'Springs Sumptuously Equipped': Meanings of Water at Bath[1]

This paper is essentially a meditation on the meaning of water, specifically the water that comes out of the hot springs at Bath – the ancient Roman *Aquae Sulis*. Bath was a sanctuary site in the Roman period, dedicated to the syncretic goddess Sulis Minerva, and it is obvious that the site's sacrality is rooted in the landscape, and specifically in the springs for which Bath continues to be famous. Understanding the role of the waters in the Roman period is necessarily central, then, if we want to understand what was happening at the sanctuary more broadly, and how what was happening fit in with the rest of Romano-British society. But the problem is that for us, too, the waters at Bath are not neutral. They have a particular place in our modern psyche as well, one that is largely formed by the town's role as a curative and social centre in the 18th and 19th centuries. So I want to start, not with the Romans, but rather with the more modern history of the Bath waters, and to explore the ways in which modern and pre-modern conceptions of the point of the hot springs have shaped our narrative for the Roman period, in particular the concept of Aquae Sulis as a healing sanctuary. I will then turn in the second half of the paper to examine what happens if we move away from our preconceived notions of what water must be doing at Bath, in particular the idea that the water is primarily intended to heal, and to explore what insights our evidence for ritual at the site may give us into what made the hot springs sacred for the Romano-British who worshiped there.

To understand the world of the18th and 19th century spa, and of the antiquarians who lived there, we must understand the processes by which water became central to the town's identity in the post-medieval period. Bath's identity during the Middle Ages was primarily as a

[1] The writing for this chapter was completed in 2017. Since then, the arguments it contains have been repeated and expanded upon in Cousins 2020, in particular in Chapters Two and Five.

cathedral city and as a centre for the wool and cloth trade, not as a spa town.[2] Even so, the waters were both known and used for bathing in the medieval period. The renovation of the King's Bath at the main hot spring in the early 12th century is likely to be attributed to John of Tours, a priest and physician who was also responsible for moving the see of the bishopric from Wells to Bath.[3] Certainly the baths were known as a place of healing by the first half of the 12th century; the *Gesta Stephani*, c. 1138, mentions that the town is called Bath, because 'sick persons from all England go there in order to bathe in the healing waters, and the healthy as well in order to see these miraculous outpourings of hot water and to bathe in them.'[4]

When the priory foundation was dissolved in the wake of the Reformation, and as the cloth trade waned at the same time, the town began to re-invent itself as the pre-eminent healing spa.[5] More extensive interest in the use of the waters for curative purposes had started to take off in the late 16th century, as physicians began to write about the health benefits of bathing, and of mineral water in particular.[6] This interest only increased during the 17th century, as physicians based in Bath began extolling in both books and pamphlets the ability of the springs to cure virtually every ailment. One physician at the baths, Dr Thomas Venner, proclaimed for example in 1628 that 'They be of excellent efficacy against all diseases of the head and sinews, proceeding from a cold and moist cause, as rheums, palsies, lethargies, apoplexia, cramps, deafness, forgetfulness, trembling or weakness of any member, aches and swellings of the joints.'[7]

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[2] Davis and Bonsall 2006: 38ff.
[3] Davis and Bonsall 2006:38; Cunliffe 1986: 64; 72-4.
[4] *Quae civitas Batta vocatur, quod ex Anglicae linguae proprietate trahens vocabulum, Balneum interpretaur, eo quod ad illam ex omni Anglia infirmi causa in salubribus aquis diluendi,sani vero gratia mirabiles calidae aquae eruptiones videndi, et in eis balneandi, concurrere solent* (*Gesta Stephani* 28). My translation.
[5] Hembry 1990: 26-27.
[6] Hembry 1990: 6ff; Davis and Bonsall 2006:67.
[7] Quoted in Davis and Bonsall 2006: 73.

The tireless efforts of these Bath-based physicians contributed a great deal to the rise of Bath as a resort. Physicians promoted tourism to the spa through their writings, through their positions on the town's governing board, and, many of them, through their status as landlords of lodging houses.[8] So by the mid-18th century, when Bath reached the peak of its social cachet as a resort for the elite of the kingdom, extolling the healthful qualities of the water was as ubiquitous as it was necessary for the continued life of the spa and all of the urban infrastructure and development which had accompanied Bath's rise to fame.

