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► **To cite this version:**

Matthew Loughton. Reuse, modification and ritual: Roman amphorae from the late Iron Age sanctuary of Corent (Puy-de-Dôme, France). Philippe Barral; Matthieu Thivet. Sanctuaires de l'âge du Fer. Actes du 41e colloque international de l'Association française pour l'étude de l'âge du Fer (Dole, 25-28 mai 2017), Collection AFEAF (1), AFEAF, pp.385-390, 2019, 978-2-9567407-0-4. hal-02891684

HAL Id: hal-02891684

<https://hal.science/hal-02891684>

Submitted on 7 Jul 2020

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Reuse, modification and ritual: Roman amphorae from the late Iron Age sanctuary of Corent (Puy-de-Dôme, France)

Matthew E. Loughton

Introduction

This article examines some of the notable practices concerning the modification, ritual treatment, and reuse of Republican amphorae on the late Iron Age sanctuary of Corent (Poux, Demierre, dir. 2015) (Fig. 1, n°1) topics which are currently of considerable academic interest (Peña 2007 ; Lawall, Lund, dir. 2011; Poux 2004). Just over 50,000 sherds of Republican amphorae with a weight of 5 tons were recovered, most of which came from the sanctuary enclosure ditch and the gallery. There are c.900 vessels mostly from the Dr.1A with moderate numbers of the Dr.1B and Dr.1C and rare Adriatic vessels (Lam. 2, Brindisi). As such the assemblage can be dated to the late second to the early first century BC with some La Tène D2 activity (Loughton 2014; Guichard *et al.* 2017).

Reuse of amphorae

Storage vessels

36 Dr.1s have been modified and reused as storage vessels (Fig. 1, n°2). This involved the removal by sawing or chipping of the upper section and the smoothing of the break on the lower reused part. Reused vessels account for c.4% of the amphora MNI. Similar and higher percentages are seen on other sites in the region (Fig. 2, n°1). Reused amphorae tend to be more common on sites with evidence for industrial activities (Gondole 'Les Chaumes', Toulouse 'caserne Niel', Villeneuve-St-Germain) (Loughton 2014, in prep. 2; Loughton, Alberghi 2012; Hénon 1995). Many of the reused Dr.1s came from the enclosure A and the amphora pavements around the wooden basins inside the sanctuary entrance (Fig. 1, n°2). It is possible that some of the unmodified amphora bodies from these features were also reused.

Amphora discs

There are 117 discs and 20 half-discs (broken discs?) from the sanctuary (Fig. 1, n°3). Their diameters range from 25 mm to 188 mm with a median of 70 mm (Fig. 4). These are roughly

finished and only rare examples have polished edges (Fig. 4, n°14) while none are pierced and we can exclude their use as loom weights. Most came from the lower levels of the sanctuary ditch (phase 1.2) with a small number from the enclosure A and the amphora pavements (phase 2) (Fig. 4). It has been argued that the ceramic discs from the sanctuary served as offerings, voting tokens or as substitute money. Such uses can be discounted for the amphora discs given their larger size, and that they were not deposited alongside the ceramic discs which came from the enclosure A, the gallery (phase 2), and the entrance area (Guichon 2015; Guichon, Gruel 2015) (Fig. 4). It is more likely, that the amphora discs served as vessel stoppers (Loughton in prep. 1). This use would account for the similarity in size of the Corent discs with those from other sites (Fig. 4).

Other 'worked/shaped amphora sherds'

Amphora were sometimes cut down into fan, triangular and rectangular shaped sherds (Fig. 4, n°18-32). One of the triangular sherds and some of the rectangular sherds have traces of smoothing and may have served as polishers (Fig. 4, n°23, 28-29). It is worth noting the concertation of rectangular sherds, one triangular and one fan shaped sherd from part of the eastern branch of the sanctuary ditch (Fig. 1, n°3). Many amphora discs were also recovered from this part of the ditch. Finally, three thin segments have been cut from Republican amphora handles (Fig. 4, n°33). These may have served as wedges and supports. Rare triangular, rectangular and fan shaped amphora sherds are also found on Gondole 'Les Chaumes' and Gergovie (Loughton in prep. 1). Large numbers of small cube shaped amphora sherds are known from the late first century BC funerary enclosure at Troyes 'Impasse des Carmélites' (Aube) (Olmer, Kasprzyk 2016).

