

Research Article

Naturalizing the Normative: Cosmology, Ontogenesis and the Emergence of Ritual Communities in Southern Roman Britain

Sahal Abdi 

McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, University of Cambridge, Downing Street, Cambridge CB2 3ER, UK

Abstract

Rituals are sites of personal and social transformations. However, we still do not have a sophisticated theory for how these rituals were embedded and generated within specific political economies, nor how communities used ritual activities to conceptualize the cosmos. This paper develops a theoretical framework exploring pragmatism and materialism to articulate the relationship between imperial political economies and ritual activities, situating the latter in the former. This framework will then be applied to ritual activities in southern Roman Britain, exploring how ritual activities emerged within the imperial political economy. The emergence of Roman imperialism in Roman Britain materially impacted upon not only the nature and range of ritual activities, but also the cosmologies of local communities. Ritual activities are materializations of cosmological beliefs, and both were determined by the imperial political economy. It is this process by which cosmologies emerged to naturalize socially constructed relations and activities that I call ontogenesis.

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Introduction

Ritual activities are thoroughly embedded within the social structure of the communities that enact and perform them and can only be understood within the social system they are intertwined with and structures them, thereby inviting recognition of these relations, and consequently, the potential recognition of the wider social structure that enables said ritual activities (Bell 1992, 208–17), stabilizing and transforming relations and identities through precise and structured engagements (Grimes 2020, 211–14; Keane 2008).

How communities interact with each other in sacralized spaces is directly related to the imperial political economy of the Empire (Dench 2018). The question to explore is the relationship between ritual activities and the wider political economy. My argument is that ritual activities construct cosmological structures, by which communities conceptualize and order their social relations and the norms and values by which they live (Foucault 2002, 420–22), a process I refer to as ontogenesis. The question left is to explicate the process of ontogenesis by investigating the relationship between political economy, ritual activities and cosmologies.

The paper aims to explore the nature of ritual activities in southern Roman Britain. The key analytic concept that I will

develop, called ontogenesis, refers to the process by which historically specific and contingent social relations become fully naturalized, as narrative structures that describe and order how communities understood themselves and the world they lived in. In order to do this, I will analyse the imperial political economy that the rural communities in southern Roman Britain operated within, how their ritual activities emerged in this context and how this provided the structure within which communities formulated their cosmologies. As such, the details of the process can only be conceptually discussed at the end of the article, but it is important to note that the processes discussed in the empirical analyses are materialization of the ontogenetic process. The aim will be to provide a fully materialist analysis of cosmologies, but also one that is situated in the pragmatism of both the imperial administration and local communities as they both adapted to the emergent imperial economy in southern Roman Britain. This will be explored through the transition in political economies from MIA–LIA (Middle Iron Age and Later Iron Age) to Roman Britain, and analysis of ritual activity in rural settlements in southern Roman Britain.

Pragmatic colonialism, pragmatic agency

Pragmatism is concerned with the historical emergence and practical consequences of ideas, meaning and practice, considered in its full diverse expression in social life (Preucel 2006; Preucel & Mrozowski 2010; Rorty 1991).

Corresponding author: Sahal Abdi; Email: sa2289@cam.ac.uk

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Pragmatism's concern with practical consequences gives it an ethical and normative core as in implications for what someone will, should and ought to do (Peirce 1998, 346). Pragmatism asks what *impact* a set of ideas, practices and social structures has on the world and on the people living within it.

This discussion of pragmatism is related to two key ideas: pragmatic colonialism and pragmatic agency. Pragmatic colonialism argues that colonialism is not a uniform process, but that the key strategies of colonialism (extraction of wealth and control over land) had to be adapted to the local conditions of the territory that was being annexed. The historic conditions structured the agentic capabilities of the imperial administration in establishing the colonial administration (Emirbayer & Mische 1998, 973), thereby producing a unique form of colonial rule specific to southern Roman Britain.

Pragmatic agency follows naturally from this, arguing that local communities had to adapt themselves to the new realities of living within a new colonial structure, and that patterns of activities and behaviour are the consequence of adaption to colonial rule to maintain social cohesion (Cipolla 2013, 19–24). Pragmatic agency has been used in historical archaeology to circumvent the resistance/domination and rebellion/acculturation dichotomy by recognizing that local communities in a colonial context would have sought to maintain local community relations in the face of dramatic upheaval, and that as a consequence of this, adaption to external circumstances would have been short-term and reactive (Mitchell 2009, 22; Preucel 2006, 50). Whereas traditional accounts of agency treated it abstractly, pragmatic agency properly appreciates that a community's ideas, beliefs and worldviews were not only historically situated but were a direct consequence of the historical conditions within which they were situated (Gardner 2012; Rorty 1991, 23).

The concern with the historicity of imperial rule is a key one of postcolonial Roman archaeology, with theories such as discrepant identities, creolization and globalization all exploring the historicity of imperial rule and imperial identity-making (Lambert 2024). Whereas globalization theory has developed the idea of the Roman Empire as an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world of localities, people and goods (Pitts & Versluys 2015) which produces a homogenized and homogenizing imperial material culture (Pitts 2019; Pitts & Versluys, 2021), ideas of creolization, performativity and discrepant identities have sought to reconceptualize the role of subaltern agents under imperial rule, aiming to give them agentic capacities and not just making them dupes of imperial ideologies (Mattingly 2004; Revell 2016; Webster 2001).

Globalization theory allows us to understand the imperial structure as an integrated whole, but at the cost of the consideration of the insidious nature of imperial power (Fernández-Götz *et al.* 2020), the active reorganization of the colonial landscape as part of imperial conquest and rule and an explicit disavowal of the contextualization of object relations within interpersonal social systems (Pitts 2019, 87–92). To restate the classic point: material relations are expressions of underlying social relations.

Creolization, discrepant identities and other postcolonial-influenced theories of identities allowed us to place subaltern peoples back into the process of history, but at the cost of situating agency within broader social structures (Millett 2025, xxxiii). What this does is present agency and structure as independent concepts that are externally related (this is the standard image of the duality of structure and agency), instead of properly situating agentic capabilities within the structure; the ability to act only makes sense in the structure it is embedded within.

Pragmatic agency allows us to consider the historicity of action and identity-formation under imperial rule, but also, and against modern theoretical strands that would seek to jettison agency in favour of other theoretical concepts, it breathes new life into the concept (Gardner 2021). Pragmatic colonialism helps theorize the emergence of the imperial political economy that allows for a materialist analysis of ritual and cosmological activities to be undertaken. The key thing to note is that these processes are embedded within the imperial political economy of Roman Britain, as both process and structure: it emerges out of the web of social relations that make it up, while also structuring them at the same time (Hamilton & Shin 2015).

The Later Iron Age and Roman political economies of southern Roman Britain

I explore the LIA and Roman political economies and historical contexts of southeastern and south-central Britain, corresponding to the modern county regions of Kent, East and West Sussex, Surrey, Greater London and Hampshire (Fig. 1), roughly, as more in-depth studies of the archaeology of these regions exist in the literature, alongside an expansive archaeological record (Champion 2016; Fig. 2). By focusing on the LIA–Roman transition, we can investigate the specificities of imperial rule that caused the pattern of relations observed in the archaeological record.

