

Shells and feeding bottles: continuity or breach between Greece and Rome?*

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If one follows a specific phenomenon over an extensive time span and in various regions of the ancient world, it becomes necessary to keep an eye on the possible structural, social and chronological developments, as these may lead to consequences for the interpretation of the phenomenon (STROSZECK 2012: 57).

Abstract: The presence of these feeding bottles deposited in graves of Roman Gaul brings forth questions regarding such practice, as the analyses of the contents lead us to link them more to body care. The presence of shells in some of the feeding bottle graves also brings us to consider these assemblages from a gender perspective, due to the attribution of shells to *mundus muliebris*.

Keywords: Feeding-bottles, shells, biochemical analyses of the content, the world of women, transfer of practices.

Resumé: Le dépôt desdits biberons dans les sépultures de Gaule romaine soulève des questions sur cette pratique que les analyses du contenu nous amènent à lier aux soins du corps. Elles ont en effet livré un contenu inattendu, plus thérapeutique qu'alimentaire. La présence de coquillages dans certaines des tombes à biberons nous amène à considérer ces assemblages sous un nouveau regard, celui du genre, en raison de l'attribution du coquillage au *mundus muliebris*.

Mots clefs: Biberons, coquillages, analyses biochimiques du contenu, monde féminin, transfert des pratiques.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to reflect on the possible origins of funerary and care practices relating to children in the Gallo-Roman worlds. It is based on the funerary practices relating to specific age groups, namely those of toddlers, which show certain regularities throughout the cultural spaces of the Mediterranean. In order to achieve this goal, we will take into account the phenomena of synchrony and diachrony that took place within one city, then from city to city within the same cultural space, then from the mother city to its colony, and finally per historical periods, between different civilisations of the Mediterranean basin¹.

Our research is based on the numerous works of recent decades, including the trilogy *L'enfant et la mort dans l'Antiquité*² (The Child and Death in Antiquity), which offers a good synthesis thanks to the spatio-temporal diversity it provides. Other approaches also feed our discourse.

Anna Lagia's study (LAGIA 2007), which is bioarchaeological and focuses on Greece, supports our observation regarding the similarity between practices over a long term. She observes that the representation and situation of children's burials in necropolises or urban spaces change simultaneously in the different cities, depending on the period: «Their uniform presence in cemeteries of southern and eastern Greece as well as in those of some poleis in the Chalkidiki, along the Thracian coast, and further afield in the Mediterranean world confirms the idea that Greek-speaking populations in these regions shared similar burial rites not only during the LA/EC (Late archaic/Early classic) periods but also during Hellenistic and ER (Early Roman) times» (LAGIA 2007: 304-305).

Following S. Raftopoulou (RAFTOPOULOU 1998: 136), Anna Lagia also agrees that in the Roman period «burial customs conform to the norm of the average town within the Empire», even for cities that had remained marginal until then, such as Sparta. As for Valentino Nizzo (NIZZO 2011: 65), he already perceives the adoption of Greek burial practices in central Italy (notably at Pontecagnano in Campania) during the Orientalizing period. Barely present during the Early Iron Age in the necropolises, children attained a representation rate in line with that of infant mortality in pre-Jennerian societies (about 50%). For the researcher, this change is due to Greek influence at work following the foundation of the colonies of Cumae and Pithecuses (FULMINANTE 2018: 203).

¹ This approach is the one described by G. Gnolia and J.-P. Vernant (1982) and pursued by Irini-Despina Papaikonomou, whom I deeply thank both for her proofreading and for sharing her expertise of the Greek world with me.

² ANR directed by A. Hermary, which produced three volumes, including the one mentioned here, *Le matériel associé aux tombes d'enfants*.

In addition to the regular recourse to the burial of their remains³, the deposit of their bodies inside ceramic vases⁴, and their separate grouping in the necropolises of metropolitan Greece, such as Astypalaia, Abdera, Messene, etc. (GUIMIER-SORBET, MORIZOT 2010), or within the community necropolises⁵, toddlers, according to the place and the age group, either had no furniture at all, or were accompanied by particular and typical furniture. Sophie Collin-Bouffier reached this conclusion in her revealingly titled article *Des vases pour les enfants* (1999), pertaining to southern Italy, where she points out *askoi*, *choes* and feeding bottles as characteristic pieces of such furniture. An extremely similar observation is made by Céline Dubois (DUBOIS 2016: 517) for Greece in the Archaic and Classical periods: «More generally, however, three types of vases are regularly associated with young children: vases with tubular spouts or ‘bottles’, *choes* and miniatures».

