

Human Sacrifice?

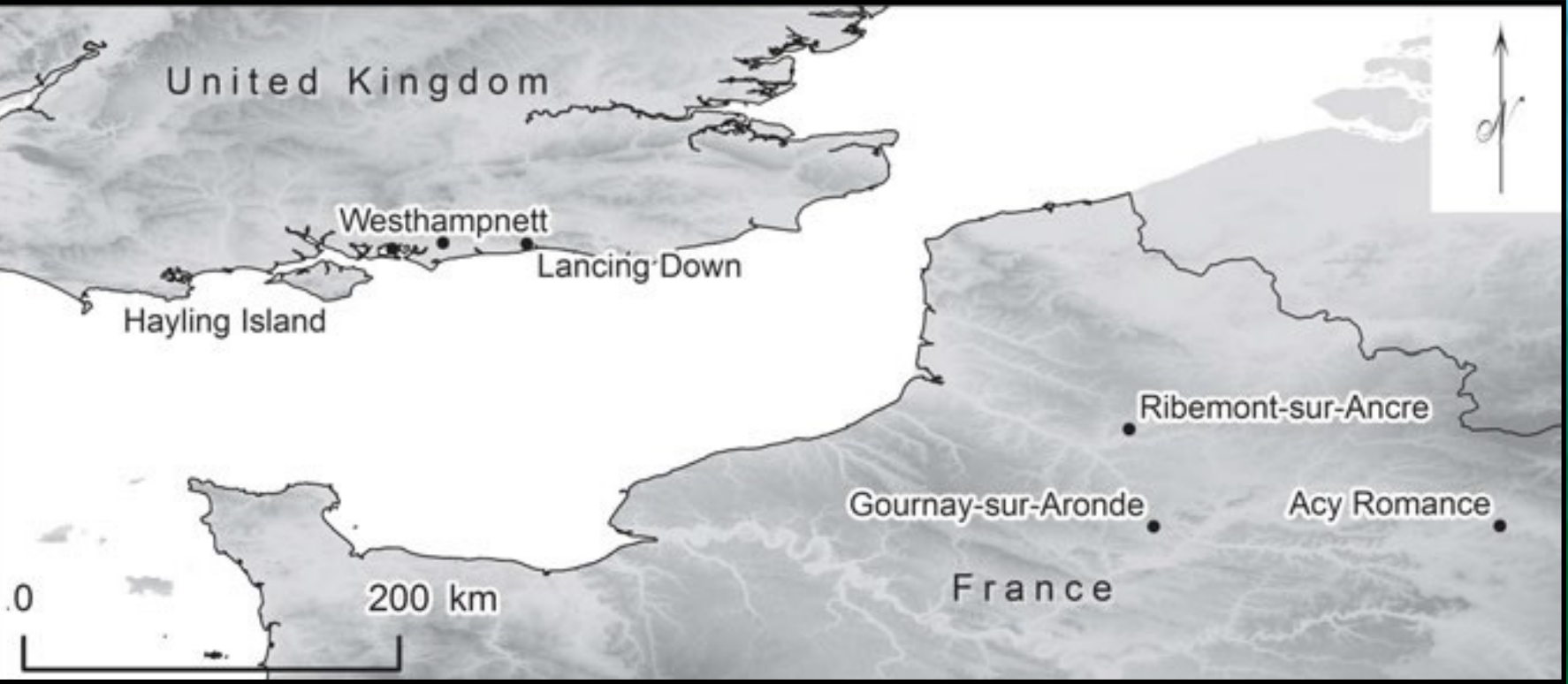
One thing that we come across when looking at the Celts is that it is believed to have performed human sacrifices, one of the reasons for this is because of authors like Diodorus writing “It is in consonance with their savagery that they practice a unique impiety in their sacrifice... they also use prisoners of war as sacrificial victims in paying honour to their gods” (Diod, 5, 32, 5). There is no confirmed evidence to say that there were human sacrifices. What we do have is evidence to suggest that there were human sacrifices as one author wrote “contain the remains of several humans who may have died in battle, but who equally could have been sacrificed as captives of war” (Green, 1997). Looking at this work we can see that this author in particular has no clear answer as to the reason of the bodies being buried there. Yet one author does back Miranda Green up by writing “suggests that the reports of human sacrifice were not exaggerated” (Collins, 2003). But one again we are only going by the writings of Diodorus, and what we find in the archaeological evidence, which is compelling but still not finite.



Partial skeleton of which one of the vertebrae was cut by a sword stroke (Protohistoryfunerary, 2016)

Is it really a Celtic site?

The reason this site is a good case study to use as insight into Celtic society is because of the unique tradition that is seen there, Nicky Garland wrote that “they represent a unique mortuary tradition not comparable to other known Iron Age sites” (Garland 2013). Yet there is a problem when looking at this site, as it could be argued that it is not a Celtic site due to it having a unique structure to it. We could argue that it is not a Celtic site for this reason.



A map showing the general area in France as to where Ribemont-sur-Ancre is (Garland, 2013)

Ribemont-sur-Ancre.

Function of the site.

A suggested function of this site could be that it was only used during certain times of the year, this being during the festivals, Maureen Carroll wrote “The combination of cult theatre and temple is well known in Gaul, for example Ribemont-sur-Ancre ..., the theatre being used at times of religious festivals and assemblies of the native population” (Carroll, 2001). This idea of it being used for festivals connects to the idea of human sacrifices being performed as they may have only happened at certain times of the year. Another reason to suggest that this area was used during festivals is because of the uniqueness of it, as “about 1,000 individuals aged fifteen to twenty years were stacked and criss-crossed into a sinister cubic monument measuring 1.60m each way” (Eluère 1993). This could also suggest that there was a religious significance behind doing this, but due to the people of the area not writing many things down, the true function behind this building is lost to us.



