

CHAPTER 4

Material Culture and Religious Affiliation in 4th-Century Gaul

A Time of Invisibility

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Abstract

A still poorly understood, let alone explained, page of history is the evolution of pagan cult places in the Western Roman empire from the 3rd to the 5th century CE. Based on available sources, all, or nearly all, has already been said on the restoration of the imperial state and Roman city-states after the crisis of the 3rd century, the slow integration of Christian communities into the life of cities, and the continuity of paganism until its near destruction under Theodosius at the end of the 4th century. At the same time, the transformation of public religious systems organised by cities from the Augustan period onwards remains in large part unknown. The reason for this is first and foremost the disappearance of epigraphical sources after 250 CE, poorly replaced by the works of Christian or pagan writers, often rhetorical and polemical. This chapter evaluates the fundamental problem of

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religious transformations in the 4th century, starting from the results of recent excavations, showing that a certain number of great civic sanctuaries, built and restored at great expense by local elites from the 1st to the beginning of the 3rd century, had already been abandoned and even dismantled in the second half of the 3rd century. This phase of abandonment, occurring before the conversion of Constantine and the rise of Christianity as the official religion, reveals an essential change in religious practices in the provinces and a transformation of religious identities, in the way of being pagan. Related to this is the transformation of the urban landscape in the provinces of Gaul, confirming that the celebration of public sacrifices and *ludi scaenici*, of big festivals, seems to have ceased in the 4th century, the fortification of towns taking priority over religious festivals. What was it, then, to be pagan or Christian in the 4th century in Gaul, when the big festivals had ceased, and when Christian communities were not yet constructing monumental meeting places or churches and cathedrals, a process only documented by archaeology from the very end of the 4th century and into the 5th century?

Keywords: pagan cult places, 4th century, Christian communities, religious transformations, archaeology, civic sanctuaries, religious identities, urban landscape

A Decline of Civic Religion

The interpretation of the life of sanctuaries in Late Antiquity is still often based on old archaeological records and is therefore incomplete and founded on an uncertain chronological framework. The activity of a shrine is usually described based on the fragile testimony of 4th-century coins found on sites, while the question of the circumstances of abandonment, violent or not, is invariably raised (Lavan and Mulryan 2011). A distorting effect is given by tables showing a linear evolution of the use of cult places from the 1st to the 4th century, without regarding criteria as fundamental as the reliability of archaeological data, the status of shrines (public or private) or the precise characterisation of religious activities. The considerable methodological progress made by archaeology in the last 30 years and the development of rescue archaeology in France and neighbouring countries provide the conditions for a careful examination of the evolution of cult places in Late Antiquity. It is now possible to work on the detailed phasing of sites

and the characterisation of material remains, as well as to consider the specific contexts of discovery of a variety of archaeological materials (pottery, coins, small finds, animal bones, plant remains etc.), enabling us to study religious practices and how they changed.

In Rennes/Condate, the capital of the Riedones, in the second half of the 3rd century, a town wall was built, enclosing a small portion of the urban area of the High Empire, in accordance with a general trend observed in Roman Gaul. The wall is built on a massive foundation made with blocks of granite and limestone removed and reused from destroyed buildings. And some of these blocks come from the great civic sanctuary dedicated to the main god of the Riedones, Mars Mullo, especially from the basilica of the temple where the statues of the *numina pagorum*, the patron gods of the territorial subdivisions, the *pagi*, would have stood (Figures 4.1 and 4.2).¹ The use of the great



Figure 4.1: Section of Rennes late antique city wall discovered in 1958. Columns are used to fill the internal part of the wall. Photograph: H. Couâsnon.



Figure 4.2: In Rennes the cult of Mars Mullo was organised as the main cult of the *civitas*, chaired by a flamine. Source: *AE*, 1969–1970, 405a, Musée de Bretagne. Released under the license Creative Commons BY-SA.

civic sanctuary as a stone quarry is a significant act. Indeed, with the adoption of the centralised system of the city-state at the beginning of the imperial era, the cult of Mars Mullo was organised as the main cult of the *civitas*, chaired by a flamine. A municipal decree in 135 CE (*AE*, 1969–1970, 405a) indicates that Mars Mullo had a temple (*templum*) associated with a basilica, a monumental hall, in which were displayed statues representing the divine powers of the *pagi* of the city-state. Such an organisation was the result of the religious integration of the territory of the city-state within the municipal system; it implicated the *pagani* in the public religion of the Riedones. In Trier, where the

same organisation is attested, we know that the main god of the Treveri was Lenus Mars and that at a fixed date, the tutelary deities of the *pagi* were in the same way associated with the public ceremonies organised in the great temple, endowed with a theatre and public baths (Figure 4.3).² Public sacrifices were therefore celebrated at Trier and Rennes, bringing together all sections of the city-state; sacrifices were given in honour of the great civic god and also the gods of the *pagi* under the chairship of the local priests, all members of the local assembly.