Impact marks

Pierced and holed amphorae

Two bases have been pierced with small holes (c.1-2 cm diam.) through their centres, to allow for the decantation of their contents (Loughton, Alberghi 2015) or their use as funnels or

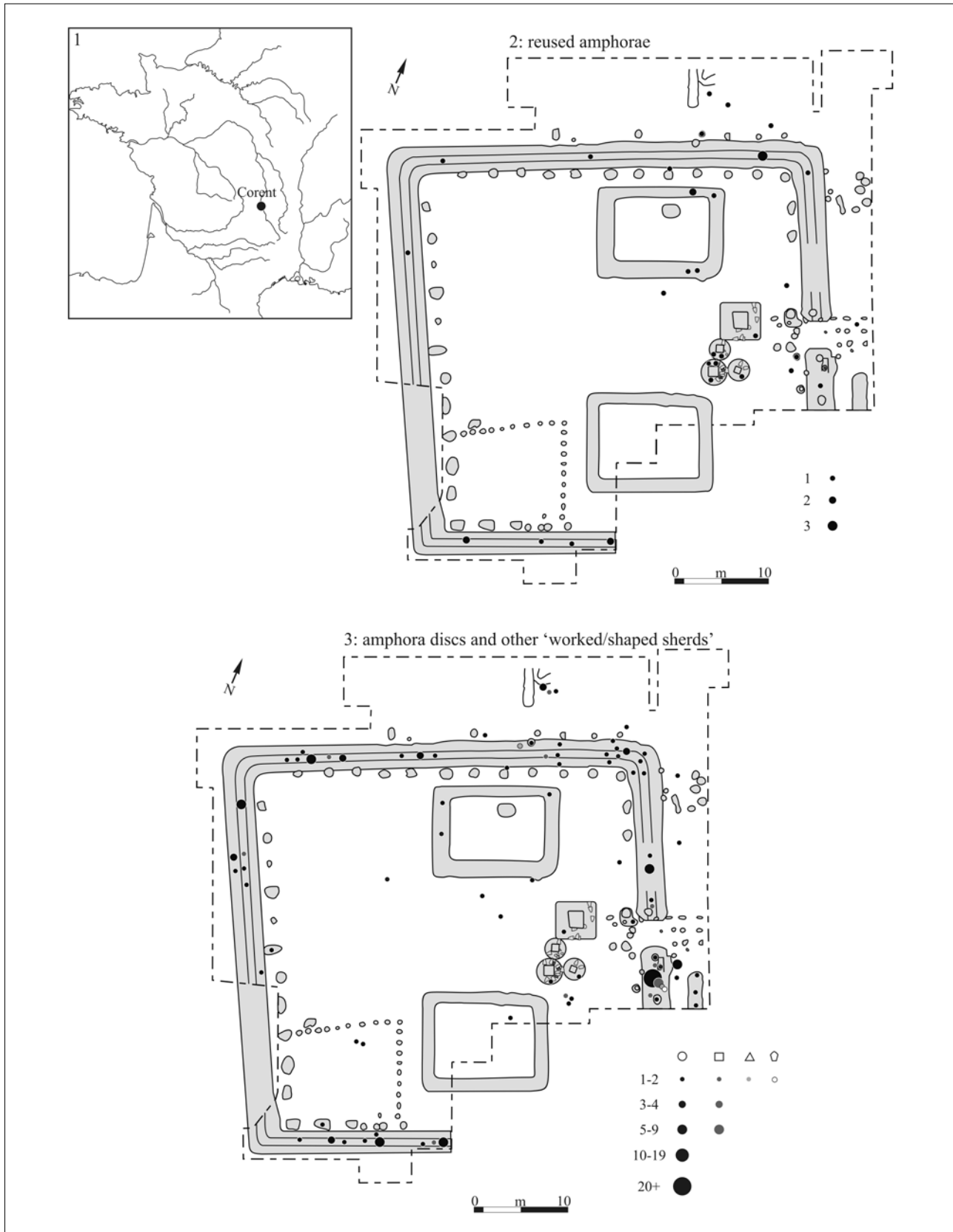


Fig. 1. Location of the Coront sanctuary (1), and the distribution of reused Dressel 1s (2), and amphora discs and other 'shaped/worked sherds' on the sanctuary (3).

