

Scientific Report

ESF Exploratory Workshop on

Death in the Roman Empire among Religious Law, Social Performances and Ritual Practices

Paris, France, 11 - 13 October 2007

Convened by:

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Exploratory workshop

Death in the Roman Empire among Religious Law, Social Performances and Ritual Practices

Executive Summary

The exploratory workshop on *Death in the Roman Empire* was held from 11th – 13th October 2007 in accordance with the scheduled programme. All those included in the provisional programme took part in the workshop, apart from three people. They were replaced by Daniele D'Angelo, from Metaphora, a company that works in partnership with the *Servizio antropologico della Soprintendenza archeologica di Roma* to process data from excavations of the imperial necropoles. The event was divided into two main sessions, with the first public session being devoted to presenting the most recent research in this area via oral presentations and the second session, organised into two workshops, being a series of discussions between the participants, with each discussion being preceded by an introductory summary report.

The first half-day was devoted to presenting recent research conducted by the various European teams attending the seminar. The session was held at the *Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art* and in addition to the participants was also attended by around 40 members of the public. Each presentation was followed by a preliminary discussion, which set out the themes tackled during the two workshops. The aim was to compare the experiences of the different participants in the field of the archaeology of death in the Western Roman Empire. The emphasis was placed on the most recent discoveries, which had not yet been presented publicly. This was the case for the excavation of the large residential, industrial and funeral complex of Casal Bertone in Rome and the extraordinary Naintré mausoleums in the Poitou region of France. Other presentations provided an update on the progress of experimental excavation programmes in the Roman necropoles, specifically the Classe necropolis near to Ravenna and an enclosure in the Porta Nocera necropolis in Pompeii. Finally, other speakers provided an overview of research in a town (Mainz) and a region (the Trevires region). The interesting and original nature of the contributions led us to envisage their publication in an archaeological magazine aimed at the “general public”.

The workshops were a continuation of the first half-day's presentations and discussions. They took place in two phases: the themes listed above were covered, specifically based on the textbook example of the Classe necropolis, which was a reference site (workshop 2) and the discussion of future development areas that the European working group meeting in Paris could set for itself (workshop 1). Discussions focused on the different procedures to be respected during the various stages of a dig, its publication and presentation to the public. For the latter, a decision was taken to produce a volume of contributions on “Rome and its dead” for an archaeological magazine aimed at the “general public” and to plan a travelling European exhibition on this theme.

Scientific Contents

The presentations and discussions focused on three major themes which enabled the majority of the key issues currently raised by the archaeology of death in the Western Roman Empire to be reviewed.

- Preventative archaeology and archaeoethanatology

For around fifteen years, the archaeology of death in the Western Roman Empire has benefited from a considerable development of preventative archaeology initiatives on the site of ancient necropolises on the outskirts of large cities. This was especially the case in Rome, during the construction of a high speed railway line linking Rome to Naples, which enabled large cemeteries to be unearthed. These cemeteries had to be dealt with as a matter of urgency. The solution adopted by the Rome Archaeology Department was to set up a stable anthropology department, headed by Paola Catalano, who works directly on the ground, importing into the field of archaeological heritage management (*la tutela*) the methods and objectives of archaeoethanatology (as defined by Henri Duday).

The results obtained are exceptional. They enable large population samples to be obtained which are likely to provide osteological and paleopathological data enabling living conditions to be reproduced and the issue of demography in the capital of the empire during the first three centuries of our era to be entirely reviewed. This data can be linked with the other preventative archaeology areas on the outskirts of Rome. The case of Casal Bertone, which was presented for the first time here, is particularly significant: it has been possible to link a large industrial dyeworks with the neighbouring necropolis, where the skeletons of the deceased presented traces of traumas linked to the work carried out in this industry.

New research in Rome is eagerly awaited by researchers working on the process of Romanisation in the Western Roman Empire, as until the present day there was no documented reference corpus that met modern standards for the capital of the empire. This information now exists and the Paris seminar helped to publicise it and to start to envisage it being developed at international and multidisciplinary level. Over 5,000 tombs have now been documented, both in terms of osteological, osteometric and archaeological data – taphonomy and construction of the tomb and funerary artefacts. A complex database which is accessible to researchers needs to be created, with this work already having been started. The project needs to draw on the experiments carried out in other regions. The Paris seminar clearly showed that this is a priority area for the coming years.