What happened, then, to these large public celebrations when, at the end of the 3rd century, the local authorities of Condate/Rennes decided to dismantle at least partially the great sanctuary of Mars Mullo? One might naturally think that the main altar was maintained, but to remove the statues of the *numina pagorum* and the *summi viri* would have had consequences for the organisation of the public cult and for local religious memory. Whatever the aspects of sacrifices cel-

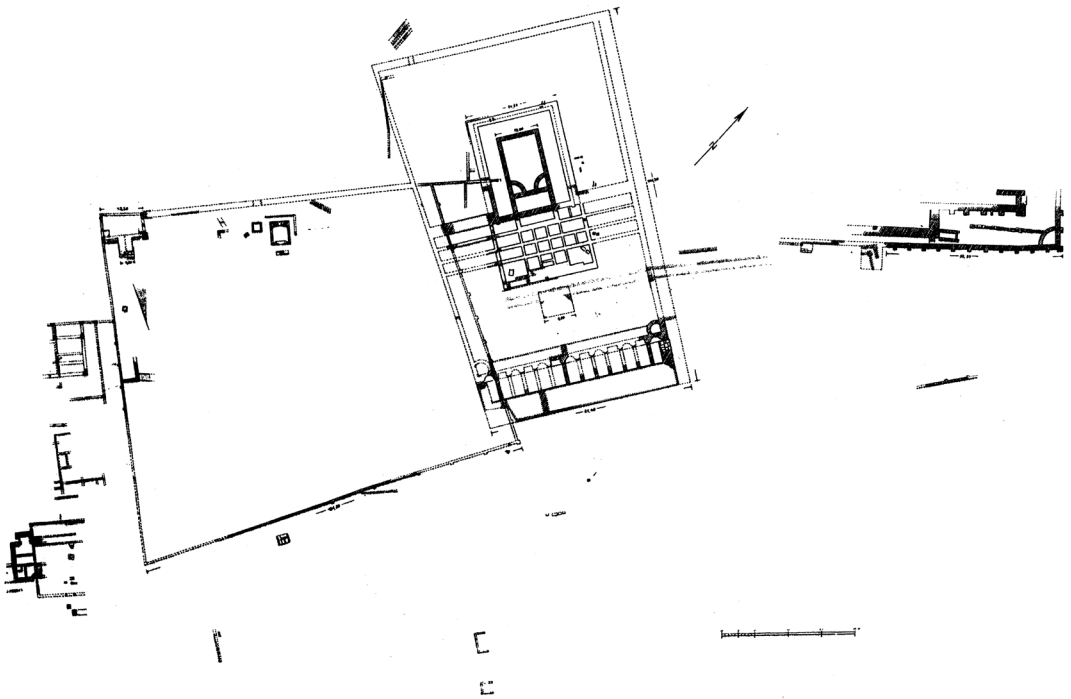


Figure 4.3: In Trier the main god of the Treveri was Lenus Mars, who was installed in a great temple, endowed with a theatre and public baths. Reproduced from Gose 1955.

celebrated in the ruins of the sanctuary, I doubt that the great festivals were still celebrated, bringing together the *pagani* of the city-state and feeding the local market with fresh sacrificial meat.

Close to the Riedones, among the Eburovices, it is possible to further interrogate this phenomenon thanks to a recent excavation made at Vieil-Évreux, the site of a great civic sanctuary located six kilometres from the capital Evreux/Mediolanum Aulercorum (Guyard et al. 2012; Guyard et al. 2014, 39–50). The monumentality and the richness of the religious complex indicate that it was used for public festivals and paid for by public funds and local elites. It is certainly where the patron deity of the Eburovices was installed. The main temple was completely rebuilt and embellished again in the early 3rd century, but it did not survive the events of the second half of the century. The stratigraphy shows that the temple was carefully dismantled in the last quarter of that century. The question remains of what happened to the bronze statues of the *numina pagorum* of the sanctuary of Condate/Rennes, since only the stone bases were reused within the city walls; we undoubtedly have the answer at Vieil-Évreux, where the destruction levels contain the metal *ornamenta* of the sanctuary: fragments of the statues of Jupiter, Apollo and Minerva, but also of liturgical furniture. The closure of the great temple of the Eburovices marked the end of the great public ceremonies held in honour of the patron god of the community. One may consider the possibility of the repatriation of the cult to the capital, but it is hard to believe when seeing the state of the public monuments in towns at that time. In any case, the programmed dismantlement of the great civic temple site indicates that the local authorities planned and supervised the process, and it is difficult not to think that this organised destruction of Vieil-Évreux had no connexion with the new construction project planned a few kilometres away: the new town wall.

The increasing amount of archaeological data reveal that this process of degradation or destruction was in fact more general than might be thought.³ Among the Coriosolites, still in the west of Gaul, the great sanctuary of Le Haut-Bécherel near the capital, with a configuration similar to that of the temple of Mars Lenus in Trier, experienced a slight drop in usage in the middle of the 3rd century, with traces of the complete reuse of goods and construction materials (Figure 4.4). Among the Nervii, the great sanctuary of Blicquy, where we have recovered important infrastructure such as baths and a theatre, was abandoned



Figure 4.4: Among the Coriosolites, the great sanctuary of Le Haut-Bécherel was ravaged by a fire in the second half of the 3rd century. Photograph: A. Provost. All rights reserved.

in the 260s. The theatre, which was built on wooden structures and could accommodate 6,000 people, was abandoned at the same time. A nearby necropolis testifies, however, to a certain continuity of human occupation. This phenomenon seems to reflect a major change in common behaviour as well as in the internal organisation of the commu-

nity. In Reims/Durocortorum, capital of Gallia Belgica, the temple of Rue Belin was destroyed by fire around 250 only to welcome a secular occupation in the second half of the 3rd century. Two deep wells were then built reusing the blocks of the temple and the surrounding monuments. Later, during the construction of the town wall in the time of Constantine, civic authorities did not hesitate to dismantle the monumental altar of the Princes of Youth erected in the forum in the Augustan period (*AE* 1982, 715; *CIL* XIII, 3254), even if it was one of the first religious monuments of the *civitas* and one of the first expressions of municipal autonomy. Sometimes destruction came a little bit later, as for example in Allonnes, where the great sanctuary of the Cenomani was ravaged by a fire in the second quarter of the 4th century. However, if this event marked the definitive end of the sanctuary, it seems that the temple was already partially abandoned in the second half of the 3rd century. At this precise time the inhabitants of Le Mans/Vindinum, the *civitas* capital, stopped throwing personal offerings in the mud of the sacred pond located on the edge of the town. At Avenches/Aventicum, colony of the Helvetii since Vespasian, the urban community was installed at the same time as a religious district, which developed on the edge of the town. The site had hosted a variety of gods up until the 3rd century, including an important but anonymous one installed in the great temple of Cigognier. In front, a theatre welcomed performances (*ludi scaenici*) completing the worship of gods and the sacrifices that animated the public life of the colony. All this stopped in the second half of the 3rd century, when the theatre was transformed into a fortress surrounded by a wide defensive moat. Life there did not quite end, however, as is shown by the existence of shops and workshops in the neighbourhood.⁴