Before beginning this analysis, a short description of the concept 'political economy', because there are a number of definitions and uses. I will use the definition set out by Marx, and I will provide the full quotation because it sums up my own approach to analysing and understanding political economies:

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. (Marx 1977)

Material stuff is produced by the social relations that organize labour, such that in analysing material relations, we are also analysing social relations. How people invariably organize themselves into social structures is conditioned by their productive and reproductive forces: the material stuff that people make, consume, discard and remake, consume



Figure 1. England with the boundaries of the modern counties. (Image retrieved via Wikimedia Creative Commons License 'English ceremonial counties 1998 (named)' by English_ceremonial_counties_2010.svg. Nilfanion derivative work: Dr Gred is licensed under CC BY-SA. Image non-adapted.)

and discard (McGuire 1992). This not only presents us with a historically specific analysis of social and material relations; it also gives us a materialist foundation for analysing cosmological belief systems.

The data that form my detailed empirical analyses for Roman Britain are taken from the Roman Rural Settlement Project (henceforth RRSP; Brindle *et al.* 2016). The RRSP is a database for rural settlements in Roman England and Wales which collects information on sites and their associated publications, including monographs, articles and reports, with the aim of exploring the value of commercial archaeology (Fulford & Holbrook 2011).

Settlement patterns in the MIA-LIA were, despite the emergence of the *oppidum* as the site of exchange and consumption of trans-continental goods and other large-scale activities associated with emergent political kingdoms, predominately roundhouses and other small settlements usually housing small kinship groups. There have been debates about whether LIA societies were hierarchical, egalitarian or heterarchies, but the important thing to note is that there was short- to long-term exchange network interdependence not integrated within any formal or informal structure, and this was in sharp contrast to the later emergence of the imperial political economy (Hill 2011),

as well as having the capacity to shift between these different political modes, a choice no longer available to them once the territory had been annexed (Wengrow & Graeber 2015).

The MIA-LIA period (roughly from BCE 400 to 43 CE, ending with the conquest of Britain by Claudius; the LIA itself ranges across BCE 100–43 CE) was one of substantial reorganization of the landscape. Emergent settlement patterns, changes in pottery production and advances in agricultural activities generated the conditions that would make Roman colonization of the period possible (Cunliffe 2005). As will be explored, there are differential regional patterns during this period, and this would have had a later impact on Roman colonialism in the region (Fig. 3).

Unlike other regions in Britain, southeast Britain had no significant settlement patterns dated to the MIA, and pre-Roman activity in the region relates principally to the LIA period. The evidence suggests a large expansion in settlement and industrial activity, indicating substantial reorganization of social relations in the region during the LIA period (Champion 2007, 119–20; Hill 2007a, 24). The emergence of hillforts such as Bigberry, a potential precursor to the civilian capital of Canterbury in the later first–second centuries CE (Williams 2003, 222), where a 6 km trackway acted to link up disparate settlements, as well as the

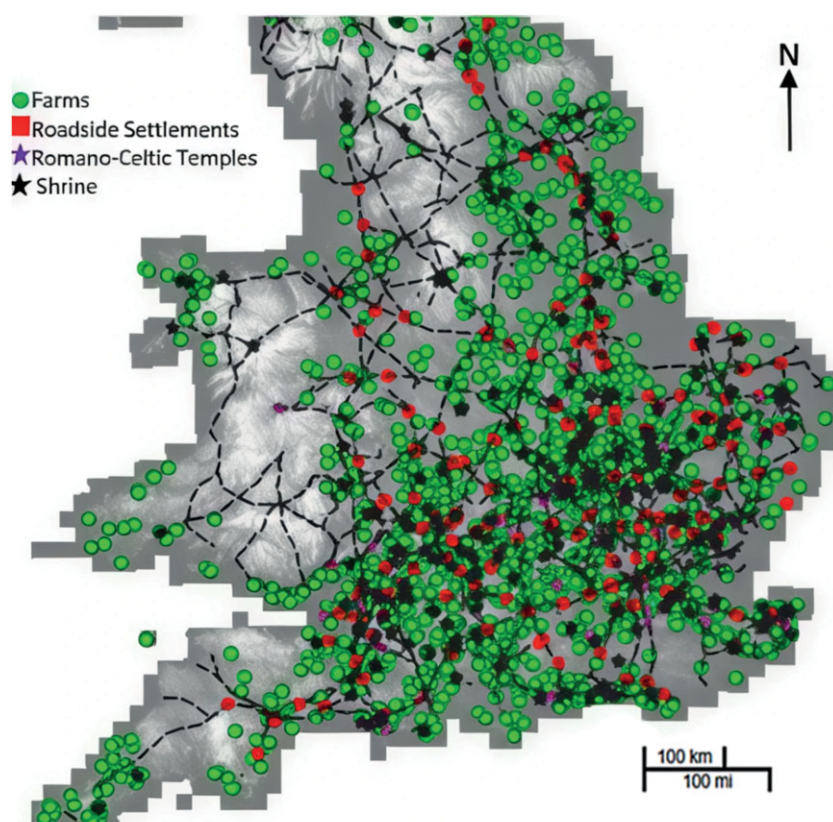


Figure 2. Selected sites in Roman England and Wales as recorded by RRSP. The fertile central and lowland regions are, unsurprisingly, the most populated, c. 43–410 CE. (Data: derived from Ordnance Survey Data © Crown Copyright and Database Right 2014.)

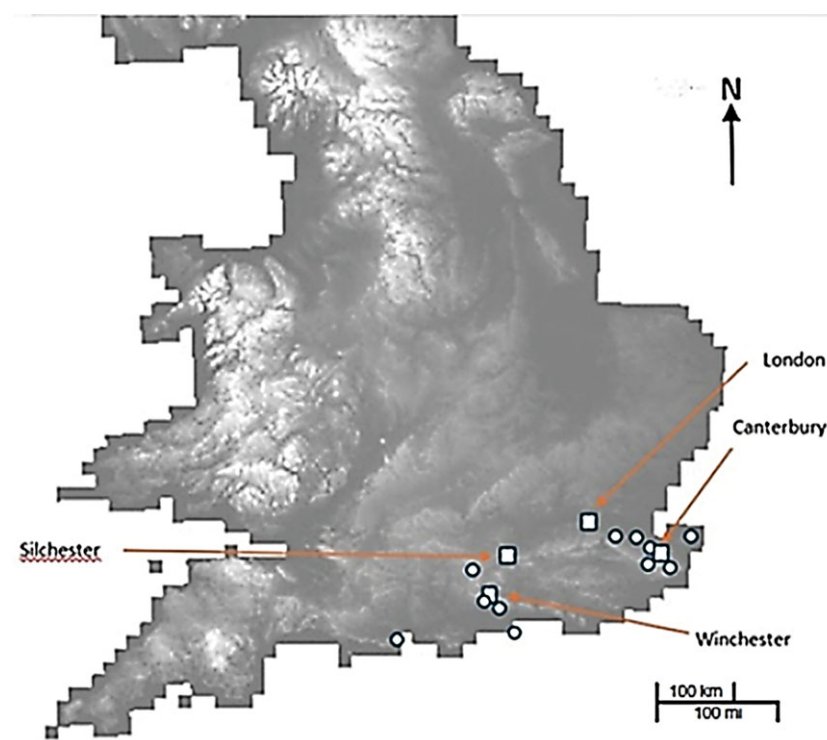


Figure 3. Map of MIA–LIA settlement in relation to Roman urban centres. From right to left: Thanet, Bourne Park, Bigberry, Homestall Wood, Quarry Wood Camp, Springhead, Hayling Island, St Catherine's Hill, Oram's Arbour, Sudden Farm, Hengistbury Head. (Data: derived from Ordnance Survey Data © Crown Copyright and Database Right 2014.)

