



LE DÉPARTEMENT



EXHIBIT VISITOR'S GUIDE

A JOURNEY ON THE SHORES OF THE STYX



April > 17 September 2018

ABBAYE DE
LA CELLE

EVERYWHERE, FOR EVERYONE, THE VAR, YOUR EVERYDAY PARTNER

► Opening the cinerary urn of grave 71 of the Pauvadou necropolis in Fréjus (Photograph by C. Gébara).

Roman Beliefs

In the Roman era, belief in the immortality of the soul was already a deeply rooted ancient practice. The vast majority of inhabitants of Roman Antiquity, as the epigraphy, literature and archeology of graves prove, believed in the existence of a form of consciousness that perpetuated itself after death. It was assumed that the living and the dead could have mutual influence. The Greek belief that the dead, despite their existence in the shadows, still kept their names and up to a certain point, their personalities, is reflected by the Romans through the notion of Manes of the souls of individuals.

We have abundant, indisputable proof of the necessity, throughout Antiquity, to keep the dead alive through offerings of food, drink, oil and even blood during the funeral feasts organised on their graves by those still living. From the end of the Republic and during the entire Empire period, two fundamental beliefs were both optimistic: that personal individuality survived after death, and regarding the kind of life that awaited the soul beyond the grave. In this era, the Romans were convinced that the terror and power of death could be conquered and that a richer, happier life closer to deification could be attained by the souls of the dead in certain conditions. In Rome, from the earliest Antiquity, both rites - cremation and inhumation - were practiced side by side. A lot of families continued to practice inhumation, in particular the gens Cornelia (start of the Third/middle of the Second century B.C.). In the Roman Republic, in general, cremation was the normal rite starting in 400 B.C. It remained so during the first century A.D., to such a point that Tacitus, speaking of the inhumation of Poppaea, Nero's wife, in 65 A.D. describes cremation categorically as *Romanus mos* (a Roman custom). During the reign of Hadrian, one cannot attribute to the spread of suddenly-flourishing sculptural art of the sarcophagi the sole reason for a gradual shift to a preference for inhumation over cremation. Nor can it be ascribed to the influence of Christianity, which would arrive much later.



The disappearance of cremation during the Second century A.D. is a process that took place in all of the Roman provinces in the middle of the Third century A.D. The explanation must be sought elsewhere. In the end, buried or burnt bones amount to the same thing. Burnt bones for that matter are more resistant, and both imply the belief that one's consciousness survives. But perhaps inhumation was considered to be a less violent, more respectful way to guide the mortal body, which was the seat and mirror of the immortal soul and personality, to its final resting place.

Funeral Rites

The grave was designed as an eternal dwelling, containing the food and objects necessary for the deceased. Several ancient texts attest to the various rites that were carried out during funeral ceremonies. Family members bid their last goodbyes to the deceased by closing his eyes (*oculos condere*). Then, they called him by his name several times (*conclamatio*) until the body was laid on the pyre or buried. The body had been washed, perfumed and dressed beforehand. It was then crowned with flowers and foliage. A coin was placed in the mouth, in general, representing Charon's obol. This was a right to passage to enter the

realm of the dead. Depending on the case, the deceased was displayed for three to seven days in his home. When this time period was up, the body was brought to the place of burial or cremation in a procession. One of the main worries of men and women in Antiquity was to ensure a decent sepulchre after death. The size of the ceremony and the sepulchre varied according to the social status of the deceased. Lower classes formed funerary societies and contributed to the fund their entire life to ensure that they had a sepulchre.

Ancient Necropoli, Cities of the Dead

The structure of the funeral grounds in the Roman era was related both to its size and its topo-chronology: the idea of the necropolis (from the Greek *nekropolis*, for “city of the dead”) is often used incorrectly to designate funeral grounds that were not structured, or that are small in size.

The term only applies to an important cemetery from Antiquity, urban and monumental in nature.

In the Var, only two sites are likely to meet this criteria: the Saint Lambert and Pauvadou necropoli, the East and North necropoli of *Forum Julii* (Fréjus), the seat of a territory that covered a great part of the county today.

