

IL VALORE DEI GESTI E DEGLI OGGETTI

Monete e altri elementi in contesti funerari

a cura di
Noé Conejo Delgado



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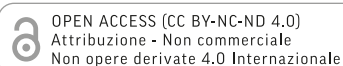
In copertina: dettaglio di una sepoltura con monete a Epinoy/Sauchy-Lestrée (Pas-de-Calais)
(foto Vincent Merkenbreack).

In quarta: dettaglio della tomba 19 della necropoli tardoantica dell'area degli Uffizi (Firenze)
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14. UNDER THE CLOAK OF INVISIBILITY: THE *MISE-EN-SCÈNE* OF DEATH IN THE WEST OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Abstract

The funerary record sets itself up as a privileged stage for (self-) representation, moulded to the image of the deceased and/or the group to which he/she belonged. In view of this, mental codes and social dynamics are expressed in the handling of death. This paper therefore presents some of the gestures 'hidden' in the funerary record, as documented in ancient Lusitania. Through the grave goods identified in rural necropolises in the westernmost province of the Empire, we intend to shed light on the intentionality of the gesture, and the details that comprise the mise-en-scène of death in this territory.

Keywords: Antiquity, funerary practices, Lusitania, funus, grave assemblages.

Résumé

Sous le manteau de l'invisibilité : la mise en scène de la mort dans l'Occident de l'Empire romain

Le registre funéraire s'affirme comme une scène privilégiée d'(auto) représentation, modelée à l'image du défunt et/ou du groupe auquel il appartenait. Ainsi l'être, les codes mentaux et les dynamiques sociales s'expriment dans le traitement de la mort. En ce sens, nous présentons certains des gestes "cachés" dans les découvertes funéraires documentées sur le territoire de l'ancienne Lusitanie. À travers le mobilier funéraire identifié dans les nécropoles rurales de la province la plus occidentale de l'Empire, nous avons l'intention de mettre en lumière l'intentionnalité du geste et les détails qui composent la mise en scène de la mort sur ce territoire.

Mots clés: Antiquité, pratiques funéraires, Lusitania, funus, ensembles funéraires.

1. INTRODUCTION

«We cannot analyse the significance of an object without referring to a consciousness that invests it with meaning and transforms the object into a speech, into something that says something» (ALARCÃO 1995, p. 43, translation by author). This idea assumes special importance within the scope of research on the funerary world. The funerary record sets itself up, in our view, as a privileged stage for (self)representation, moulded to the image of the deceased and/or of the group to which he/she belonged. As an acknowledged

«And then Death asked the third and youngest brother what he would like. (...) he asked for something that would enable him to go forth from that place without being followed by Death. And Death, most unwillingly, handed over his own Cloak of Invisibility.»

(From *The Tale of the Three Brothers*, p. 90)¹

materialisation of memory (individual and collective) – and as a corollary of a basically cathartic, basically illusory management of the idea of finitude –, mental codes and social dynamics are expressed in the treatment of death, often conferring a renewed meaning to everyday objects.

Through the grave goods identified in rural necropolises in the westernmost province of the Roman Empire, we intend to bring to light the intentionality and relevance of the gesture crystallised in the funerary context. The geographical frame of our analysis corresponds to an area in the southern half of modern day Portugal, near the border with Spain: the 'Alto Alentejo' (the Portalegre district)² and the upper part of the designated 'Alentejo Central' (the Évora district). This area was part of the Roman province of *Lusitania*, in the ancient *Hispania*. It was an eminently rural area, and therefore our study sample is exclusively composed of rural necropolises, associated with *villae* or other rural settlements. Nevertheless, this region seems to have been a non-peripheral and well-connected territory during Antiquity; a fact that is largely explained by its proximity to the provincial capital, *Augusta Emerita*.

2. OUR APPROACH

In the attempt to obtain a closer and more detailed look at the mortuary ceremonial, the treatment of the available data was based on two key ideas. Firstly, the idea that «ritual is the mechanism – the prescribed formula – by which the transition occurs» (BAKER 2012, p. 15) and secondly, that the «the *mise-en-scène* of the deceased, i.e. the 'rhetoric' of their presentation when laid out for burial as an embodiment of key social

¹ ROWLING 2007/2008, *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, London, pp. 87-105.

² Throughout this text, the Portuguese designation 'Alto Alentejo' will be replaced by 'North Alentejo'.