existence of ritual metalworking, demonstrated increased activity during the LIA period (Ashbee 2005, 160–62; Millett 2007, 158). Other sites such as Homestall Wood and another potential hillfort at Bourne Park suggest that the Canterbury hinterland was a socially vibrant region

(Wallace & Mullen 2019, 79–80). There was a Roman road at the *oppidum* at Quarry Wood Camp, which formed an important part of the iron trade to the Weald and continued to have some uses into the Roman period (Howell 2014, 63–4). The LIA ritual site at Springhead later became a major

roadside settlement (Andrews *et al.* 2011, 190–92) and villas such as Keston, Minster-in-Thamet and Fishbourne all have evidence suggesting pre-Roman settlement activity (Booth 2017).

Ritual activity in southeast Britain was varied and included the ‘Aylesford-Swarling’ tradition, wherein cremated remains were interred in decorated wooden pots with imported amphorae and pottery which were likely influenced by Gallic burial traditions, and dating at some burials places these types of burial to the first century BCE, with the possibility of some occurring earlier in the second century BCE (Champion 2016, 160–62). There were other local traditions of inhumation in East Kent and Thanet (Parfitt 1998) and Brisley Farm (Stevenson 2013, 157–62), as well as the LIA ritual complex at Springhead. Many of these different ritual activities are evidence of the complexity of the sacred/profane dynamic (Champion 2016).

The LIA pattern in the southern-central region is different compared to the southeast, with the major difference being a longer-term settlement pattern from the MIA and earlier (Sharples 2010). Changes in much of southern Britain reflected long-term trends, and patterns observed during the Roman period were dependent on activity in the region stretching back to the MIA–LIA (Sharples 2010, 8–14). Also important in this context are the regional trade connections with Gaul during this time, and the rise of major sites of exchange and consumption such as at Hengistbury Head (Cunliffe 2005, 170–80). Hillforts such as St Catherine’s Hill and Oram’s Arbour show settlement activity in the MIA, although the former appears to have been abandoned by the first century BCE (Cunliffe 2005, 104). The Sudden Farm enclosure appears to have been settled consistently from the seventh century BCE to the fourth century CE with a few periods of abandonment (Stevens *et al.* 2013, 257). Like Canterbury, the urban town at Silchester was the site of a major LIA *oppidum* and likely served as the seat of the Atrebatas Kingdom (Creighton 2006, 20–24).

Ritual activity in the LIA southern-central region is dominated by the Hayling Island complex. The LIA shrine had multiple phases of construction and depositional evidence included sacrificed pigs and sheep, human bones, horse harnesses, currency bars, coinage from Britain, Gaul and Republican Rome, which were deposited in specific zones within the shrine (King & Soffe 2008, 139–40).

Changes in agricultural activities in the LIA included increased centralization of crops in storage pits (Van der Veen & Jones 2006, 226) and new techniques such as field drainage, free-threshing wheat and mono-cropping continued into the Roman period (Van der Veen & O’Connor 1998) alongside increases in the scale of production and the introduction of new crops such as fruits, herbs, vegetables, malted beverages and hay (Van der Veen 2016). Alongside this were changes in animal rearing and dairy production (Allen & Lodwick 2017, 144), the use of corn-dryers and grain mills, innovations in wheel-thrown pottery (Shaffrey 2015). Many of the road networks established during the Roman period also had LIA antecedents (Allen 2016), and LIA cross-Channel exchange introduced Roman-style material goods to the territory (Champion 2016, 158–9), a process turbocharged by the annexation, increased influx of goods as well as

increase in local production in Roman Britain (Pitts 2019, 207–9). Britain was now plugged into this global network of goods circulating through a multitude of trade networks of production and consumption (Versluys 2014). The increases in technological production allowed for the conditions that would make colonization of Britain a project that could be pursued, alongside the existence of cross-Channel exchange networks and increasing settlement density (Marx 1976).

With this in mind, we can now explore the development of the imperial administration in southern Roman Britain. The construction of the colonial administration had some key features. This involved the institution of the road network, the creation of military forts, the development of urban centres, the establishment of a legal system, which created a colonial administration tasked principally with wealth extraction through land redistribution and regressive taxation (Birley 2005, 9–14; Mattingly 2011, 132–9; Fig. 4). The establishment of a road network not only partitioned the region, but also served to facilitate trade relations across the region and connect up major urban and military sites with nucleated rural settlements, thereby creating secondary markets at nucleated rural settlements in the region (Brindle 2017, 277–80), and allowed for administrators, tax officials and military officials attached to the administration to access large swathes of the rural landscape more easily to extract taxes and resources from the regions. The development of urban centres recreated the means by which imperial administrators could create the politico-legal bureaucracy for administering the region, as well as replicating the social conditions they were most comfortable within. London developed as a major port town and military-administrative centre, which, alongside Canterbury, acted as a major centre of consumption and distribution in the wider region (Orengo & Livarda 2016). The urban centres at Silchester and Winchester in Hampshire were settled in the political territory of the Atrebatas Kingdom, whose seat of power was likely the *oppidum* that preceded the construction of Silchester (Fulford 2012).

There are several similarities between the southeast and southern-central regions, including the nature of agricultural activities, the presence of the road network, the number of settlements with LIA antecedents (Allen 2016, 82) and the development of the imperial administrative bureaucracy, but there are also major differences. As noted already, the southern-central region had a longer-lived settlement chronology than the southeast (Creighton 2006, 20–24). By the middle of the third century CE, settlement patterns and activity in the southeast had contracted significantly, with the majority of farmsteads seeing either a decline in material evidence or the wholesale abandonment of sites (Allen 2016, 82; Table 1a, 1b). There are several reasons for this, but the important thing to note is while this pattern occurred in the southeast, there was a very different pattern occurring in the southern-central region, which had a longer-lived settlement pattern, including a major reorganization of both the urban centre at Silchester (Fulford & Timby 2000) and the wider rural landscape (Allen 2016, 136). It is likely that the role of the imperial administration in both regions contributed