The secondary urban areas such as *Forum Voconii* (Le Cannet-des-Maures) and *Matavo* (Cabasse), were dotted with rather large but less structured cemeteries, where the graves from both types of rites were lined up along the Via Aurelia.

In rural areas in the Var, cemeteries and graves such as we know them are always linked to a Romanization of the territory and are linked to a mausoleum most of the time. This is especially true starting in the middle of the First century A.D. The mausoleum is that of the owner of the property, and constitutes the core of the extended funerary estate and its main attraction.

The Saint Lambert and Pauvadou sites are good examples to consider for understanding the evolution of necropoli in the Var but also in the south-east of Gaul, because the chronological period covered is long and continuous. It spans the last quarter of the First century B.C. to the Fourth century A.D. Saint Lambert, the oldest one, was established at the end of the First century B.C. around a main road that heads towards the seaside to the East of the city. The first sepulchres are small square mausoleums lined up alongside the road, then the walls appear, creating private spaces in the necropolis, and finally, actual enclosures are built.

The necropolis at Pauvadou appears to be structured from the very start, around the middle of the First century A.D.

The funeral estate is well-defined around a specific road to the North of the city, respecting the strictest of rules for ground occupation. The funeral enclosures are oriented North/South and separated by narrow passageways, up to the Third century A.D.

How the property of the funeral estate and the location of the sepulchres were developed is, in general, very elusive: our regions do not have the beautifully preserved remains in elevation like the *Isola Sacra* necropolis in Ostia or the *Via Triumphalis* in the Vatican, where even the funerary stelae and the libation pipes are preserved, not to mention the Pompeii necropolis which was perfectly preserved for us by the Mt. Vesuvius eruption.



► Funerary stela of Petronia, discovered previously in Fréjus (Photograph by Y. Lemoine)

In the Var, as all throughout Gaul, the cemeteries - urban or rural - have disappeared the quickest. A few mausoleums subsist in our time, the most well-known and well-preserved being the Mausoleum of the Julii (Glanum, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence). Funeral grounds, already deteriorated by time and human action, have been found in great number since the 80's in the Var. They were discovered when agricultural, road works or property development projects were undertaken. They were often excavated in difficult conditions, at the cost of a significant loss of information.

However, several stelae survived, discoveries preserved in museums or in private collections, at times reused in city walls or in churches. A very small number were found *in situ*. The stelae marking the location of a sepulchre provide precious information on the identity of the deceased, their family, sometimes on their occupation or the circumstances of their death, and on funeral rites. Ossuaries may also give indications on the deceased, but these are rarer, such as that of Taetania.

▼ *Cinerary urn discovered in the 17th century in Brignoles. Musée Granet, City of Aix-en-Provence (Photograph by Christine Durand CNRS, Centre Camille Jullian, Aix-Marseille Université).*



This ossuary was found in the 17th century in Brignoles and shown for the first time in the Var. Finally, the boundary marker for Publius Licinius' cemetery plot is a rare discovery. It shows how the funeral estate could be franchised in lots to private individuals, and was uncovered during the Pauvadou excavation in 1982 in Fréjus.

Funeral Practices in the Roman Era

In the first two centuries A.D., in the middle and southeast regions of Gaul, cremation is the most commonly-practiced method for treating bodies, oftentimes in continuity with previous customs. It was associated, on the same sites, with inhumation, and this bi-ritualism constitutes without a doubt one of the essential characteristics of funeral treatments during the Roman Era. Both are part of an entire set of actions and the treatments, while in appearance so different, aim to bury the deceased and anchor their memory to a territory. Thus, in the Var we note that the practice of depositing a coin (Charon's obol), intended to facilitate crossing the Styx, is done in nearly equal number for sepulchres of the two rites. Crockery and food left are also similar, in quantity and type of offering chosen. One exception should be noted: very young children under the age of one year are buried, sometimes in reserved sectors.