At the same time that the curative powers of the water became gospel, Bath's image as a 'valley of pleasure', as one writer put it,[9] was becoming entrenched both in literature and in the popular imagination. The picture of Georgian Bath, the social whirl of theatres, assembly rooms, card parties, the promenades up and down the pavement, all set against a backdrop of the both truly invalid and the merely fashionably so, remains an alluring one, as the innumerable memorials in 2017 honouring both the bicentennial of Jane Austen's death and the social world she depicted attested.

But the 'glory days' of Bath, at least from the point of view of social exclusivity, were fading by the end of the 18th century. Bath, in essence, had become too popular for its own good; the most fashionable ranks of society deemed the town *passé* and moved on to the new seaside resorts, and a more middle-class clientele took their place.[10] Bath's story in the 19th century, at least as it was perceived at the time by the city's burghers, was one of social and economic stagnation and slow decline.[11] By the end of the 19th century, Bath, with its cheap living conditions,[12] was seen as a place for retirees or impoverished spinsters: its cachet as a

[8] Davis and Bonsall 2006: 73.
[9] Quoted in Neale 1981: 12.
[10] Davis and Bonsall 2006: 151.
[11] Hembry 1997: 54ff.
[12] Hembry 1997: 62-63.

destination had faded.[13] Healthfulness, though, was still central to its identity – Bath was seen as a salubrious place to be.

It is against this backdrop of social rise and fall centred on curative springs that we must think about the ways antiquaries and, later, archaeologists, wrote about the discoveries of the remains of Roman *Aquae Sulis*. I begin in the 18th century, when antiquarian interest started to be augmented by the first major archaeological finds; in fact many of these early objects came to light during the re-building of the town centre that took place in the Georgian period.

In June 1753 an inscription[14] was found that recorded the restoration of a sacred place, a *locus religiosus*, by a centurion named Severius Emeritus. A few months after the discovery, John Ward, then Gresham Professor of Rhetoric and vice-president of the Society of Antiquaries, put forward the suggestion that the *locus* in question might have been a public cemetery.[15] He was incorrect, but his justification reveals a good deal about his preconceptions about the nature of Roman Bath: '[T]here was no town, to which this could be more suitable than Bath, on account of the great number of strangers, who resorted thither for the benefit of the salutiferous springs. For as some of those, who came from distant parts, may be supposed from time to time to have died there; a public cemetery for the burial of them was highly requisite.'[16] Forty years later, shortly after the discovery of the pediment of the temple of Sulis Minerva and of an inscription with the phrase *pro salute* on it, Governor Thomas Pownall suggested that 'there might have been erected at the Roman town Aquae Solis an *Aedes Salutis* – the very sort of place whereat to erect and dedicate such a temple…'.[17]

[13] Davis and Bonsall 2006: 154-155.
[14] *RIB* 152
[15] Ward 1753-4: 334.
[16] Ward 1753-4: 337.
[17] Pownall 1795: 16.

These two interpretations, bookending the second half of the 18th century, are broadly representative of 18th-century antiquarian writing on the Roman town. Ward, Pownall, and their contemporaries were writing at a time when knowledge of Roman Bath was extremely limited, confined to the few contextless inscriptions and reliefs which had been found by the 18th century. The influence of Georgian Bath's status as the preeminent place of healing in Ward's and Pownall's writings and in the propositions they made about the ancient town is consequently clear; that was, after all, all they knew. By the mid-19th century, however, the local antiquary Henry Scarth in *Aquae Solis*, the first full-length work on the Roman town, was explicitly comparing the modern and ancient: 'The natural features of the country remain unchanged, the Springs pour forth their healing as they did of old, but a free, active, enlightened, united, and strong people, governed by just laws, and encouraged to active endeavours, have taken the place of an enslaved and degenerate race, the victims of oppression and cruelty.'[18] The Victorian morality inherent in the rhetoric is compelling. Nonetheless, this assumption that the nature of Bath was the same in antiquity and in the modern period quickly led scholars to dismiss the lack of evidence for a healing sanctuary. Scarth himself, for example, declared that 'It is most probable that a School of Medicine existed in Bath at an early period. The Mineral Springs being visited by many patients for their healing benefits, would naturally cause the residence of eminent Physicians in the neighbourhood. No record, however, has been found of any patients, nor have we any Votive Altar put up by a Physician, as at Chester, or any memorial to a Physician, as on the line of the Roman Wall in Northumberland.'[19] It is hard, reading Scarth's hypotheses about physicians, not to be reminded of the crowd of doctors who made their living by promoting the baths; Scarth's School of Medicine clearly comes more from the medical culture of his own day than from anything to do with Roman Britain.