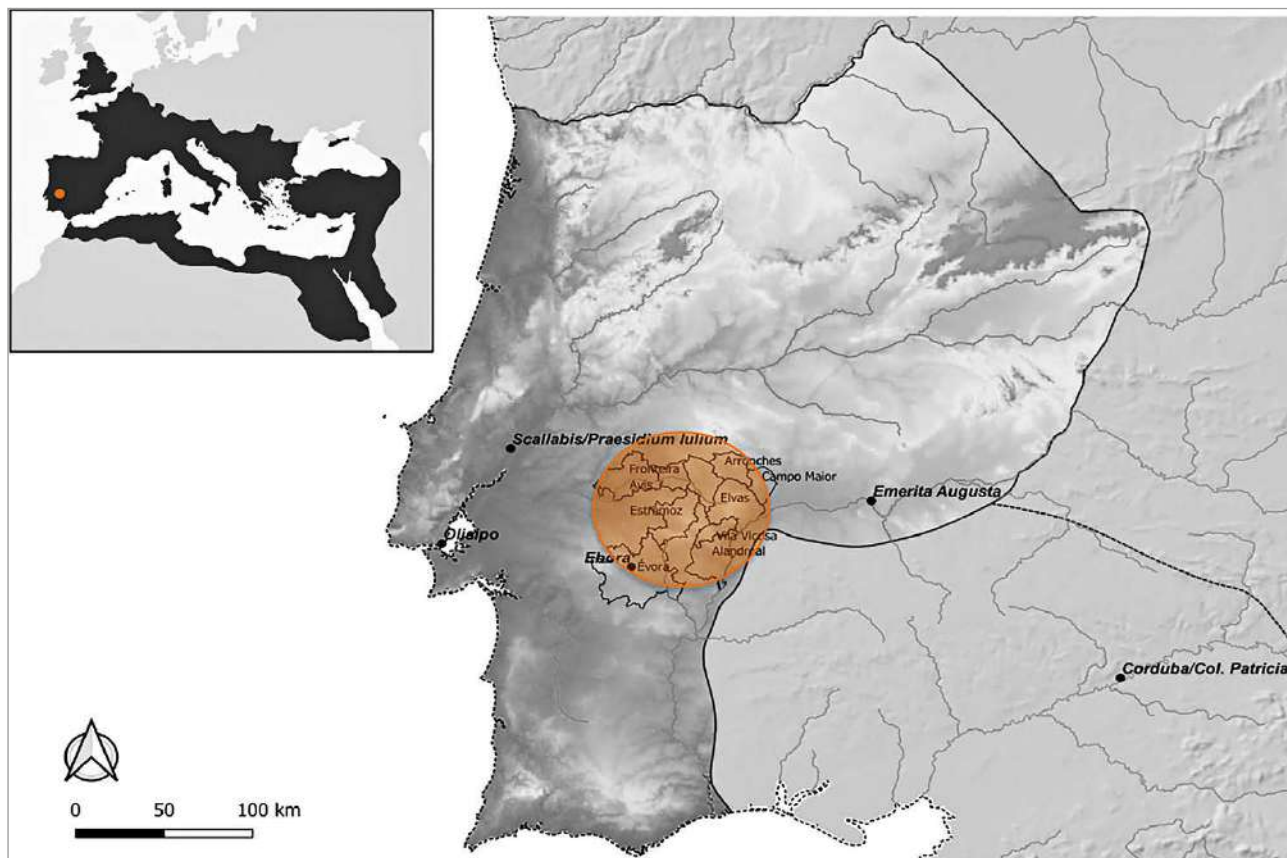


fig. 1 – Location of the geographical area in analysis (Map Roman Empire: © <https://www.vectorstock.com/royalty-free-vector/map-roman-empire-vector-23891464>. Map *Lusitania*: © J. García Sánchez. Both maps adapted by author.).

and cultural values (...) remains poorly understood» (PEARCE 2015, p. 451). The funerary archaeological record is therefore conceived as a 'liminal' context. It is a point of transition between different spheres – the dead and the living; the worldly and the heavenly; the mundane and the symbolic; the individual/self and the society/others, etc. At the same time, funerary practices are seen as a dynamic process – an individual or group attempt to deal with and overcome death, assuming a polyhedral dimension that can rarely be inferred in its entirety (variable forms, multiple causes). Tracing and explaining the multiple causes (age, gender, ethnicity, rank, familiar traditions, etc.) that underlie mortuary practices' variability, i.e. the motivations that underlie the gesture is a complex task. Ultimately, «the forms by which a deceased may be brought to rest are as many as there are causes of death» (BRANDT 2015, p. 16).

Concerning the data on funerary practices in this rural territory in the West of the Roman Empire, there are some unavoidable constraints on our analysis. Besides the scarcity of ancient written sources on Roman and Late Antique *Lusitania*, much of the information available and material evidence has come from mid-20th century excavations, poorly documented and with no concern for context, stratigraphy, bio-anthropological

data; and even less with regard to reconstituting the funerary ceremonial.³ In addition, there is a significant imbalance between the known data, depending on the regional areas and chronological frames. In the North Alentejo, for example, one Roman funerary context is counted for every 10 Roman habitat sites (CARNEIRO, ROLO 2019, p. 166). This invisibility and fragility of funerary archaeological record becomes even more striking when we attempt to study the 'fringe' groups of society (the undistinguished burials; the 'unburied' – SMITH *et alii* 2018, pp. 275, 277). This reinforces the idea that the funerary archaeological record only gives us a partial portrayal of the communities (BLAIZOT *et alii* 2007, p. 306).

3. UNDER THE CLOAK OF INVISIBILITY

3.1 The *Funus* – an overview

Notwithstanding the constraints (mentioned above) on the available data, it is still possible to spot some gestures in the funerary record that composed the

³ Exception for the necropolis of Santo André (Montargil, Ponte de Sôr), excavated in the 1970s and well documented – VIEGAS, NOLEN, DIAS 1981.

mise-en-scène of death in this area of *Lusitania*. When analysing the *funus* (as described by VAQUERIZO 2001, pp. 58-59) *in agro* in ancient *Lusitania*, some evidence clearly stands out.

In the first place, the practice of inhumation has been confirmed from the second half of the 2nd c. AD, with the coexistence of both rites – cremation and inhumation – lasting until the mid-3rd/4th c. AD (even in the same necropolis) (ROLO 2018, vol. I, pp. 339-340). In a group of more than 800 tombs, cremation was the main funerary rite. The funerary tradition from Late Iron Age burials (cremation remains placed in cinerary urns) continued during the Early Roman period. From the second half of the 2nd c. AD, the practice of inhumation gradually increased until it became the dominant rite. As already pointed out by several authors regarding other provinces of the Roman Empire (PEARCE 2013, p. 147; SMITH *et alii* 2018, p. 222), the preference for one or another rite was not linear, and may have had multiple motivations, whether personal or family/community-related, religious, economic, etc. Similar motivations seem to explain the variability of the tomb architecture, both for cremations and inhumations. Among cremations, the most common practice in the set of necropolises analysed was cremation with secondary deposition, as attested by the presence of *ustrina*. The most frequent formal typology of cremation graves were simple pit holes, with no cover or covered with tiles, stones or *tegulae*. Box-shaped graves, built with stones, *tegulae* or *lateres* were also frequent. See, for example, the tombs in the Santo André necropolis (Montargil, Ponte de Sôr), or the incineration graves documented in the necropolises of Horta das Pinas and Padrão (Elvas, Portalegre)⁴. The inhumation graves, of equally varied morphology, could correspond to simple pits, with no identified coating or cover, or box-shaped tombs, built with stones (including marble) or building ceramics. The Torre das Arcas necropolis' tombs are a good example of this formal variety (VIANA, DEUS 1955; ROLO 2018). Marble sarcophagi are also documented (e.g. the Eira do Peral necropolis, Monforte and Herdade do Botafogo, Elvas)⁵.

The prevailing orientation of the graves was W-E/E-W, but there does not seem to be a regulating norm. In inhumations, the rule was deposition in dorsal decubitus and there are no records of anomalous graves⁶ identified (although that does not mean they did not exist).