The rite of cremation, which was dominant in the first two centuries A.D., is completely abandoned in the Fourth century B.C., even though contrasting situations exist within a region, inside a city or between cities and the countryside. In Southeast Gaul, particularly in Provence (the former *Provincia*, conquered starting in the Second century B.C. by Roman armies), the rite of cremation, which spread during the Iron Age, is perpetuated after the Roman conquest. We can consider that syncretism was present between the Roman customs and pre-existing customs. As in Rome, in the Var, cremation dominates from the end of the First century A.D. to the Second century A.D. Inhumation, exceptional in the first half of the First century A.D., appears more frequently starting from the middle of the First century after and coexists equally with cremation during the Second century A.D. to become the only rite starting in the Third century A.D.



◀ Fréjus, Saint Lambert necropolis, photograph taken during the excavation of grave 155

However, a delay can be noticed in the countryside, where Romanisation is undoubtedly a bit slower to take hold. In the Var, in rural areas including secondary urban areas such as the Forum *Voconii* or *Matavo*, inhumation only appears in the Third century A.D. though a few examples of cremation persist.

Cremation

The term “cremation” supplants “incineration”, which involves reducing bones to ash. In cremation - in the past as it is today - once the body is burned, “calcius” remains, the calcium residue from the bones, somewhat fragmented but solid. Since 1976, a decree has imposed that bones be pulverised, hence called “ash”.

During Antiquity, the burnt bones were sorted, broken, and very often washed, in order to be deposited into an ossuary and buried. In the Roman era, several types of pyres existed. The *ustrinum*, “place where the body is burned”, was a place where cremation was performed collectively, in a pit or on a flat surface, bordered by a low wall. The bones were buried afterwards in a different place. The *bustum*, or “place where the body is burnt and buried”, was both the place where the deceased was cremated individually, and the sepulchre. Current scientific terminology prefers using the term collective pyres, which were reused and did not hold the remains of the deceased, and grave-pyres used for a single individual buried in some way or another in this particular place. In the Var, several examples of collective pyres exist, in particular in the Termes cemetery in Le Cannet-des-Maures (R. Boyer excavation) and in the Saint Lambert necropolis in Fréjus (I. Béraud and C. Gébara excavation).

Numerous examples of individual pyres have been recorded in the county, in particular in the La Calade and La Guérine cemeteries in Cabasse (G. Bérard excavation), as in Fréjus, in Le Cannet-des-Maures, and elsewhere.

Once the bones were gathered, washed or not, they were generally deposited into a container, either an ossuary or a vase purchased or recovered to be used as an ossuary. The ossuary was then buried, accompanied by the same rites as a buried body.



▲ Fréjus, necropolis: ossuary urns made from local sandstone
(Photograph by P. Foliot)

Inhumation

The practice of inhumation has raised numerous questions from archaeologists, essentially for the Third century A.D., when it supplants cremation. Must we consider that it is a question of an Eastern fashion adopted by the Imperial family being propagated? Or was it brought by populations arriving from North Africa or the Near East? Perhaps an adaptation of practices related to a shortage of timber? Maybe a philosophical evolution with respect to the body? Whatever the reasons may be, we note that the two rites coexist for a long period in big cities (Lyons, Marseilles, Fréjus), while in the country, the shift to inhumation happens later. In *Forum Julii*, the county seat of the Roman city, the Saint Lambert necropolis is the oldest and undoubtedly that linked to the foundation of the colony at the end of the First century B.C. Several ancient inhumations are noted there, in particular grave 155, which has been recreated in the exhibit.

Grave architecture is varied, ranging from a simple pit in the ground to construction of a framework in stone, to framework made of flat tiles (*tegulae*) forming a gable roof (often with round tiles or imbrices on the crest) or a rectangular coffin. These sepulchre forms may be lined with a wooden coffin, nailed or not, and the deceased may be buried with a shroud. The notes from the excavation specify the position of the skeleton, giving us a number of clues on this topic.

The methods for laying the body of the deceased in its sepulchre are quite codified.

The body is generally laid on its back, with lower limbs parallel and most often the upper limbs are parallel to the body or crossed. But relatively frequently, we find skeletons resting face down, which is the case for the Pauvadou necropolis in Fréjus.