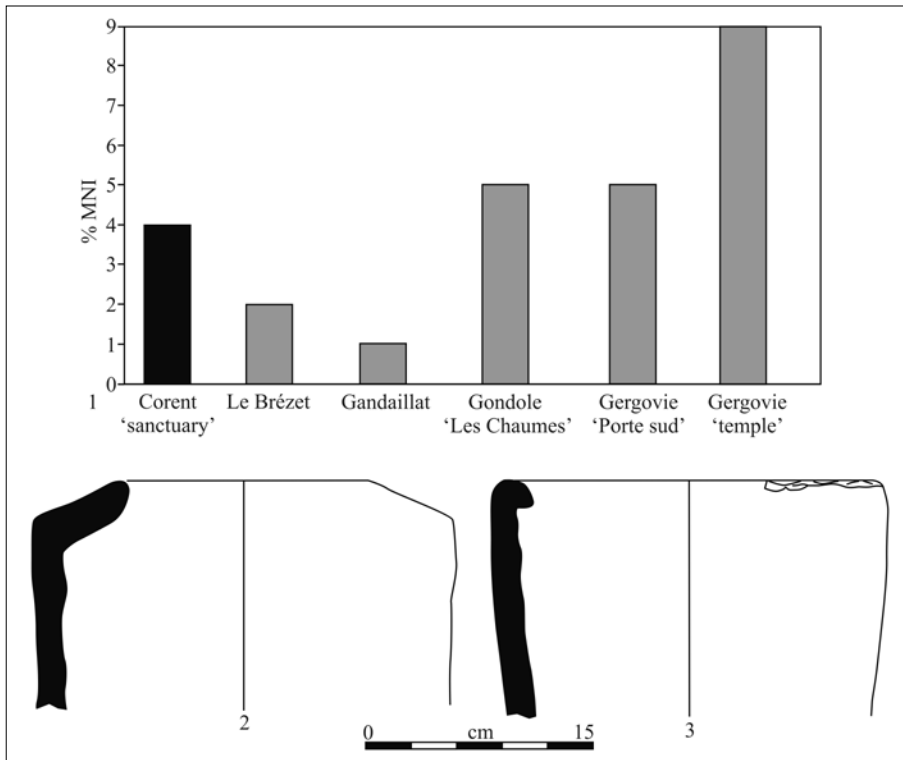


Fig. 2. Frequency (% of MNI) of reused amphorae on the sanctuary and for other late Iron Age sites in the region (1) and two reused Dressel 1s (2-3).

weights. Four large amphora discs (diam. 150-190 mm) (Fig. 4, n°15-17) may have been created by the opening of amphorae, which contained garum or salted-fish, by holing and the cutting of a large opening on the body (Loughton, Alberghi 2015).

Impact and tool marks

The rarity of amphora sherds with impact and tool marks and waste cut-offs (upper amphora-portions) suggests that amphorae and amphora-parts were not being modified within the sanctuary (Fig. 3). Instead, the reused Dr.1s were produced in other parts of the settlement. In contrast, on the La Tène D2 industrial suburb at Gondole 'Les Chaumes' large numbers of reused amphorae as well as the waste products from their production were found suggesting that these activities took place in the central zone of the excavation (Loughton in prep. 2). Cut marks are found on a small number of amphora sherds while chips have been removed from some bases (Fig. 5). The latter may have been produced during transportation as bases with similar marks are found on other sites in the region (Loughton 2014).

