

Analysis of the funerary ritual of the necropolis Ex Manifattura Tabacchi of Piacenza

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Abstract. In 2021 an excavation was carried out in the suburban necropolis Ex Manifattura Tabacchi of the Roman city of Piacenza. The necropolis is dated between the I and the II century AD. The research focused on food remains, as evidence of the roman funerary ceremonies. An archaeobotanical approach was adopted, analysing vegetal offerings from the graves. The carpological remains mostly belong to cultivated plants such as cereals and pulses. Fava beans are the most frequent taxon, due to their funerary symbology

Key words: necropolis, roman, archaeobotany, rituals

Introduction

The archaeological excavation

The Ex Manifattura Tabacchi necropolis was discovered in the suburbs of ancient *Placentia*, towards the routes that led to Val Tidone, and presumably, it was related to a rural settlement.

The area in which the tobacco manufacturing complex was located, between via Rafalda and via Montebello (Figure 1), has been affected by requalification projects as part of the Urban Implementation Plan (PUA). The excavation was carried out at first under the scientific direction of Dr. Marco Podini, archaeologist of the Soprintendenza Archeologia Belle Arti e Paesaggio di Parma e Piacenza, and then it continued under the scientific direction of Dr. Paola Mazzieri, archaeologist of Soprintendenza Archeologia Belle Arti e Paesaggio di Parma e Piacenza, and the technical direction of Dr. Maria Giovanna Cremona.

At the end of December 1959, some archaeological discoveries came to light, clearly related to a funerary context. In fact, during the excavation of the foundation of one of the buildings of the complex (Marini Calvani, 1990; Marini Calvani, 2000), 2 ollas

with an ovoid body in raw ceramic and a mutilated glass with a crushed spheroidal body were recovered. The finds are similar to the one of the current excavation and they date back to the early imperial age.

1998 the area was abandoned after the Italian Tobacco Authority's creation.

Since 2009, a requalification project has been planned for the entire complex, which involved dismantling existing structures and the construction of residential, public and commercial settlements.

In 2019, during urbanization works, other funerary evidence emerged. The 2021 excavations brought to light 6 burials of the early imperial age.

In 2022, archaeobotanical investigations were carried out on some tombs to verify the presence of possible residues of plant offerings.

Materials and methods

The grave goods

The burials are all indirect cremations with urns. The grave goods are made up of few finds and from a preliminary analysis, it doesn't seem to be a social

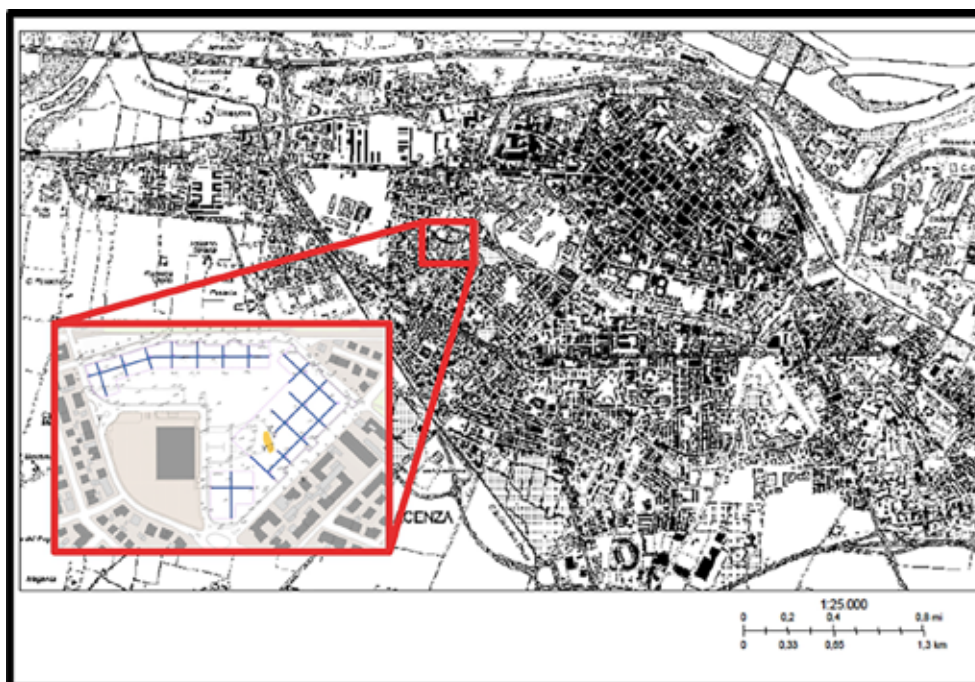


Figure 1. Location of the Ex Manifattura Tabacchi excavation. Graphic processing of the CTR map at 1:25000 scale, from Geoportale dell'Emilia Romagna (graphic processing by Di Piero).

difference among the burials. Below are listed the finds related to the tombs in which the archaeobotanical analysis was carried out. The data comes from the thesis of Dr. Del Piero Lucia, Scuola di Specializzazione in Beni Archeologici dell'Università di Milano a.a.2021/2022 (Del Piero, 2021/22).

