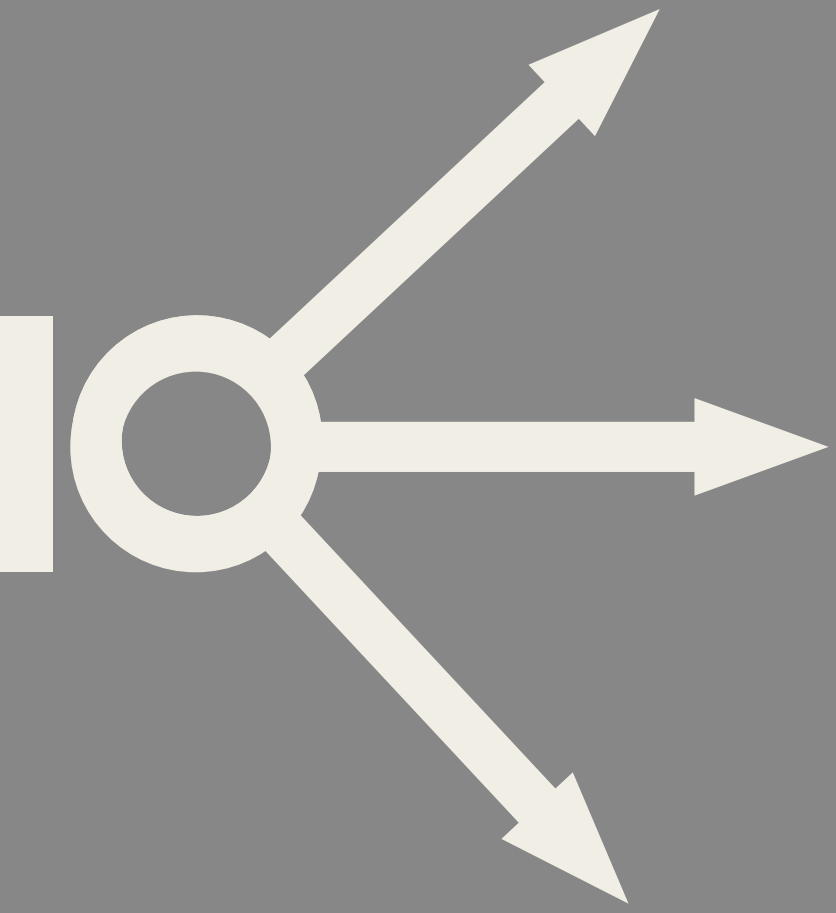
10TH INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE

METHODOLOGY & ARCHAEOMETRY

Zagreb, 1st – 2nd December 2022



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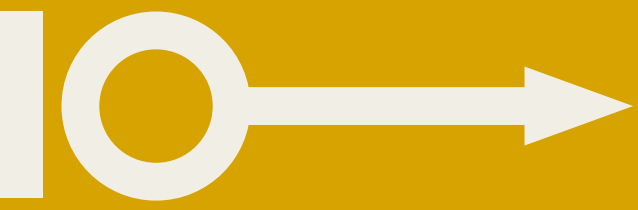
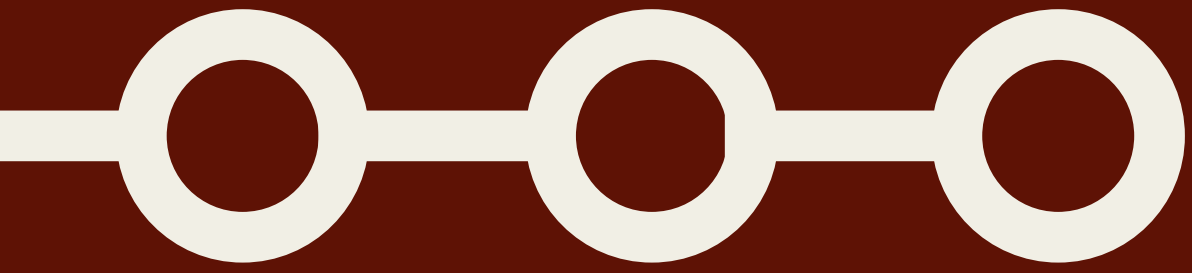