[18] Scarth 1864: viii.
[19] Scarth 1864: 32.

As the 19th century came to a close, writers continued to see Roman Bath mirrored in their own contemporary experiences of the town. Emanuel Green, a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and prolific local scholar on Bath, wrote in 1890 that 'Some accommodation there must have been [for strangers and invalids] as the place, with such magnificent baths, must be judged to have been much what it has been and may be still, a place of ease and idleness; a mixture of groans, music, and flippancy; a resting place for humanity, old, infirm and in ruins; a comfortable thoroughfare from this world to the next.'[20] In Green's words we can easily recognize the haven for retirees which Bath had become by the late Victorian period. In the early 20th century, Francis Haverfield, the preeminent Roman archaeologist of his day, continued the equation of modern and ancient, writing that 'No doubt a population of others than invalids dwelt round the springs, as it does to-day. But, first and foremost, Bath was a bathing place.'[21] He too continued to assume that this bathing was for curative purposes: 'The reason for the occupation of the site is simple. In the level space within the fold of the river rise mineral springs, hot, medicinal, abundant; and their waters, suitable alike for drinking and for bathing, have power over gout and rheumatism and serious skin diseases.'[22]

By the late 20th century, these long-standing assumptions concerning the curative nature of the Bath waters and Aquae Sulis' status as a healing sanctuary continued to be unconditionally and unquestioningly accepted by modern archaeologists. In the 1970s, Barry Cunliffe, the principal modern excavator, would open his book *Roman Bath Discovered* with the words 'Throughout its two thousand years of life, the town of Bath has always been famous as a great religious centre and for its thermal springs with their curative

[20] Green 1890: 126.
[21] Haverfield 1906: 216.
[22] Haverfield 1906: 219.

associations',[23] and in his seminal report on the curse tablets from the reservoir of the main hot spring Roger Tomlin would write the blunt sentence that 'the waters of Bath can cure disease.'[24] In Peter Salway's words 'In Roman times the spa was middle class, respectable, and seriously dedicated to healing and recreation', we can still see the effect of Bath's modern past: such words could as easily have been written about the town Jane Austen depicts in *Persuasion*.[25]

The automatic acceptance of the waters as curative, even in the second half of the 20th century, is unsurprising. How could anyone think otherwise, when up until as recently as 1976 a doctor's prescription was required in order to use the spa?[26] The evidence, however, concerning Bath's claim to fame is ultimately ambiguous. On the one hand, chemical and geophysical analyses of the water have concluded that 'No evidence has yet been found to show that the chemistry of the water has any particular quality which is of outstanding medicinal value'.[27] On the other hand, studies did show that immersion in hot water (of any origin) could indeed produce positive physiological changes, and both historical evidence and modern trials seemed to indicate that the Bath waters have some effect on paralysis brought on by lead poisoning.[28] The idea, however, that the waters are effective at healing a wide range of conditions, and consequently that any use of the hot springs must have healing in mind, is a cultural construct. It is a construct that for us today has behind it the weight of centuries, but there is nonetheless no reason to assume the Romano-British who venerated the spring shared this construct, or that it was the primary impetus for the worship of Sulis and the construction of her sanctuary.

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[23] Cunliffe 1971: 1.
[24] Tomlin 1988b: 102.
[25] Salway 1981: 688.
[26] Rolls 1991: 57-58.
[27] Kellaway 1991: 22.
[28] O'Hare et al., (1991); Heyward (1991).