The results of our work on the so-called ‘feeding bottles’ from Roman Gaul, based on a catalogue of more than 700 examples as well as biochemical analyses of the contents, lead us to confirm these conclusions, although with some qualifications. Indeed, like Céline Dubois for Greece (DUBOIS 2012), we also observed that the bottle sometimes accompanied an adult. We thus demonstrated that this type of association must be interpreted from a different angle that cannot be developed here, but which in no way prevents us from establishing that the feeding bottle was, throughout the ancient world, mainly associated with infants. Its shape, bringing to mind that of the female breast, and the strong symbolism attached thereto, naturally led to a wider context of use (see PAPAICONOMOU 2013; JAEggi 2021).

Our investigation into the origin of the Gallo-Roman practice of depositing a bottle vase in the grave, particularly of children, has led us to consider an object that presents similarities in terms of its privileged place of deposit (children’s graves) and whose function, in this context, still eludes us: the shell. It should be pointed out that the habit of depositing baby bottles and shells in these tombs does not exist in the indigenous (pre-Roman) necropolises of southern France, in contrast to the Greek necropolises of Marseille (DEDET 2011: 34)⁶. The richly documented article that Jutta Stroszeck devoted to the marine ecofact points out

³ Such is the conclusion of C. Dubois at the end of her thesis *Du foetus à l’enfant dans le monde grec archaïque et classique: représentations, pratiques rituelles et gestes funéraires* (2016: 485, unpublished): «With the exception of a few rare examples, it is thus burial that largely dominates funerary rituals for the youngest. This state of affairs is invariably observed throughout the Greek world, even in necropolises where the practice of cremation is dominant for the other deceased». See also GARLAND 1985: 78.

⁴ MICHALAKI-KOLLIA 2010; KALLINTZI-PAPAICONOMOU 2010; DUBOIS 2016: 496 and 503: «Cette pratique (l’enchytrisme) est attestée dans l’ensemble du bassin méditerranéen depuis le Néolithique et se poursuit en Grèce jusqu’à l’époque byzantine»; KOTTISA 2012 (Pydna, today Macedony, 5th-4th century BC); MARIAUD 2012 (Greek cities of the Eastern Aegean, Archaic period); NIZZO 2007: 27-28 (pre-Roman Italy).

⁵ With regard to Marseille, see DEDET 2011.

⁶ The author differentiates between the Greek world and the indigenous world by specifying that, in the Celtic world of earlier periods: Final Bronze IIIb and the First Iron Age, shells were deposited more in the tombs of adults and children over 7 years old. According to him, they symbolised «rather the young child’s belonging to the world of the women of the household» (DEDET 2008: 157-240).

its presence inside two Marseilles burials of the Greek period containing a feeding bottle, for which Manuel Moliner generously entrusted us with the study of the furniture⁷.

Discovered in the necropolis of Sainte-Barbe, a shell along with a bottle, form the only furniture accompanying the deceased of these two tombs which probably belonged to two children: the skeletal remains of the first (tomb 118) point to a new-born, whereas the absence of bone fragments in the second tomb (232) obliges us to deduce that the occupant is a child from the size of the grave, without any further precision (MOLINER 2012). These assemblages are unique within the necropolis, which contains 96 graves from the Greek period (400-150 BC) and 436 from the Roman period⁸. In addition to these two deposits, the shell was found in eight other immature graves in the necropolis (STROSZECK 2012: 59). With regard to the practices of continental Greece, Jutta Stroszeck points out the total absence of feeding bottles in the shell tombs of the Athenian Ceramic necropolis (6th-5th century BC), which is surprising in view of the large number of feeding bottles discovered (STROSZECK 2012: 71, note 58). The researcher also notes a distribution of these two pieces of furniture according to age: the shells are found in the graves of the youngest children, while the bottles accompany the eldest children. In view of this distribution, she proposes to interpret the shell as a feeding tool for administering small quantities of food, such as milk, wine or medicinal substances, to infants, whereas the bottle would have been used as part of a varied diet. Also found in tombs of adult women (STROSZECK 2012: 71)⁹, the shell would, according to the researcher, be part of the *paraphernalia* (personal property of the married woman, *nymphé*), which would therefore confirm a spoon function, this time with a cosmetic or medicinal vocation (STROSZECK 2012: 66-67)¹⁰, also advanced by Irini Papaikonomou for a silver shell found in the rich tomb of a young woman from Patras (PAPAICONOMOU 2000: 82-108)¹¹. This interpretation seems to be supported by the etymology of the Greek words *κρήμη* (*krhémē*), referring to the species *Venus casina* and *μύστρον* (*mustron*) denoting a spoon taken from the mussel (*mus*) *Mytilus edulis*, both of which are used as a unit of measurement corresponding to 1/24 of an Attic *kotyle* (roughly equivalent to one centilitre) (STROSZECK 2012: 66). In Athens, the practices also repeat a certain stereotype, since the shells are generally associated with a set of three vases comprising a *pyxis* (jewellery box) or a *lekanis*

⁷ Municipal archaeologist for the City of Marseille, Chief Heritage Curator, Marseille History Museum - Archaeology Unit. We would like to take this opportunity to thank him warmly for having given us access to this material.