The arrangement of the graves within the necropolises' area seems significant evidence of the intentionality of

the funerary gesture. A few examples associated with different chronologies, funerary rites, and conceptions of the treatment of death should be highlighted. The first one is Santo André (Montargil) – a cremation necropolis (c. 60 burials), used during the High Empire (1st-2nd c. AD), and where the graves were apparently randomly distributed along the necropolis' area (VIEGAS, NOLEN, DIAS 1981). In turn, in the necropolises of Padrão (Elvas) and Juromenha (Alandroal) – also associated with the cremation rite and High Imperial chronologies (second half 1st-early 2nd c. AD) –, the arrangement of the graves in parallel rows suggests a considered organisation of the funerary space (ROLO 2018). However, there is no information about possible grave markers in these necropolises. We also have the example of Eira do Peral (Monforte): a non-excavated site, identified in the mid-20th century, where a marble sarcophagus (probably 3rd-5th c. AD) was collected (ROLO 2018, vol. I, pp. 155-160). The description of the site in the local press in the mid-1940s tells us about a square room, with columns in each of the corners, and where multiple sarcophagi were placed. We hypothesize that the described square room may have been a *mausoleum*⁷. In the case of Terrugem (Elvas), the plan of the Late Antique necropolis⁸ revealed a rectangular structure occupying a central position, and the inhumation graves seemed to be organised around that structure. It is clear that this central building, independently of its function (funerary and/or religious – *mausoleum*/martyria?), played a polarizing role in the necropolis (VIANA 1950; ROLO 2018, vol. I, pp. 253-255), emulating the phenomenon of *tumulatio ad sanctos*.⁹

With respect to grave goods and funerary offers, it is interesting to notice, on one hand, the diversity of artefacts represented in these necropolises; and, on the other, a certain uniformity in many of the grave assemblages. Thus, regarding the 'funeral kits'¹⁰ from our study sample, it is noted that material culture variability contrasts with mortuary uniformity. Pottery – coarse ware pottery and fine ceramics – constituted the major percentage of the offerings. This was followed by metals (especially personal adornment and clothing elements, weaponry and tools). Concerning coarse ware pottery, and despite the diversity in the

⁷ On the Eira do Peral site, see also Carneiro 2014, vol. II, p. 352, n. 13.38.

⁸ 4th-6th c. AD.

⁹ Naturally, conceptions of death in the High Imperial Roman world differ from those held among the early Christian communities. However, the intentionality of the gesture regarding the treatment of the dead stands out, common to the various examples presented and regardless of the motivations, context or religious background.

¹⁰ The expression 'funeral kit' was coined by Jill Baker (2012). As defined by the author (BAKER 2012, pp. 12-13), we considered the concept well suited to the known Roman funerary panorama in the geographical area under analysis.

⁴ On Santo André, see VIEGAS, NOLEN, DIAS 1981. On the Horta das Pinas and Padrão necropolises, see ROLO 2018.

⁵ ROLO 2018, vol. I, pp. 159, 342.

⁶ As defined by VAQUERIZO 2015, p. 22, footnote 27.

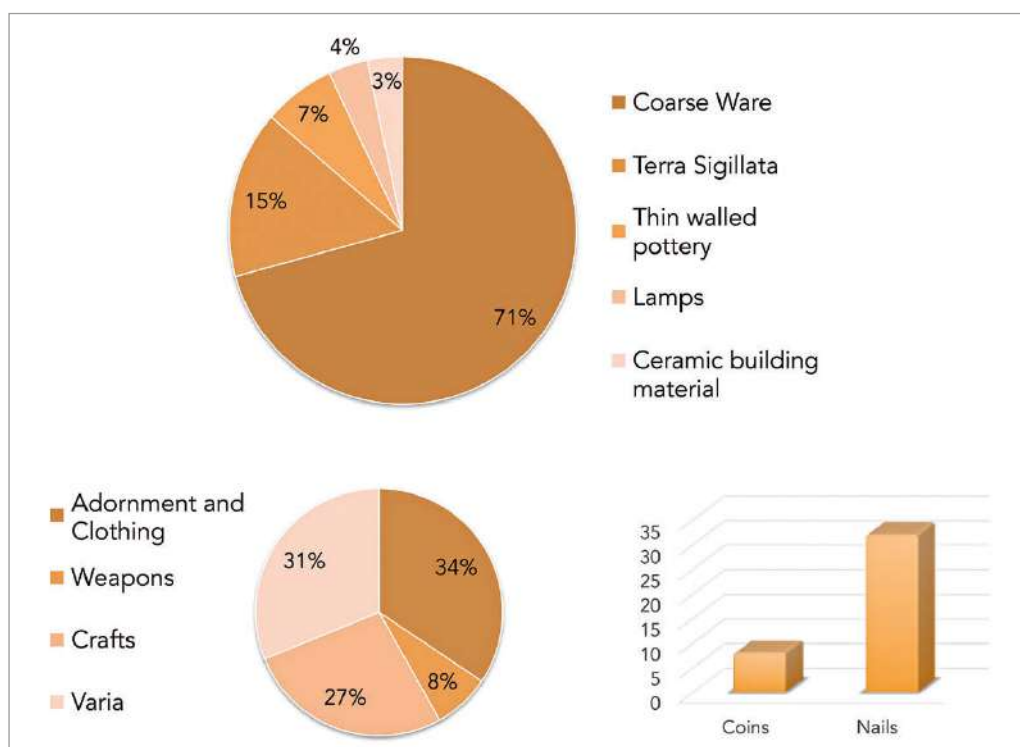


fig. 2 – Material culture provided by the rural necropolises from North Alentejo (© Charts by author.).

quantity and formal variety of the funerary pieces, there is a clear stability regarding the type of offerings deposited in funerary contexts. The recurrent presence of pots (also used as urns), bottles or jugs, pitchers, bowls and plates among the grave assemblages studied is, therefore, of great interest. For example, the burials explored in the Juromenha necropolis (Alandroal) showed that, frequently, the sets of offerings were composed of two-handled pots and a bowl or a jug, which might or might not be accompanied by other artefacts (such as fine ceramics or glass). In general, these sets did not exceed a total of five pieces. The choice of a specific set of items (of personal and/or utilitarian nature), which were repeated in several graves, reflects an intention and possibly a repeated ceremonial behaviour (BAKER 2012, p. 15). These offerings seem to have had a special meaning for the community and played an important role in the way they dealt with death. Converted into «essential grave goods», these everyday objects gained an eschatological function and a symbolic funerary meaning: «those items that are repeatedly deposited with each person regardless of rank within the community suggest routine practice, rite, ritual, and ceremony» (BAKER 2012, p. 12).