Content



All soul is immortal (Plato)[1]

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In this paper, the authors dealt with the idea of souls of the deceased taking a journey from and back into our known world. In order to achieve this, a soul would need light to reach the Afterlife, but also some light to return safely. The idea of a souls' return journey was debated by several ancient philosophers, among others Plato and Cicero. One possible material manifestation of this idea is the fact that many times, oil-lamps were placed into graves that had never been used before, as well as those that were placed into graves upside-down. The motifs depicted on the deposited oil-lamps were possibly meant to encourage the deceased to take the journey back, while some were meant to make them remember this life easier and become eager to come back. Also, oil containers (jugs) that were deposited as grave-goods contain large amounts of oil, which might also be explained with the idea that a soul was expected to go to the Afterlife, but also come back and use all of the oil.

Keywords**:** *oil-lamp experiment, Afterlife, soul, journey, Plato, Cicero*

Introduction:

After lamps were invented, human life reached a new dimension. Lamps offered light that was always helpful in moving around and doing work during nighttime. Roman lamps were made in different sizes, from the extremely big ones, that could hold a large amount of fuel, thus ensuring a long-lasting and uninterrupted flame, to the really small ones that are considered toys. They were lit on different occasions – family feasts, birth, wedding, and they were lit above doorsteps or windows (Vučić 2009: 12). They were also lit during funerals and as part of funerary rituals, but they also played a symbolic role. In all of the ancient cemeteries, oil-lamps belong to the most frequently encountered grave-goods. Within graves, they are usually found in a regular position and such positioning could be connected to symbolic lighting of deceased's way into the Afterlife. However, in some cases, oil-lamps are discovered turned upside-down and such a position could be understood as a symbolic disappearance of light and of the forthcoming death (Škarica 2022: 3).

[1] Plato, *The Republic*, book X, 611a-b; Plato, *Epistulae* 7, 335a.

Materials and methods

Most of the oil-lamps discovered on ancient cemeteries possess burning traces on their nozzles. Still, it remains unclear whether they were used during the funerary procession and deposited into the grave pit while the flame was still flickering. One thing is certain and that is that after the grave pit was closed and the oxygen was cut, the lamp would stop lighting.[2] Sometimes, lamps were deposited into graves that showed no traces of burning, indicating that they were never used in their primary purpose. Such lamps are proofs of the symbolic of lighting a way to the soul that departs into the other "darker world".

Regarding other grave-goods, pottery and glass vessels, cosmetic and medical tools, jewelry, bone and metal needles for sawing, spinning tools, fishermen's hooks were also deposited. Their purpose in everyday life is clear. If one accepts that the ancient man believed in the continuation of life in another world, then the purpose of putting different everyday items in graves is clear (Giunio and Alihodžić 2019: 114). The same could be said about the oil-lamps, but the authors consider that they played a double role in the Afterlife: not just the basic one of lighting one's way, but also the guiding role from here to Beyond and possibly also back. A lamp, deposited together with a jug filled with oil, certainly represents a set or a toolkit necessary for a wondering soul. If one looks further into the matter, it becomes clear that at a certain point, a lamp had to be re-filled and the wick needed to be pulled out, so that the light would last until the end of the journey.

Within experimental archaeology, there are not many experiments that deal with using and kindling of oil-lamps, possibly because finds of this kind are rather frequent and one usually considers that all about them is already said and written. However, one usually does not think about all of the actions that need to be taken to get the lamp ready for usage: to fill it with fuel, set and light the wick, put the lamp in a place with enough oxygen but wind-free and then continuously pull out the wick and re-fill the fuel container. Further questions are related to the connection between the length of the wick, the material it is made of, and its burning time, and also, what is the relationship between oil capacity and burning time (Vaiman 2020)?

The experiments described below offer answers to some of these questions raised above. The authors find it precious for their further research on journeys of the soul.