Indeed, the opposite seems to be true. A straightforward examination of the archaeological evidence from the Roman period of Bath reveals no proof that the sanctuary was curative. Of the eighteen known altars and dedications set up to the principal goddess Sulis and other gods, none were explicitly given in thanks for healing, nor are any dedicated to other healing deities such as Aesculapius or Hygeia. We also do not find requests for healing anywhere in the site's large corpus of so-called 'curse tablets', the pewter petitions for justice or vengeance thrown by worshipers of Sulis into the reservoir of the town's largest hot spring. Most instead are concerned with the theft of small items and with dedicating lost objects to the goddess: they do not even ask that Sulis strike the thief down with illness. Similarly, the ex-voto objects recovered from the main spring itself evince no connection to either sickness or healing. By far the most common offerings were coins, over twelve thousand of which have been found, predominantly *aes* denominations and spanning the whole Roman period. The more than one hundred other objects from the reservoir, ranging from a catapult washer to gemstones to pewter pans, are principally characterized by eclecticism. Finally, the sculptural corpus from Bath contains no scenes of healing or depictions of healing deities.[29]

The overall assemblage from the sanctuary, then, shows no clear interest in or connection to healing or curative rituals. Is there any archaeological material at all from Bath that can be associated with healing? Three altars have occasionally been casually cited as part of healing cult.[30] All three were set up by freedmen to Sulis, for the welfare, *salus*, of their legionary former masters – one of these was the inscription Governor Pownall was referencing, when he was imagining his *Aedes salutis*.

Two of the altars are dedicated *pro salute et incolumitate* – for the welfare and safety – of the same man, Aufidius Maximus, while the third is *ob salutem sacrum* – dedicated on account

[29] It has often been claimed that *CSIR* 1.2, no. 3, a carved block found in the Cross Bath, contains Aesculapian imagery; however, the arguments are unconvincing (see Cousins 2020: 42-45 for further discussion).
[30] e.g. by Salway (1981: 688).

of the welfare - of Gaius Iavolenus Saturnalis. But the *pro salute et incolumitate* and *ob salutem sacrum* formulae are petitions for general welfare, not just health, and are more about the continuance of well-being and the prevention of harm, than a direct reaction to illness.[31] Indeed both phrases were used frequently in routine and regular religious petitions by citizens and the state on behalf of the emperor, and are encountered on inscriptions at sites throughout the province, almost always in army contexts. Of the forty-six other inscriptions from Roman Britain dedicated *pro salute* (not including the Bath pair), twenty-nine are for the *salus* of the emperor or his family. Of the remaining seventeen, six are for the *salus* of a military unit or group of soldiers, two are dedicated by soldiers *pro salute sua suorum*, one is for the *salus* of a woman, Sanctia Gemina, three are altars from Coventina's Well at Carrawburgh Fort, and three are, like the Bath altars, dedicated by freedmen on behalf of their former masters. The final one is for the *salus* of the *vicani* of the fort at Leintwardine, but it too is linked to the emperor since the deities petitioned are Jupiter Optimus Maximus and the *numina* of the Divi Augusti.

There is, then, in almost every single case of the phrase in Britain, a connection either to the emperor or to the army or to both. It is, in fact, language more *imperial* than curative. Given the lack of other evidence for healing cult at Aquae Sulis, nothing about their texts indicates that we must read these altars as set up in search of a specific cure.

The only ex-voto from the reservoir possibly associated with healing is a pair of ivory breasts. (A second object made of bronze may also be an anatomical depiction of a single breast.) I am willing to accept that this anatomical ex-voto may well have been deposited for or after a cure.[32] But as John Scheid has pointed out for Gaul, one anatomical ex-voto does

[31] Le Glay 1982: 427; Marwood 1988: 1.
[32] Anatomical votives have usually been read as offerings either asking or giving thanks for a cure of the depicted body part (Potter 1985: 34ff). Nonetheless, it is important to note that, at least for some body parts,

not make a healing site.[33] To pluck this object out of the ex-voto corpus and focus on it alone is to miss the point: the very variety of objects from the spring challenges our idea of Sulis Minerva as a goddess with a single primary purpose.