Grave Goods Accompanying the Deceased in the Sepulchre

No matter the rite chosen, whether inhumation or cremation, in Eastern Provence and particularly in the Var, the offerings or goods deposited in the sepulchres vary little and are greatly homogenised. Offerings of goods, food, small personal objects persist with little changes until the Fourth century A.D. Thus demonstrating an impermeability to the influence of new monotheistic religions from the East, and a rooted belief in polytheism - or at least for the majority of the population. For that matter, the fact is corroborated by the orientation of most inhumation graves (North/South). This is noted in the Fourth century A.D., in the Pauvadou necropolis in Fréjus, and by the very frequent presence of Charon's obol and offerings of goods or food in the graves of both rites, in all eras. In the same way, the evolution of the architecture of most inhumation graves changes only very slowly since we observe the use of a rectangular tile framework in near-totality between the First and Third centuries A.D., with gable roofs only appearing in the Third century A.D.

It is difficult, even impossible, to know whether the objects accompanying the deceased in the sepulchre belong to him personally or whether they were offered during the funeral ceremony. Also, archaeologists prefer the term "goods" now, which has the advantage of being neutral. However, in certain cases the distinction is clear: some graves contained crockery that was visibly worn, or that had been used to cook food. The coins that accompanied the deceased are sometimes visibly worn...

Not all families had the means to pay for new or quality goods. However, certain types of objects were preferred, and deposited in numbers. In this instance we can make the case that it possibly concerns goods acquired afterwards and “offered” to the deceased. Such an example are the glass cosmetic jars, and the pitchers found in sets of three. The pottery workshops are, incidentally, in immediate proximity to the city necropoli. Moreover, children’s sepulchres may contain specific goods (baby bottle, amulets, etc.).

In the case of cremation, the choice of the container for the burnt bones is interesting. For those who could purchase it, a stone urn (always in sandstone) equipped with a suitable cover, is intended solely for this purpose. However, a glass urn possibly deposited inside, or in another amphora-type container may have been retrieved from the kitchen. It very well could have been purchased specifically for use as an ossuary. The extremely widespread use of ceramic urns, in general equipped with a suitable or recovered cover, suggests that this vase, commonly found in excavations of dwellings, could also have been purchased to be used solely as an ossuary. It would seem, too, that certain recipients that would have accompanied the deceased on the pyre, then gathered in the grave were related to the funeral banquet and to libations.

The use of goods in inhumation is not really different: the same types of objects (apart from the urns) are deposited around the body of the deceased according to a specific organisation. The fragmented material found outside the grave may just as well have served in the funerary banquet as it may simply be vestigial. The relation between grave goods in inhumation and those deposited with the ossuary is quite obvious. Thus, the difference in treatment of the body (burnt or buried) does not imply a distinct rite.

The ceremony of the living, paying homage to the deceased is very well-illustrated by two sepulchres in Fréjus. The excavation of cremation grave no. 133 in the Pauvadou revealed that four ceramic cups had been broken in ritual, without a doubt by throwing them abruptly into the pit, when the libation in honor of the deceased was performed. The excavation of the inhumation grave no. 155 in Saint Lambert (presented in the exhibit) unarguably proved that numerous glass cosmetic jars and coins had been thrown into the open sepulchre and on the body of the deceased, undoubtedly from the road that crosses the necropolis.

It is clear that in the first case, it was a toast to the deceased or a libation; and in the second case, this was a gesture showing the survivors’ appreciation with respect to her personality (cosmetic jars or *unguentaria* could have contained perfume).

The standardisation of customs and offerings is marked in all funerary sites in southeast Gaul, and particularly in eastern Provence (standardisation of containers used as ossuaries, objects accompanying the deceased in the sepulchre, etc.).

Ossuary Urns

During Antiquity, several types of containers were used to hold the burnt bones of the deceased after cremation. Some were exclusively designed as ossuaries, others intended for storing or transporting foodstuffs, or as cooking vessels (glass and ceramic urns, amphora). The latter were generally recovered after having been used in the home, and were re-used as an ossuary. The recipients equipped with a suitable cover, made in a standard format from stone or metal, in particular lead, served exclusively for preserving the deceased’s burnt bones after cremation. Sometimes, the bones were placed in a more fragile recipient and then deposited into a stone urn, as was the case for glass urns.