A statue of what is believed to be a dog holding two heads to represent the cult of the head (Bren279, 2015). Which connects to the idea of the head being missing.

Characteristics about the site.

One noticeable thing about this site in particular is that archaeologists “discovered an extraordinary structure build almost entirely of 2,000 human limb bones” (Green 1997). It could be suggested that this is the only sort of structure discovered in the area during the La Tène period. This connects to the idea of human sacrifice, yet we could also suggest the idea of ancestor worship. In another book it is described that “Community ossuaries made pillar-like structures of the enclosure” (Eluère 1993). To connect to this one author wrote “human heads are noted by their absence despite the remains of several hundred individuals being found on the site” (Collins, 2003). This scholar is one that has noticed the absence of the skull, as the functions of using bones is explained but there are merely speculations as to why there is no skull. This also suggest that it is most likely human sacrifice rather than it being ancestor worship. One thing to note about this site is that it is “one of the largest rural sanctuaries in Gaul” (Eluère 1993). This suggests that Ribemont-sur-Ancre could have used by many people of the time due to its size, as rituals were performed locally, but if there was a large festival there could be the possibility of many people coming together to celebrate it.

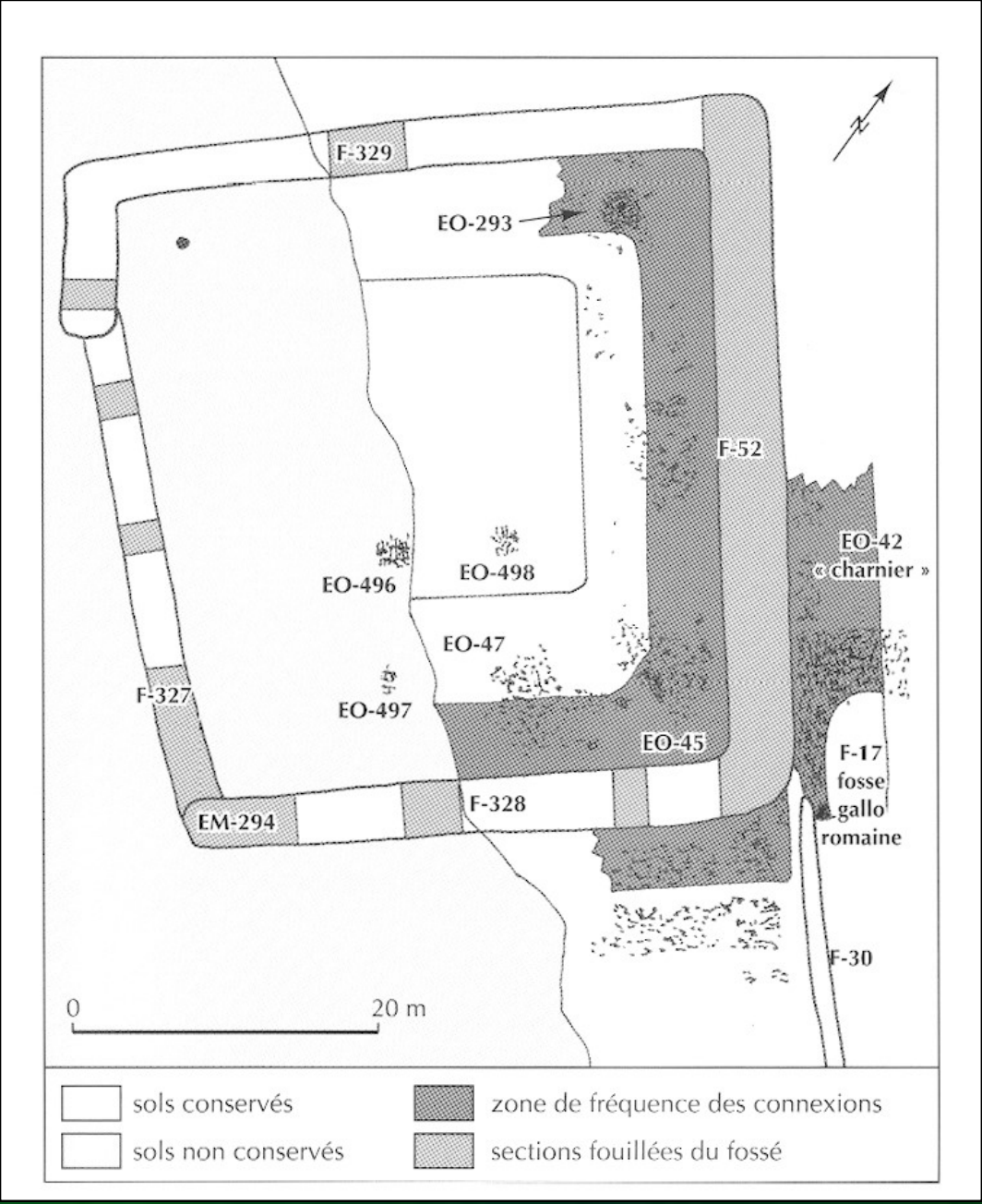


Image showing the excavations of the ditch in Ribemont-sur-Ancre (Bataille, 2016)

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