Only around 35% of the analysed graves did not provide offerings. The majority of the burial assemblages were composed of two to three items. In about 9% of the cases, the burial assemblages were composed of eight to 18 items (the largest set). These cases tended to correspond to High Imperial cremations (ROLO 2018, vol. I, p. 347).

In some cases, it is possible to trace a deliberate arrangement of the grave offerings within the tombs. See, for example, tomb G.3 at the Santo André necropolis, in which there was a clear separation between the areas where the cremation remains were concentrated and where the grave goods were deposited (VIEGAS, NOLEN, DIAS 1981, pp. 163-164, Est. XLIX-LII). In tomb 60 at the Padrãozinho 4 necropolis (Vila Viçosa) – also a cremation burial –, the only coin was placed in the upper half of the tomb, close to one of the side walls; while the rest of the grave goods (*circa* eight items, including pottery and glass vessels) was concentrated in the lower half of the tomb (ROLO 2018, vol. II, Appendix 1). In some graves, the funerary offerings were carefully set, placing the allegedly more fragile item inside another that could serve as protection (e.g. an oil lamp inside a coarse ware vessel, or a metal bracelet inside a red slip ware bowl)¹¹. In other cases – such as graves 79 and 84 at the Serrones necropolis (Elvas), or graves 10 and 18 at the Padrão necropolis (Elvas) – cavities annexed to the tomb itself, in which the funerary offerings were placed, have been found (ROLO 2018). In other situations – such as graves 10 and 20 at the Padrão necropolis or grave 46 at the Serrones necropolis –, the offerings might have been placed outside the tombs, possibly on the covering slabs of the graves. The hypothesis that these pieces could be related to

¹¹ This careful arrangement of the funerary offerings was documented, for example, in grave 39 at the Torre das Arcas necropolis (Elvas) and in grave 49 at the Padrãozinho 4 necropolis (Vila Viçosa) (ROLO 2018, vol. I, p. 351).

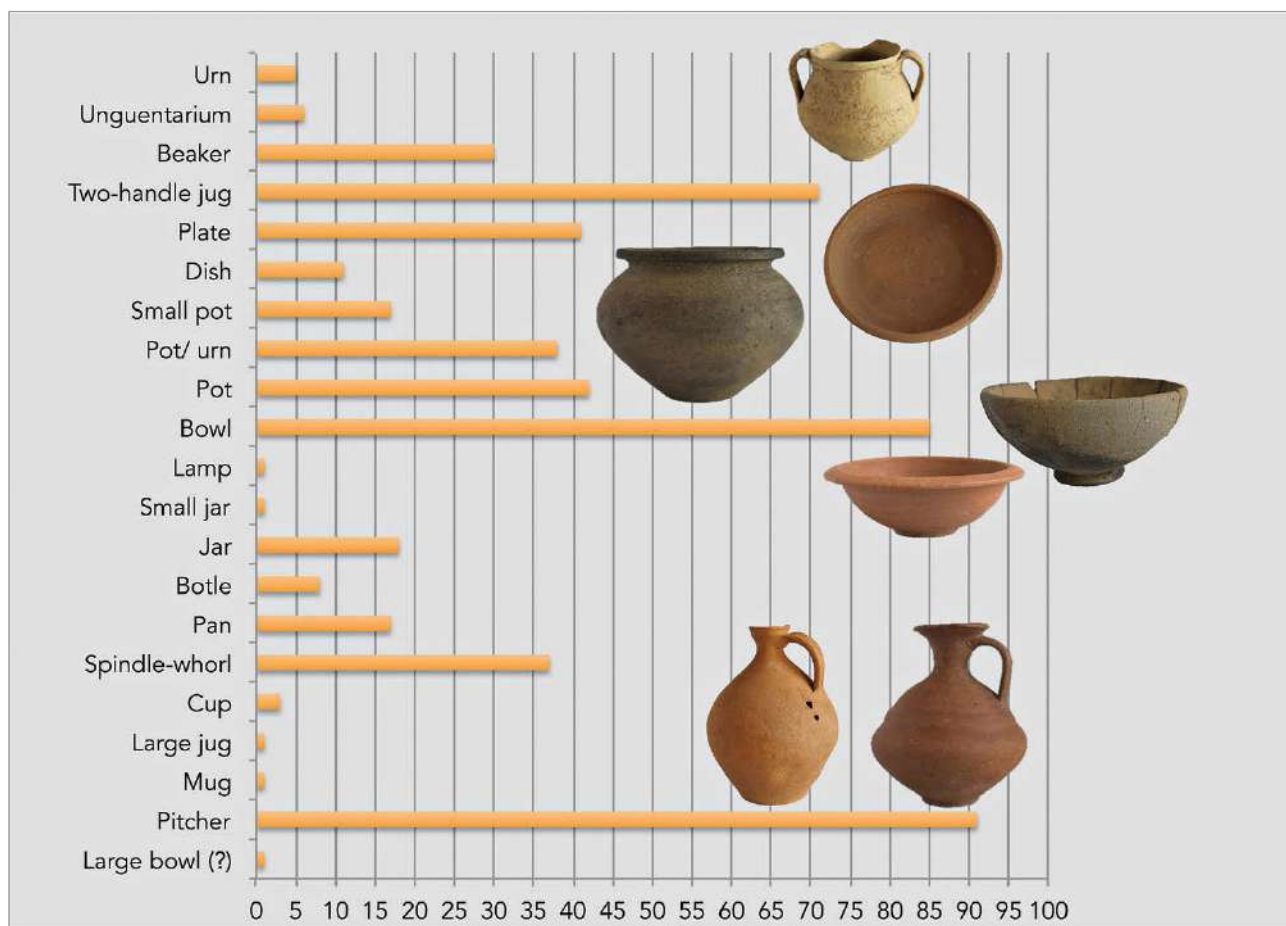


fig. 3 – Coarse ware pottery forms most frequently found in the grave assemblages from the necropolises analysed (© Chart by author.).

exsequiarum in homage to the deceased seems likely (FRADE, CAETANO 1993, p. 867; FRADE, CAETANO 2004, p. 336).