Experiments

The first experiment, the one executed by Vaiman,[3] included replicas of oil-lamps from the Mediterranean area and dated from the 1st to the 7th century AD. For kindling material, Vaiman used non-distilled olive oil, castor oil and linseed oil, although the first one was the most widely used in the Mediterranean region. As material for wicks, he used cotton, flax, and hemp, all of them widely spread in Roman times, too (Vaiman 2020).

Regarding the length of the burning time, the average was one hour with wicks that were 7.5 cm long. Cotton wicks proved to be the best ones, i.e. their burning time was the longest (Vaiman 2020). What affected the burning time was temperature: when it was colder, the burning time was longer and vice versa (Vaiman 2020). The same goes for fuel type: if it is cold, burning time lengthens and the flame is lower, and vice versa. Olive oil showed to be the best fuel. It does not give off smell and smoke during burning. The flame is strong, high, and bright. However, olive oil was expensive and was used mostly in the south of the Roman Empire (Vaiman 2020). A fact must be added here that says that an average Roman lamp consumes 8 gr of olive oil per hour (Crnobrnja 2008: 411). It seems that the lamp type has no significant effect on oil burning.

Result or the general conclusions reached with this experiment were the following (Vaiman 2020):

1) Ceramic lamps that were used during the experiment became heated.

2) It was impossible to use them outside, especially during windy weather. They had to be closed with a special cover and used as lanterns.

3) The combustion time is different for each kind of ceramic lamp and is related to the length of the wick.

4) A wick needs to be pulled every 40–45 minutes with pincers.

5) The nozzle form was not only aesthetic, since it replaced the wick holders.

[2] A grave inscription from Ostia can be named here, saying *„Hic situs finita luce"* (When you lie here, the light has gone out). CIL XIV, 1865.

[3] Vaiman Aleksei, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Department of Archaeology, Israel.

The second experiment was executed by Alihodžić and Bilić (Bilić 2019: 4). The following items were used for it: replica of a firma-lamp of the FORTIS type, 10.5 cm long, 7.2 cm wide, 3.2cm high, with a bottom diameter of 4.1 cm It possessed a cotton wick. Olive oil was used as a fuel and its volume was 0.030 l. The covering of the lamp was performed with a cylinder shaped laboratory vessel that was 22 cm high and 17 cm in diameter. The air volume in the vessel was 4.990 cm^3.

Result or the general conclusions reached with this experiment were the following:

After the flame from the lamp was covered with the vessel, it burned at the minimum length of 38.44 sec and the maximum length of 56.58 sec. A total of six experiments were performed. During all of them, it was noticed that after the twentieth second, the flame would stop flickering and became reduced, in order to get extinguished in the end. The maximum of 56.58 sec was achieved only after the lamp was lit for at least ten minutes, in standard conditions and with the presence of air (oxygen). This simple experiment confirms the well-known fact that it is not possible to keep the flame burning without the presence of air.

Discussion

Oil-lamps certainly belonged to the inevitable grave-goods of Roman times.[4] Their function was to light the way of the departing soul into the Underworld. Since the burning time of each lamp is limited, it needs to be refilled. This is why in many cases there are also jugs filled with fuel and also deposited as grave-goods. The soul would therefore have a safe and secure journey that was lit all the way.

However, this might have not been the only journey one's soul was intended to make. There is a quote frequently appearing with many search engines, apparently overtaken from Plato and indicating that a soul would also undergo a return journey. It goes as follows: „*The souls of people, on their way to Earth-life, pass through a room full of lights; each takes a taper - often only a spark - to guide it in the dim country of this world. But some souls, by rare fortune, are detained longer - have time to grasp a handful of tapers, which they weave into a torch. These are the torch-bearers of humanity - its poets, seers and saints, who lead and lift the race out of darkness, toward the light. They are the law-givers and saviors, the light-bringers, way-showers and truth-tellers, and without them, humanity would lose its way in the dark*."[5]

