

**WEEK 4** RITUAL, RELIGION AND THE ROMAN WALL:  
INTRODUCING RITUAL, RELIGION AND THE ROMAN WALL  
CASE STUDY: COVENTINA'S WELL

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The inscriptions from Coventina's Well are particularly interesting, because they give us such an interesting insight into the people who are dedicating to the goddess. The main stele there, which shows Coventina lying on a river bank, has lovely lettering, very carefully done lettering. And the man who is dedicating there is a prefect of the first cohort of Batavians. He is clearly a Roman citizen. He has three parts to his name.

But the other altars are very different. We have here, for example, a small altar set up by Mausaeus a junior officer of the first cohort of Frixiauvones. And we know that came from Coventina's Well because you can see the green staining from the coins.

You then have a man who is from the first cohort of Cubernians, which is this one here, Aurelius Campester.

That gives us two units which are different to the Batavians, who are the main unit at Carrawburgh.

Over here, though, we have an altar to the goddess nymph Coventina set up by Maduhus, a German, for himself and his family. Now, this is a particularly interesting thing to say, because mostly if you came from the German provinces, you would say that you came from a particular tribe. But here, he is saying he is a German. And we have another one tucked behind the big altar here, which is Aurelius Crotus also says he is a German.

So it may be that they were serving in a unit of Batavians, but their tribal identity was from another tribe altogether. But the fact that Maduhus is setting up the altar for himself and his family may suggest that he is moving as a family unit as well as a soldier.

These small altars-- and some of them are very small indeed-- do give us an insight into the personal religion of individual people. In addition to the stonework that was found in the well, there were also some small

offerings which were thrown in by the worshippers to give the goddess a present. This includes little brooches like this little one here, which shows a running deer, which is enamelled and very pretty, and there's some glass beads, that sort of thing.

There are also some artefacts which suggest that the rituals didn't just involve throwing material into the well, but involved burning incense, such as the thuribles here, which are made of clay. And quite a number of broken vessels, most of which seem to be drinking vessels, so it may be that there was a ritual feast involved.

As well as the artefacts that you might imagine are offerings, there are also some objects which may just be pure rubbish, which may include the glass bottle. Though it is also possible that the glass bottle contains some interesting liquids-- wine, oil, or perfumes-- that were given to the goddess.

But there are also two very puzzling objects in the well. One is a Bronze Age axe hammer, and the other is half a skull. Now one of things that the Romans were very keen on is that human sacrifice was not legal. And therefore it is highly unlikely that the skull was actually thrown into the well as part of a human sacrificial event. It is possible that this actually was found, like the Bronze Age axe hammer, was found somewhere in the region, and because it was human, they may have felt that the safe, sensible place to put it would be in a religious context such as the well. Certainly, the bottom jaw and teeth were not found with the skull, just the top part of the cranium.