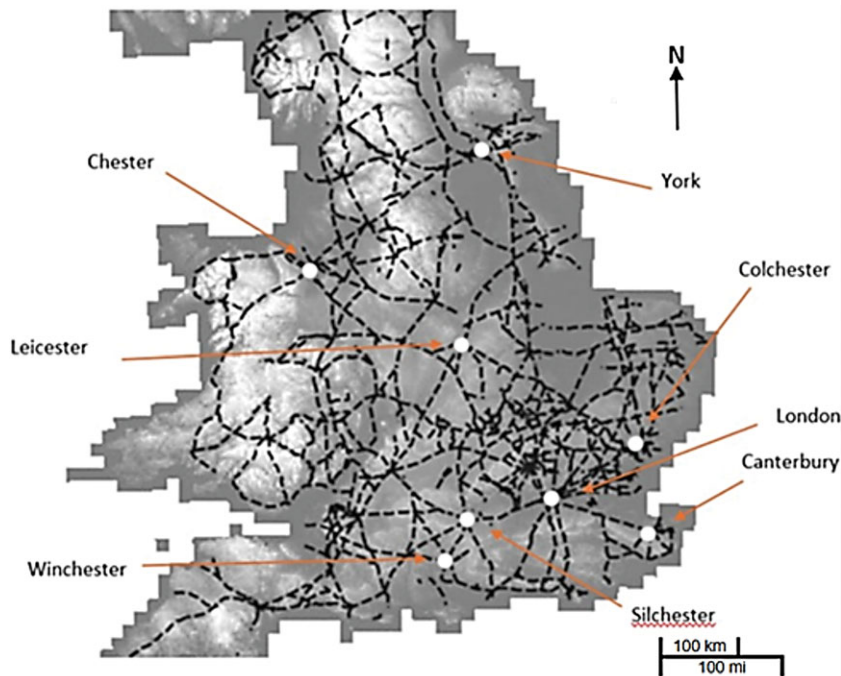


Figure 4. Major urban sites discussed in text and other selected sites from Roman England and Wales, c. 43–410 CE. (Data: derived from Ordnance Survey Data © Crown Copyright and Database Right 2014.)

Table 1a. Total number of settlement types by time period in Roman Kent. Where settlements overlap time periods, they will be included in both time periods. The division is based on the RRSP classification for major site types; cf. Table 4. Where sites are in multiple classifications, they will be added to all classifications that are applied to them, except where villas are classified as villas/farms, then these sites will be counted as villas. Where sites are farms with other associated features such as field systems and industrial centres (counted under 'other'), they shall be classed as farms. Sites solely identified as ritual, industrial or rural landscape will be placed in 'other'. This cross-classification explains the high numbers of farmsteads in the fourth century CE, because many of them were also villas, and villa construction was on the rise in the third–fourth centuries CE.

	Farmstead	Villa	Roadside settlement	Village	Other	Total
50–100 CE	25	16	7	2	27	77
100–200 CE	24	8	4	0	27	73
200–300 CE	40	1	3	0	16	70
300–400 CE	28	22	15	1	12	78
Total	127	47	29	3	92	596

Table 1b. Numbers of settlements in the Hampshire region by settlement category, following RRSP classifications. The increase noted in the fourth century CE reflects a real pattern in the data, in stark contrast to Roman Kent.

	Farmstead	Villa	Roadside settlement	Village	Other	Total
50–100 CE	28	2	3	0	20	53
100–200 CE	23	4	4	0	20	51
200–300 CE	13	2	3	0	19	37
300–400 CE	37	10	5	1	24	77
Total	101	18	15	1	83	218

significantly to the different trajectories that exist, and this was impacted by the LIA histories. The likeliest explanation is that the longer-lived settlement patterns in the central-southern region equipped those communities with a greater resilience to adapt to colonial annexation and extraction compared to the southeast.

Roman imperialism as pragmatic colonialism

We can contextualize these differences by considering the idea of pragmatic colonialism. As noted above, when the empire first conquered Britain, the Romans encountered a landscape already lived in by local communities with their own complex social relations. Encountering this varied and

complex landscape, the imperial administration had to adapt their colonial strategies to manage the province; the Romano-British imperial administration could not just implement its colonial strategy wholesale in a predetermined fashion but instead had to adapt to the conditions of LIA Britain, and it is this adaptation that produces regional differences (Creighton 2006). Imperialism is an *ad hoc* rationalization of short- to medium-term goals aimed at developing a colonial administration that can achieve its principal aims of maintaining control and extracting value. Over time, these short- to medium-term adaptive strategies develop into a unique imperial political economy, integrating and organizing social relations even as these social relations fractured regionally (Finley 1999, 51–4). As will be noted later, the diversity of social and ritual activities is actually a consequence of this fracturing: imperial integration leads necessarily to social fracturing as the imperial administration integrates the province with the aim of extracting value, while social behaviours diversify in response, adapting to this integrative process (Noreña 2021). Regional diversity existed both before and after imperial annexation; simply the networks of social relations were operating within different historical and social contexts. The regional diversity witnessed during the Romano-British period was a consequence of a complex adaptive interactions between the pre-existing landscape and the colonial administration.

Roman imperialism was a structure-altering system, one that despite continuities in social and economic activities (the predominance of agricultural activities and continuity in LIA-to-Roman settlement practices) operated within a very different structure, with the imperial political economy of Roman Britain working as an extractive machine (Steel 2008, 154–60). The continuity of social relations, and the emergence of new social relations in response to colonial annexation, were organized within this emergent imperial structure, one that arranged this web of complex social relations into a cohesive and comprehensible totality (Rose 2009), and it is comprehensibility that is key in the emergence of cosmologies; it is only by perceiving the structure in its totality that communities could conceptualize the world (Lukács 1971, 162–4).

The aim of this section has been to provide the LIA–Roman context for ritual activities and patterns observed in the southeast and central regions, and also the context by which we will explore how best to situate ritual behaviour within the wider imperial structure. Before that, we must demonstrate how it is that we can actually contextualize ritual activities within the wider imperial structure, but also provide a causal argument for how we can develop an analysis of the cosmological belief structures of local communities.

Political economy to cosmology to political economy

The previous section provided a materialist analysis of the political economies of LIA and Southern Roman Britain. The question now is to situate ritual activities within this materialist analysis. What is the relationship between rituality and the imperial political economy? Furthermore, how do cosmologies arise from ritual activities?

With that in mind, let us define what we mean by cosmology. As a science, it can be understood narrowly as the study of the universe as an ordered system, the laws that govern it and that deal with the structure and evolution of the universe (Hawley & Holcombe 2005, 4–5). The philosophy of cosmology seeks to understand the nature of the cosmos as a physical entity related to geometry, matter, fields, dark matter and energy, physical laws and probability (Ellis 2014, 5–17) and metaphysical questions concerning determinism, causality, intelligent life and complexity (Ellis 2014, 18–22).

As an anthropological theory, it relates to the idea that an understanding of the universe is an integral part of human cultures and human societies, the notion that a community's world view and belief system is based on a conceptual understanding of the structure and ordering of the universe (Darvill 2008). This is especially prevalent when thinking about the cosmologies of indigenous communities in colonial metropolises and peripheries, who had and continue to have original and unique understanding of how their world functions, and the political consequences of taking these cosmologies seriously in relation to the continued fight for the freedoms of indigenous people to live life on their terms, free from the continual colonial legacies of the modern world (Sundstrom & DeBoer 2012). Cosmology encapsulates the empirical, the normative and the abstract in terms not only of how historic communities constructed and understood their cosmologies, but also how we as archaeologists understand them (Bhaskar 2008).