Plato dedicated several of his works to the idea of immortality of the soul (Alt 2005: 43). In "Apology", he considers the Hades as a place in which souls dwell forever, meaning at the same time that the souls resting there remain immortal (Plato, Apology: 41c). On the other hand, the central idea in "Gorgias" (Plato, Gorgias: 523e – 525c) is righteousness of souls: they are being judged by judges and are either sent to Tartarus or to the Island of the Blessed, depending on their righteousness. In none of these works does Plato mention reincarnation. In "Meno" (Plato, Meno) it is introduced as support about the idea of remembering previous knowledge: from birth onwards, as well as in Hades, the soul has seen and learned a lot and this is why it can achieve a lot in its present life (Plato, Meno: 81b-e). In "Phaedo" however, Plato states that before souls reach human bodies, they dwell in Hades, which is a noble, pure, and invisible world. In Hades, or in the realm of ideas, souls reach ultimate knowledge. Further on, after having returned into human bodies, they find it difficult to remember what they had learned there. This is why human knowledge about many things (like beauty, for example) does not represent permanent possession, but it requires knowledge about ideas to be understood over and over again (Plato, Phaedo: 68b and 80d).

Only in the dialogue "Phaedo" (Plato, Phaedo) does immortality become an issue (Alt 2005: 44). Presence and re-birth of a soul are described in two different ways. Rebirth can either take place immediately (Plato, Phaedo: 81d – 82 b), or it can occur after a certain period of time during which the soul has been in one of the different regions of Beyond (Plato, Phaedo: 107d – 114c). In both cases, the soul is considered as a purely spiritual entity. Further on, only in "Phaedo" it is mentioned that a limited number of souls get the possibility to comprehend eternal light of the Afterlife, while all of the others inevitably return to this mortal coil.

In the dialogue „Phaedo", Plato also speaks about different ideas, including the idea of beauty. He understands the ideas though his soul and through the soul having

[4] It is interesting to mention that almost 87% of all oil-lamp finds from Moesia Superior come from funerary contexts (Crnobrnja 2008: 411).

[5] The quote does not appear as such in any of Plato's works. However, he wrote a lot about the soul and the body in such a way that it becomes clear that he believed in souls' return (see quotes from „Apology", „Gorgias", „Meno" or „Phaedo" listed in the main text).

insight into itself. He tends to understand the ultimate truth about the nature of the divine and human soul. Herewith, Plato understands death as separation of soul from the body. Only when it is separated from the body and the outer world, the soul can reach ultimate knowledge and ideas. The outer world is something that is changeable and tends to decay and this is why it tricks the soul, by showing it deceitful reality (Plato, Phaedo: 66 b-e and 67d).

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The time span between the life and work of Plato on one hand and the Roman imperial period on the other includes about four centuries. Even longer, if one considers the Balkans and the Roman provinces established there. However, in this period in between, there was a philosopher who studied the same questions and discussed them in his writings.

Cicero's philosophical works played a significant part in the evolution of a new understanding of the nature of philosophy, as primarily a matter of the meanings of texts and the intellectual evaluation of the claims and arguments presented in them (Blyth 2010: 93). By writing philosophical texts in Latin that achieved such wide circulation, Cicero had a decisive influence on the growth in the western Roman world of a conception of philosophy he had not intended to promote, but which subsequently became dominant (Blyth 2010: 71). In the period from approximately 55 BC to his death in 43 BC, he wrote at least fourteen works of philosophy, eleven of which remained substantially intact.

Cicero's works functioned as the primary model of Latin philosophical prose and of philosophy as prose. He initiated the process of forging a Latin philosophical vocabulary, both producing terms himself and discussing how to do so (Blyth 2010: 94). In this way, philosophy was no longer a life but a leisurely, literary adjunct to life (Blyth 2010: 91). The later reception of his philosophical texts played a significant role, since their formal characteristics, in conjunction with their foundational influence in the Latin tradition, modelled and insinuated the idea that philosophy is primarily related to texts (Blyth 2010: 93).