The situation of preventative funerary archaeology in Rome was compared to that of other countries. There were discussions of the textbook case of the large necropolis in Mainz in Germany and the situation of preventative funerary archaeology in France, particularly in the work of the *Institut National de Recherche Archéologique Préventive*. The case of the Naintré mausoleums poses very different problems to those in Rome, Mainz and South East France, as the sheer quantity of data to be collected and processed determines the organisation of research work. Advanced research carried out on this extraordinary site in Poitou was presented for the first time at the Paris seminar. The issues raised primarily relate to the excavation technique used and the organisation of the dig. This is a textbook case with the very items that make the tomb unique being the perishable remains (wreaths of flowers, imported spices and precious fabrics) and the fleeting traces of the work of “undertakers” (including footprints and rope grooves for the installation of the coffins) which required a speedy yet careful technique and rigorous recording of data. Furthermore, the Paris seminar enabled the head archaeologist to compare his project’s experience with that of the other participants, with a view to enlarging the team of specialists who will publish a work on the site.

The issue of protecting Roman funerary heritage was tackled in more a targeted manner with regard to the situation of Apollonia in Albania. The imperial necropolis of this Greek and Roman town, which is found within the Apollonia archaeology park, is located on the potential route of a motorway, with construction being planned for the next few years. It would be extremely harmful to research if the site was destroyed or was explored in a way that did not take into account recent progress in the field of funerary archaeology. It was agreed that the research group that met in Paris will monitor developments on the site.

- The archaeology of ritual and scheduled experimental initiatives

It became clear that preventative archaeology has incorporated the new methods of *archéothanatologie*. However, the Paris seminar also sought to present and discuss progress made over the past few years as part of the experimental programmes of digs of highly specific necropolis sectors, which are likely to change the future outlook and tools of the archaeology of ritual. John Scheid gave an overview of the discipline and its strategic areas. Changes to theoretical approaches on rituals in the field of Roman religious history made it necessary to get back into the field to validate the hypotheses and build up appropriate archaeological records that can provide responses to the questions that the reading of ancient texts did not resolve. The seminar aimed to present two ongoing experimental programmes - Classe and Pompeii - two sites that were selected due to their excellent conservation conditions and the potential presence of a range of epigraphical, architectural, anthropological, archaeozoological and paleobotanical evidence.

The experimental dig at Classe played a key role in renewing the approach to Roman funerary archaeology and also in the constitution of a European multi-disciplinary team working using complementary approaches on the same site. From this perspective, the Paris seminar was organised around this textbook case and the discussions drew on it in particular. The seminar came at an opportune moment as the fieldwork had finished and the study phase with a view to publishing the research had started. The Paris seminar helped to make significant progress in this area. The seminar enabled funerary archaeologists from several different national traditions (Italian, French, Luxembourg and German) and from preventative and officially scheduled archaeology, and specialists from different disciplines such as anthropology, archaeozoology, epigraphy and stratigraphy, to work together.

The second experimental dig is at the Porta Nocera necropolis in Pompeii, which was conducted in a burial enclosure of one of the necropoles of the town buried under the ashes of Vesuvius in AD 79. This eruption uniquely fossilised the ceremonial remains which were under the tombs and conserved a large number of perishable remains that are not usually found. Once again, comparing the approaches of different specialists and the presence of an archaeobotanist, helped to renew the archaeological approach to ritual processes. The dig helped to reconstruct more precisely than elsewhere the ritual chain leading from funerals to commemoration ceremonies for the deceased. The different approaches of stratigraphy, epigraphy and anthropology also enabled the history of the monument to be reconstructed and to enter into the field of tomb rights and how they were actually applied.

The presentation of these two experimental programmes and the ensuing discussions highlighted – as was the primary objective of the seminar – the need to work on Roman necropoles within an international and multidisciplinary framework. It also showed that these pilot initiatives were meaningful if they were linked to preventative archaeology. The teams from the two programmes bring together academics and preventative archaeology professionals. Firstly, because they draw on the experience of the latter in terms of dig techniques, organising a dig, managing information and optimising work rhythms. Secondly, because these initiatives must help to ensure that the new future development areas for the

archaeology of ritual are at the heart of the concerns of preventative archaeology professionals.

- From Rome to the periphery of the Empire: the Romanisation of funeral practices?