One key idea to grasp is that cosmologies provide a narrative of a community's role in the universe, in order to guide actions (Bennett & Royle 2004, 54). Cosmologies naturalize and provide reasons and justifications for the way the world is ordered and how it should be ordered. Cosmologies thus infuse the beliefs, institutions and relations within a community by providing meaning that anchors individuals and their actions within a worldview (Allan 2018, 12). This also means that cosmologies are value-laden, insofar as the values, ethics and material activities are all interconnected and they give reasons and motivations to act in certain ways and to maintain social relations that are conducive to the overall cosmology, thereby tying these relations, and other such 'mundane' activities, within the wider cosmology (Bell 1997, 122). This thereby allows the communities in question to comprehend the logic of the structure as a conceptual whole, regardless of the empirical accuracy of such comprehension.

As already noted, cosmologies emerge from the political economy to give unity to social and material relations with the aim of making sense of these relations. In other words, cosmologies are built up from the production and reproduction of social life, while also giving them meaning and structure (Boivin 2009, 273–7). Cosmologies structure political economies; the whole point of the cosmological structures is to give meaning to social relations. What is at stake during ritual activities is what cosmological structure is generated and what narrative is told, in order that it can act as a systematic belief system to maintain the integrity of the community, and where consent for the cosmological system is tacitly provided through participation in ritual activities

Table 2. Tabulated information of selected key sites discussed in text, their regional location, their morphological categories as defined by the RRSP and key publications associated with each site. As noted by Millett (2025, xxxvi), such morphological categories can tend towards homogeneity, but situating them within the imperial political economy of southern Roman Britain can inculcate us from this tendency. Note: RC = Romano-Celtic.

Site name	Site location	Site classification (from RRSP database) Major type: minor type	Primary published sources
Lullingstone	Kent	Rural settlement: <i>villa, funerary site, shrine, RC temple</i>	Meates 1979
Keston	Kent	Rural settlement: <i>villa, farm, RC temple, quarry, funerary site</i>	Philp et al. 1991
Springhead	Kent	Nucleated settlement, religious ritual and funerary, industry: <i>funerary site, RC temple, shrine, iron production, roadside settlement</i>	Andrews et al. 2011
Monkton	Kent	Nucleated settlement, industry: <i>village, field system, shrine</i>	Bennett et al. 2008
Ickham	Kent	Nucleated settlement, industry: <i>mill, field system, shrine, roadside settlement</i>	Bennet et al. 2010
Ospringe	Kent	Nucleated settlement, religious ritual and funerary: <i>funerary site, roadside settlement</i>	Whiting et al. 1931
Dartford	Kent	Nucleated settlement, religious ritual and funerary: <i>funerary site, roadside settlement</i>	Herbert 2011
Westhawk Farm	Kent	Nucleated settlement, industry: <i>roadside settlement, funerary site, shrine, iron production, field system</i>	Booth et al. 2008
Thruxton	Hampshire	Rural settlement, religious ritual and funerary: <i>agricultural building, funerary site, shrine, farm</i>	Cunliffe & Poole 2008
Alton	Hampshire	Nucleated settlement, religious ritual and funerary: <i>funerary site, roadside settlement</i>	Millett 1986
Hayling Island	Hampshire	Religious ritual and funerary: <i>shrine, RC temple</i>	King & Soffe 2008
Odiham	Hampshire	Religious ritual and funerary: <i>funerary site</i>	Jenkins 1991

and the political economy at large (Gramsci 1971, 428–38). Cosmologies are adaptive systems that allow for a sense of collective cohesion in the face of dramatic changes, such as those brought about by the Romano-British imperial annexation. Cosmological belief systems are therefore abstractions of these concrete processes, acting as a narration that provides a complete explanation of the totality of social relations (Marx 1976, 163–4). It is helpful to think of cosmologies as structures of rationalization (Chibber 2022, 111–14) that seek ultimately to make sense of the world, that seek to explain the world and to offer prescriptions on how to navigate the world (Peirce 1998, 346).

Rituality, pragmatic agency and cosmologies in southern Roman Britain

This section will explore the types of ritual activity present during Romano-British imperial rule. Table 2 details name and locational data for major sites, site categorization based on the RRSP's own model and key publications. Figure 5 gives the location of major sites in southern Roman Britain.

The reason for focusing on ritual activities is that ritual spaces are the arena wherein the logic of a community is made most apparent, where the relationship between individuals and community, between individuals and the cosmos and between communities and the cosmos is made most explicit (Durkheim 1995, 33–5). Most of the population lived in rural settlements away from the urban and military sections (some estimates put it at around 90 per cent:

Mattingly 2006, 356) and research programmes have long emphasized urban, military and villa architecture in imperial contexts in isolation from the wider imperial political economy (Mattingly 2011). The focus on rural communities is not only a redress to this imbalance but also a recognition that one cannot talk about 'Roman Britain' in any meaningful sense without investigating the other 90 per cent.

The empirical data will refer to domestic ritual activities, or ritual activities associated with domestic dwellings, in part because there is a marked increase in this type of ritual activity in Roman Britain, with around 50 per cent of recorded rural settlements having some evidence of internal domestic shrines or temples (Smith 2018, 136, 142–61), and specialized constructed sacred spaces only became a common feature after the conquest (Smith 2001, 67), suggesting that the development of these spaces was a causal consequence of the emergence of the imperial political economy, and that constructed sacred spaces within domestic sites was a common response across the region, suggesting that this was a key pragmatic response to imperial annexation.

The RRSP defines ritual activities in three broad categories: constructed sacred spaces, religious objects (Whitehouse 1996) and structured depositions (Garrow 2012). Our usual concern with ritual activities concerns whether depositions are deliberate, or 'rubbish', and how to infer meaning from them (Hill 2007b; Whitehouse 1996). Our case studies pertain to deliberately constructed sacred spaces within domestic sites, and this deliberate construction is evidence that the communities were marking out such spaces

Figure 5. Discussed sites collated in Table 2 as related to the road network and major urban centres in the region. From right to left: Monkton, Ickham, Westhawk Farm, Ospringe, Springhead, Dartford, Lullingstone, Keston, Odiham, Hayling Island, Thruxton, Alton, c. first–fourth centuries CE. (Data: derived from Ordnance Survey Data © Crown Copyright and Database Right 2014.)