⁸ The bottle from the Roman period is associated with important furniture, especially amulets.

⁹ She considers theatre actors to be androgynous.

¹⁰ Extending her research to everyday life and mythology, Jutta Stroszeck discusses the dietary and therapeutic effects of shellfish and deduces «A sea shell, usually a scallop or a cockle, served as an attribute for the goddess Aphrodite or Isis-Aphrodite in Mother Goddess. In particular, the sea shells symbolized the protector of pregnant women, birthing women and women in childbed».

¹¹ In part. 90, 94: as the shell was next to the shoulder of the deceased, «so close to the face», the researcher interprets it as a blush box that could contain *psimithia*, common in that society and at that time. It may also have acted as a container for 'soap'. For a detailed presentation of the burial see PAPAPOSTOULOU 1977: 281-343, figs. 1-12, pls. 95-118; PAPAICONOMOU 2000: 90, 94.

(ointment box), a small *olpe* (jug) and a *skyphos* (cup with two handles). As for the bodies, they were usually placed inside containers such as amphorae, *chytrai*, *hydriai*, *pithoi*, or in water pipes, along with the vases.

How can we interpret the strict distribution of the two types of shells cohabiting in the Ceramic necropolis, knowing that one, the *Mytilus edulis* which is the most represented with 5 specimens, appears solely in children's burials while the other is privileged in adults' graves? Should we consider different uses (food versus cosmetic and therapeutic) or an adaptation according to the size and needs of the recipient? And if the two situations can be confronted, how can we interpret the dissociation, in Athens, of shells and bottles in children's tombs, and, on the contrary, their association in Massaliotes tombs? Are these discrepancies due to a readjustment of funerary practices or do they demonstrate, via the tomb, a different use of these objects in everyday life?

In order to answer this question, we will begin by stating our hypothesis of the adoption of funerary strategies relating to 'Greek' children that were widespread and known in Greek cities – the origin of which is difficult to establish at present – by the Greek colonies of Sicily, Magna Graecia and the West, as well as by the Gauls. Probably established on the basis of a 'model', this adoption does not exclude a variability of practices between different geographical and funerary areas, the heterogeneity of which we are aware¹² and which leads us to evoke local reinterpretations¹³. Observed in 6th century BC Athens, this model seems to us to testify to a persistence of practices, not only funerary but also of care for the youngest, at least between the 6th century BC and the 3rd century AD.

In order to answer this question, we will begin by presenting our hypothesis, based on the deposit of the shell/bottle pair, of the adoption of the continental Greek funerary model¹⁴ by the Greek colonies of Magna Graecia, Sicily and the West, as well as, in the roman period, by the Gauls¹⁵, and of its possible persistence from the 6th century BC to the 3rd century AD. Beyond funerary practices, this article focuses on the transmission of food and childcare practices around the Mediterranean, between the Greek and Roman worlds, with particular attention paid to Gaul (protohistoric and Roman) which is the focus of our work, the results

¹² The heterogeneity of funerary practices has been questioned and recognised for Greece (LAGIA 2007: 294; KALLINTZI-PAPAIKONOMOU 2010; MICHALAKI-KOLLIA 2010; DUBOIS 2016: 456) for the Magna Graecia by MEIRANO 2012: 113; for the Gallo-Roman world by Durand (2005: 299) and others like GOUDINEAU 1991: 248; BEL, MANNIEZ 1996; BLAIZOT *et alii* 2000, etc.

¹³ For example, Véronique Dasen has shown the Gallo-Roman reinterpretation of Greco-Roman courtly statuettes (DASEN 1997: 125).

¹⁴ The proposal of a 'Greek model' in Marseilles was put forward by B. Dedet on the basis of his study of children's graves in the south of France in the protohistoric period: «Il ressort de cet examen que la répartition des défunts en fonction de l'âge au décès n'est pas la même dans les cimetières indigènes que dans celui de Marseille/Sainte-Barbe, et la différence essentielle entre les deux mondes concerne les tout-petits» (DEDET 2011: 5).

¹⁵ Yves Manniez also observes, in the tombs of the roman Gaul, the adoption of «pratiques culturelles et sociales héritées du monde grec»: see MANNIEZ 2019: 195.

of which prompted this investigation¹⁶. Outside Gaul, the sites selected for this investigation are those that offer the best documentation: Athens and Corinth (continental Greece), Himera and Locres (Sicily and Magna Graecia), Marseilles and Ampurias (western Greek colonies). For this dossier, we will rely on the biochemical analyses carried out on the two baby bottles and the two associated shells from the Greek necropolis of Marseilles Sainte-Barbe, mentioned above. The comparison of the Greek feeding bottles contents with those of the forty or so Gallo-Roman feeding bottles produced as part of our thesis should enable us to respond to the hypothesis of the permanence of not only funerary but also dietary and therapeutic practices. As for the analyses of the two shells associated with the feeding bottles, they will make it possible to specify their possible use in Marseilles and to verify whether this use can be compared to that envisaged by Jutta Stroszcek for the Athenian shells. Our analyses will open up new avenues and we hope to be able to compare them with others in the future.