Cicero was well acquainted to Platonic works (e.g., Plato's Republic and Laws), but also to the fact that aspects of it were present in many other works throughout antiquity. Though there are substantial differences in the way these two key thinkers (and their successors and near-contemporaries) articulate their thoughts on a community, they agree that its care is presented as the promotion of the life of virtue through the appropriate use of laws, education, and ritual (Márquez 2012: 198-199).

What is of great importance for this paper is that both Plato and Cicero agreed on many aspects regarding the soul. Cicero's most detailed and systematic philosophical treatment of the emotions and the soul appears in the *Tusculan Disputations*, a work composed in the second half of the year 45 BC, at a time of grief following the death of his daughter Tullia (McConnell 2021: 150). The *Tusculans* consist of five books in which Cicero attempted to popularize Greek philosophy in ancient Rome. The soul was being discussed in the first, third, and fourth one.

The nature of the soul is immediately addressed in the first book through a discussion about the philosophical question whether death is or is not evil. This dispute further leads to two questions: what does death actually involve and what is the nature of the soul (McConnell 2021: 151)? As an extension to the second question, a third, maybe crucial one, could be added: is the soul mortal or immortal? One of Cicero's positions on the matter is that the soul is a thing that is separate from the body, it lasts forever and it is immortal (McConnell 2021, 152). This position is associated most of all with Plato, and in particular with the arguments put forward by Socrates in the Phaedo (*Tusculans* I. 24, 39-40, 53-77). In other words, it matches Plato's views on the fundamentally separate natures and capacities of soul and body, with the crucial differences concerning the questions of immortality and immateriality.

Cicero offers a series of arguments for the soul's immortality that appeal instead to the authority of popular cultural traditions. Cicero first observes that the ancient Romans held that people remained sensate after death, hence the sacred burial rites, the pontifical law, and the established beliefs about the afterlife – the esteemed go to the heavenly realm, the rest to a place under the ground (*Tusculans* I. 27). He also noted that the Greeks had similar pre-philosophical traditions (*Tusculans* I. 28-29) (McConnell 2021: 153). Nature itself gives further grounds for believing in the immortality of the soul since people universally have all kinds of concerns about the future after their own death (*Tusculans* I. 31-36) and these natural impulses only make sense if there really is a self after death, which implies the immortality of the soul. Although it offers a clear indication that the soul is immortal, Cicero stresses that the nature of the soul's survival after death is not accounted for properly in popular tradition – the bodily afterlife is emphasized errone-

ously, because the ancients were unable to grasp the life of the soul separate from the body (*Tusculans* I. 36-38). This is where the philosophers come into their element and the Pythagoreans are identified as the first to distinguish the soul from the body, with Plato in particular (*Tusculans* I. 38-39).

Cicero further recounts the argument from Plato's Phaedo, in which the soul is identified as a self-moving thing without origin or birth (*Tusculans* I. 53-55; Plato, *Phaedo*: 245 c-e), and also the recollection argument in Plato's Meno and Phaedo, in which learning is explained by the soul having acquired knowledge of the forms in a prenatal mode of existence, before being entombed in a body here on earth (*Tusculans* I. 55-59; Plato, *Phaedo*, 72e–78b; *Meno*, 81a–86c). Plato distinguished the immortal soul from the mortal body by virtue of its immaterial and divine nature (McConnell 2021: 155).

On the other hand, Cicero left the question of the soul's material nature open, but he surely considered that the soul had a divine nature on any account (McConnell 2021: 155). He argued that the soul is divine because it is pure and unblended with any of the base earthly elements, but it is the Platonic line that the soul is divine because it has the capacity for memory and for thought and contemplation about divine things (*Tusculans* I. 60-65).

More arguments are drawn from *Phaedo*, saying that the soul is subject to reward and punishment after death (*Tusculans* I. 72) and death welcomes the good person (*Tusculans* I. 73-75). This is why one should not fear death if he/she had lived a good, honest, and decent life and it is also regarded the so-called final argument by Plato and Cicero that the soul by its very nature must be deathless and indestructible (*Tusculans* I. 71).