Tomb 1 US 10

Indirect cremation burial dated to the 1st/2nd AD.

1. Olla, similar to Olcese type 3a

The olla has a slightly everted rim with a quadrangular profile, a concave neck, a distinct neck-shoulder attachment, a throat marked by a double groove, a body tapered towards the bottom and a flat bottom.

2. Olpe

The olpe, in purified achromatic clay, is characterized by a flared cylindrical neck with a vertical strip rim, a compressed globular body, a ribbon handle and a ring foot.

3. Unguentarium

The unguentarium of purified achromatic clay is pyriform and it has an everted rim, a high cylindrical neck and a flat bottom.

4. Lid

The lid of semi-purified clay has an inverted rim.

5. Lid

The lid of purified clay has an inverted rim.

6. Unguentarium, similar to Calvi group F/De Tommaso type 4.

The glass pyriform unguentarium is sketchy. The cylindrical neck and the large flat base stand out. The colour is yellow/brown.

Tomb 3 US 14

The indirect incineration burial was affected by a modern sewer system. The finds date it to the 1st century AD.

1. *Olpe, derived from Lagynos*

The spinner-shaped olpe has a straight everted rim, a bell-mouthed cylindrical neck, a ribbon handle and a ring foot.

2. *Lid*

The lid is bell-mouthed and made of achromatic semi-purified clay.

3. *Terra sigillata cup, similar to Dragendorff 29 type*

The cup is characterized by a banded rim with wheel decoration and a flat bottom on which the *SEXAR* brand has been placed in relief.

4. *Tulip glass, Ricci type 1/186.*

The tulip glass of semi-purified clay has a conical hem with a straight lip. The object is incomplete.

5. *Glass pendants*

5 blue pendants made by the mold casting technique. The shape is seed-shaped with 4 through holes.

Tomb 4 USS 16-17

Indirect cremation burial with the urn, dated to the 1st century AD.

1. *Plate, Lamboglia 7/6 type.*

The plate is bell-mouthed and belongs to the black gloss ware.

2. *Olla, Vegas type I*

Oval-shaped olla with banded rim, concave neck and a flat bottom.

3. *Olla*

Oval-shaped olla, comb decorated, with a rounded rim and a flat bottom.

4. *Unguentarium, type Isings 26a/De Tommaso 39.*

Piriform yellow unguentarium with everted rim, cylindrical neck and slightly recessed flat bottom.

5. *Unguentarium*

Molten glass unguentarium, with a rounded everted rim, marked by a light groove and a cylindrical neck.

6. *Unguentarium*

Molten glass unguentarium, with cylindrical neck, slightly everted rim and marked by a light groove.

7. *Unguentarium*

Molten unguentarium of golden yellow colour with cylindrical neck and globular body.

8. *Unguentarium*

Green glass unguentarium with cylindrical neck and globular body.

9. *Unguentarium*

Blue piriform unguentarium with rounded rim and cylindrical neck.

10. *Unguentarium*

Yellow piriform unguentarium, with a raw-cut everted edge and a cylindrical neck. It is molten.

11. *Unguentarium*

Yellow piriform unguentarium, with a rounded everted rim, marked by a light groove and a cylindrical neck.

12. *Unguentarium*

Yellow piriform unguentarium with cylindrical neck. It is molten.

13. *Unguentarium*

Light blue glass unguentarium with a globular, molten body, with an everted rim and a short cylindrical neck.

14. *Unguentarium*

Yellow glass unguentarium, with rounded everted rim and short cylindrical neck.

15. *Unguentarium*

Green glass unguentarium with a globular, molten body, a raw-cut edge and a short cylindrical neck.

16. *Bronze element*

Incomplete bronze element made by casting and hammer finished, with a likely hook with folded bar.

17. Bronze element

Incomplete bronze element made by casting and hammer finished. It could be a hatpin.

18. Bronze elements

Bronze elements made by casting and hammer finished, not determinable. Among these, there are 2 small hooks.

19. Bronze coin

The coin is incomplete and illegible.

20. Oil lamp, similar to Tiegellampen III

The oil lamp has a large flat disc with 2 slightly raised concentric circles. The infundibulum and a hole in the discus are present. Dovetail nozzle with one hole and slightly recessed flat bottom.

Tomb 6 US 21

Indirect cremation burial with the urn, dated to the 1st century AD.

1. Unguentarium

Purified clay unguentarium with red paint. Rounded everted hem and cylindrical neck, bell-mouthed inwards.

Archaeobotanical analysis

Archaeobotanical analysis has been carried out on 4 of the 6 burials: tomb 1, tomb 3, tomb 4 and tomb 6.