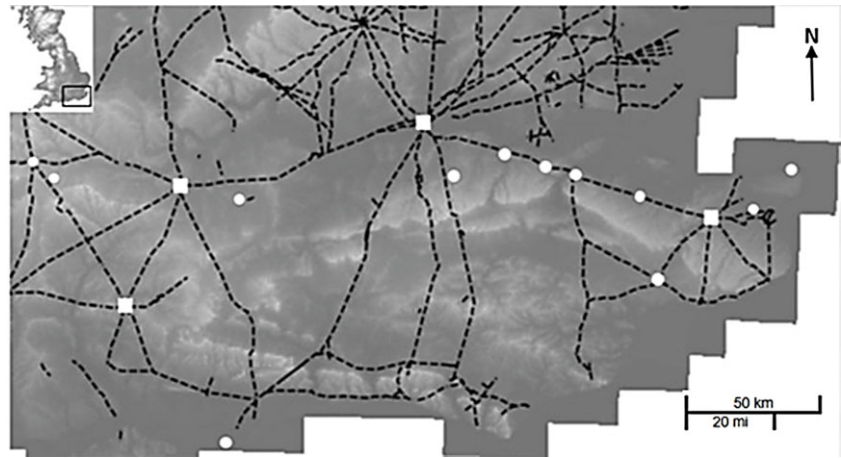


Table 3. Tabulated data showing split between different religious/ritual sites at domestic dwellings. The ‘others’ category refers to a range of ritual activities, not all of which are associated with domestic dwellings, and where material evidence is scant. In Hampshire 20 per cent of all recorded sites were funerary sites are associated with domestic dwellings (with 0 per cent being sacred sites); and in Kent, 26 per cent of all ritual sites were sacred spaces associated with domestic dwellings.

Region	Ritual (sacred) sites associated with domestic dwellings	Funerary sites associated with domestic dwellings	Others	Total
Kent	10	2	26	38
Hampshire	0	3	12	15

for the purposes of conducting ritual activities, as a direct consequence of imperial annexation. Such communities would not have understood their ritual activities through the sacred/profane dichotomy, but as adaptive responses to the imperial political economy.

Rituality, pragmatic agency and cosmologies in Roman Kent

We will principally consider two types of settlements, villas and roadside settlements, because much of the ritual activity we will investigate is associated with these site types (Booth 2011, 246; Smith 2018, 147, 182; Table 3). For clarification purposes, Table 4 details the RRSP’s classification system. As noted, the most common ritual activity in the region is demarcated sacred spaces within domestic dwellings, and while funerary sites were located in the wider landscape based on small finds and enclosures, there was not enough evidence to draw meaningful interpretations; as such we will restrict ourselves to those sites with substantial evidence (Smith 2018, 168–9).

For the most part, there is a key split in the types of ritual activity occurring within villas and roadside settlements, although there is of course a fuzziness in our categories, and we should not draw hard and fast boundaries between such differences (Brück 1999, 314). One interesting fact that does

Table 4. A classification of site types in the RRSP database (Fulford & Brindle 2016, 10). These classifications are not mutually exclusive, and sites regularly cross multiple major and minor site types.

Major site type	Minor site type
Rural settlement	Farmstead, villa, agricultural building, isolated building, hillfort, cave
Rural Landscape	Field system
Industry	Pottery production, tile production, quarry, iron production, other metal production, mill, other industry
Nucleated settlement	Roadside settlement, village, <i>oppidum</i>
Religious ritual/ Funerary	Romano-Celtic temple, shrine, funerary site
Military	Fort, <i>vicus</i> , other military
Communications	Road, jetty/bridge, mansion, port

emerge from all these sites is that the ritual spaces appear to have been constructed alongside the domestic dwelling, indicating that the development of sacred spaces was not merely *ad hoc*, but was likely a planned feature. Furthermore, we can sub-divide ritual activities in the region between those sites in which built shrines were the key ritual architecture and other sites which depict more complex ritual activities.

The villa sites at both Darenth and Thurnham had shrines that were likely dated to the initial period of construction. Furthermore, both sites lacked evidence of structured depositions, and this was starker in the case of Darenth, where the shrine enclosed a well found with no depositions, and artefacts were regularly deposited within wells (Black 1987, 1–8). Pottery and brooches found within the shrine at Thurnham dated the construction of the shrine to the same period as the first period of the proto-villa, around 70 CE (Booth & Lawrence 2006, 42–4). The pottery and brooches were detritus and not structured depositions (Garrow 2012), and as such we can group Thurnham along with those other sites for which ritual and sacred space was not accompanied

by ritual depositions. There is also a range of roadside settlements including the sites at Westhawk Farm, Monkton, Ickham and Each End, wherein the principal ritual activity was the presence of either masonry or timber-built structures, all of which have very little to no evidence of ritual or structured depositions. The shrine at Westhawk Farm was most likely planned and built as a single entity based on the uniform shape of the structure, suggesting that the location and the decision to build it were deliberate (Booth 2001, 12), and while the evidence is not clear for the other sites, it would not be a stretch to infer that the shrines were built in conjunction with the domestic site, likely suggesting that whatever activities were being conducted within these spaces, they relied not on the ritual deposition of artefacts or cultic activity (Booth *et al.* 2008, 379) but on the conviviality generated by the social interactions of the communities within these spaces and the repeated, creative and structured interactions that these spaces generated (Berggren & Stutz 2010, 175–9). The memories, emotions and sensorial responses associated with the act being within these spaces were experienced collectively (Antczak 2017, 147–8), fully embedded in the social system the community was part of.

We can go further and argue that such social interactions within these spaces was the key ritual activity undertaken within the shrines; acts of collective and mutual memory-making and remembrance (Van Dyke 2019). At Westhawk Farm, the shrine did not contain evidence indicating ritual deposition (Booth 2001, 17–18). As noted earlier, depositions in wells and watery contexts were key indicators of ritual activity, and such activities continued in some form into the early Roman period (Champion 2016). At Westhawk Farm, a nearby well had deposits including waterlogged wood from an oak, pottery dated from the second century CE and 227 coins, again dated to the second century CE, were found in wells (Booth 2001, 11–17; Garrow 2006). The most important thing here is that these depositions were found away from the shrine, and not within it. This demonstrates two things: first that, and as noted above, the nature of ritual activity within the shrine was oriented towards ends not associated with ritual depositions; and whatever cosmological belief system was constructed within the shrine was flexible enough to encompass a variety of different behaviours beyond the formal ritualized space, allowing for individuals to act and interpret such belief in personal terms (Dornan 2004). As for claims that the shrine may not be ritual in nature, the fact that it was built at the same time as the domestic settlement, and that the shrine was oriented south-east similar to IA roundhouses, indicates otherwise (Oswald 1997, 92), and also points to the role of social memory among the community at Westhawk (Van Dyke 2019).

The exception to the rule is Springhead, a major LIA ritual site that later became a major roadside settlement in the early Roman period and was the only roadside settlement with multiple Romano-Celtic temples which contained structured depositions. LIA activities were oriented around the nearby river Ebbsfleet, and included both cremation burials and deposition of coins and metalwork (Andrews *et al.* 2011, 190–92). Depositions continued into the early Roman period with the construction of five temples (three were

Romano-Celtic) in the early second century CE. Votive offerings of jewellery including brooches and hairpins were carefully chosen for their shape, colour, motifs and materials, and were just as important as the type of offering being given (Andrews *et al.* 2011, 94–8; Puttock 2002, 115). Other structured depositions included animal bones (sometimes only a skull, which was likely borrowed from Romano-Gallic burial traditions: Woodward 1992), and infant burials interred with a headless bird (Alaimo 2016, 160–62). It is more than likely that Springhead's LIA ritual activities continued into the Roman period, and the emphasis on ritual depositions in the LIA explains why they continued into the early Roman period, in contrast to the other roadside settlements, which do not have this same history.