Can we qualify these phenomena? Epigraphy gives some information, despite the extreme dearth of inscriptions from 250 CE.⁵ In Dalheim, a *vicus* of the colony of the Treverii, an inscription recently discovered tells us that the inhabitants of the *vicus* restored their public baths 'destroyed by the violence of barbarians' around 250 (Krier 2011). As it should be, a religious ceremony was celebrated, commemorated by an altar in honour of the Divine House and the goddess Fortuna, habitual patron of the baths – 'for the preservation of the Empire', says the inscription. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that it was a military person, Marinianus Marinus, centurion of the eighth Augustan legion, who 'took care' of the reconstruction. This mention of the intervention

of a representative of the Roman state is not trivial, at a time when the religious activity of the *vicus* was suffering a certain decline: temple D in the religious complex was abandoned shortly after the middle of the 3rd century. The text of Dalheim is exceptional because after 250, inscriptions become very rare. At Til-Châtel (*CIL* XIII, 5622), an altar was erected in 250 or 251 in the context of a local sanctuary. At Vieux/Aregenua (*CIL* XIII, 3163), capital of the Veliocasses, C. Victorius Felix erected, perhaps between 260 and 268, an altar to the god Mars at a temple in town for the salvation of his family, and in the finest tradition of the early empire. At precisely the same time, the old forum of the town shows signs of transformation, part of the public buildings becoming a kind of slaughterhouse and the richly adorned curia for the *senatus* even being abandoned. The rest of the inscriptions are all located on the Rhine border and related to a strong military presence, even when the municipal authorities are mentioned. In 276 at Mainz, a *decurio*, Marcellinius Placidinus, ordered a votive altar ‘in h[onorem] d[omus] d[ivinae]’ and for the goddess Luna in an unknown context (*CIL* XIII, 6733). In the same town, between 293 and 305, the *civitas* celebrated a sacrifice to the Capitoline triad and the immortal gods for imperial salvation, certainly in the context of the restoration of the empire, when the barbarians were pushed back beyond the Rhine (*CIL* XIII, 6727). The military aspect is in any case well marked on an altar at Bonn, erected in 295 by legionaries who restored the local temple of Mars in honour of the *domus divina* (*CIL* XIII, 8019). After this date, the gods of polytheism disappeared from provincial epigraphy, with the exceptions of the dedication of the mithraeum of Speyer (Noviomagus Nemetum) in 325, again in a military context, and two recently discovered inscriptions from the 4th century from another mithraeum in Angers/Iuliomagus (Molin, Brodeur and Mortreau 2015). The other texts, just as rare, appear in a Christian context in Lyon in 334 (St Irene’s Church), at Valcabrière near Lugdunum Convenarum in 347 and at Autun in 378, and even the Manes are still mentioned on a funeral inscription from 352 in Zülrich in lower Germany. While few texts emerge from an epigraphical meltdown after 250, those that do seem to indicate that in the second half of the 3rd century the maintenance of traditional religion is essentially documented in official and military contexts. Archaeology confirms this, showing that the vast majority of the temples were not restored at the time.⁶

Is it, then, possible to establish an initial observation that changes the generally accepted idea for Gaul of a slow decline of pagan sanctuaries throughout the 4th century. It seems that most of the great civic sanctuaries stopped operating in the second half of the 3rd century, long before the conversion of Constantine and the rise of Christianity as the official religion. Certainly, the disaffection of sanctuaries should not necessarily be seen as an exceptional phenomenon. Pliny the Younger's account (*Ep.* X, 96) of the Christians of Bithynia in the time of Trajan is well known. Pliny complained that the development of the Christian community had led to the abandonment of the temples of traditional gods. Of course, catastrophism is part of the rhetoric employed to expose and stop the activism of the Christians in Bithynia. However, this example indicates that cults could be neglected, and then reactivated on the initiative of the provincial governor, a member of the elite or the patron of a college. At Bath, in the province of Brittany, an inscription, unfortunately not dated, tells us that a religious place dedicated to the *numen* of Augustus, ruined by sacrilegious hands, was restored by a military veteran (*RIB* 152). At Virunum, a mithraeum was rebuilt after being deserted for many years (*CIL* III, 4796). The mention of an interruption of sacrifice is rare. Most of the time, the inscriptions simply specify that the place of cult was restored, sometimes *a fundamento*, from the foundations, even if this reconstruction concerned only the decoration. In the context of the disappearance and reactivation of cults, Nock has highlighted this phenomena with the example of the spectacular piety of an Arcadian aristocrat who restored all the temples and cults of the area (Nock 1972, 16ff). The most famous example is of course the restoration of Roman cults by Augustus, which operates in the context of political restoration of the Republic. Even if one can question the idea of a true religious crisis, except perhaps in the decade preceding Actium, the political action of Augustus had an impact on the intensity of Roman cults. 'The Augustan revival itself is the product of an age increasingly favourable to belief: religion was in the air', says Nock (1972, 9). In other words, the action of Augustus in favour of religion is presented as a normal reaction of piety, which was intended to restore the cults left fallow or dormant.

