Caesar: *De Bello Gallico* 6:14) Proof for astronomical knowledge in Iron Age Britain might be provided by the Fiskerton causeway. The construction phases of the causeway matched visible lunar eclipses in the 5th and 4th centuries BC, and that would not have been possible without astronomical knowledge (Field & Parker Pearson, 2002:136f:147f).

Caesar described gods worshipped by the Iron Age people in Britain. He mentioned a god with power over wealth and trading that was the inventor of all art and guide on travels. A war god, healing god, sovereign god over the heavenly powers and a goddess that taught the invention of manufacture were also pointed out (Caesar: *De Bello Gallico* 6:17). Lucan wrote of various gods being worshipped by Gallic cults

(Benvenuti 1991:40f). In a general way, the archaeological evidence confirms these statements.

The art of Iron Age Britain was schematic and abstract but contained symbolic and religious images that may have been intertwined. The greatest issue when analysing Pre-Roman Iron Age art is that no relevant written analogies from that time exists to compare it with. The context the art was found in does though tell us much of its meaning, and is often in pre-Roman Britain associated with ritual behaviour (Green 1996:145ff).

Judging by symbolism and imagery, principal religious powers in the British Iron Age were the fertility of the land, weather, sky and sun. Goddesses connected to healing and regeneration can be distinguished, as well as local spirits connected to certain features in nature or a village (Green 1989:1-5:9). It is very difficult to identify gods in Pre-Roman British art with certainty except by their symbolism, since we mostly do not know the names of these gods (Green 1996:147). Pre-Roman stonework, iconography on coins and images from healing springs makes it possible to trace some gods to the time before Roman influence (Green 1989:6f).

Accompanying symbols and attributes to gods in art can indicate their functions. Fertility and prosperity was linked to many gods and a sun god and hammer god can be found with the help of their attributes (Green 1989:1-5:9). A traceable god from the Pre-Roman Iron Age who we know the name of is the horned Cernunnos. He was probably was a deer-deity until the 4th century BC, when he changed into an anthropomorphic form. Occasionally, he was represented with a female counterpart and a ram-horned serpent that seems to have been a semi-god or independent deity, symbolizing death and the underworld (Fray Bober 1951:14,25fff).

Inscriptions and pictures on votive offerings discovered in watery contexts tell us that gods and mostly goddesses were thought to reside in rivers, and nymphs and lower divinities in springs and wells. Some rivers and springs were thought to have healing powers, seen in the thanks offerings with pictures of the river or spring goddess and offerings of money, ingots of gold or silver and models found of body parts that needed healing.

The models were thrown into the water to pass healing from the goddess/god to the human body part. The spirit of waters was often embodied in an animal like a fish or an eel, which later evolved into a god (MacCulloch 1911:182-186). In conclusion, there is no evidence for gods or goddesses with the exact functions mentioned by Caesar – but other gods can be distinguished and Lucan's general statement that several gods were worshipped can be confirmed.

3.5 Votive deposition

Another custom Caesar mentioned was votive deposition (Caesar: *De Bello Gallico* 6:17), which there is much evidence of from Iron Age Britain. In Caesar's account he said that the places for deposition were considered sacred - which many archaeologists agree with. Frequent findings of deposited fine artefacts are made from Iron Age watery contexts, occupied contexts and occasionally shafts and wells in Britain. The depositions in watery contexts point to them being considered holy. Objects deposited in watery places were things like warrior equipment, cauldrons, personal ornaments and coins.

Votive depositions could have been single events or depositions over a long period of time (Cunliffe 1994:194; Megaw & Simpson 405f; MacCulloch 1911:181). The depositions at the Fiskerton causeway are for example believed to have been votive and the causeway might have been built for that purpose (Field & Parker Pearson 2002:136:179:184).

A tradition of deposition in rivers without any specific special concentration can also probably be seen in Iron Age Britain, but is harder to prove archaeologically. In those cases, the rivers in themselves might have been seen as the holy place and therefore people deposited objects at any place in the rivers. These deposits were perhaps ruled by a different religious belief than watery depositions in specific places. Both traditions were though based on a belief that the gods needed to be appeased by placing objects in water (Cunliffe 1997:194f).

