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# Interdisciplinarity in Archeology

## Death in the Roman world: example of the civitas of Forum Iulii

(Fréjus, Var, France)

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### A Roman city and its territory : an experiment for analyzing Death during the Antiquity

During the first century AD, the territory of the civitas of Forum Iulii, a Roman colony founded by Julius Caesar, occupied a large part of the current Var department. This territory is located at a strategic point : an important crossroads between *Via Julia Augusta* (also called *Via Aurelia*) and *Via Domitiana*, two major roads between Italy, Spain and Northern Gaul. Along the first road, which is the east-west axis, the territory was structured by the presence of a few small urban areas: the two mutations of Forum Voconii (Cannet-des Maures) and Matavo (Cabasse).

Selected because of a rich documentation but until now unexploited, this vast territory, well known and geographically limited, offers the opportunity to conduct **an interdisciplinary research combining approaches from the humanities and the environment to analyze the funerary practices and the settlement of different necropolis between the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AC to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD.**

During the Roman Empire, the Death and the deceased are a privileged way for individuals **to express their own identity showing their social status** during the funeral ceremonies or by the arrangements placed at their grave. Moreover, this period is characterized by two different treatments of the corpses: cremation, which is dominant during the third first century, and inhumation from the 4<sup>th</sup> century onwards.



Reproduction of a roman pyre and funerary ceremonial  
 (From Direction de l'archéologie de la DGO4  
 - Service Public de Wallonie -  
 Musée du Matgré-Tout)

### Aims and objectives

This process falls within an **archaeoanthropological approach** with the **correlation of biological, historical, archeological sociological and cultural data about the Death in Past Populations.**

The anthropological approach aims to identify the deceased to understand the social organization and living conditions through the diversity of funerary practices. A biological study is absolutely essential for knowing populations of the Past.

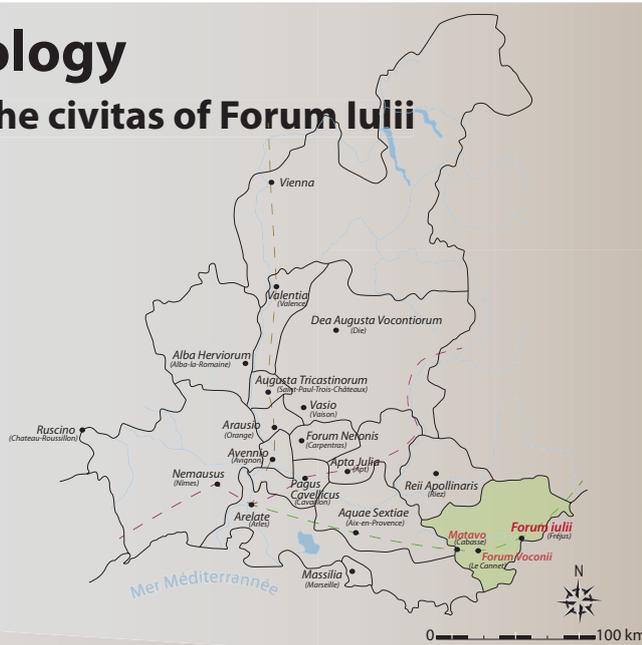
This approach involves different objectives:

- **Examine human gestures** from different kinds of data to highlight specific treatment from various criteria (biological (like age, sex), social and cultural when it is possible). Obviously, this step is conditioned by the preservation of the bones exhumed after spending 2000 years in the soil ;
- **To count and analyze the artefacts** deposited with the deceased, to understand their function according to the funeral dimension, the age and sex of the individual for example or make hypothesis about their origin (italic people as mentioned in the text) ;
- **To give a societal analysis** by confronting of biological data with written sources, archeological and topographical information, highlighting the dynamics and strategies of development of these funerary spaces, in urban or rural context.

### Corpus

For this work, four big sites were studied. The amount from the mutatio of Matavo will be increased for the final discussion (the study was done during the 1980's).

Urban aeras	Name of the site	Years of excavation	Number of graves	Datation
Forum Iulii (Fréjus)	Pauvadou	1982-1985	<b>157 graves</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> BC - 4 <sup>th</sup> century AD
			73 inhumations	
			84 cremations	
Forum Iulii (Fréjus)	Saint-Lambert	1984-1986	<b>270 graves</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> - 3 <sup>rd</sup> century AD
			41 inhumations	
			229 cremations	
Forum Iulii (Fréjus)	Saint-Lambert	2006-2007	<b>103 graves</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> - 3 <sup>rd</sup> century AD
			26 inhumations	
			77 cremations	
Forum Voconii (Cannet)	Les Termes	2007-2008	<b>181 graves</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> - 4 <sup>th</sup> century AD
			31 inhumations	
			150 cremations	



### An interdisciplinary protocol

A common protocol **combining anthropology and archaeology (= archeoanthatology), including many others disciplines** when data was available (anthracology, ceramology, paleobotany, architecture, geomorphology, etc.), allowed the identification of common human gestures in Death. By recognizing the function and nature of the archaeological structures, it could be possible to suggest variability and complexity in funerary practices, following these different steps :

- 1 Biological analysis based on a protocol previously tried and tested, specifically adapted to treatment of corpses (cremation or inhumation).
- 2 Documentation analysis that contributes to restituting the initial funeral dispositive to define the taphonomy (=post-depositional processes) of each sepulture.
- 3 Interpretation of cross-reference data to comprehend the management of Death, and the integration of the funerary space in the landscape, its relation to the habitat.



Evocation of Forum Iulii during the second century - Watercolours J.C. Golvin, 2013  
 (From <http://jeanclaudegolvin.com/forum-julii-frejus>)

### Particular case : the treatment of the very young people

During the third century, inhumation is also represented in the funerary space, even though cremation is the dominant. But **this treatment is reserved to a particular age class: the young and babies.** This specific treatment is mentioned in the written sources which explain that the young were not yet integrated in society and could not benefitate of the cremation rite.

*« uel terra clauditur infans et minor igne rogi »*  
 Then the earth closes over a babe too young for the funeral pyre.  
 Juvenal, Satire, XV, 139-140

*"Hominem prius quam genito dente cremari mos gentium non est"*  
 It is the universal custom of mankind not to cremate a person who dies before cutting its teeth.  
 Pliny the Elder, Natural History, VII, 16, 70-72



Grave of a child (approximately 1-4 years old). His corpse was surrounded by unguent vases in ceramic and glass, lamps and small vases.  
 (Conseil Général du Var, 1985)



**This original work in archeoanthatology aims to study all the aspects related to Death. And it is only possible using an interdisciplinary approach involving :**

- ➔ The study of funerary practices over a long chronological period and a large spatial scale ;
- ➔ Correlative analysis of the biological, historical and archeological data ;
- ➔ Focalization on a territory with the integration of the funerary areas in the landscape of the Living ;
- ➔ Comparative analysis between the different funerary spaces of this territory.