Now if we go back to the second half of the 3rd century, we are forced to face the facts. The restoration of the Roman state that followed the crisis certainly led to a one-time religious restoration policy

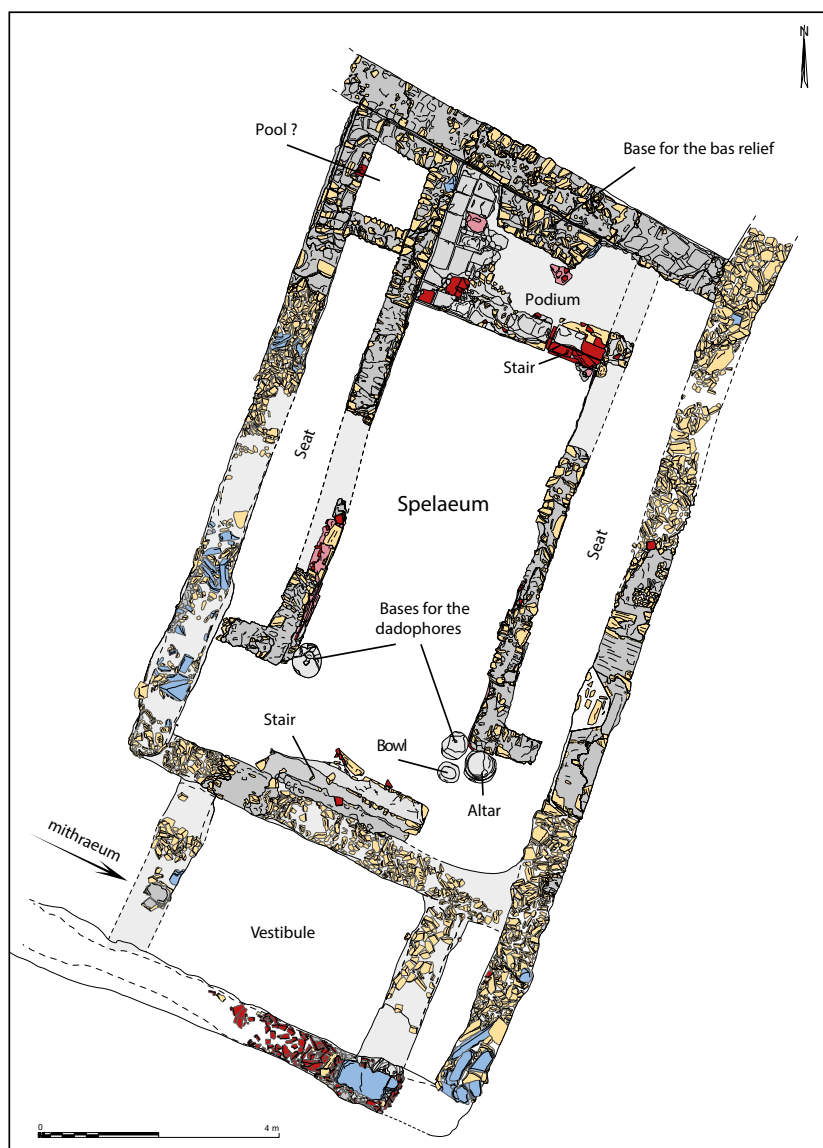
which left evidence in Rome, Italy, in militarised areas like the Rhine-land border cities, and in towns favoured by the imperial power such as Trier or Autun/Augustodunum, if we are to follow the panegyric of Eumenius describing flamboyant urban landscape (*Latin Panegyrics*, V; Hostein 2012; Hostein and Kasprzyk 2012). John Scheid, in a book that founded the principles of the Roman civic religion, concluded that people had, in the 3rd century, lost faith (in the sense of 'trust') (Scheid 1985). 'A religion that is inextricably linked to political faith cannot avoid being deeply touched when state structures are disrupted or in the process of dissolution.' In other words, it seems that we have gone from a historical form of polytheism to a new one, not so strongly based on the organisation of the city-state. The gods changed and some cults became obsolete, never again to be restored. Public religion, formed in the imperial period on the great gods invested by municipalities and the imperial cult, which kept each man in his place, provided community markers, and defined municipal autonomy and memory, was dissolved during the restructuring of the Roman state. In one generation, the system of 'polis religion' collapsed, ultimately as fast as parochial civilisation, as is so well described by Y. Lambert in the years following the Second World War (Lambert 1985). Lambert explains that Limerzel, a village in Morbihan in the 1960s, made a fundamental break with respect to a state in which religion was obvious; he speaks of a slow rupture by successive fragments, which saw the old parish civilisation replaced by a new world. Similarly, the events of the 3rd century in Gaul resulted in a slow decline through repeated shifts in the civic compromise that was based on large public ceremonies, replaced by another historical form of polytheism which forced communities to reinvent their pagan religion.

Clearly, with the restoration of the Roman state from Diocletian onwards, civic religion was not on the agenda of most of the city-states of Gaul. The cities were able to recover from the crisis or temporary difficulties, but the priority of the municipal governments, whatever may be said, was not the restoration of shrines and public altars but the construction of fortifications, which are known to be exceptional monuments and very expensive compared with other monuments of urban ornament. It is no surprise to see the approval of Diocletian and Maximian of the decision of a governor to prioritise the construction of town walls before the financing of games (Justinian Code, XI, 42, 1); this also shows that imperial power now partly dictated the allocation

of expenditures of the municipalities. Ramparts before religious festivals! There was no hesitation to demolish the sanctuaries and retrieve the ornaments, which raises an institutional problem, since they constituted inalienable property.⁷