The motive for depositions in watery contexts might be seen in pictures and inscriptions found in rivers, springs and wells. They reflect a belief that nymphs and lower gods lived in springs and wells and goddesses in rivers, and that they were believed to possess healing powers (MacCulloch 1911:182-186). Votive deposition of

objects in water can be traced from ca. 1600BC to the Roman conquest of Britain (Cunliffe 1997:194f).

A tradition of votive deposition in occupied contexts can also be discerned in the material evidence, made in grain pits (Cunliffe 1997:196), shafts and wells (Green 1992:104), under structures (Hingley 2006:217f) and in association with settlement boundaries (Hingley 2006:221-229). Things like tools, pots, horse gear – in some cases together with animals and humans were deposited in grain pits (Cunliffe 1997:196). Depositions in pits might have been done for fertility purposes and been associated with seasonal festivals (Green 1992:103f: Cunliffe 1997:197: Hill 1995:95-102).

Hill (1995) argues that several relationships and spatial patterns through and between different categories of archaeological finds could not have been created naturally and therefore the pits were structured ritual deposits. Cunliffe (1991) and Whimster (1981) agree that the pit depositions were a widespread ritual practice across Iron Age southern England. The absence of evidence for consumption of the animals and the fact that the number of animals represented in them does not reflect their proportions in the general animal population, together with the presence of multiple burials of animals implies deliberate sacrificial slaughter and deposition (Green 1992:100-104).

Material evidence has also been found for depositions of animals in shafts and wells and iron objects in caves (Green 1992:104: Hingley 2006:224). Iron objects were also deposited in settlements and rivers in the middle Iron Age and mostly in association with settlement boundaries in the pre-Roman Iron Age (Hingley 2006:214-221). Depositions of objects in settlement features could have been done to commemorate old settlements or settlement features. Deposited iron objects were for example weapons, agricultural tools, iron currency bars and personal objects. In some cases iron objects were deposited together with human remains (Hingley 2006:217: 221-229).

Depositions of iron objects increased in the 2nd century BC when quite large hoards were deposited (Hingley 2006:214-221). The greater depositions of weapons and other treasures probably represented tribal answers to the gods - either one deposition related to one momentous event or a continuous practice of worship

(Cunliffe 1997:195f). Depositions may have been communal acts, since many onetime deposited hoards were too heavy for one person to carry (Sørensen 2007:334f). A problem for archaeologists analysing iron objects and hoards is that they have been very badly recorded and seldom published. Only since the 1980's more thorough recordings are a regular practice (Hingley 2006:214-221).

There are three possible reasons proposed for the deposition of the pre-Roman Iron Age ironwork hoards: To dispose of the material as rubbish, which is not probable for the most of the hoards. To preserve them during a period of danger with the intention of recovering them, which is the most generally accepted explanation for the Iron Age hoards. They could also have been votive deposits for the gods, which is the explanation favoured for metalwork hoards in pools and bogs. A votive deposition explanation is generally accepted for the Llyn Cerrig Bach hoard and hoards in similar contexts, since throwing them in a peat bog removed them from human use and they mostly did not contain rubbish items (Manning 1972:239-241). In conclusion, Caesars statement of votive deposition can be confirmed by numerous material remains.

3.6 Discrepancies between the classical texts and the archaeological material

This discussion shows that many statements by the classical writers are confirmed by the archaeological evidences, but some statements cannot be supported by material evidence. There is no evidence for human sacrifice being performed at altars and temples or in the large basketry figure as described by Cicero, Caesar and Strabo (Perseus, 2009:Caesar: De Bello Gallico 6:16: Strabo IV 4:5). Reasons given for human sacrifice by classical writers cannot be discerned in the archaeological material, and it is not clear whether the druids actually performed the sacrifices (Caesar: De Bello Gallico 6:13:16: Strabo IV 4:5).

Furthermore, it cannot be archaeologically proved whether certain functions and rituals ascribed to the druids by classical writers were actually performed by them. (Caesar: De Bello Gallico:6: 13: 14: Diodorus Siculus:Histories V 31: Strabo IV 4,4: Pliny the Elder, Nat.Hist. 16:95) The druidic system of succession and education described by Caesar (De Bello Gallico 6:13:14) is not substantiated by anything in the archaeological material.