For many years, archaeological work on Roman funerary practices was mainly carried out in the peripheral regions of the Empire. The aim was to evaluate the influence of ritual practices inherited from the pre-Roman Iron Age and those borrowed from Roman funerary practices adopted at the time of the conquest, even slightly before. This issue was tackled from two angles during the seminar. On the one hand, Jeannot Metzler and Patrice Méniel presented the textbook case of the transformation of funerary practices amongst the Trevires at the time of Romanisation. Changes to objectives that have taken place over the past few years are due to the evaluation of the impact of Rome on the culture of Germanic aristocracies no longer being solely based on the study of funerary artefacts and the percentage of italic imports that they contain. Instead, it now subtly results from the reconstruction of ritual processes and changes that occurred to them during the last two centuries before our era. Once again, the joint intervention of archaeologists, anthropologists and archaeozoologists is now inevitable.

However, evaluation of the degree of Romanisation of ritual behaviours needs to be able to access a frame of reference built up in the central regions of the empire, namely in Italy and more specifically in Rome. This is why the comparison of results obtained in the capital and on the edges of the empire is vital. Indeed, this was one of the aims of the seminar. There is now a need to set up procedures for recording and describing remains which make it possible to compare geographically far apart and historically and sociologically different locations. Development of databases in the different regions in question must be carried out based on the same standards; otherwise the comparative approach will be limited in terms of results.

The case of the Trevires demonstrates that even today, a range of aspects of funeral ceremonies are better known in the outlying regions than at the heart of the empire, with this being the case for installations used to display the body before burial and remains of commemorative ceremonies, such as banquets, which are documented due to the data obtained in the large aristocratic tombs which have been excavated recently (Clemency, for example).

Assessment of the Results, contribution to the Future Direction of the Field

During the workshops, discussions focused on the future development areas. They primarily focused on the procedures to be respected during the different stages of a dig and when recording data and during academic publication and presentation to the public. The issues will be tackled in the same order in this document.

- The range of fieldwork approaches

All the teams in attendance work using different modern *archéothanatologie* methods. However, the field covered by this discipline is vast and the various aspects that it covers are not accessible at the same time on the same site. That is why each team makes its own interpretation of what defines Roman funerary archaeology today and why it is also vital, in order to cover the theme in its entirety, to work using networks of sites and teams

Two major clusters can be observed within the discipline. On the one hand there are paleodemographic studies, which focus on the living conditions of the population, the composition of the population that had access to the necropoles, the funerary space and its connections to the residential, trade and industrial areas. This trend is particularly prevalent in Rome, due to the exceptional evidence provided by the city's necropoles in this field, and

inversely the relatively standardized and discrete nature of the data on funerary practices. On the other hand there is the archaeology of ritual, which aims to describe in detail the chain of ritual events that takes place following the death of an individual until the commemorative ceremonies. This requires excellent site conservation conditions and a very careful and intensive dig. This means that globally we can distinguish between a rather quantitative funerary archaeology focusing on the economic and social history of Antiquity and which in particular concerns the preventative archaeology digs at the large necropoles, and on the other, the archaeology of ritual, resolutely focusing on the history of ancient religions and cultural changes, which generally stems from micro-archaeology in an officially scheduled context.

The two approaches are complementary but the seminar demonstrated that it was quite difficult to get them to interact, due to different methods on the ground and in the research laboratory. One of the issues for the next few years, which emerged implicitly from the discussions, will be to reduce this distance between the economic and social archaeology of funerary populations and the cultural and religious archaeology of ritual funerary practices

- Recording data

These differences make for relatively varied approaches when recording data from digs. A comparison was made between three major recording systems that led to the development of funerary databases - that of the Rome Archaeology Department, that of the Classe dig and that of the Pompeii dig, which is based on the standards drawn up as part of French preventative archaeology (INRAP and the Chartres Archaeology Department). Particular attention was paid to cartographic data, particularly for the case of Classe, due to the quantity and diversity of information to be mapped. We also saw that necropolis digs are no longer simply tomb digs; indeed they are far from it. Jacopo Ortalli for Classe and the Pompeii team demonstrated how a significant amount of the useful information comes from the spaces between tombs and above them and consequently that data recording must be carried out in a living area for example, taking into account in a more systematic manner the complexity of the stratigraphy. The tombs become one of several structures in the necropolis and must be recorded themselves in all their stratigraphic complexity – including the different strata within the cremation urns, the complex filling levels of the graves, the systems of libation channels and signage on the ground. These questions are also being raised in Rome, but often less keenly, due to the poor conservation conditions of the surface remains.