On the subject of apotropaic practices, coins and nails have been found in some of these rural necropolises. Regarding coins, very few have been collected and identified. Nevertheless, their presence has been documented in some graves, regardless of funerary rite and chronology. For example, in the necropolises of Serrones and Torre das Arcas (Elvas), or in Lage do Ouro (Crato). The latter corresponds to a cremation and inhumation necropolis, used from the 1st c. until the late 4th/5th c. AD, and in which the presence of coins has been recorded in 20% of the graves (FRADE, CAETANO 1991). In spite of the multiple symbolism that coins may assume in funerary contexts, they are traditionally interpreted as symbolic payment to Charon (*naulum*). More careful and better documented excavation processes, in terms of register and interpretation, could have enabled more accurate interpretations. With regard to nails, they correspond to circa 15% of the metal assemblage collected in these necropolises. Nails are commonly documented in Roman graves (cremations and inhumations),

with a utilitarian function usually being attributed (DUNGWORTH 1998, p. 153). However, the frequent presence of nails (in variable number) in some of the cremation graves at these rural necropolises, with no information available on burial containers (e.g. the use of timber coffins)¹², leads us to suggest a possible apotropaic function for these items. The nails could have been used as a magical-prophylactic element, aimed not only at protecting the deceased but also to anchor them in the world of the dead (DUNGWORTH 1998, p. 153; ALFAYÉ 2010, pp. 444-448; VAQUERIZO 2015, p. 18).

3.2 The gestures – some case-studies

Despite the difficulties in tracing the stages of funerary ceremonial and ritual practices in the archaeological record available, there are some noteworthy case studies.

In the Torre das Arcas necropolis (Elvas), 84 tombs have been identified, associated with two different burial phases at least: a first phase datable from the

¹² As occurs at the Serrones and Padrãozinho necropolises – see ROLO 2018.

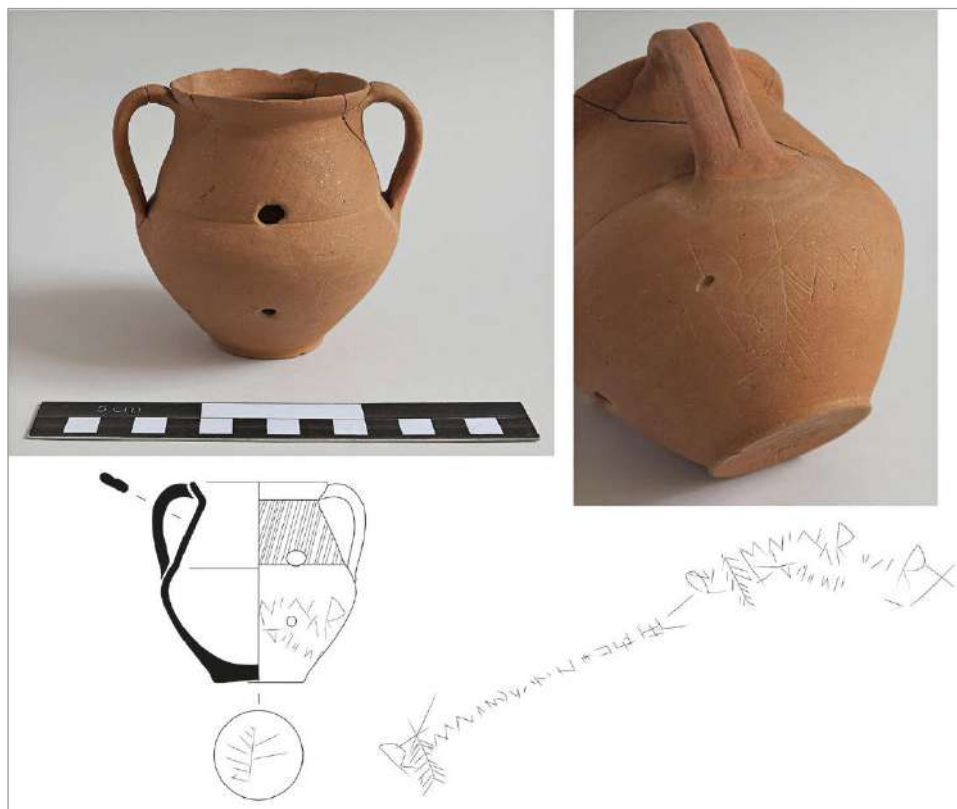


fig. 4 – Coarse ware vessel from tomb 51 of Torre das Arcas necropolis (© Photos by author. Drawing by author and Vanessa Dias, in ROLO 2018: vol. III, Appendix 2. See also NOLEN 1985: n. 149, Est.s XXII, LVIII).

mid-1st century until the mid-3rd/4th century AD; and a second one, datable to the 6th-7th centuries AD. During the earlier phase of the necropolis' use, both funerary rites – cremation and inhumation – were practised one followed the other, but they coexisted in time and space. Inhumation is documented from the second half of the 2nd c. AD onwards, while the use of cremation (with secondary deposition) extended until the 3rd/4th c. AD. In this necropolis, oil lamps were a significant presence among the grave assemblages, compared to the other necropolises in our geographical frame. Pottery oil lamps – mostly Dressel 28 and 30 forms – were present in 26% of the graves (21 lamps distributed among 20 graves) and point to chronologies from the 2nd until the 4th c. AD (ROLO 2018, vol. I, pp. 235-236). This element suggests a choice that, for a family or community, assumed special meaning and symbolism when dealing with death and ensuring a peaceful transition to the afterlife for the deceased. This recurrent presence of lamps may be interpreted as symbolic of the light that illuminates, guides and assists the deceased on their final journey (FRADE, CAETANO 2004, p. 337); or, in the most abstract sense, the lamp symbolizing light as the source of life (GONZÁLEZ-VILAESCUSA 2001, p. 83).

Among the grave goods from tomb 51 (probably a double inhumation, according to VIANA, DEUS 1955, p. 252) at the Torre das Arcas necropolis¹³, a coarse

ware vessel that had been carefully pierced on the upper and lower part of its walls was found. It also presented an extensive – although illegible – graffito, including the repetition of an apparent alphabetiform motif – 'R' – and spine and cross motifs. The spine motif (which can also be described as a representation of the Tree of Life) is well known from other funerary contexts, namely from Late Antiquity¹⁴. It seems likely that the graffito may have had a symbolic meaning that goes beyond the mere mark of ownership. Taking into account the graffito, as well as the two holes carefully made in the vessel, we suggest a possible ritual function for this piece – it could have been used, for example, in ritual libations during the *funus*' ceremonial or in commemorative activities in honour of the deceased. Given the chronology attributed to the funerary context where the vessel was found – late 3rd-4th c. AD (ROLO 2018, vol. II, Appendix 1) – we also hypothesize that both the vessel and the graffito on it may have had a funerary and/or religious symbolism. A possible association with the Christian faith would place us before a precocious testimony of the Christianization of these rural communities.

contained two burials (VIANA, DEUS 1955, p. 252), one probably datable from the mid-1st to the mid-3rd c. AD, and another one datable from the late 3rd-4th c. AD (ROLO 2018, vol. II, Appendix 1).