There are also a range of sites with ritual activities related to burials/cemeteries. At the villa site of Lullingstone, the Romano-Celtic temple/mausoleum contained inhumations for two adults (probable male and female in their mid 20s) buried under the temple in a chamber. The burials were dated to CE 300 based on grave goods such as silver spoons, copper alloy, ceramic flagons, glass vessels and whetstones (Meates 1979, 125), and a signet ring was found belonging to the governor of Britain and later emperor Publius Helvius Pertinax; and villas were expansive architectural structures for the cultivation of local elites (Taylor 2013). An infant burial associated with the fourth-century CE church was interred with wheat grains, a small ceramic vessel, a decorated copper-alloy vessel and five coins dated to the later fourth century CE. There is also evidence that a horse's head was laid above ground in front of the temple structure alongside cattle skulls from the late third century CE. Further animal skeletons included cats and dogs (Meates 1979, 125–8). The roadside settlement at Ospringe has a cemetery containing mostly cremation burials, but there were some inhumations; many of these burials do not survive in any meaningful way, making inferences about social relations difficult (Whiting *et al.* 1931). Excavations at another roadside settlement at Dartford uncovered two stone coffins alongside a number of cremation burials. Pottery and iron deposits were found interred with the bones, which allowed for the cemetery to be dated to the later Roman period, in contrast to many other cemeteries, which are of an earlier date (Herbert 2011, 105–8).

The ritual activities described above were all attached to domestic settlements, and this should be seen as a pragmatic response to the annexation of the land and the inability to establish relationships across the region, because the establishment of the colonial bureaucracy and the associated institutions reshaped how these communities interacted with the wider landscape which acted as a control mechanism. (Deleuze 1992). This would have had profound consequences on their cosmological belief systems having to rationalize their retreat from the landscape and back into clearly demarcated domestic sites. The establishment of the imperial political economy necessitated new ways of living, with the structure mediating and organizing social relations. The differences noted between the different types of ritual activities should be considered as localized instantiation of this general pattern of ritual activities as embedded within the overall settlements and their community relations.

The diversity in ritual activities is matched by the diversity of cosmological belief systems that each community would have constructed, expressed and acted within. Differences between roadside settlements and villas should be approached with regard to the principal roles they played in the region, the former as rural markets of exchange and consumption and the latter as estates for managing land, as well as sites for the production of particular types of elite Romano-British identities related to either local elites or attachés of the imperial administration (Smith 2016). Further differences should be seen as unique localizations of ritual activities and pragmatic agencies.

Rituality, pragmatic agency and cosmologies in Hampshire and south-central Roman Britain

This can be contrasted with the evidence of domestic ritual activity in south-central Roman Britain. Again, ritual activity is intimately associated with domestic sites, but most ritual activity appears in the record as burial sites, either as part of a settlement, or as cemeteries with evidence of Bronze Age and Iron Age precursors. At the villa site of Thruxton, two ditches were dug during the LIA on a rural farm, and a first-century CE inhumation with La Tene brooches and a nearby shaft deposition which included organic deposits and most likely remained exposed until it was filled in during the fourth century CE. During the third century CE, a fenced enclosure was built between the hall and the southern enclosure ditch, encompassing the early grave and ritual shaft, transforming the site into a ritual sanctuary (Smith 2018, 142, 152–4). Opposite the burial, excavators discovered a series of inhumations from the late fourth century CE, all evidence which points to the ritual centrality of burials. A cemetery at Alton uncovered eight richly furnished graves. These burials date from the LIA into the second century CE and are like other cemeteries in the region with the emphasis on large assemblages of pots (Millet 1986, 80). One particularly well-furnished burial contained gaming counters and dice alongside a gaming board (Millet 1986, 83) as well as a signet ring of onyx set in gold engraved with the figures of Fortuna, Ceres, Hercules and Diana and meant to evoke the power and symbolism associated with these deities (Millet 1986, 51–3).

The major ritual site in the south-central region was Hayling Island, a LIA shrine constructed in similar fashion to those seen in northern Gaul, demonstrating pre-Roman cross-channel cultural connections (Brunaux & Malagoli 2003), which later became a major Romano-Celtic temple. The uniqueness of Hayling Island compared to the ritual practices already analysed demands our attention. Votive offerings offer a sharp contrast to the LIA assemblage with an absence of military, vehicle and animal materials, and the Roman period assemblage included pottery, glass objects, animal bones, coins, brooches such as an enamelled horse and rider brooch and a votive offering which originated from France; and a fragment of an inscribed stone altar was dedicated by an officer of the *legio IX Hispana* (Britannia 12 1981, 369). The LIA–Roman temple acted as a major politico-religious site, with the civil war within the Atrebatas kingdom

leading to the success of the faction allied to the imperial state; one consequence was the establishment of the military sites at Chichester and the villa at Fishbourne (King & Soffe 2008, 141). The Romano-Celtic temple was constructed with the backing of the imperial administration, and the local elites who allied themselves with Rome constructed a particular communal and personal identity that sought to identify with the administration, projecting religious and cultural power in the absence of real political and economic power, because by the time the imperial administration had become established in the region, these local elites were intermediaries, acting on behalf of the Romano-British state while possessing little power (Creighton 2006). The presence and role of the Atrebatas kingdom in the development of Hayling Island were the key differences, and something that was not a factor in the southeast, and this was a consequence of longer-lived settlement patterns in the central-southern region and the specific adaptive colonial process that occurred.

That the Romano-Celtic temple was constructed on the site of the LIA temple again demonstrates the desires of local elites to construct major architectural sites on previously inhabited territory. Similar to Thruxton and Alton, the Roman period structures, whether they be temple, roadside settlement or villa, were all constructed on sites where previous LIA and early Romano-British burial sites and other ritual activities were located, and were intentionally built around these older burial sites. This is likely related to what Creighton (2006, 93–107) calls the ‘creation of the familiar’, the attempt to construct physical and emotional structures, landscapes and environment in which individuals and communities would feel comfortable. What we see in Roman Hampshire and the wider south-central region is the attempt by individuals and communities to construct their own sense of self through association and an alliance with burials of likely perceived powerful individuals.

Beyond Hayling Island and across the wider region, the building of settlements on or near ancient ritual sites is again an attempt to use the memory of these sites as a display of social and cultural power (Smith 2018, 142–3), to project a certain strength in the face of a loss of real political power, as local elites became intermediaries of the Romano-British state, in effect becoming middle managers. Having been stripped of their political authority, and with their only means of social mobility being to climb the Roman political system, this would have been their attempt to carve out a position within the imperial administration using whatever limited agency they had available to them. Having traded real political power for membership in the imperial bureaucracy, and deciding to collude with the imperial state to retain and maintain limited forms of political power, the nature of their agency changed. While they were still in positions of prosperity relative to the wider rural landscape, their agency had changed as they became middle managers for an imperial political-economic system they had limited capacity to shape and little desire to change: there was no double consciousness at play here, just good old-fashioned collusion (Fanon 1963, 60–64). The attempts to utilize the LIA and Romano-British burials as markers of power was their attempt to use ancestral ties to the landscape as an ideological smokescreen:

to present themselves as custodians of a land over which they no longer had any power.