Strabo and Diodorus Siculus wrote of the custom of taking enemies heads as trophies among the Iron Age people in Britain (Strabo IV 4:5: Diodorus Siculus: Histories V 29:4). This is not supported by material remains. A detail mentioned by Caesar in De Bello Gallico 6:18 that archaeologists have not found proof for, was that the Iron Age people of Britain kept time with the night preceding the day. Several classical writers mentioned the belief that soul persists after death and passes to another body – reincarnation (Caesar: De Bello Gallico 6:14: Strabo IV 4:4: Benvenuti 1991:40f). The material record does not tell us whether this was true. Caesar also wrote that the person that disturbed the holy depositional spaces and took objects was punished with torture (Caesar: De Bello Gallico 6:17). We cannot know this, at least not judging by material remains.

Seen from another perspective, the archaeological material examined indicates customs among the Iron Age religion in Britain that the classical authors did not mention. The classical writers did not write of foundation sacrifices, which there exists archaeological evidence for from Iron Age Britain. Foundation sacrifices were perhaps done to gain approval from otherworldly powers, maybe particularly the ones presiding over the area. Other reasons could have been to bring good luck, longevity and prosperity to the building and those raising it (Aldhouse Green 2001:166).

The archaeological record seems to indicate that animals in some cases were surrogates for human sacrifices (Aldhouse Green 2001:47ff), which is not mentioned by the classical authors.

Furthermore, material remains of animal sacrifices tell us things of the rituals performed in association with them, which were not brought up by the classical writers. For example, proof for ritual feasting has been discovered at many sites of animal sacrifices. Ritual consumption might have been seen as a sacramental process that connected humans and gods, or was perhaps a way of gaining supernatural powers. When only parts of animals were eaten and the others deposited in the ground, this might have been a way of dividing the offering between the people and the gods. The flesh may have possessed symbolic meaning, it was important in ceremonial feasts in sanctuaries and material remains points to that the killing often took place there as well (Green 1992:41:71:92-98ff).

Indicating evidence for religious festivals in Iron Age Britain has been found by Cunliffe in his excavations of the Danebury grain pits. His theory is that the grain in the pits was used at religious festivals connected to the seasons or the agricultural year. This is based on analyses of the grain and weed in connection to the pits (Gosden 2007:142-151). None of the classical writers discussed the existence of religious festivals in Iron Age Britain. Another thing they did not mention was what symbols and objects meant to the Iron Age people of Britain. Green (1989:1-5:9) writes that religious objects perhaps had different significances in different spaces – domestic, holy or other contexts, which we can discern when looking at in which context objects have been found.

Animals depicted in British Iron Age Art show us that people there worshipped and believed certain animals to be sacred. This notion is also supported by place names and animal remains found in ritual contexts. It could be serpents, bears, pigs and stags. In addition, Iron Age headdresses with animal features have been discovered which points to that shamanism might have been a ritual performed in Britain (MacCulloch 1911:208-213: Ross 1999:65: Aldhouse Green 2001). Heads, faces and masks were subtly included in much Iron Age art. They seem to have had a symbolic importance and were often connected to divine attributes. Faces might have had a talismanic function, since they were often portrayed on personal ornaments (Green 1996:139-142). These features were not written about by the classical authors.

Finally, there seems to have existed depositional customs that the classical writers did not relay. In Iron Age hill forts, there might be evidence for so called massacre deposits. They consist of several iron object deposits that have been found together with weapons, personal objects and disarticulated human remains in enclosure entrances from the pre-Roman Iron Age (Hingley 2006:221-229). The Salisbury hoard and similarly deposited assemblages of objects show a hoarding custom not discussed by the classical authors. The hoards consisted of objects ranging in dates from several hundred years apart that were buried together in the Iron Age (I.M. Stead 1998:118-123).

3.7 Personal remarks

The change to cremation as a more common burial tradition in the late Iron Age could according to me indicate that people believed in reincarnation - since cremation could

have been related with the release of the spirit (Cunliffe 1997:208f). I also think that the presence of grave goods points to that the Iron Age people of Britain believed that the soul persisted after death. Why would the dead be provided with food, tools, animals and even in some cases chariots if they were not believed to continue being in some way? The grave goods could on the other hand contradict a belief in reincarnation, since they would not have been necessary to give to people that would be reborn in this world.