It is also noteworthy to take a brief look at the Roman law on the matter of souls' immortality. The Romans assumed that the soul was the immaterial part of a person which left the body when that person breathed his last. The soul remained under the ground, generally in the grave. On the other hand, after the soul had left the body, its immortality depended on the way in which the dead body had been handled. By writing their will or codicil, a person could take steps during his lifetime to ensure that his soul would find rest after death, requesting their heirs or legatees to carry out their wishes regarding their funeral (Tellegen 2012: 181). In other words, when someone died, their relatives were expected to perform a number of rituals with care and precision. For example, in order to mark a household struck by death, they needed to set up cypress branches and light lamps (Giunio and Alihodžić 2019: 108). If they failed to perform the rituals or had not performed them well, the soul went to join the *Lemures*. Such souls could not find peace and roamed around at unseasonable hours. If the relatives had performed the rituals well they hoped that the soul would go to join the *Dii Manes*. Despite the will or a codicil that had been written, it was sometimes very difficult to enforce them and in cases of heirs' conflict, the immortality of the soul became a legal problem (Tellegen 2012: 182).

Regarding the argument by Plato and Cicero mentioned earlier in this paper, through which learning is explained by the soul having acquired knowledge of the forms in a prenatal mode of existence, before being entombed in a body here on earth, one needs to think of the souls' return to this world over and over again. This hypothesis sheds new light on the matter. Clearly, since it was believed that the soul is immortal, it needs to come back and for this, it again needs lamps and light (and fuel). This again brings us back to the disposition of lamps deposited in graves, since their position might again represent a way leading to re-birth. This might also explain the presence of oil-lamps that were deposited as grave-goods but never used before. Finally, the fact is that the volume of jugs containing lamp fuel many times exceeds the volume of oil-lamps and this could indicate that lamps were needed for a return journey.

When motifs on oil-lamps are considered within this debate, it becomes rather clear that many of them indicate resurrection and re-birth. In many cases, there are images of Dionysus and his associates and attributes depicted on oil-lamps, like Amor or Cupid (Anđelković Grašar and Tapavički-Ilić 2016: 119). They are usually depicted with vines, grapes or wine and through the Dionysian cult, they are linked to apotheosis and the afterlife. On oil-lamps, but also sarcophagi, they are represented either independently or within a scene, always indicating epiphany, salvation, triumph, and love (Elsner 1998: 150-152; Ramage and Ramage 2005: 292-293). In addition, because of his rebirth, Bacchus-Dionysus was considered the god of abundance and therefore, immortality and resurrection could have been accomplished through him. The appearance of mask motifs on oil-lamps can be explained in this context, too (Крунић 2009: 246). Other related motifs, like grapevine or ivy, are typical ornaments in the Dionysus' cult and they represent longevity, continuity and eternity (Anđelković Grašar and Tapavički-Ilić 2016: 120, 121). In addition, the wine's greatest importance in Roman art was gained in

Figure 1. Oil-lamp with the image of a gladiator (AmZD, A31105). (Photo by N. Škarica).

the Dionysian cult due to the connection with the idea of metamorphosis (Црнобрња 2006: 57). On some oil-lamps, images of dogs chasing rabbits are depicted. Rabbit is a lunar animal, a follower of lunar and chthonic goddess Hecate, but also an attribute of Aphrodite, Eros and Dionysus. It is a symbol of life renewal, dying and rebirth (Кузмановић Нововић 2013: 71).

Rosettes also come as motifs on oil-lamps. They resemble a solar character and the cycle of birth and death and thus, they are important in the cult of death. In the territory of Upper Moesia, it represents one of the most commonly used motifs decorating oil-lamp discs (Anđelković Grašar and Tapavički-Ilić 2016: 119).

Very often, on discs, there are images taken from Roman everyday life. Besides the already mentioned masks, there are also scenes of gladiator fights, dogs chasing deer, chariot races or erotic scenes, all made in such a manner to gain buyers' affection (Cambi 2002: 197; Vučić 2009: 12). Here, one might ask whether these motifs were also souls' reminders of their previous lives, aiming for them to remember it easier?