- Academic publication

Both the preventative and officially scheduled initiatives covered during the seminar are currently being published. The workshops were the opportunity to tackle the technical issues raised by presenting the results of the digs. The seminar showed, if indeed it was necessary, the need for all the study stakeholders to be involved in the preparation of the publication. This requires long periods of joint work, an example of which was seen in the last half-day session of workshop 2. A joint seminar was therefore scheduled for the preparation of the monograph on Pompeii. It took place in April – May 2008 in Bibracte.

- Informing the general public about the results

One of the objectives of the seminar was also to discuss how to present the results of all this research, which is sometimes highly specialised and technical, to the general public. Two methods were selected.

A publication aimed at the “general public”

The first idea was to put together a volume of contributions that would faithfully reflect progress in the field of Roman funerary archaeology, aimed at a wide public. It was agreed to

put forward the joint drafting of a special report to a monthly French archaeological magazine. The proposal was accepted by *Dossiers d'archéologie*. The work of the seminar will be presented in the double issue (330) of November – December 2008, *Rome et ses morts. L'archéologie funéraire de l'occident romain*.

The outline of the issue, designed during the Paris seminar, focuses on the different features of the research. It includes presentations of the digs covered during the workshop, whether they were preventative or officially scheduled: Rome, Pompeii, Classe, Mainz, the Trevires region and Naintré. In order to complete the report, the research of several teams that were not present in Paris is also being included: Musarna in Etruria, Pupput close to Hammamet in Tunisia, South East France and Great Britain. Other contributions take stock of the various disciplines involved in the study of death in the Roman Empire: the archaeology of rituals, epigraphy, anthropology, paleopathology, archaeozoology, archaeobotany etc. The plan adopted - from Rome to the periphery of the Empire - provides an account of the historical perspective, linked to the process of Romanisation, which determines research carried out at European level.

An international exhibition

The second project discussed at the seminar was a European exhibition devoted to “Rome and its dead”. The central idea, proposed by Peter Fasold, was that of a trail which would reconstruct the ambiance of a funerary route virtually linking Rome to the north-west edges of the Empire. As in the *Dossiers d'archéologie* issue, each site would constitute a stage on this route, and depending on its specific features would enable general historic themes to be featured as well as the specialised research methods used in the different fields. The sites making up the exhibition could be the following: Rome, the management of the dead in an ancient megapolis, paleo-demography and paleopathology; Pompeii, the funerary right, funerals and commemorative ceremonies, and archaeobotany; Musarna, the Romanisation of Etruscan concepts of death; Classe, the development of necropoles in a cosmopolitan context, necropolis excavations and funeral epigraphy; Mainz, monumental necropoles and funerary architecture; the Trevire region, the Romanisation of ritual practices in Germania and archaeozoology; Naintré, aristocratic Gaulish funerals and the sociological approach to funerary artefacts; Great Britain, death on the edges of the Roman Empire and preventative funerary archaeology

The aim is to present research progress to the public, as well as the main historical trends that characterise the Western Roman Empire, based on necropoles, but also on individual stories reconstructed using archaeology, anthropology and epigraphy. The latter would seek to show the general public how the issue of death and the treatment of the dead in Antiquity is both totally foreign to us – as it was governed by practices very different to our own – and yet extremely similar – as the context of funerals, which the archaeology of ritual aims to reconstruct, is sadly only too familiar.

The seminar enabled a relatively specific exhibition plan to be drawn up taking into consideration both the requirements of academic research and its presentation to the public. All that remains to be done is secure funding for the exhibition. Several options have been looked into without a solution actually being identified. The participants are now tasked with making proposals in the countries represented at the seminar.

Stéphane Verger

Ecole pratique des Hautes Etudes – EA 4115 HISTARA

Programme

Death in the Roman Empire among Religious Law, Social Performances and Ritual Practices

Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (EA 4115)
Collège de France
European Science Foundation
Paris, France, 11 - 13 October 2007

Thursday 11 October 2007

Latest findings in Rome, Italy, Germany and Gaul

Paris, Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art, 2 rue Vivienne, 75002 PARIS, Salle Vasari

14h15 – Welcome by Ségolène Demougin, doyen de la IV^e section de l'EPHE, and François Queyrel, directeur de l'EA 4115, par François Queyrel, directeur de l'EA 4115

14h30 - General Overview, by Stéphane Verger (EPHE)

Rome and Italy

15h - Stefano Musco, Paola Catalano and Angela Caspio (Soprintendenza archeologica di Roma), *Spazi e pratiche funerarie a Roma. Nuovi dati dallo scavo di Casal Bertone*

15h30 - William van Andringa (Université de Lille) and Henri Duday (CNRS-EPHE), *Organisation de l'espace funéraire : l'exemple de la nécropole de Porta Nocera à Pompéi* and Sébastien Lepetz (CNRS), *Fouille d'une aire de bûchers dans la nécropole de Porta Nocera à Pompéi*.