Urbs Nova: Advent of New Towns in the 4th Century

This brings us to observe another fundamental characteristic of the 4th century: the material invisibility of the two religions involved, Christianity and paganism, particularly in towns. Were sacrifices still celebrated in the public square? In most cases, suburban sanctuaries were abandoned, and the forum area was most of the time excluded from the walled city. However, the mithraea of Angers continued to be busy ([Figure 4.5](#)). At Narbonne, at the Clos de la Lombarde, in the apse of an already abandoned bath, a cult place dedicated to Isis was attended by a small community.⁸ In the same town, the great temple of the city that had clearly seized the imagination (Ausone, *Ordo urbium nobilium*, v. 120–23) ended up being dismantled at the end of the 4th century to fuel the construction of the new harbour. In Toulouse, at the same time, the marble and limestone of the capitol temple were systematically salvaged, but it is very probable that public ceremonies had ceased for some time already. These monuments were obviously maintained for a time thanks more to their memory status within the local community than to their true religious function. However, this situation is not incompatible with the Christian topography of the cities of the 4th century, on the contrary. Indeed, we must recognise that Christian communities of Gaul did not build monumental churches at that time, or at least monuments to mark the urban space: they wouldn't do so until the very end of the 4th century. This is the date that is given to a basilica discovered in the corner of the *castrum* of Bordeaux, near Saint-André Cathedral and to the baptistery of a Grenoble episcopal complex on land occupied by a public monument or an aristocratic house. At the same time, at the very end of the 4th or the beginning of the 5th century, the first cathedral of Geneva was erected above a small building identified as an oratory; this is also the date given to the basilica/baptistery discovered in the *castrum* of Mandœuvre ([Figure 4.6](#)).⁹ There is only one conclusion to be drawn from all this: in the 4th century, religion had largely deserted the public arena



Plan du mithraeum d'Angers - clinique Saint Louis
 illustration © Didier Pfof - INRAP, réalisation Maxime Mortreux - Inrap GO
 état du bâtiment phase 5c : milieu à fin IVe s. (figures 190 et 191 du RFO de
 fouilles)

Figure 4.5: Plan of Angers' mithraeum in the second half of the 4th century. Image: Didier Pfof and Maxime Mortreux. All rights reserved.

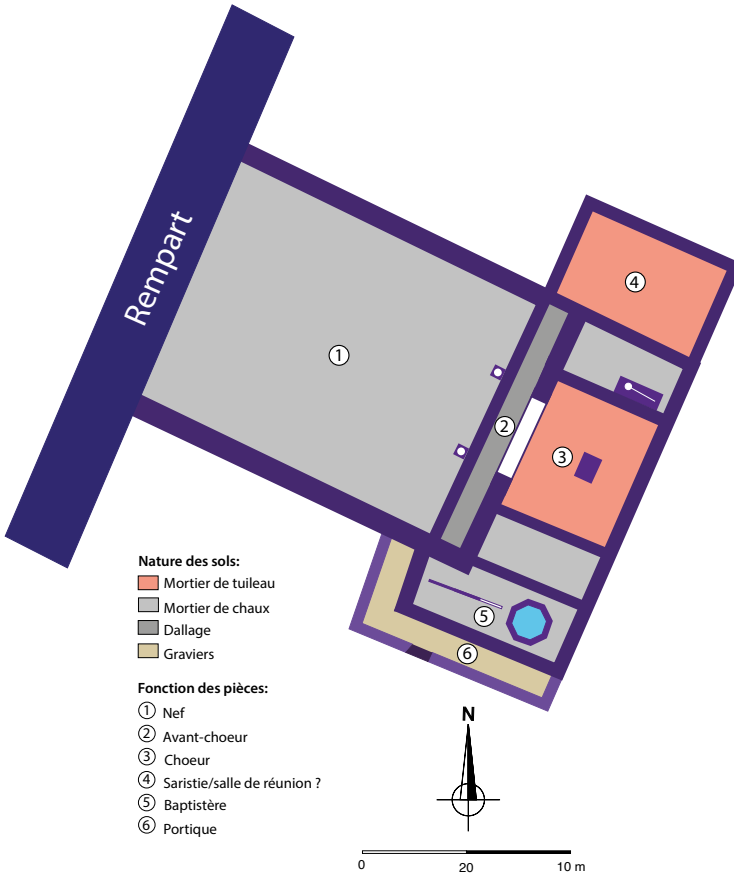


Figure 4.6: Plan of Mandeur church at the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 5th century. Image: Cédric Cramatte. All rights reserved.

and the field of urban representation before the construction of the first Christian monuments at the turn of the 4th and 5th centuries.

This frankly unprecedented situation of a city that is not organised by religious topography raises questions about the role played by civic spaces in the 4th century. We know the importance of the forum in cities of the early Roman empire: structured in the beginning around a curia and an altar of Rome and Augustus, the public squares were gradually monumentalised to accommodate all spaces and monuments that served the *dignitas civitatis* and the exercising of municipal