2. IN CONTINENTAL GREECE

In the Athenian necropolis of Ceramic, Jutta Stroszcek counts, for the period from the end of the 6th century to the end of the 5th century, 15 graves of children enclosing a shell¹⁷. In addition, there is one of a child whose age is estimated to be between 3 and 6 years and which is dated to the Roman period¹⁸. The children who received a shell are all buried in a vase. The latter is in most cases an amphora and more rarely a pot (*chytra*), a *hydria*, a *pitbos*, even water pipes and, in two cases, a *larnax*. Within such containers there is usually a stereotypical set of crockery including a lidded vessel (*lekaneis* or *pyxis*), a *skyphos* and/or a small *olpe*, as is the case for most of the enchanted tombs in the necropolis. The shell is always placed in either a *pyxis* or a *lekaneis*, of a normal size, often along with a smaller vase such as a bowl, *kytyle* or jug or a miniature (*skyphos*). In one case, the lidless *pyxis* is covered by a plate. These assemblages seem to show a desire to protect the object and are accompanied, in one case, by astragals (Fig. 1), in another, by an *exaleipteron* (Fig. 2)¹⁹, and in the last by a make-up tablet (Fig. 3). In Athens, the custom of placing shells in children's graves is not limited to the Ceramic necropolis, as shown by a 5th century tomb (tomb 1010) discovered outside the site. This practice, which was limited in time to just over a century, ended at the same time as the

¹⁶ Indeed, we observe that the practices that were common in Rome and its surroundings during the Hellenistic and Roman periods differ from those of romanised Gaul. This leads us to reflect on the origins of the practices, notably funerary but probably also medicinal, adopted by the peoples of Gaul at the turn of the new millennium. Can we envisage that the conqueror allowed, in some way, the transmission of practices that he himself had not adopted? We will attempt to answer these questions in a future research project.

¹⁷ Not included in this study are a child's burial from the 10th century BC, about which little is known, and the 15 burials of adults in the necropolis that yielded a shell.

¹⁸ As the Roman period of the necropolis has not yet been excavated, it is not possible to ascertain the frequent use of shells in children's graves from this period.

¹⁹ In this child's tomb, the shell is a Venus Cockle which was with the *skyphos* in the lidded bowl. See STROSZECK 2012: 71, cat. 5.

deposition of children in the two sectors covered by the necropolis (STROSZECK 2012: 59). From the second half of the 5th century onwards, shells are found in the graves of adults of the necropolis. They are all determined as women where gender determination was possible. As for the children of the earlier period, the burial material is part of the female sphere.

The necropolis of Corinth shows similar practices. Its discoverer, Carl William Blegen, also highlights the frequent association, in children's tombs, of shells and *pyxides* or *lekanides* (a kind of box), both used as cosmetic containers or as gifts to brides (BLEGEN *et alii* 1964: 71). He points out that these boxes are the most often found in burials with a strigile. They often contain eggs – also called shells –, small pots and shells (BLEGEN *et alii* 1964: 77). Shells are found in five 6th-century burials, all of which are children. A change in practices appears between the 6th and 4th centuries: during the earliest period, the shells are Mussel-type, whereas in the period closer to us, all kinds of species are found. It appears that the shells were no longer reserved to children and were actually more addressed to women (BLEGEN *et alii* 1964: 84). It is interesting to note that at Corinth, the four bottles found in a funerary context are all dated after the change in the practices observed, i.e. between the third quarter of the 4th century (T457 and 449) and the beginning of the 3rd century (T 495). As in the Ceramic necropolis of Athens, none are associated with shells. However, two were deposited with individuals described as children. The condition of the skeleton accompanying the third bottle renders age determination impossible. As for the fourth bottle, it came from a pit considered as an offerings pit, and associated with an area where there was a concentration of children's graves.

3. IN MAGNA GRAECIA AND SICILY

Many necropolises in Magna Graecia have yielded shells. Sicily is no exception. About twenty shells are mentioned in the graves of children from Megara (ORSI 1889-1892²⁰; CARUSO 1892²¹) of which three are from Selinunte (KUSTERMANN GRAF 2002)²². In Gela, in the Borgo area (T. 34), Paolo Orsi reports the existence of a white, mealy substance in one child's grave containing 4 shells (ORSI 1906; BOUFFIER 2012: 145, note 49). In Syracuse, shells are present in nine children's graves, including one (T178) where they form a group of 16 individuals (BOUFFIER 2012: 145, note 52; CARÈ 2018: 151, note 62)²³.