Amphora decapitation

Although the opening of amphorae by decapitation is well attested on late Iron Age sanctuaries (Poux 2004) evidence for this on the Corent sanctuary is rare. Decapitated amphorae only account for 0.5 % of the amphora MNI (Fig. 5, n°1-3). Indeed, decapitated amphorae are found on many of the late Iron Age sites in the region, and sometimes in greater numbers (Fig. 5, n°1) (Loughton 2014, in prep. 2).

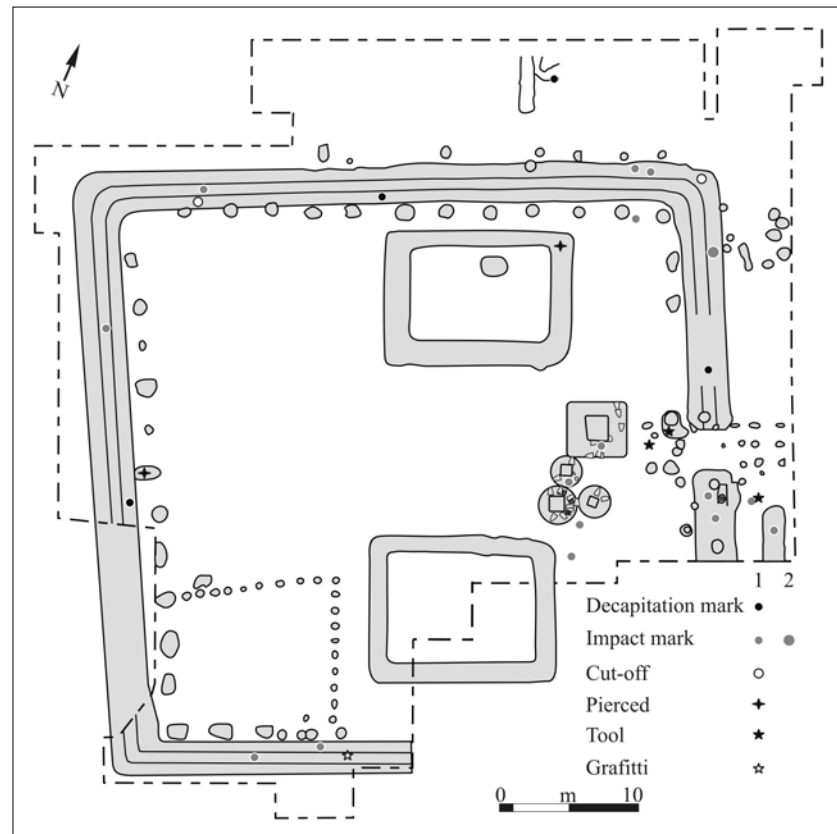


Fig. 3. Distribution of amphora sherds with impact and tool marks, sherds reused as tools, and sherds with post-firing graffiti on the sanctuary.