Finally, an oculist's stamp marking the contents of a container of eye-salve, found in 1731, has also been cited as proof of medicinal activity at the sanctuary.[34] However, over thirty oculists' stamps have been found in Britain, from a wide range of sites, mostly urban ones.[35] They are a normal and relatively frequent part of the material culture of the north-west provinces in general.[36] We would not choose to read oculists' stamps at, for instance, London or Colchester as indicative of ritual healing: why then should we do so at Bath?[37]

It seems clear, then, that had the temple and spring not been found at Bath itself, with all the modern connotations laid out above, the site would probably never have been interpreted as a healing sanctuary. As Scheid has discussed, simply because a sanctuary revolves around a spring does not mean that it is *ipso facto* a healing site. As he puts it, 'on ne saurait considérer comme sanctuaire guérisseur (dont la fonction première est de guérir) qu'un sanctuaire qui livre des témoignages parfaitement explicites de guérisons, inscriptions univoques et/ou nombreux ex-voto de toutes sortes d'organes.'[38] Bath simply does not meet these criteria. So how *were* the Romans using the waters of Sulis? I turn now properly to the Roman period sanctuary.

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this interpretation may not be valid; for example, votives of feet may represent a desire for a good journey, or ears a wish to be heard by the god (Scheid 1992: 30; Recke 2013: 1075-1077).

[33] Scheid 1992: 35.

[34] Scarth 1862:32ff; Sauer 1996: 73.

[35] Frere and Tomlin 1992: 46.

[36] Boon 1983: 3; Jackson 1990: 275.

[37] Scheid (1992: 28) makes the more general point that oculists' stamps, scalpels, and other medical equipment should not be taken to be indicative of a healing sanctuary, since they are found in a wide variety of public spaces.

[38] Scheid 1992:35.

The Roman site of Aquae Sulis lies surrounded on three sides by the River Avon, in a marshy valley at the lower extent of the Cotswold hills in Somerset. Evidence of Roman settlement has been found on both sides of the river, but the core of the site is a walled area of about 10 hectares. Within this walled area bubble up three hot springs, the largest of which is known as the King's Spring. At this spring was built in Roman times a reservoir, which contained the flow of water, and directed it to a massive bathing complex. Nearby was the temple of Sulis Minerva, offerings to whom have been recovered in quantity from the reservoir of the spring.

The reservoir which was constructed early in the Roman period to enclose the spring was a massive feat of engineering, one of the most considerable ever undertaken in Roman Britain.[39] Today the King's Spring produces around a quarter of a million gallons a day, at a temperature of 46.5°C, and geologists working on the appearance of the springs in prehistory and the Roman period have assumed that there has been no significant change in the flow since then.[40] A quarter of a million gallons a day is an extraordinarily large volume to control and the design of the reservoir demonstrates both the detailed Roman knowledge of the workings of the spring, as well as the Roman determination to render its output tameable. The waterlogged mud which surrounded and clogged the spring was first consolidated by a wide ring of wooden piles.[41] After construction of the permanent main drain, which led out water through a gap in the pile ring, mud was dug out from the spring head. This involved a considerable amount of earth-moving, to a level at least a meter and a half below the tops of the piles.[42] The building of the massive stone wall of the reservoir was the next stage, with a sluice for the draining of the reservoir placed on the west side, and an outlet leading to the drain of the Great Bath on the south side. Finally, the interior was lined with lead sheeting,

[39] Cunliffe 1980: 193; Cunliffe and Davenport 1985: 42.
[40] Kellaway 1985: 7-8.
[41] Cunliffe and Davenport 1985: 39.
[42] Cunliffe and Davenport 1985: 39.

and the tops of the piles closed over with waterproof mortar, making sure that the whole remained watertight.[43]

The change that this construction would have brought about in the character of the site cannot be overstated. The area would have gone from a muddy, hot, swamp overflowing with steaming water to a controlled human space, with the previously untamed water rigidly confined by concrete, lead, and stone, and with the surrounding area, no longer in constant danger of flooding, now able to support a built-up environment.

The reservoir had no bottom or filtering mechanism by which the spring water entered it; so alongside the water would come up silt and sand from the spring's fissure. This created a quicksand-like atmosphere at the bottom of the tank, meaning that objects thrown into the reservoir could not be seen after their deposition. In thinking about worshipers' encounters with the water, therefore, we should not be imagining a wishing-well type atmosphere, with coins glinting clearly through clean water. Furthermore, the significance of the heat and steam of the spring should be emphasized. This would have been an exceptional quality for ancient visitors, especially those native to Britain, where hot springs are extremely rare.