▼ Fréjus, Pauvadou necropolis, glass urn that was used as an ossuary (Photograph by P Foliot).



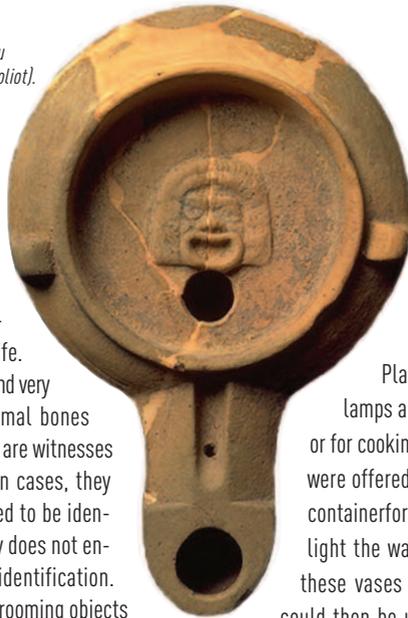
► Oil lamp with medallion showing a theatre mask discovered in the Pauvadou necropolis in Fréjus (Photograph by P. Foliot).

Offerings in Metal and Worked Bone

Among the personal belongings deposited in graves during the Roman era, we find numerous objects from the deceased's daily life. In metal (silver, bronze, iron, lead, and very rarely gold) or worked from animal bones (turned or carved), these artifacts are witnesses of the Roman lifestyle. In certain cases, they also allow the sex of the deceased to be identified when the osteological study does not enable this, or to corroborate the identification. So we frequently find finery and grooming objects in female graves: hair pins and jewelry boxes or carved bone cosmetic cases and also bronze mirrors. Rarer, instruments such as razors or strigils have been found in male graves.

Funerary Offerings of Glass Dishware

The glassmakers of Antiquity designed a multitude of shapes of vases created through casting or blowing glass essentially composed of silica (or sand) to which a flux has been added. The Roman glassmakers had become masters of the art of glassblowing. Glass would be used frequently for food, as it does not change the taste of liquid or solid contents, unlike ceramic or metal containers. The glass dishware is frequently found among the funerary objects in graves. Plates, cups, bottles, flasks and other containers in plain or colored glass were discovered. These were found, in particular, in the *Forum Julii* / Fréjus necropoli (Pauvadou and Saint Lambert) and in the *Matavo* / Cabasse cemeteries (La Guérine and La Calade), and from the *Forum Voconii* / Le Cannet-des-Maures. The preferred shape is that of a cosmetic jar (unguentarium), also known by the term of lachrymatory. It could contain various liquids such as perfumes, ointments but also collyrium, whose composition is close to that of tears.



Funerary Offerings of Ceramic Dishware and Terracotta Objects

Plates, bowls, cups, pitchers, urns, oil lamps and other ceramic vases for the table or for cooking accompanied the deceased. These were offered either as a goods offering, or as a container for liquid or solid food offerings, or to light the way for the journey beyond. Most of these vases were used first in daily life, and could then be used in the sepulchre. But certain ones were purchased from the local potter specifically with this purpose in mind.

Common ceramic vases were made by numerous pottery workshops set up on the edge of clay deposits located throughout the county. The largest centre of production was located in Fréjus. Other vases were imported from northern Italy, Spain, North Africa, or from the south of Gaul - in particular, from La Graufesenque, in the Aveyron. These vases were of superior quality, decorated and engobed, often red or orange in color. They imitated the metal dishes that were used by wealthy Romans. For the most part, oil lamps were imported from North Africa or northern Italy.

A few ceramic objects modeled from pre-Roman tradition were made, and may indicate the local origin of the deceased, or a lower social status.

This collection of ceramics brings together the funerary goods discovered during the archeological digs at the *Forum Julii* / Fréjus necropoli (Pauvadou and Saint Lambert), the *Matavo* / Cabasse cemeteries (La Guérine and La Calade) and from the *Forum Voconii* / Le Cannet-des-Maures.