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La crémation à Alexandrie et dans l'Égypte grecque et romaine: étude d'une pratique à travers ses urnes cinéraires

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Abstract

CREMATION IN ALEXANDRIA AND IN GRAECO-ROMAN EGYPT - STUDY OF A FUNERARY PRACTICE THROUGH ITS CINERARY URNS

This research aims to study the practice of cremation in Alexandria and Greco-Roman Egypt, through the examination of its cinerary urns.

The corpus of these urns, which brings together a little more than a thousand objects, includes both ceramic vases and stone vases (white-ground hydriae with polychrome decoration, Hadra hydriae, vases with relief appliques so-called Plakettenvasen, alabaster hydriae), designed as cinerary urns, but also many vases from the domestic and sometimes civic/religious sphere, diverted from their primary use and reused in necropolises, as well as a group of alabaster vases from the Pharaonic period, sometimes of very remote time, later adopted and reinterpreted in Roman times.

The re-examination of the necropolises and the various kinds of tombs in which these urns have been unearthed since the 19th century has shed new light on the categories of people concerned by this practice, whether it is a personal choice of anonymous individuals, or a custom of the Ptolemaic state for people whose funerals were supported by the Crown, and who are known through the inscriptions present on the Hadra hydrias.

The analysis of data from the anthropological study of a selection of Alexandrian cinerary urns has made it possible to reconstruct a theoretical framework on the unfolding of the various stages of the funeral ceremony, from the construction of the pyre to the collection of the bone remains and deposition in the grave.

Finally, thanks to a typo-chronological study of the corpus of these urns, we were able to determine four major periods during which the frequency and methods of cremation evolved, between the foundation of Alexandria and the 2nd century AD.