¹⁴ Parallels for the spine motif are found, for example, among the grave goods from tombs 23 and 27 at Torre de Palma (Monforte) (WOLFRAM 2011, vol. II, pp. 313, 315, figs. 24 and 29). The apparent 'R' motif, repeated at least four times throughout the graffito, could bring to mind a certain resemblance with the Chi (X) Rho (P) monogram.

¹³ Tomb 51 at Torre das Arcas was an inhumation grave, excavated on the soil and covered with *tegulae*, oriented E-W. Apparently it

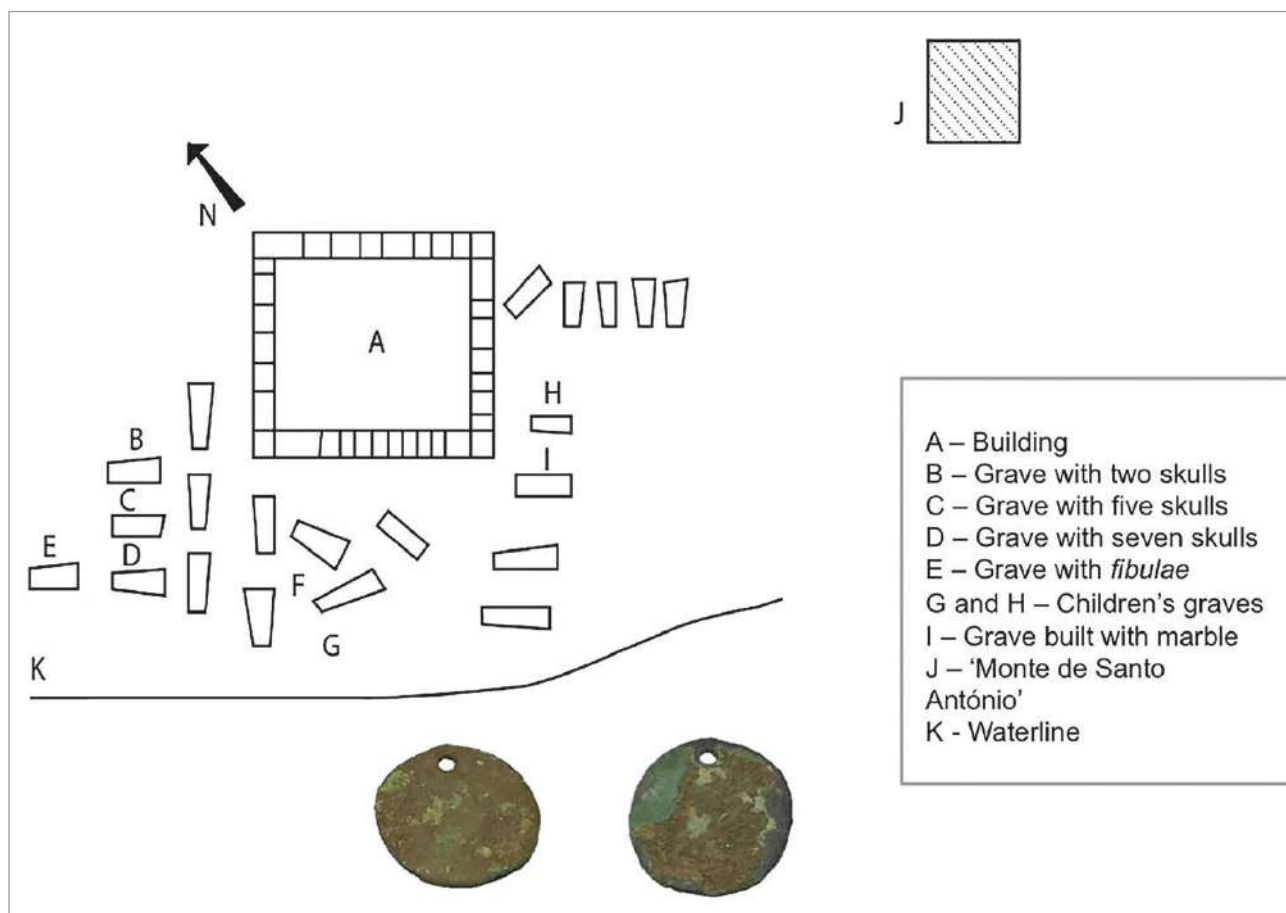


fig. 5 – Terrugem late antique necropolis: the necropolis' plan and the two coins converted into pendants found under one of the stone blocks of the central structure. (© Plan VIANA 1950. Adapted by Vanessa Dias and author. Photos by author).

The general tendency for a decrease in the quantity of funeral offerings and grave goods throughout Late Antiquity seems to be confirmed in Torre das Arcas, particularly in the inhumations datable from the 6th-7th centuries AD. In the late burials of this necropolis, there is a significant reduction of offerings, especially when compared with the High Imperial tombs. The Late Antique grave assemblages tend to be limited to some glass vessels, objects of personal adornment (belt buckles, earrings and rings), hairpins, and ritual common ware jars, such as the one identified in tomb 68¹⁵. This last type of item tended to be associated with the symbolism of water as a purification element: the water that washes away one's sins and restores one's soul's purity¹⁶. Such symbolism was especially

¹⁵ Tomb 68 at the Torre das Arcas necropolis was a box-shaped grave, built with stones and oriented E-W. It contained one inhumation with ossuary. The only funerary offering coarse was a coarse ware jar, type Flörchinger 9B (FLÖRCHINGER 1998), probably datable from the 6th c. AD (ROLO 2018, vol. II, Appendix 1; vol. IV, Appendix 3, TDA. cc.022_68).

¹⁶ «(...) by the help of the water of new birth, the stain of former years had been washed away, and a light from above, serene and pure, had been infused into my reconciled heart — after that, by the agency of the Spirit breathed from heaven, a second birth had restored me to a new man» (Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistle I to Donatus*, 4. In ANF, vol. 5, p. 276).

enhanced in the ongoing Christianization of the *Lusitanian* countryside.