The soil samples were sieved in water with decreasing mesh size (10 – 0.5 – 0.2 mm). Once dried, the residual material was collected in containers (indicating site, tomb/structure number, layer).

The isolation and identification of the carpological remains were carried out with a binocular stereomicroscope (Leica Wild M10), using magnifications between 6x and 20x.

For identification, carpological keys/atlasses, various miscellany and comparison samples from the Carpoteca of the Palynology and Paleobotany Laboratory of the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia were used.

Results (Table 1)

A total of 80 liters of soil were sifted and only tomb 3 and tomb 4 sorted carpological remains. The seeds/fruits found are 156, and 137 belong to the taxon *Vicia faba* var. *minor*, fava bean (Figure 2). The remains are all charred, perhaps they had been placed on the funerary pyre during the cremation of the body.

Table 1. Table presenting carpological remains.

TOMB-US	VOLUME (L)	Plant Species
T.1 US 10	1 L	/
T.3 US 14	1 L	/
T.3 US 14	1 L	/
T.3 US 14	6 L	<i>Vicia faba</i> var. <i>minor</i> (fava bean) = 5
T.4 US 16	5 L	/
T.4 US 16	5 L	/
T.4 US 16	6 L	<i>Vicia faba</i> var. <i>minor</i> (fava bean) = 3
T.4 US 16	5 L	<i>Vicia faba</i> var. <i>minor</i> (fava bean) = 3
T.4 US 17	4 L	<i>Vicia faba</i> var. <i>minor</i> (fava bean) = 4 Indeterminate = 2
T.4 US 17	5 L	/
T.4 US 17	4 L	/
T.4 US 17	5 L	<i>Vicia faba</i> var. <i>minor</i> (fava bean) = 2
T.4 US 17	4 L	<i>Vicia faba</i> var. <i>minor</i> (fava bean) = 12 Quercus sp. = 1
T.4 US 17	4 L	<i>Vicia faba</i> var. <i>minor</i> (fava bean) = 43 Pulses = 5 Cereals = 3
T.4 US 17	6 L	<i>Vicia faba</i> var. <i>minor</i> (fava bean) = 10
T.4 US 17	5 L	<i>Vicia faba</i> var. <i>minor</i> (fava bean) = 15 Indeterminate = 2
T.4 US 17	5 L	<i>Vicia faba</i> var. <i>minor</i> (fava bean) = 40 Pulses = 3 Indeterminate = 3
T.4 USS 17-19	4 L	/
T.6 US 21	4 L	/



Figure 2. Example of charred fava beans from a necropolis in Modena.

No fruits have been recovered, while cereals and legumes are present.

Discussions

The fava beans, with their characteristic dark colour, were very important elements as a link between the world of the living and that of the dead; in fact, the “black beans”, as Ovid writes, are used in the *Feralia* ceremonies, dedicated to the ancestors, which involve bringing gifts to their tombs, and in the celebrations for the *Lemures*, the souls of the dead. For the beginning of these celebrations, several literary sources refer to the death of Remus: Romulus took the fava beans during the ritual, to bring peace to his brother’s soul (Ferro & Monteleone, 2014). The considerable presence of the fava bean underlines the desire to ward off the spirits of the dead, the so-called *Lemures*. The Romans believed that the *Lemures* and the evil *Larvae*, wandered around the houses, lonely and hungry, searching for prey. Through the ancient rite of the *Nocturna Lemuria*, a ceremony that took place on the 9th, 11th and 13th of May (Riso, 2022), the evil and the dead would chase out. During the ceremony, the rule established that the temples had to be closed and weddings were not celebrated.

The presence of cereals and legumes could be interpreted as a predilection for the more accessible

plant resources, which, in all likelihood, were in the surroundings of the burials. This circumstance would have facilitated the repetitiveness of the ritual gestures. Therefore, the absence of exotic and expensive food, towards ordinary food, such as cereals and legumes, reflects the rural social condition of the settlement.

The same is noticeable among the grave goods. The objects do not highlight social differences, showing homogeneity among the lower class.

Conclusions

The investigations of the Ex Manifattura Tabacchi necropolis are an example of complete and systematic sampling, highlighting how important the synergy is among the Superintendency, the excavation company in charge and the archaeobotanist, starting from the excavation phase.

The archaeobotanical results confirm that, when sampling is carried out through a scientific strategy, it is possible to define an accurate reconstruction of the funerary event and ceremonies.

The sampling carried out at different levels of depth of the burial allows us to understand the moments in which the necropolis was attended.

About the sociocultural aspects, recurrent and standardized behaviors have been noticed, perhaps due to custom or economic-social conditions, such as the redundancy of fava beans among the plant remains, associated with glass or clay unguentaria and drinking vessels. Olpai and cups, underline the importance of the *profusiones* during funerary ceremonies.

The choice of both food offerings and grave goods is linked to a clear funerary symbolism, aimed at strengthening the emotional relationship and keeping the memory of the dead among the family members.

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