autonomy guaranteed by imperial power (Van Andringa 2015). If one focuses on the archaeological evidence, it is difficult to speak of an immutable maintenance of the forum area, at least in forms similar to those we observe in the early Roman empire. First of all, there is a total absence of evidence concerning the restoration of forum areas in the 4th century: town walls, baths, but never the forum. On the contrary, the available evidence rather suggests a restructuring or partial abandonment. The destruction of the forum of Vannes/Darioritum is dated from the late 3rd century, and it seems that this destruction corresponded to the beginning of the town wall construction. In any case, the forum area was left out of the walled town. At Limoges, the last traces of activities in the southern gallery of the forum are dated from the last quarter of the 3rd century. In Auch/Augusta Auscorum the abandonment is set in the decades preceding 370, while the forum of Amiens /Samarobriua experienced new uses in the first half of the 4th century. We can add new evidence with the recently excavated forum of Vieux/Aregenua which witnessed renewal works in the early 3rd century before being appropriated for slaughter and butchery activities at the end of the century. At the same time, the forum of Bavay/Bagacum became a *castrum*, but this restructuring is partially explained by the transfer of the *civitas* capital. These observations do not question certain functions of the forum, which could have continued to be used as a public place or a market, especially when the area was incorporated inside the town wall like in Reims or Amiens. However, in most cases, the forum was ignored by the new urban plan, now centred on the walled area. In Périgueux/Vesuna, the fortification dated to the first half of the 4th century was attached to the perimeter wall of the amphitheatre, but carefully avoided the forum area and the largest urban temple, stripped of all its ornaments (Figures 4.7a and 4.7b).¹⁰ The forum was also left away from the new walled towns of Paris and Rennes. In the latter, the blocks used for the foundation of the fortification dated to the turn of the 3rd and 4th centuries and obviously came from the forum area.

In the very real programme of urban restoration that followed the Great Crisis, in addition to the non-reoccupation of the abandoned suburban areas, I will single out two major events, the first being the abandonment or dismantling of large civic temples, the second being the importance given to the city walls in the new urban setting at the expense of major civic monuments like the forum. These changes are



Figure 4.7a: City wall of Périgueux. Photograph: Père Igor. Released under the license Creative Commons BY-SA.

too important to speak of urban continuity before the advent of the Christian city in the 5th century; they show instead that cities are necessarily the image of a particular historical situation and that they are renewed accordingly. The city of the 4th century was no exception to the rule: it was certainly a new town, a new kind of town, even if it stayed at the centre of the city-state organisation until the setting up of the Merovingian royal administration (Liebeschütz 2006; Krause and Witschel 2006). An obvious fact is that there was no attempt to repopulate the cities affected by the crisis of the 3rd century. On the contrary, the abandoned residential areas became demolition salvage yards that were integrated into huge construction projects: the walls programmed to define smaller or shrunken towns.¹¹

Built at different times according to local contexts between the second half of the 3rd century and the late 4th century, town walls became the representative monument of the urban fabric; the reasons for this were primarily military, after the raids and anarchic situations of the 3rd century, although as noted by Cassiodorus in the 5th century, in

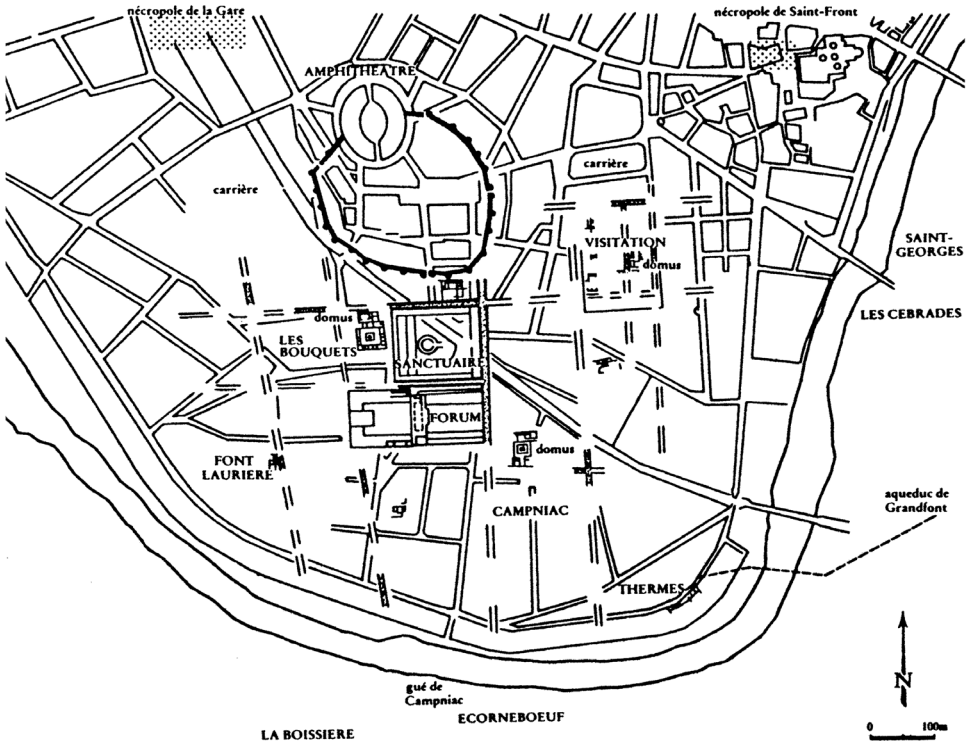


Figure 4.7b: Plan of Périgueux: 4th-century town wall and forum area.
Source: Girardy-Caillat 1996, fig. 82.

times of peace the wall served also as ornament to the city (Var. 1, 28, 1.): ‘and *ornatus pacis* ... and *bellorum necessitas*’. That they were still defensive works is indicated by the association of the amphitheatre, turned already into a bastion in the 3rd century, with the Constantinian wall of Tours, a phenomenon that is also found in Périgueux.¹² But the real change lies in what can be called the urban system. The city of the early Roman empire was first the production of elites in the name of civic compromise, which made members of the local aristocracy custodians of local autonomy and therefore essential elements of the empire. If the elites continued to serve the empire in the 4th century, under renewed offices, adapted to the new political context, their maintenance or social mobility was no longer based on urban representation shaped by the exercise of magistracy, urban domiciliation or the organisation of religious festivals. Another aspect of this evolution



Figure 4.8: A town according to the *Notitia Dignitatum*. Picture from the 15th century copying a Carolingian manuscript. Image: The Bodleian Library, Oxford.

was the disappearance of big funerary monuments at the gates of the town that linked individuals and their social memory to their city. After the crisis of the 3rd century, city programming was suddenly reduced to the defence of the community embodied by the construction of a fortification, erected with *spolia* coming from an urban system which ceased to exist, enclosing a condensed space where people continued to live and work but where religion and elites had much less need for representation areas. And it is precisely in this new town, defined by a rampart which had absorbed the entire municipal memory, that the Christian city arose – but much later, not until the 5th century, and very gradually ([Figure 4.8](#)).