The necropolis of Himere, which has the specificity of having delivered a very large number of bottles over the entire period of the necropolis' life (second half of the 7th century BC to the end of the 5th century BC), seems to offer an ideal setting for our research. However, shells are only mentioned on two occasions. Both relate to children's graves, one dated to

²⁰ T. 16, 96, 105, 128, 135, 152, 159, 204, 222, 225, 237, 276, 300.

²¹ T. 639, 681, 686, 687, 741, 768.

²² T 41, 152 and 219.

²³ Barbara Carè nevertheless highlights that, in these different sites, the presence of shells is not limited to children's graves. They are even largely in the minority.

the first quarter of the 6th century by a plastic Corinthian vase representing a ram, the other to the late archaic period without any further precision. While the first tomb is most likely an earth burial which, in addition to the vase, yielded 105 cowries (RA69), the second (W9088) is quite unusual due to the body's container, which is in the form of a terracotta bathtub with a lid. The bathtub was 70 cm long and could have contained a child under the age of two, whose bones have disappeared. The shell, whose type is unfortunately not furnished in the publication, was placed on the outside of the bathtub in a *pyxis*²⁴. Inside the bathtub were a feeding bottle, a lamp, a black-faced *lekythos*, a small cup and a *kotyliskos*.

The site of the Lucifero necropolis in Locres, Calabria, presents two other children's tombs with shells, which stand out from the others thanks to the richness of their material. Dated to the first half of the 4th century, one (564) contained a miniature reproduction of a piece of furniture (*trapeza* or chest), several miniature black-glazed vases, including a lid, fish dishes and a *pyxis*, as well as astragals, three shells and an ivory cicada (ORSI 1913: 7, fig. 6; ELIA 2001; MEIRANO 2012: 117). The feminine connotation of this set of objects is also emphasised by the various researchers interested by this material. Its presence in children's graves is interpreted as referring to the female gender of the deceased, as well as to the fertility/fecundity cycle (PAPAIKONOMOU 2006: 246) and to a destiny within the *oikos* cut short by premature death (see e.g. KALLINTZI, PAPAIKONOMOU 2006: 481-482). The second burial (567) seems to express an identical message (Fig. 4). It contained two *louteria*, water vessels, used in wedding rites to purify the spouses, a miniature altar (*arula*), small vases, a plastic duck-shaped *askos*, and three types of objects (shells, astragals and animal teeth) gathered in small sets of five (MEIRANO 2012: 125).

4. IN THE WESTERN GREEK COLONIES

In the Western Greek colonies, shells appear either alone in the tombs either associated with one or more objects²⁵. In the necropolis of Sainte-Barbe in Marseilles (400-150 BC), 14 specimens are spread among 10 children's graves, including four new-born and two infants (T105 and 3 in T305) – i.e. aged between 6 months and one year –, another whose age is estimated to be between 1 and 4 years (T57) and another between 5 and 9 years (T16). These very young deceased are all buried, according to Greek practice, either directly in the ground (T19, T118, T 305), in a vase (T106, T545), or in a casket (T 105, between 300 and 200 BC). Two of them received, in addition to a shell, a bottle vase the contents (T118 and T232) of which we will detail later (Fig. 5). Only one other Marseilles burial encloses an additional object accompanying the shell, in the form of a bronze rod. It was found in the grave of a child aged between 1 and 4 years (T57). Eleven shells deposited in adult burials are equally added to this number. As Manuel Moliner mentions, only one of the two shell valves is

²⁴ The type is not specified in VASSALLO 2014: 274, fig. 15, nor in CARÈ 2018: 146, note 9 and 148, note 24.

²⁵ The graphic presented by B. Dedet shows that a shell is the only material of 5 children tombs. See DEDET 2011: 14, tab. V.

deposited in the grave, which excludes the food function of the bivalve shells (MOLINER 2012: 178).

Shells are also frequently represented in the Greek necropolises of Ampurias. In the Marti necropolis, 12 were found with youngsters and 3 alongside adults; in the Bonjoan necropolis, their predominance lies with adults with 7 specimens and only 4 with youngsters, also in Mateu Granada the only specimen found was associated with an adult. In Ampurias, the shells are, more often than in Marseilles, associated with another object. Thus, one of the tombs at Marti also contains an astragalus and a terracotta (M20); another tomb (M77) contains a terracotta and a glass artefact²⁶, as does a tomb at Bonjoan (B43). Bottles are rarely present in the Ampurias tomb complex. Only one tomb containing one has been identified at Marti (M85). The feeding bottle was accompanied by an articulated doll, but no shell was found (PAPAICONOMOU 2008). Neither the age nor the sex of this last deceased is reported.

It emerges from this brief inventory that in Marseilles shells are favoured first and foremost for children under the age of six months, but sometimes that they also accompany children between six months and a year old, or even older. Shells also accompany adults. They are actually more often associated with the latter in the necropolises of Bonjoan and Mateu Granada. The species of shellfish encountered do not include, as in Ceramics, Blue mussels, but rather cockles (*acanthocardia echinata* in T57) and Great scallops (*Pecten maximus* in T105 and T232), irrespective of the age of the individual beside whom they lie.