As I have argued elsewhere, ritual deposition at the reservoir seems to have been in large part concerned with harnessing and controlling feelings of loss or decay through the act of giving objects, either literally or by proxy, to the goddess' waters.[44] This is particularly seen in the deposition of pewter and silver vessels - probable so-called temple plate - and of the well-known corpus of 'curse tablets'. Many of the vessels show signs of wear or even soldered repair, indicating that their deposition in the reservoir was the last act in a longer life history of the object, taking place once the vessels were too worn to be functional any longer. The tablets, meanwhile, are almost exclusively concerned with items stolen from the worshiper;

[43] Cunliffe and Davenport 1985: 40.
[44] Cousins (2014).

crucially, they never seek to regain the object for the worshiper, but rather dedicate it to Sulis. Deposition of vessels or tablets into the water, therefore, allows victims of time or of theft to regain control of both the situation and the object, and to refashion the loss to be a willing one – a voluntary handing-over of ownership claims to the goddess.

Another, individual, votive might also reflect the reservoir's role as a place of ritual relinquishment. This object, a small bronze pan with a handle and a 'rectangular meandering decoration' which would originally have been filled with enamel, is part of a larger category of vessels, found at various sites (including on the continent), which seem to depict the line of Hadrian's Wall;[45] three of this series, the Rudge Cup, the Amiens Patera, and the recently discovered Ilam Pan, have the names of several of the western Hadrian's Wall forts running in a band below the rim of the vessel.[46] The Bath pan and a similar contextless fragment from Spain (the Hildburgh Fragment) lack this; the Bath vessel, however, does bear a punched inscription on the handle, which dedicates the pan to the Dea Sulis Minerva. The second line, unfortunately fragmentary, begins 'Codon…'; Tomlin supposes this to be the name of the dedicator.[47] Both this personal dedication by an individual and the material, bronze, mark this object out as separate from the pewter and silver vessels discussed above.

Rudge-type cups have usually been presented in scholarship as soldiers' mementos, which they took with them into retirement as 'souvenirs' of their time serving on the Wall.[48] So entrenched is this interpretation that a recent volume surveying the known vessels is titled *The First Souvenirs: Enamelled Vessels from Hadrian's Wall*.[49] It is noteworthy, however, that all four vessels for which the context is known potentially come from ritual contexts. The Bath pan, of course, comes from a votive context, and indeed has a dedicatory

[45] Sunter and Brown 1988: 14-16, cat. no. 23; Breeze 2012: 6-7.
[46] Holder (2012).
[47] Tomlin 1988a: 55.
[48] Cowen and Richmond 1935: 342; Heurgon (1951); Heurgon 1952: 114-115; Künzl 2012: 18ff.
[49] Breeze, ed. (2012).

inscription. The Rudge Cup was found in Froxfield (Wilts.) in 1725 in a well which contained a mass of other Roman material, including 'several bones of beasts, four or five human skeletons, and some medals of the lower empire.'[50] Although 18th and 19th c. antiquarians suggested that the cup may have been deposited as a votive, Cowen, writing in 1935, dismissed this possibility on the grounds that the animal bones and human skeletons (which could 'only be attributed to a scene of violence'), ruled out a votive interpretation.[51] Now, however, given the work done in recent decades on structured deposits in pits and wells, vast numbers of which include deliberately placed animal bone as well as ceramic and metal vessels and occasionally human remains,[52] the context of the Rudge Cup sounds distinctly 'ritual.' Meanwhile, the Amiens Patera was found buried next to a pipe-clay Dea Nutrix figurine.[53] The context of the Ilam Pan is less clear. It was found by metal detectorists on moorland overlooking the river Manifold in Staffordshire, and subsequent excavation did not reveal any sign of a site at the location.[54] However, other finds were found nearby, including at least twelve 1st and 2nd century brooches, 'several of which were reported to have been orientated in the same direction, seemingly in some sort of extended linear arrangement,' which could possibly suggest a type of structured deposition.[55]

These find contexts have led Ralph Jackson to argue that the pans may have had a ritual component, probably water-related, in addition to being 'souvenirs'.[56] Martin Henig has gone further, arguing that they are undoubtedly ritual in purpose.[57] Problems of survival will likely be skewing our sample, with pans that were ritually deposited less likely to be destroyed or melted down for reuse than those that were not. Nonetheless, it seems clear that