Rituality, pragmatic agency and cosmologies in southern Roman Britain

Having established the range of ritual activities in the southeast and south-central Roman Britain, the question now is to demonstrate why they took the forms they did. If pragmatic colonialism asks how the colonial administration reacted to and adapted its colonial strategies, pragmatic agency asks how the local communities reacted to and adapted to the arrival and imposition of the imperial administration. The ritual activities described above were produced as a context of being embedded within the particular historical context and imperial political economy of southern Roman Britain (Gardner 2021). These ritual activities could only have been produced under these conditions, structured by the reactions of local communities and the imperial administration to the historical conditions. The cosmological belief systems that emerged as a context should be seen as *ad hoc* rationalization of processes driven by the imperial structure (Chibber 2022, 111–14). In the southeast, the cosmological belief system would have emerged because of the emergence of new forms of ritual activities that were intimately tied to domestic settlements, a direct result of partitioning of the landscape in the region. In central-southern Britain, the role of local elites attached to the Atrebatas kingdom created ritual activities and cosmologies that emphasized their connection to historic landscapes, in order to assert some limited agency in the face of colonial annexation, because they no longer possessed real political power. More interesting, and despite differences in the form of ritual activities, all the ritual sites above were clearly marked out as differentiated spaces within the overall settlements, and as such we should see them as clearly marked-out spaces of ritual importance within domestic sites; a consequence of the nature of imperial annexation in the region.

These cosmological systems also had certain ideological ramifications, as they legitimized local forms of power and authority, and demanded certain normative actions of the members of these communities (Brandom 2000, 80–81). The diversity of ritual activities demonstrates creative flexibility on the part of local rural communities to express social relations in ways that were not solely a direct consequence of direct imperial imposition. These ritual activities operated on ‘landscapes of mutual indifference’, where (with the exception of wealth and labour extraction), the imperial administration was uninterested in the social relations of these communities (Millett 2021, 65), so even if the most common ritual activity occurred within domestic settlements, they diverged in interesting ways because the imperial state did not seek to enforce any uniform ritual behaviour: imperial integration, regional diversity (Noreña 2021).

Ontogenesis and the making of the cosmological landscape

As noted in the introduction, it is only after the empirical analysis has been done that we can fully detail the process of ontogenesis. To do this, we can explore Bhaskar’s distinction

between the empirical, the actual and the real in his account of causal mechanisms (Bhaskar 2008, 47). For Bhaskar, the empirical constitutes the domain of experiences, the actual constitutes the domain of events and the real constitutes the domain of mechanisms. The empirical refers to the observation of actions in the world as individual experiences, the actual refers to the integration of these instances together into a coherent picture and a recognition that they form part of a collected whole. The real refers to accounting for the collective whole as a mechanism, in exploring how the collective whole acts as a causal network which produces the phenomena under observation (Illari & Russo 2014, 123). Mechanisms help us understand how a given result is brought about by the precise configuration of specific relations in the system (Glennan 2002, 344), as well as accounting for change systematically (Crellin 2020, 12–17).

I am going to modify this image to explain the process by which cosmological belief systems emerge, beginning with the empirical, which includes the daily interactions with the institutions and networks of the colonial administration through exchange relations, the manufacturing of resources and goods and the material relations through which communities maintain their daily lives. The actual refers to the recognition that these interactions form part of a complex system of relations that are interconnected to the wider colonial administration, and that they constitute a totality (Lukács 1971). The real is the process by which these material and social relations become naturalized, as cosmological belief systems developed as a consequence of the pragmatism displayed by local communities are embedded into the fabric of how they understand and interpret the world. This creates a process whereby cosmological structures emerge from the political economy while ordering these relations into a comprehensible whole. It is this process by which historical processes become naturalized, and the way in which different actors seek to naturalize historically contingent relations that I call ontogenesis. Ontogenesis is a genetic process that creates new forms of understanding and interacting with the world within and through the conceptualization of social relations (Lévi-Strauss 1966; Reed 2019). Normatively constructed relations about how communities should function become naturalized into a descriptive understanding about how the world actually works, and it is this naturalization that serves as a narrative structure that allows for communities to make sense of the dramatic changes brought about by Romano-British imperialism. This can be usefully contrasted with Ingold’s notion of ontogenesis as the generation of being, as opposed to its essence, one in which being is constantly renewed and generated differentially within what he calls a ‘one world anthropology’ (Ingold 2018, 166–8). Ingold takes his own idea of ontogenesis from the French thinker Simondon, for whom ontogenesis was akin to individuation, of the immanent differential process by which life is renewed within itself, constantly marking itself through this internal act of differential renewal (Deleuze 2014, 260; Simondon 1993, 300–305). Put more prosaically, it is about the differential and individual process of becoming, as opposed to the static and essentializing ‘being’ (Harris & Cipolla 2017, 138–46). Despite

opposing his idea of ontogenesis to ontologies (and multiple ontologies in particular), Ingold's theory is still metaphysical in its attempt to account for the nature of reality. On the other hand, my own use of ontogenesis as a process is non-metaphysical. It is not aimed at developing any idea of how reality *in itself* works, but names the process by which constructed social relations are naturalized and how cosmological structures emerge that condition and determine the range of ritual activities and belief systems that communities living within these relations can, and do, express.

Conclusion: making communities

This paper has sought to justify a single premise: that understanding and exploring the cosmologies and cosmological structures of a given community is a necessary part of archaeological research. To accomplish this, however, we need to understand that how communities conceptualize the world is conditioned by how they experience it. This paper has sought to establish an inductive process between local communities, the imperial political economy and ritual activities in order to demonstrate not only how they are connected, but to demonstrate that a rigorous understanding of the empirical evidence is a prerequisite for careful analysis and speculation of the cosmological structures of a community. We may not be able to provide an individualized account, but we can certainly delineate a narrow range of cosmologies that communities could take up, in part because the social relations they are embedded within would restrict the range of belief systems they could imagine. Inferring the cosmologies of ancient communities is believed by most archaeologists to be a fool's errand, available only to those working either with ancient texts or with descendant communities, usually citing Hawkes' (1954) ladder of inference, in which religion is the hardest aspect of society that one can infer. We can flip this by arguing that it is only once a fully materialist analysis of communities has been given that we can provide a route through to analysing cosmologies (Engels 1970). This paper has been one attempt at providing this materialist analysis, demonstrating the viability, if not the finality, of this project.

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Sahal Abdi is the Black Heritage Research Fellow at the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research. He obtained his PhD from the University of Leicester. His current research is concerned with investigating the impact of Roman imperialism in North Africa, and beyond this is concerned with the nature and impact of Roman imperialism, political economy, archaeological theory, Roman Britain, social archaeology and ritual archaeology.