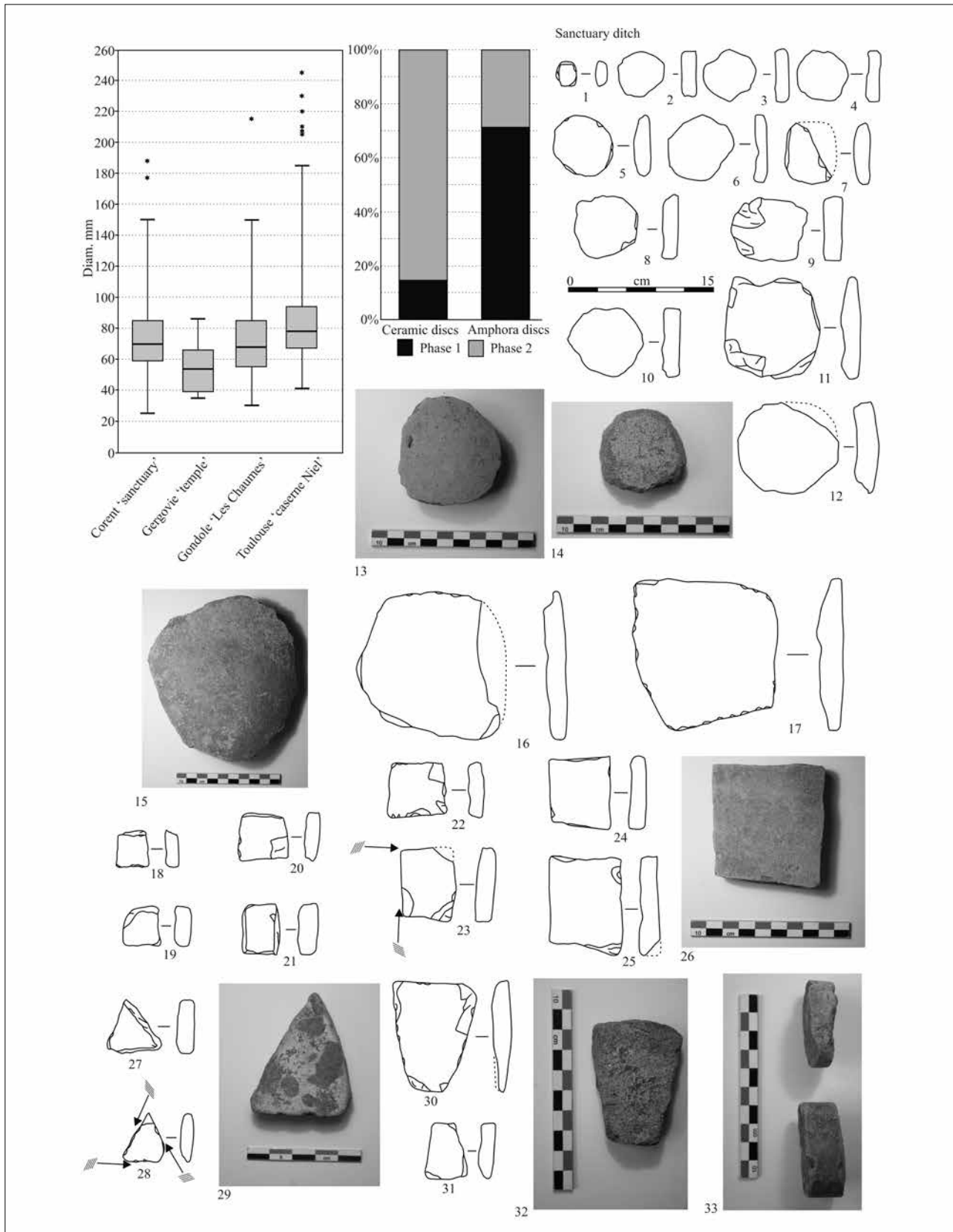


Fig. 4. Examples of amphora discs and other 'worked sherds' from the sanctuary.

Conclusion

Evidence for the modification, reuse, and ritual treatment of amphorae on the sanctuary is modest and similar evidence is to be found on other parts of the site and on other settlements in the region. Sherds with impact marks are rare, and so too is evidence for the rapid opening and disposal of amphorae. Instead, most of the amphorae from the enclosure ditch and the amphora pavements consist of old material (discs, reused vessels, etc.) originally from other parts of the site. It is possible that old

amphorae were decapitated to provide bodies which could be reused for storage, rather than as a ritual decanting technique. The amphora pavements around the wooden basins and the amphorae from the enclosure A are dominated by old reused vessels. It is possible that wine or other drinks were stored in these reused amphorae which could have been set upright within the wooden basins just inside the sanctuary entrance. In part of the enclosure ditch, south of the entrance, there is evidence for the deposition of amphora discs and 'worked' sherds.

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Abstract

Des recherches récentes ont démontré le rôle important du festin et de la consommation du vin durant la Tène finale. De nombreuses festins aristocratiques ont eu lieu sur le sanctuaire de l'*oppidum* et durant ces événements diverses pratiques rituelles impliquant des amphores républicaines sont attestées. Par exemple, la mutilation des amphores, la « décapitation » des amphores, etc. Cet article examinera des données concernant leur modification (tessons avec des marques d'impact, rondelles, tessons percé) et la réutilisation des amphores sur le sanctuaire de la Tène finale à Corent.