[50] Cowen and Richmond 1935: 313.
[51] Cowen and Richmond 1935: 313.
[52] See, e.g., Fulford's examples from Silchester alone, which include one pit with four dog skulls and at least three pits with human remains (Fulford 2001: 201ff).
[53] Heurgon 1952: 95.
[54] Jackson 2012: 42.
[55] Jackson 2012: 42.
[56] Jackson 2012: 58-60.
[57] Henig 2010/2011

at least some of these pans were imbued by their depositors with ritual significance. Can we take this a step further and ask what that significance may have been? One possibility is that some of these pans may have been used in rituals at the end of military careers or even after the end of a soldier's life, obtaining ritualized closure through the burial or relinquishment of an object symbolizing the location of the soldier's military service. Similar rituals may have taken place in another area of the north-west provinces: Roymans and Aarts have argued, although their evidence is not conclusive, that Batavian soldiers (many of whom would in fact have served on Hadrian's Wall) book-ended their military service with rites at sanctuaries in their homeland, e.g. the temple of Hercules at Empel.[58] A similar interpretation would in fact work well for the Bath pan, since it ties in thematically with the interpretations of ritual closure I have put forward for the deposition of pewter vessels and tablets.

A core component of this model of ritual relinquishment is that the reservoir is a place of chthonic significance, a place where objects can disappear through the swirling steam and quicksand into the depths of the earth. Elsewhere I have suggested that the water plays a role in these rituals of closure through its ability to effect transformation in other objects or people via its own ever-changing state as an element in flux,[59] but the chthonic power of the spring emphasized by the heat and steam is likely to be as, if not more, important. This chthonic conception of Sulis' *numen* may also be supported by our one ancient literary reference to Bath. Solinus, the late 3rd or early 4th century[60] author of the *Collectanea rerum memorabilium*, reports that in Britain

[58] Roymans and Aarts 2005: 354ff.
[59] Cousins 2014: 58.
[60] Hofeneder 2008: 138-139. Solinus was dated by Mommsen to the mid-third century (Mommsen 1864: v-viii) but more recent scholarship has argued for a later date.

> '*fontes calidi opiparo exculti apparatu ad usus mortalium: quibus fontibus praesul*[61] *est Minervae numen, in cuius aede perpetui ignes numquam canescunt in favillas, sed ubi ignis tabuit vertit in globos saxeos.'*
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> 'Hot springs are sumptuously equipped for human use: the divine spirit of Minerva presides over these springs, and in her temple the perpetual fires never decay into ashes, but rather when the fire has died out it turns into rocky balls.'[62]

The consensus has long been that Solinus is referring to Aquae Sulis in this passage; not only does Aquae Sulis match his description extremely well, it is the only site in Britain which does so.[63] It has also long been pointed out that the 'rocky balls' are likely to be chunks of coal from outcroppings near to the site.[64] Solinus did seem to have sources of information concerning Britain; the rest of his discussion of Britain contains some surprisingly accurate details – for instance, that Britain is a source for jet.[65] If we accept that he is describing rituals at the sanctuary, there are two points to make: first, that coal was burned in honour of Sulis and second, this was considered to be a notable, and characteristic, feature of the goddess' temple – noteworthy and distinguishing enough that word of it reached Solinus. Indeed, the coal's behaviour would likely have been striking to anyone used to the combustion of wood; a correspondent of J.G. Frazer described his first-hand experiences with Somerset coal in this way: 'I lived some 30 years ago at Frome in Somerset, and it took me some time to get used to the peculiar behaviour of the local house-coal, which after giving off

[61] It has occasionally been suggested that this line should be emended to read '*praeest Sulis Minervae numen*' (See Hofeneder 2008: 151-152 for an overview). While there is no need from a manuscript perspective for an emendation, the suggestion, according to S. Oakley (pers. comm.), is 'neither absurd nor implausible.' There is, then, a possibility, albeit faint, that Solinus had not only heard of Bath, but also knew the full syncretic name of the goddess.
[62] Solinus, *Collectanea rerum memorabilium* 22.10. My translation.
[63] Haverfield 1906: 221; Cunliffe 1969: 7, who points out that the equation goes back to Geoffrey of Monmouth in the 12th c.
[64] Lysons 1813: 3; Scarth 1864: 3; Haverfield 1906: 221.
[65] Solinus, *Coll.* 22.11.