5. IN PROTOHISTORIC AND ROMAN GAUL

Neither the presence of shells, nor that of feeding bottles has been noted in the graves of children of the indigenous populations of the Second Iron Age, or in the burials of adults. Some bottle-type vases, with a spout on their body, have nevertheless been found in domestic (Centre Val-de-Loire region, 4th-3rd century BC²⁷) and cultual (sanctuary of Ribemont-sur-Ancre, Latène Period) contexts. Therefore, the Celtic world cannot be considered as a model for the deposit of this type of artefact in the burial sites of Roman Gaul. Celtic funerary practices relating to children are also very different from those in Greece and the colonies in protohistoric times. In Celtic times, children under one year of age are largely absent from community necropolises favouring living quarters. The youngest (perinatal) are, however, as elsewhere in the Mediterranean world, generally buried, unlike older children. For the latter, as for adults, the practice of cremation, which was generalised as of the 5th century BC, applies (DEDET 2011: 2).

With Romanisation, a change in funerary practices is evident in Gaul. In conjunction with the integration of children, even the new-born, into community areas, we observe the

²⁶ The shell is a *cardium edulis*: MOLINER 2012: 183.

²⁷ Sandrine Linger-Riquier, to whom we owe this information and whom we would like to thank here, calls the vases of this, as yet unpublished, series that includes more than ten examples in two different sizes (one between 10 and 12 cm in height, the other about 18 cm) 'vases with spouts'. They were found in domestic dumps.

adoption of funerary furniture that reflects Greek customs and includes shells. Valérie Bel, who questions the absence of fauna – represented almost exclusively by shells – in her *corpus* from Narbonne Gaul, mentions three Nîmes graves containing molluscs. One of them is a cremation tomb deposited in a stone urn (Fig. 6). It contained four shells (one pecten and three *cardium*) associated with a glass bottle, numerous ceramic vases, a fine fragment of glass bowl, a terracotta doll, a cameo, a silver coin and a pierced bone object (BEL 2002: 247). Our catalogue of tombs containing a baby's bottle lists three other tombs which include a shell. One of them is located in Poitiers (Fig. 7)²⁸ and contains, in addition to several ceramic vessels and a bone knife, a necklace made up of a shell (*Buccinum undatum*), seven coins and a copper alloy phallus (BRIVES 2008: II, 90-91). Another grave is located in Bourges (CADALEN-LESIEUR 2001: 89-118). The body container is made of wood and also contains important funerary furniture. It consists of three jugs, two closed vases and a ceramic bottle, as well as a glass flask, a silver denarius, a bronze fibula and a shell. The last is in Strasbourg (HENNING 1912: 33). Placed, along with the body, in a ceramic urn, the furnishings here are reduced to a shell and a glass bottle. Although the age of the dead in these tombs could not be determined, the discoverers nevertheless concluded that they were children.

6. BIOCHEMICAL ANALYSES OF THE CONTENTS OF TWO MARSEILLES BABY BOTTLES AND THEIR RESPECTIVE SHELLS

The biochemical analyses have been made by the chemist, Nicolas Garnier²⁹. The bottle from burial 218 is a Marseilles production in clear paste of the Bats F822 type (dated between 350-300 BC). Its mouth is sealed and pierced with four holes. It accompanied a perinatal deposited in the ground in a 32 cm long pit. The contents of the bottle are composed of a ruminant fat, which, according to the heat traces (cholestadienone) observed, was heated, as was the pitch identified (presence of HPA, retene, 4*H*-retene). The mixture was spiked with fermented black grape juice, i.e. red wine. The squalene, a marker almost present in cutaneous tissues and olive and often debated, here seem to indicate the presence of rind, – due to its presence mainly in skin (animal or human) –, rather than olive, due to the absence of the other markers for this fruit (cycloartenol, 24-methylene cycloartanol, citrostadienol). The shell associated with the bottle is of the *Callista chione* type (family *Veneridae*). It contained a vegetable oil, most probably olive, with a coniferous pitch, probably fir, and a very small amount of red wine. There is no wax or leafy plant extract. The contents of the bottle and the shell differ and therefore cannot be the result of the same libatory gesture, which would have been carried out on all the objects before the grave was closed. We must therefore conclude that the preparations were dissociated, probably conceived during the lifetime of the perinatal, probably with a therapeutic aim, as suggests the presence of pitch in both the bottle and the shell. It is indeed excluded that the pitch served to seal the shell (because

²⁸ Necropolis of the Dunes, Poitiers, cremation of the tomb 218.

²⁹ Laboratory Nicolas Garnier: <http://www.labonicolasgarnier.eu/presentation.html>.

found all over the inner side of the flask) and the medicinal use of pitch was well known. Pliny the Elder mentions it against various ailments (throat, teeth, lung, etc.)³⁰ and to combat poisons. Pitch was sometimes given in wine, as the naturalist states. One recipe includes pitch from Bruttium (present-day Calabria) with wheat flour to combat udder pain (mastitis)³¹.