As mentioned, signs of overkill support the notion of human sacrifice in many uncertain cases according to some archaeologists. For example many of the deposited human bones in the Danebury pits show signs of extreme and unnecessary violence (Aldhouse Green 2001:50ff). I agree with Aldhouse Green that these very probably were sacrificed humans, because a single case with these injuries can be explained with murder, but several cases with similar contexts and injuries makes a pattern – of human sacrifice.

4. Results

According to Caesar, cremation was a way of treating the dead body in Iron Age Britain. The archaeological evidence supports this, but only in the late Iron Age. No general custom or treatment of the dead is discernible in Iron Age Britain, but there is a trend that shows that inhumations were most common in the early and middle Iron Age and cremation in the late Iron Age. Caesar wrote that wealthy people were afforded with animals and fine artefacts as grave goods, which the archaeological record confirms. Another custom there is rich material evidence for in Iron Age Britain, mentioned by many of the classical writers - was the custom of animal sacrifice. The reasons for this custom suggested by the classical authors were that they were burn-offerings to the gods, divination purposes, offerings to a war god and in the mistletoe rite. There were probably a variety of reasons for animal sacrifice in diverse contexts, and any of them mentioned by the classical authors could have been possible.

Caesar mentioned the tradition of votive deposition in Iron Age Britain, which numerous findings of artefacts in occupied and watery contexts, shafts and wells strongly support. A statement made by Lucan was that various deities were worshipped by Gallic cults, which seems to have been the case in Iron Age Britain.

Material remains from the British Iron Age tells us of goddesses connected to healing and regeneration, a hammer-god, a sun-god, Cernunnos the horned god and a ram-horned serpent deity with connections to the under-world. Caesar mentioned a war god and healing god, a god with power over wealth and trading that was the inventor of all art and guide on travels, one god that was the sovereign over the heavenly powers and a goddess that taught the invention of manufacture. These cannot be specifically discerned within the archaeological material.

After comparing the classical texts with the archaeological material, statements in the texts that may have been true can also be discerned. In these cases there exists indicating evidence.

Several classical writers discussed the tradition of human sacrifice among the Iron Age people of Britain, for which there is some possible material evidence. Many cases are uncertain, but for example the Lindow Man was probably ritually sacrificed, and bears signs of overkill –which is the central argument that strengthens theories of human sacrifice. A motive for human sacrifice brought up by Caesar was attendant sacrifice. Double graves from Iron Age Britain provide us with some possible proof for this. Furthermore, the Danebury pits and watery depositions maybe strengthens a statement made by some classical writers that sacrifices were made to the gods.

Another account made by the classical authors which there exists some possible evidence for, was that there were druids in Iron Age Britain. The possible proof for them comes from burials, animal sacrifice, the Llyn Cerrig Bach hoard and iconography. Graves provides us with the most prominent evidence. Excavations have provided us with burials of high-ranking men probably with religious knowledge and an understanding of nature, which were attributes afforded to the druids by the classical authors. Animal sacrifices might have been executed by druids according to Green (2001), which Caesar claimed all sacrifices were –but the material remains for this are not strong enough to be seen as proof.

Caesar also wrote that astronomy was taught by the druids, which might have been the case. The Fiskerton causeway gives us evidence for astronomical knowledge having been present in Iron Age Britain, but whether the druids were the one's possessing this knowledge is not sure. Finally, Strabo and Diodorus suggested that vates (diviners) were present in Iron Age Britain. A cemetery perhaps for a religious

community and cult instruments found from Iron Age Britain may indicate the existence of religious clergy.

4.1 Personal reflections and current research

The Iron Age religion of Britain shared many elements with the religion of Gaul, but the former was not affected by the Romans until in the late Iron Age. This makes it possible to learn more about the transition in belief from the solar and lunar based religion in the Bronze Age to the Romanized version of the Iron Age belief-system in Western Europe.

Even though the authors behind the classical text lived in another society and had different values than the Iron Age people in Britain, it seems that they took pride in relaying the truth –even about a people they were at war with. Their prejudices can be seen in their works, and I think that these might have coloured their texts somewhat. For example – imperial politicians would have benefited from exaggerating a custom like human sacrifice being performed by the enemies of Rome.