At the archaeological site of Terrugem (Elvas), a Roman settlement, possibly a *villa*, and two necropolises were identified in the mid-1940s. The earliest necropolis (cremation) was presumably datable from the 1st-early 2nd c. AD. During Late Antiquity, south of the residential structures and High Imperial necropolis, an inhumation necropolis was in use between the 4th and 6th c. AD.

There are two aspects concerning the necropolis as regards Late Antique ceremonial and ritual practices that should be emphasised. Firstly, and as previously mentioned in point 3.1., the necropolis plan showed a central structure. This structure, built with granite blocks, has not been excavated but it is known that two coins were found underneath one of the building stones. The severe abrasions on the surfaces of the coins indicate that the metal was of poor quality, therefore suggesting a chronology from the 4th c. AD onwards¹⁷. Already converted into pendants, these coins, therefore, been out of currency for an undetermined period of time. The use of such coins, even if

¹⁷ We thank Noé Conejo Delgado for the analysis of these pieces.



fig. 6 – Grave goods from Padrãozinho 4 necropolis (tombs 18, 20, 59 and 98) (© Photos by author).

converted into pendants, seems to point to some sort of consecration ceremony of this central structure – a probable *mausoleum* or religious building.

Secondly, in one of the Late Antique graves (presumably a child's) a silver spoon with the inscription 'AELIAS·VIVAS IN·CHR(isto) αω' has been found¹⁸. The inscription on Aelia's spoon leads us to a Paleochristian cultural environment. It makes sense to think that this kind of grave good would be related with the Eucharist celebration, and specifically with the reception of the Holy Communion before one's decease (*viaticum eucharistiae*), a common practice among the first Christian communities (GONZÁLEZ-VILLAESCUSA 2001, p. 74). The presence of this type of item is also documented, for example, among the grave assemblage from tomb 17 at the Torre das Arcas necropolis. This inhumation tomb provided ten mortuary offerings, including fine and coarse ware pottery, an oil lamp, four nails, a coin and

a copper spoon. The significance of the presence of the spoon among this grave assemblage is unknown. However, and as far as the funerary ceremonial is concerned, it seems relevant that on a burial datable to the 4th c. AD (*t.p.q.* suggested by an African red slip ware vessel, fabric C – *Atlante* I, pp. 70-71; DELGADO 1968, p. 57, III-1), a coin presumably from the early 1st c. AD was found (VIANA, DEUS 1955, p. 261, footnote 10; ROLO 2018, vol. II, Appendix 1). The third case-study under analysis is the Padrãozinho (4) necropolis (Vila Viçosa). At the Padrãozinho site, at least four different funerary areas have been identified from 1st c. BC until Late Antiquity¹⁹. One of these areas – Padrãozinho 4 – was a cremation necropolis (128 tombs), used from the mid-1st c. until 3rd c. AD. The funerary architecture was varied, from simple urn burials in pits to box-shaped tombs built with local stone, *tegulae* and/or *lateres*. At least two *ustrina* were identified in the Padrãozinho 4 necropolis, attesting to cremation with secondary deposition. Among the grave assemblages, the intentional (and partial) destruction of everyday objects for their subsequent funerary deposition has been noticed. In some of the

¹⁸ The best parallel identified is the silver spoon from the treasury of Monbadon (Gironde), also with Chrismon and the inscription of the owner's name *Pompeianus*, datable to the 5th-6th century AD (BALMELLE 2001, p. 80, fig. 20). Formal parallels also exist with the silver spoon from tomb 22 at the Caldeira necropolis (Tróia, Alcácer do Sal) – ALMEIDA 2009, p. 56, Est. XL, n. 201. On the Terrugem necropolis and Aelia's spoon, see also CARNEIRO, ROLO 2019; ROLO 2018, 2022.

¹⁹ On the Padrãozinho necropolises, and Padrãozinho 4 in particular, see ROLO 2016, 2018.

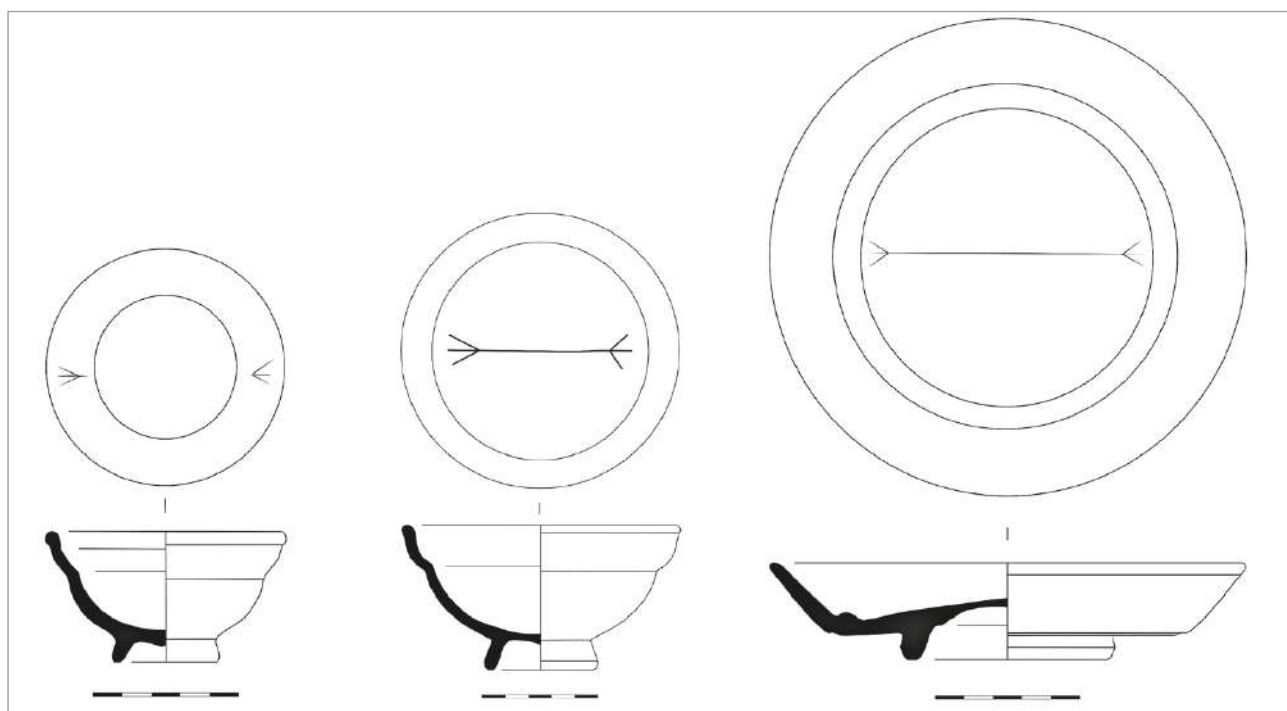


fig. 7 – Hispanic RSW vessels from Horta das Pinas necropolis. (© Drawings by author and Vanessa Dias, in ROLO 2018, vol. III, Appendix 2.).