16h10 - Maria Grazia Maioli (Soprintendenza per i beni archeologici dell'Emilia Romagna) and Jacopo Ortalli (Università degli studi di Ferrara), *Problemi di lettura e interpretazione dei contesti sepolcrali: il caso di Classe (podere Minghetti)*.

16h30 - *Coffee-break*

Germany and Gaul

17h - Jeannot Metzler (Musée National d'Histoire et d'Art, Luxembourg) and Patrice Méniel (CNRS, UMR 8546), *Les pratiques funéraires des Trévires au I^{er} siècle avant J.-C.*

17h30 - Marion Witteyer (Archäologische Denkmalpflege Mainz), *Domus aeterna - Burial practices in the capital city of Germania superior*.

18h - Bernard Farago (INRAP) and Henri Duday (CNRS – EPHE), *Le mausolée de Naintré dans la Vienne*

Conclusions

18h30 - John Scheid (Collège de France), *Archéologie du rite. Observations sur les recherches récentes*

19h – Discussion

Friday 12 October 2007

Meeting place: Fondation Hugot, Collège de France

Workshop 1: A European exhibition project

09h00 - General Introduction, Paola Catalano and Stéphane Verger

Discussions - Moderator: Stéphane Verger

09:15 - Discussion 1 – *Displaying the working of a complex funerary monument*
Discussants: Jacopo Ortalli, William van Andringa, Bernard Farago, Stefano Musco, Marion Witteyer, Jeannot Metzler, Marin Haxhimihali, Saïmir Shpuza

10:00 - Discussion 2 – *Displaying the results of research in physical anthropology*
Discussants: Henri Duday, Paola Catalano, Walter Pantano

10:45 - *Coffee Break*

11:00 - Discussion 3 – *Towards a new way of displaying the traces of the ceremony and offerings*
burial

Discussants: John Pearce, Catherine Gaeng, Anna Buccellato, Stefanie Martin Kilcher, Véronique Matteredne

11:30 - Discussion 4 – *Displaying conceptions of death in the Roman Empire*
General Discussion led by John Scheid

12:00 - Summary and proposals, Peter Fasold, Daniele D'Angelo

***Workshop 2: A case study of a multi-disciplinary European archaeological site
The Classe cemetery in Emilia-Romagna***

14:00 - Introduction, John Scheid

14:30 - Discussion 1 – *A European multidisciplinary excavation of a Roman cemetery: assessment of a new experiment.*

Discussants: Maria Grazia Maioli, Jacopo Ortalli, Giovanna Montevicchi, Cristina Leoni.

15:30 - Discussion 2 – *Mapping the excavation of the cemetery at Classe*
Discussants: Jeannot Metzler, Catherine Gaeng.

16:30 - *Coffee Break*

17:00 - Discussion 3 – *Cremations and inhumations: an assessment of burial practices.*
Discussants: Valérie Bel, Henri Duday

Saturday 13 October 2007

Meeting place: Fondation Hugot, College de France

09:00 - Discussion 4 – *Tombs, materials and burial practices.*

Discussants: Stephanie Kilcher-Martin, Chérine Gebara, Isabelle Béraud, Maria Romana Picuti.

10:00 - *Coffee Break*

10:30 - Discussion 5 – *Digging the same cemetery with different methods: beyond national tradition and disciplinary experience.*

Discussants: Marion Witteyer, Peter Fasold, Jacopo Ortalli, Valérie Bel, Chérine Gébara.

11:30 - Summary: *What differences exist between Roman burial practices at Classe and in Gaul and Germany?*

Discussants: Jacopo Ortalli, John Scheid, Marion Witteyer, Jeannot Metzler, Stephanie Kilcher-Martin, Chérine Gébara.

Participants :

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Verger Stéphane
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Witteyer Marion
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Statistical Information on Participants :

Male / Female : 15 / 9

Countries of origine :

Albany : 2

France : 7

Germany : 2

Italy : 8

Luxemburg : 2

Switzerland : 2

United Kingdom : 1

Professions :

Professors : 7

Researchers : 3

Archaeological Services : 9

Professionals of the Rescue Archaeology : 5