At the territory of Zadar, a total of around 2400 graves has been discovered. According to the grave-goods found within them, they were dated from the 1st to the beginning of the 5th century, actually in the period when one lived and was buried according to the Roman laws. During archaeological research, both cremated and supine burials were found (Giunio and Alihodžić 2019: 88). In numbers, there were 1237 cremated graves, 1147 graves with supine burials, and 84 graves with an unknown burial ritual (Gluščević 2005: 191, 217; Plohl 2018: 65-97). Regardless of the ritual, the graves always contained oil-lamps as grave-goods (Fig. 1 and 2).

Although over two thousand oil-lamps are kept in the Archaeological Museum of Zadar, for the purposes of this paper, only 863 of them were considered. The reason for this is that many lamps come from old excavations and do not possess the necessary finding context and related data. The lamps that were taken into consideration come from the excavation years 1989 and 1998, as a shopping mall was built in Zadar (Gluščević 2005). The majority originates from cremated burials (143 lamps from 396 graves), while much less originates from skeletal ones (63 lamps from 467 graves). Several graves contained more than just a single oil-lamp.

If one observes oil-lamps in the context of grave-goods represented on the ancient cemetery of Zadar, it is possible to conclude that their disposition within graves does not follow any specific pattern. In cremated graves, oil-

Figure 2. Selection of oil-lamps from cremation graves discovered at the ancient Roman cemetery of Zadar. (Photo by I. Čondić).

lamps are usually encountered next to vessels in which the remains of the deceased were deposited. In most of cases, they are placed regularly, but there are also cases of them being placed upside-down or leaning vertically against the urn (Fig. 3). Oil-lamps deposited in skeletal graves were also deposited in different positions, close to the head, feet, or anywhere near the body (Fig. 4). Regardless of the fact whether they were cremations or skeletal graves, oil-lamps that were positioned upside down or vertically could not burn at all, since these positions would make all of the fuel run out. On the other hand, for those lamps positioned regularly, the question remains how long would they remain lit after the grave pit was closed and the oxygen flow was cut?

It needs to be mentioned that around all of the well-preserved grave-goods from the Zadar graves, deposited either around cremated remains or a deceased body, a large amount of iron nails was discovered, too. They might imply the existence of a wooden grave cover. Its shape and dimensions remain unknown since the wood had rotten away, but one can suspect that it fitted the shape and size of the grave pit. In time, the wood would decay and the eath gradually filled in the grave pit. Such gradual descending of the earth into the pit might be a reason for the good and full preservance of glass and ceramic grave-goods. Further on, graves covered with tegulae were noted, them being placed as covers and disposed in the shape of a lid or as gable roofs. Such architectural constructions were noted with both burial rituals. With either wooden covers or grave constructions, it is clear that there was enough room within the grave pit that was filled with air. In cases of depositing a lit oil-lamp into the grave pit and next to the deceased, there was a possibility to keep the flame burning as long as there was enough air. The question arises whether that was enough to light the way of the departing soul?

There is no answer to the question about what was deposited within glass or pottery vessels discovered at the Zadar cemetery. In several stone urns that were hermetically closed, there were glass urns with bones and some kind of liquid, but no samples were taken for a chemical analysis (Fig. 5). At the end of the 19th century, during the excavation at Pompeii and within the monumental tomb of Nevoleia Tiche, Munazio Fausto and their relatives, urns had been discovered containing a mixture of water, wine and oil (Taborelli 1999: 472). Regarding re-filling of the oil-lamps, one certainly should expect oil in at least some of the deposited vessels.

Figure 3. Cremation grave from the ancient Roman cemetery of Zadar. (Photo by T. Alihodžić).

Figure 4. Skeletal grave from the ancient Roman cemetery of Zadar. (Photo by I. Fadić).

Finally, wick needles also need to be mentioned in this context. Although there are no finds of this kind from Zadar, there is an interesting one from Crikvenica. In 2012, during the excavation of the south-western part of Crikvenica's *figlina*, two inhumation burials were unearthed (Šiljeg et al. 2013). Both graves were infant burials in simple pits, with the first grave being rather damaged and the second one (G2) discovered intact (Konestra and Ožanić-Roguljić 2016: 128).