its gases in the form of flame, leaves the grate full of dead coke, which soon goes out completely unless there is a good draft.'[66]

There is a small amount of archaeological evidence supporting Solinus' statement. Although no burnt coal was found during the 20th century excavations,[67] the 19th century antiquary J.T. Irvine noted a find of 'a quantity of coal ashes…and thrown on it a large Roman cup' in the northwest corner of the temple precinct.[68] No coal from Bath has been tested so far, but tests of coal from other sites in the region around the Severn imply that local sources of coal were being used by the inhabitants of the area.[69] Evidence for the use of coal in ritual contexts in Britain, however, is exceedingly rare. Coal has been found in 4th century layers at the temple at High Nash (Glos.);[70] on the other hand, coal from the shrine at Nettleton (Wilts.), although occasionally cited as evidence of coal in a ritual context,[71] seems rather to be associated with the site's transformation into an industrial settlement.[72] While it is possible that the use of coal at other ritual sites has either gone unrecognized, or has left no archaeological trace (either because the coal was entirely consumed or it was completely cleared from the site after use), the archaeological evidence as it now stands supports the impression from Solinus that the burning of coal was a singular part of ritual practice at Aquae Sulis – not merely rare in comparison with Solinus' continental experiences, but rare within Britain itself. Perhaps, then, coal, a material emerging from the ground, was seen as a particularly appropriate fuel for Sulis' cult: taken together, both the coal and the spring place heat from the earth at the heart of worshipers' experience of Sulis.

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[66] Letter, Thomas C. Cantrill to J.G. Frazer, 24th May, 1921. Recorded in a MS note by Frazer on the last page of his personal copy of T. Mommsen's edition of Solinus (held in the Classical Faculty Library, University of Cambridge).
[67] Unburnt coal was found in the period 5 layers (i.e. after the temple had fallen into disuse) (Cunliffe and Davenport 1985: 35).
[68] Cunliffe and Davenport 1985: 35.
[69] Smith 1996: 379.
[70] Dearne and Branigan 1995: 92.
[71] Travis 2008: 159.
[72] Wedlake 1982: 68, 220; Dearne and Branigan 1995: 94.

I want to conclude with a brief word about the role of water in the bathing complex. The sanctuary at Bath was certainly designed by people thoroughly immersed in Roman cultural *mores*,[73] and given the centrality of bathing in Roman life, it is hardly surprising that they chose to exploit the hot springs in this way. The layout of the site, however, strongly suggests that there was both an increasing physical and conceptual disconnect between the waters in the reservoir and the waters once they got to the baths: despite their proximity, there was, for instance, no logical path for visitors to Aquae Sulis to get from one place to the other. In the Baths' initial phase, bathers would have had a view onto the reservoir of the spring as they passed through the central hall of the complex to the Great Bath; the experience of bathing and the experience of viewing the sacred heart of the site would thus initially have been intertwined. [74] By the second phase, however, probably at some point in the second century, these two experiences were disconnected by changes made to the layout of the central hall, which blocked the windows to the spring from view. [75] This suggests that, although the baths were technically fed by the hot water from the reservoir, as time went on the activities taking place in the baths were consciously separated from the ritual activities taking place at the reservoir edge. There is also no evidence for any ritual activity within the bathing complex itself. It is possible, then, that the hot water of the baths, although coming from the sacred spring, was not part of the ritual experience of visitors. In other words, as the water left the spring and entered the baths, perceptions of its purpose may have changed from the ritual functions I have described above, to a more mundane appreciation of the physical pleasure it could afford to bathers: the 'sumptuously equipped' waters of Solinus' description.

[73] Cousins 2016: 104.
[74] Cunliffe 1969: 103.
[75] Cunliffe 1969: 104-105.

These pleasures of bathing bring me thematically full-circle to where I began, with the rise of the baths for healing and social enjoyment in the early modern period. There is more to say about Roman Aquae Sulis, of course. In this paper I have focused on differing perceptions of the waters through time, and not through space, but the ways in which Aquae Sulis does or does not compare to other watery sites in Britain and Gaul is equally important – although left for another day. I hope, however, that I have shown to what degree our modern perceptions of the Bath waters have obscured the Romano-British context, and made some steps to putting that context, and in particular the chthonic force of Sulis' waters, back at the heart of discussion where it belongs.

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