The bottle from burial 232 is an Italic import in the Campanian style with black varnish (Morel typology F 5811a1). It was associated with an individual described as very young in the absence of bones and in view of the size of the grave (63 cm long). It contained a heated ruminant fat, squalene markers and a fermented white grape. Its basic contents are therefore very similar to those of the previous bottle, although including white rather than red wine and showing no trace of pitch. The shell (*Pecten jacobens*) associated with it (n. 155) is unfortunately very heavily polluted by modern materials and its contents almost undetectable. Animal and vegetable fats in equal proportions and traces of resinous material were noted, but their identity could not be determined. The sensibility of the analyses also enabled the identification of wine. As in the previous case, the contents of the bottle vase and the shell diverge. The vegetable oil is reserved for the shell. However, the shell also seems to have contained animal fat and pitch. It can therefore be concluded that the shells were not used to administer the contents of the bottles. The presence of oil in both shells seems closer to the preparation of the Bézanne bottle and the other glass examples in our *corpus* than to the Gallo-Roman ceramic bottles and suggests an external administration, such as a body care cream. The contents of the two bottles are consistent with those of the Roman bottles. Of the nearly 40 Gallo-Roman examples analysed, most contained animal fat, with vegetable fat and milk present in a minority. These results, which should be enriched by other analyses of feeding bottles and shells discovered in the different cultural areas of the Mediterranean, suggest, even at this stage, a continuity of care practices, which probably motivated the deposit of these objects on the borderline between ‘cosmetic’ and ‘therapeutic’.

7. CONCLUSION

Far from being a majority ecofact in burials, the shell seems to have acquired a sufficiently strong symbolism to have been deposited in the tombs of children for centuries and by different Mediterranean cultural spaces. In Athens, as in Corinth, it was thus favoured for the burials of the youngest until around 450 BC. Thereafter, a change in practices led to its inclusion in the burials of adults, generally women, which suggests a change in either funerary practices or in everyday life practices, or both. If the significant funerary changes that mark the middle of the 5th century support the first hypothesis, the second cannot be excluded. Indeed, the adoption at this time of other forms of shells, notably of the Saint Jacques type,

³⁰ HN 23, 47.

³¹ HN 24, 39.

whose shape brings them closer to the goddess Aphrodite, suggests diversified uses of the ecofact in a framework that is situated upstream of the funerary framework. For example, it can be found in a set of miniature bone pieces discovered in the burial site of a three-year-old girl in Abdera. This set of objects, including a weaving comb, a double axe, a pomegranate, a cicada and a figure wearing a long chiton held at chest level by crossed bands, is also found among the offerings of the sanctuaries of female deities and, as I.-D. Papaikonomou points out, on a *kernos* from the Samos *heraion* (Fig. 8).

Thus, it can be said that everything in the shell tombs considered in this dossier – even those of the youngest, and especially those of Locres – is in fact dedicated to the feminine sphere and to marriage, through the panoply referring to it. They include *pyxides* and *lekanides*, *luteria*, miniature furniture, jewellery and shells, etc. and the Athenian children's tombs dated before 450 are no exception! Indeed, the same type of furniture that could be described as feminine can be observed there. Taking Athens as a model, we can then suggest that the shells belonged, in both periods under consideration, to the feminine sphere of which they are in a way the symbol. Deposited in children's graves, they may thus have been an expression of women's care, rather than a symbol of childhood. As the care varied over time, the 'blue mussels' seem to have been replaced in their function (perhaps food?) by another object, such as a feeding bottle. It is then the larger shape of the scallop shell and other pectens that is favoured in Athens and throughout the Greek world, both by women and children. From the studies presented here, one can envisage the almost simultaneous transmission of the practices (which does not exclude a reappropriation of the uses) – not only funerary but probably also care – in the other Greek cities and colonies (islands and Magna Graecia) and, a posteriori, their adoption by the neighbouring indigenous cities and those further afield with close contacts.

The blue mussel shell, which has a particularly limited use in space and time, may have had, as Jutta Stroszcek has suggested, the function of a spoon for administering small quantities of food or therapeutic substances to children. The larger shape of the scallop and the *pecten* and *cardium* types, which are less suitable for oral administration, may have been used, as biochemical analyses suggest, more like a palette, for mixing thicker cosmetic products such as ointments. One can easily imagine their use by and for women as well as for children. These two functions, food and cosmetics, are the same as those that we attribute, on the basis of biochemical analyses of the contents, to the Gallo-Roman feeding bottles and the two Marseilles examples! Although they do not contain any exotic substances, such as castor oil³², the therapeutic use of which cannot be disputed, these last two examples are perfectly in line with their successors! Like them, they have a basic mixture comprising a fatty