The grave-goods deposited within G2 included a jug, a pearl, a nail and an oil-lamp with a pointy needle inserted into its filling hole, its head exiting from the hole (Konestra and Ožanić-Roguljić 2016: 130). This position indicates a secondary usage of the needle, which can probably be interpreted as a tool used for adjusting the wick (Konestra and Ožanić-Roguljić 2016: 133). Oil-lamp toolkits are known from many sites and museum collections, usually made of bronze and associated with metal lamps (Konestra and Ožanić-Roguljić 2016: 133). They were used for adjusting the wick's length and trimming its burnt-out section, allowing optimal illumination at all times (Chrzanovski 2013: 48-49). Apart from these specific tools, various objects were used to regulate wicks, from simple sticks to iron nails (Chrzanovski 2003-2006: 119). The position of the broken sewing needle in the

lamp from G2 could point to such an interpretation, supported also with the blackened wick-hole indicating that the lamp had been used at some point. In accordance with this, all of the lamp's features and the placement of the needle could suggest that the lamp was lit when placed in the grave or, at least, that it was burning while the funerary ceremony was being performed (Konestra and Ožanić-Roguljić 2016: 133).

Many oil-lamps were excavated at the Roman town and legionary fort of Viminacium, actually its cemeteries, where almost 14.000 graves were unearthed. The oil-lamps from this site represent the most numerous collection of oil-lamps from the territory of the Roman Empire and those coming from archaeological excavations. At the Viminacium cemeteries, the total of over 8.000 oil-lamps were discovered, with almost three quarters coming from closed contexts, actually graves (Korać 2018: 11-12).

Figure 5. Liquid in a stone urn from the ancient Roman cemetery of Zadar. (Photo by I. Fadić).

Conclusion

Although throughout the Roman Empire, the numbers of oil-lamps as grave-goods are measured by thousands, some aspects of their presence in graves still remain uncertain. They were surely deposited in order to fulfill their primary purpose, i.e. light someone's way, but was that only a one-way or a return journey? Was a soul expected to re-fill the lamp and pull the wick out in order to keep the flame lit for a longer time? Would such an action represent knowledge gained during one's previous life and not forgotten during the Afterlife? Was the duration of the journeys just right and in accordance with the amount of fuel deposited within pottery jugs? Is this time measurable by the average life-span of a human being, is it measurable at all or does it stand close to infinity?

One thing is certain and that is the unbroken tradition of symbolic light reflected in the fact that the ancient oil-lamp was replaced with a wax candle. This is especially clear with the Christian religion, since during the last moments of one's life, a lit candle is placed in their hands in order to light the way of the departing soul.

Even today, light is brought to the deceased in the shape of different lanterns. While praying for the deceased, among others there is the phrase "let perpetual light shine upon him/her", indicating that this belief is not forgotten (Lukač and Artuković Župan 2015: 64).

Here, the authors played with the idea of souls taking a return journey from and back into our known world. For that, a soul would need light to reach the Afterlife, but also some light to have a safe return. This might be a possible explanation of the fact that many times, oil-lamps were placed into graves that had never been used before, as well as those that were placed into graves upside-down. The motifs depicted on the deposited oil-lamps were meant to encourage the deceased to take the journey back. Some were possibly meant to make them remember this life easier and to become eager to come back. Also, oil containers (jugs) that were deposited as grave-goods contain large amounts of oil, which might also be explained with the idea that a soul was expected to go to the Afterlife, but also come back and use all of the oil.

The idea of never seeing the beloved ones again is difficult to accept. After their death, for a long period of time, friends and relatives in many ways act as if that person is still around. Logically, the idea of the deceased's return is therefore close to every human being that lost someone who was close to them. Although it might be considered wishful thinking, it might also be considered as an optimistic perspective. And the ones that were left behind would do anything to make another encounter possible, so why not leave a light on? At least as long as someone else lights the light for us?

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