tombs – tombs 18, 20, 33, 51, 59 and 98 – disused, fragmented and incomplete coarse ware vessels have been placed. All these vessels had their form – jars or jugs – and their arrangement within the grave in common. They were placed without rim or neck and covered by a small fragment of stone (schist) or *tegula*. It is not possible to confirm if the fragmented state of the vessels was a consequence of their use as a funerary offering (possibly in some ritual practice or ceremony). Their use as grave goods could also have been due to the fact that the vessels were already broken and, therefore, of no use in a domestic context. In any case, and according to the available data, we should consider the hypothesis that these vessels may have been used in ritual ceremonies, possibly in funeral feasts (*circumpotatio*).

Lastly, Horta das Pinas (Elvas) was a cremation necropolis (around 60 tombs), with a total area of approximately 4 acres (4 ha) and datable to the second half of the 1st c.-early 2nd c. AD (with just a single phase of use documented, as far as it has been possible to ascertain)²⁰. Like Padrãozinho 4, the tomb architecture was quite diverse, varying from simple urn burials (similar to Late Iron Age urnfields) to more elaborate graves – box-shaped and rectangular, built with stones, *tegulae* and/or *lateres*. Among the grave goods collected in Horta das Pinas three Hispanic *terra sigillata* (RSW) vessels were identified – two type Draggendorf 27 cups and one type Draggendorf

15/17 plate – with the same graffito scratched on the internal bases. The burial context of these vessels is unknown, but we can easily presume that there was an intention to differentiate these offerings by using the same graffito motif. We hypothesise the three vessels could have been placed in the same grave, belonging to the same burial and, thus, the graffito could be an ownership marker. Or, they could have been part of the burial assemblages of distinct tombs, but identifying individuals related in some way (for example, family members). The graffito could also be imbued with a symbolic, apotropaic or religious meaning that we cannot perceive.

4. FINAL IDEAS

The analysed study sample corresponds to a well-defined geographical area – *Lusitania's* countryside in the territory closely dependent on the ancient provincial capital, *Augusta Emerita* and bordered by two rivers: the Tejo, to the North; and the Guadiana, to the south²¹. Concerning Roman funerary archaeology in this territory, a significant number of sites were explored from the late 19th and during the mid-late 20th century. Nevertheless, the available data has several constraints, mostly related to the inaccurate excavation and registration methods.

²⁰ On the Horta das Pinas necropolis, see ROLO 2018.

²¹ The ancient River *Tagus* and the River *Anas*, respectively.

There are unavoidable difficulties in accessing the energy invested in mortuary practices, in reconstructing the ritual sequence and ceremonial, and in distinguishing the products of various depositional processes, as noted by J. Pearce (2015, pp. 451, 464). These difficulties remind us that studying the *mise-en-scène* of death (as a reflex of multiple factors – social, cultural, religious, economic, etc.) implies recognizing that, to a certain degree, we are dealing with the intangible dimension of the individual, the group and their context.

A general overview of the available data highlights the diversity in attitudes to the disposal of the dead and the mortuary setting (tomb architecture, rites and grave goods), even within necropolises. As N. Christie has pointed out «the material record (...) and especially the burial record exhibits (...) an array of forms and practices, which shows that, often, form will be multiple too, dictated by locale, population, roots and outlook – which are all things hard for us to trace and understand» (CHRISTIE 2018, p. xiv). The variability of the material culture (fine and coarse ware pottery, glass, metals, coins, etc.) documented in the burial assemblages contrasts with the uniformity observed in most of the ‘funeral kits’. Among these ‘funeral kits’, some items seem to have had the status of ‘must have offers’, clearly associated with a social, symbolic and eschatological perception (and use) of the objects. Not only do they seem to have assumed a key role in the ritual procedures aimed to help overcome death and ease the last journey of the deceased, but they also reinforced the bonding link among the group. The individual dimension of one’s memory and self-representation thus merged with the group (family, community) perception of the deceased and of death itself. Likewise, details such as the preference of a small community to be buried with lamps, as documented in the Torre das Arcas necropolis; the use of graffiti (names and/or figurative motifs) to identify ceramics used as grave offerings or in funerary rituals; and the intentional destruction of everyday objects for their subsequent deposition in a funerary context, as observed in the Padrãozinho 4 necropolis, were also part of this dynamic underlying the *mise-en-scène* of death in rural *Lusitania* during Antiquity.

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IL VALORE DEI GESTI E DEGLI OGGETTI

IL VALORE DEI GESTI E DEGLI OGGETTI

*Monete e altri elementi
in contesti funerari*

a cura di
Noé Conejo Delgado



I rituali funerari delle società antiche e medievali sono ricchi di piccoli gesti che non possono passare inosservati. Negli ultimi anni, molti ricercatori che si dedicano all'archeologia della morte hanno concentrato la loro attenzione sulla traccia di questi comportamenti, analizzando in dettaglio molti dei materiali rinvenuti nelle sepolture. Monete, gioielli, ceramiche, ossa, cibo e fiori sono alcuni degli oggetti che venivano frequentemente utilizzati per dare l'addio al defunto. L'analisi dettagliata di questi materiali in ampi contesti funerari dimostra che la loro scelta e collocazione nelle tombe era ricca di significati che variavano a seconda delle epoche, delle regioni e delle comunità. Questo volume riflette proprio su questi ultimi aspetti, studiando in dettaglio la scelta, la collocazione e il valore ideologico di piccoli oggetti tradizionalmente associati a concetti ormai superati. È per questo motivo che gran parte dei lavori presenti in questo volume sono dedicati all'analisi delle monete nelle tombe, poiché si tratta di un oggetto utilizzato con una certa frequenza nei riti funerari di varie culture. Accanto a questi studi numismatici, altri contributi sono dedicati all'esame, secondo approcci aggiornati, degli elementi di decorazione e consumo personale in contesti funerari, fornendo così nuovi dati che permettono di ricostruire e di ripensare con maggiore precisione le concezioni della morte in epoca antica e medievale.

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