³² It is possible that taphonomic factors have erased some of the less perennial markers, such as those from plants. In addition, fat itself is a widely used substance in a therapeutic setting. Speaking about the qualities of the milk, Galen says that like fat it is useful: «aux pansements et autres médicaments» (for bandages and other medicines, trad. by the author): Galen, *Sur les facultés des aliments*, III, 15 (K VI 683, 9-10), ed. & trad. J. Wilkins, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 2013.

substance (in this case animal), a fermented fruit juice (wine) and, in one case, pitch. Amongst the Gallo-Roman examples, some were found to have a more complex composition, confirming a therapeutic function. This is the case of castor oil, rare oils, some of which are impregnated with oak leaves or other woody structures not yet identified. Another example is the original and complex content of a glass bottle from Bézannes (France, Marne; see BONTROND *et alii* 2013: 181) – found in what was probably a child’s grave – which takes the form of a mineral base, combining limestone and sand, associated with a milk-oil mixture, either impregnated by enfleurage (plants/flowers in milk), or enriched with unidentified plants and a resin or coniferous wood.

The fact that the Marseilles baby bottles and shells have a mixture so similar to that of the Gallo-Roman baby bottles seems to us to confirm the transfer and the long duration of practices, not only for the care of infants, but also for funerary purposes, between one cultural space and the other. Whether they are associated or not, the feeding bottles and shells seem to us to have to be interpreted from now on more in reference to the individual who fills them, handles them and of whom they are the symbol. One being an allusion to the breast, the other to intimate parts, they appear in the tombs as a testimony to those who gave birth to them, fed them, and cared for them until death.

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Fig. 1: Athens, Kerameikos, content of the child burial in *hydria*, Tumulus G: Blue mussel in a *kotyle* placed in a *chytra* beside five astragals, a bowl, a one-handed cup and a Black-figure *lekythos*, 500-490 BC (from STROSZECK 2012: 60, fig. 1).



Fig. 2: Athens, Kerameikos, part of the content of the child burial in amphora (tumulus G): sea shell in the *skyphos* in one of the lidded bowls, *exaleipton*, five miniature *skyphoi*, 490 BC (from STROSZECK 2012: 60, fig. 3).



Fig. 3: Athens, Kerameikos, part of the content of the child burial in amphora: a *lekythos*, a lidded bowl, two *skyphoi*, probable make-up tablet, 450-425 BC (from STROSZECK 2012: 60, fig. 3).



Fig. 4: Locres, Lucifero necropolis, part of the content of the child tomb 567: 5 shells, a *louterion*, a small two handled vase, a duck shaped *askos*, end 5th century BC (from MEIRANO 2012: 121, fig. 10).

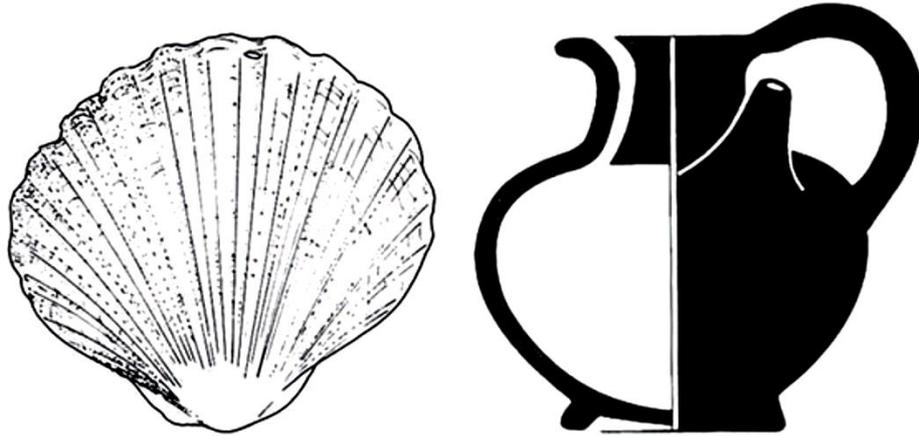


Fig. 5: Marseille, Sainte-Barbe, content of the child tomb black glazed feeding bottle and *Pecten jacobus* shell, 4th century BC (from MOLINER 2012: 185, fig. 15, 4 and 5).



Fig. 6: Nîmes, 1, rue Fulton: part of the content of the child tomb showing a lidded bowl, a beaker, a *skyphos* type cup and a doll, second half of the 1st century BC. (from FICHES, VEYRAC 1996: 471-472, fig. 361-362).



Fig. 7: Poitiers, part of the content of the tomb 218 (cremation): necklace composed of a shell, seven coins and an alloy phallus, after the 2nd century BC, Musée de la Ville de Poitiers et de la Société des antiquaires de l'Ouest (©Musées de Poitiers, Christian Vignaud).



Fig. 8: *Kernos* of the Héraion of Samos, 7th century BC (photo Irini-Despina Papaikonomou).