A Religion in Pieces

In this context, with the decline of public sacrifices and the advent of new towns, we must evaluate the place of the gods of polytheism in this new world that is the 4th century, in the transformed city-state of Late Antiquity where imperial power favours Christianity. The end of the gods has not yet come, as evidenced by anti-pagan laws issued to respond to the problems of the time (like private haruspicine) and

particularly adapted to a new and fragmented religious situation. Archaeological records are there to raise the question of the scope of these texts and their geographical base. Which sacrifices and practices were condemned by 4th century imperial legislation in the context of a marked depletion of pagan cults and conversion to Christianity? Similarly, the absence of maintenance in many shrines from the 3rd century onwards raises questions about the aspect of the religious landscape tackled by Martin of Tours (Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini*, 12–15): is, then, the late paganism of Martin first the product of clerical representations at a time when the Christian authorities just took the offensive? (Mériaux 2010). After the death of Emperor Julian in 363 CE, all indications are that the Christians were kicking a man already down in their behaviour towards the pagans, at least when it comes to practices which were, in Gaul, no longer defined by public authorities and pagan sanctuaries.¹³ It is, then, necessary to question how the gods were worshipped in the 4th century. While the great sanctuaries were abandoned, some other shrines were visited: even if the *habitus* had changed, attendance at places of cult continued, leading to a transformed or simplified liturgy. While these places were not embellished or restored – except in rare cases – they invariably recorded traces of occupation in the form of coins discovered mostly scattered in the fills of the destruction.¹⁴

The religious practices of the 4th century must still be defined with better precision, particularly through a detailed study of archaeological remains such as those at the sanctuary of Fontaine l'Étuvée at Orléans/Cenabum (Verneau 2014). This shrine experienced intense activity in the 1st and 2nd centuries: people assembled there on a regular basis, vows were fulfilled and pledged as indicated by the testimony of the numerous ex-votos left on the site, a spacious portico was added thanks to the generosity of Capillus; in the 4th century, archaeological evidence shows that few people came to the abandoned and partly demolished sanctuary for religious purposes (the tile roof of the gallery had collapsed), and that they left few coins or ritual traces (Figures 4.9a and 4.9b). In this case, the main factors are certainly the disappearance at this time of anatomical ex-votos and the organisation of practices in private ceremonies. From an archaeological point of view, the discreteness of the archaeological traces at cult places still visited in the 4th century is comparable to the extremely subtle traces recorded in domestic cult in imperial times.



Figure 4.9a: Inscription from the sanctuary of La Fontaine-l'Étuvéé at Orléans. Photograph: Musée d'Orléans. All rights reserved.

This situation is not isolated. The evidence shows that a new way of being pagan was adapting to a fragmented religious landscape, and it confirms the sharp decline of the civic impregnation of religion while Christianity was slowly rising as a new reference system. After the crises of the 3rd century, the changes in the administration of the empire were the basis of a second pagan era, which could be termed an 'occasional paganism': pragmatic and functioning in closed social circles, it was opposed to the ancient form of paganism, which was based on the city-state and celebrated by large public sacrifices organised and financed by magistrates and priests. When the gods changed, they were also more vulnerable. The places of worship of the Gallic provinces recorded hardly any traces of occupation or visits from the reign of Theodosius onwards, the same time in which stones from the *Capitolium* of Narbonne were reused to build the new harbour of the town and when we see the very first remains of churches and baptisteries:¹⁵ the oldest examples of well-dated churches such as those in Mandeure

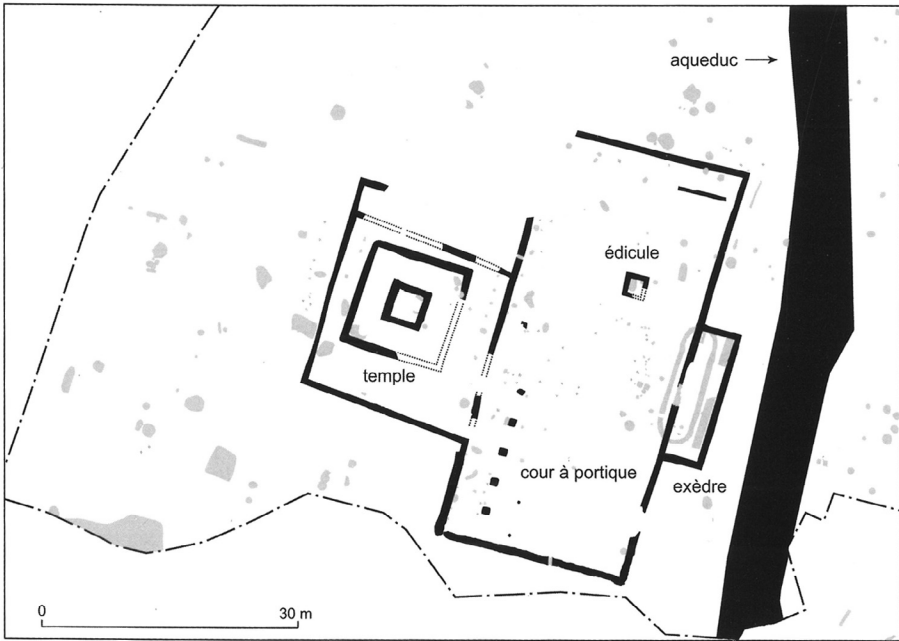


Figure 4.9b: Plan of the recently excavated sanctuary of La Fontaine-l'Étuvée at Orléans. Source: F. Verneau.

or l'Isle-Jourdain emerged at the end of 4th or the beginning of the 5th century. The intransigence of anti-pagan laws and the sudden resonance given to Saint Martin's actions against pagan temples show that the imperial and ecclesiastical institutions then tightened their policy against paganism – a paganism that was no longer and had long since ceased to be irrigated by large community sacrifices.