Knowledge we have about divinities and the meaning of them mostly derives from art and iconography – and Aldhouse Green´s interpretations of those sources. It would be interesting to obtain perspectives from other archaeologists about these issues. Cunliffe has studied pit depositions in detail at Danebury, but further excavations at other hill forts would contribute to a more complete image of this custom. A mystery that still remains is where the majority of the Iron Age people in Britain were buried. Further excavations of settlements and analyses of scattered human remains are necessary to find out whether this was the main funerary rite.

At the moment excavations of an early Iron Age settlement site is being carried out by the British Museum, where they are studying ritual customs in an occupied context (British Museum: 2012). An Iron Age/Romano-British settlement will also be excavated this year in Swaledale (Swaledale and Arkengarthdale Archaeology Group:2012). Furthermore, a late Iron Age centre for human activity will be excavated this July (University of Oxford: 2012). Fieldwork consisting of making test-pits, field walking and surveying is also carried out at a British peat bog this year. Hopefully they will encounter a bog body (Bamburgh Research Project: 2012).

It would be interesting to compare other causeways with Fiskerton to establish whether the theory of astronomical alignment is true for other cases as well. After having analysed the classical sources and archaeological material, it is clear to me that even though classical written sources help us understand the Iron Age religion in Britain, it is firstly the archaeological remains we need to analyse to understand and know more about these issues.

5. Summary

Several classical writers discussed the Iron Age religion in Britain, which there also is archaeological evidence for. In this essay, these two sources are presented and compared in an attempt to discover whether they correlate. Classical writers included are Cicero, Julius Caesar, Strabo, Diodorus Siculus, Valerius Maximus, Lucan, Pliny the Elder and Tacitus. The analysed archaeological material in many cases derives from ritual contexts and is divided into 4 groups:

- Burials
- Sacrifices
- Art, rituals and religious customs
- Votive object depositions

A discussion is held in which the material remains are compared to all the statements made by the classical authors. The result of that discussion is that many facts of the Iron Age religion in Britain written by the classical writers could have been true. Discrepancies do though exist, which show that some information cannot be proved and that the archaeological material in some cases provides us with more information than the classical texts.

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7. Appendix

Picture 1



Based on: [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Map] Available at: <http://www.planetware.com/map/england-united-kingdom-of-great-britain-and-northern-ireland-map-eng-ukgbni.htm> [Accessed 15 May 2012]

Picture 1 a

Scotland (Regions)		
1 Shetland Islands Area	37 Cambridgeshire	
2 Orkney Islands Area	38 Suffolk	
3 Western Islands Area	39 Gloucestershire	
4 Highland Region	40 Oxfordshire	
5 Grampian Region	41 Buckinghamshire	
6 Tayside Region	42 Bedfordshire	
7 Central Region	43 Hertfordshire	
8 Fife Region	44 Essex	
9 Strathclyde Region	45 Avon	
10 Lothian Region	46 Wiltshire	
11 Borders Region	47 Berkshire	
12 Dumfries & Galloway Region	48 Greater London	
England (Counties)		
13 Northumberland	49 Somerset	
14 Tyne & Wear	50 Hampshire	
15 Cumbria	51 Surrey	
16 Durham	52 Kent	
17 Cleveland	53 Cornwall	
18 North Yorkshire	54 Devon	
19 Lancashire	55 Dorset	
20 West Yorkshire	56 West Sussex	
21 Humberside	57 East Sussex	
22 Merseyside	Wales (Counties)	
23 Greater Manchester	58 Gwynedd	
24 South Yorkshire	59 Clwyd	
25 Cheshire	60 Dyfed	
26 Derbyshire	61 Powys	
27 Nottinghamshire	62 West Glamorgan	
28 Lincolnshire	63 Mid Glamorgan	
29 Staffordshire	64 Gwent	
30 Salop	65 South Glamorgan	
31 West Midlands	Northern Ireland (Counties¹)	
32 Leicestershire	66 Londonderry	
33 Norfolk	67 Antrim	
34 Hereford & Worcester	68 Tyrone	
35 Warwickshire	69 Fermanagh	
36 Northamptonshire	70 Armagh	
	71 Down	

Based on: [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Map] Available at: <<http://www.planetware.com/map/england-united-kingdom-of-great-britain-and-northern-ireland-map-eng-ukgbni.htm>> [Accessed 15 May 2012]

Picture 2



Based on: Jope E.M, 2000. Piglets and boars: Hounslow, Middlesex. [photograph]
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