Conclusion

What does archaeology allow us to say? We can say that from 250, the dominance of elites and civic concord are no longer expressed in community celebrations that bring the local population together in the great sanctuaries. After 280, the conditions of the traditional civic compromise are no longer met, the municipal temples are not restored by the elites, and some were even dismantled at the initiative of local authorities. Municipal memory framed by public festivals and the monumen-



Figure 4.10: Foundation of tower C, late antique city wall of Périgueux. Photograph: Ch. Durand, 1920.

tality of civic sanctuaries in the beginning of the imperial era seemed to be suddenly forgotten ([Figure 4.10](#)). Civic compromise, based on a close link in city-states between public sacrifices, benefaction and elite domination, suffered an irreversible shift that changed the history and the pagan gods themselves. The religion of the 4th century can be qualified as a religion in pieces, expressing the breakdown or the divisions of big religious structures, Christians and pagans. This situation of fragmentation explains why people progressively constructed, from the end of the 3rd century, a kind of tailor-made religion: here a group of people offered a few coins and celebrated in a private ceremony in the ruined sanctuary of La Fontaine l'Étuvée; there a member of Narbonne/Narbo Martius elite reused a 2nd-century altar dedicated to Isis to organise a private shrine in his domus; there again, a small group of Mithra worshippers gathered without interruption until the end of the 4th century in Angers/Iuliomagus. In the same way, the owner of the

big villa of Lullingstone in Britain built a private church, which consisted of a small rectangular space, enlivened only by a simple niche its eastern wall.¹⁶ This idea of tailor-made religion certainly explains the material invisibility of religion in the 4th century. Religious duties were not conceived any more in the civic or public sphere, except maybe for the honours given to the emperors, which explains the maintenance of some *flamines* and *sacerdotes* in the documentation (Elvira concile).¹⁷ Religious duties were, then, conceived more as individual needs and explorations developed in small groups or communities, according to the local situation and local social pressures.¹⁸ This very peculiar situation of the 4th century explains why some freshly converted Christian people were still convening pagan ceremonies, as indicated by a canon of the Council of Arles in 375 CE that denounces this kind of practice. Being semi-Christians or Incerti, these people were just expressing their personal religious experiences at a time when religion had lost its civic character.

Notes

- 1 Aubin et al. 2014, 219–48; Bousquet 1971; Pouille 2008. On the cult of Mars Mullo, Van Andringa 2017, 156–60, 238.
- 2 Scheid 1991; Van Andringa 2017, 160–62, 258ff; also Van Andringa 2013, 468ff.
- 3 See the examples in Van Andringa 2014. This process has been already discussed in L'Huillier and Bertrand 2006.
- 4 Corseul (Le Haut-Bécherel): Provost, Mutarelli and Maligorne 2010, 219–25; Blicquy: Gillet, Demarez and Henton 2009; Reims: Neiss et al. 2015; Allonnes: Brouquier-Reddé and Gruel 2004; Le Mans: Chevet et al. 2014; Avenches: Blanc and Castella 2011.
- 5 Raepsaet-Charlier 1993, who inventories no more than a dozen of dated inscriptions in Gaul and Germany after 250.
- 6 *Contra* Goodman 2011, 168, who mentions a series of sanctuaries built or embellished in the 4th century. Those are in fact very few: see for example the temple of Matagne-la-Grande, Cattelain, Paridaens 2009; Paridaens, Cattelain and Genvier 2014; also, the case of Liberchies: Vilvorder 2014.
- 7 The juridical status of cult places is discussed by Thomas 2002.
- 8 Sabrié 2015. On the mithraea, CAG 33/2, 334–37 (Bordeaux); Molin, Brodeur and Mortreau 2015 (Angers).
- 9 Prévot, Gaillard and Gauthier 2014, 62–67 (Bordeaux), 107–16 (Grenoble); Bonnet 2009; Blin and Cramatte 2014.
- 10 Bayard and Massy 1979 (Amiens); Galliou 2009, 345–54 (Vannes); Gardes et al. 2012 (Auch); Girardy 2013 (Périgueux); Jardel and Lelièvre 2014 (Vieux); Loustaud 2000, 364 (Limoges).

- 11 Garmy and Maurin 1996. The importance given to the town wall is confirmed by the Theodosian Code, XV, 1, 32 and 33; see Arce 2015, 319; Van Andringa 2020.
- 12 Girardy 2013 (Périgueux); Seigne and Galinié 2007 (Tours).
- 13 This situation is not very far from the one described for the eastern part of the empire; Julian, Epist. 78 (4), from 361, cf. Belayche 2005, 349.
- 14 We know that money played an important role in the ritual of the early empire, like the stips deposited or thrown into the sanctuary. Obviously, the coins found in the 4th-century sanctuaries show that the rituals of that era borrowed some of these habits, ending visits made to the sanctuary or the use of equipment managed by the shrine or used with the prayer in a kind of reformulated liturgy.
- 15 Agusta-Boularot et al. 2014 (Narbonne); Blin and Cramatte 2014 (Mandeure).
- 16 Bowes 2008, 131.
- 17 Vives et al. 1963, canons 2, 3 and 4.
- 18 Bowes 2008.

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