

**The Invisible in the Grave**  
*Rencontre autour de l'invisible  
dans la tombe*



**Call for papers**

What is the invisible? It is that which is not immediately visible to the eye. The search for the invisible is at the heart of archaeology - a scientific discipline that brings objects to light, unearths forgotten contexts and searches for structures that have been lost from the ground surface. The strength of the archaeology discipline lies in its ability to make visible what is no longer visible through the use of a variety of excavation and analytical techniques. And what about the invisible inside the grave? In this specific context, the aim of the archaeologist is to reconstruct what did not survive, from the body to the textiles, the funerary architecture, the perishable objects and all the organic elements doomed to decay. In other words, the task is to reveal the components of the grave that have become so decayed they are no longer caught by the trowel, whether they are too small to be seen, too fleeting or too confused to be identified. For funerary archaeology interpretation of indirect evidence is central. Taphonomic study of graves is a key way to highlight “the archaeological invisible”. It focuses on skeletal order and disorder, on the consequences of constraints on the remains, on the spatial distribution of the artefacts that barely left traces ...

The aim of the 2024 Gaaf Meeting is to change the scale of our observations by including inputs from various disciplines such as life and earth sciences, physic, chemistry and imaging. Taken together, these disciplines expand the range of remains that can be recorded. The conference will give the opportunity to discuss recent and future developments, but also the various approaches stemming from archaeosciences, whether they are now standard or still prospective. We are particularly interested in two-way papers that will combine archaeology and archaeosciences.

Although methodology issues can be addressed, the conference will strongly be focused on the rediscovered materiality of biological or organic elements that have all but disappeared, regardless of whether they are from inhumation graves, cremations, primary or secondary contexts. Where possible, speakers will be asked to consider the contribution of these “archaeological invisibles” to an understanding of the burial, based, for example, on a visual reconstruction of the grave. Graphic reconstructions are also welcome.

Archaeosciences have shaped new ways to analyse burial practices. They will be explored and discussed during the conference: how can they be combined with other data and soil archives to revise grave typologies? What does the composition of the graves, now less incomplete, reveal about burial practices or the status of the deceased? What do these fleeting traces of the corpse's journey express? And what about the function and trajectory of the objects accompanying the deceased? Or why not bring into the discussion the sensitive materiality

conveyed by the organic elements, such as odours, textures, colours, emotions... thus enhancing our perceptions of ancient funerary realities?

The conference will be organised around four themes: the corpse, the elements used to build the grave, the organic elements, and the sensory perception of the grave. To this end, the conference will be open to other documentary sources: texts, iconography, history, anthropology and ethnology.

### Themes of the conference

#### ***I – The corpse and its materiality***

Inhumation graves sometimes do not contain any human bones. The high fragmentation of the skeletal elements or their deformation caused by exposure to fire may complexify their identification, and even sometimes to make the difference between human and animal bones. Some contexts raise questions about the possibility that only parts of bodies were buried (organs, limbs ...) or the state of the body at the time of burial. This questions the interpretation of the burial structure. What methods (chemical, genetic, micromorphological, radiographic and other analyses) are currently available to uncover these human remains, and thereby attest to the materiality of a grave or funerary gesture?

#### ***II – The architectural elements used to build the grave***

It is not necessary anymore to mention the importance of organic materials, in particular of plant origin, in the creation of the grave. Most of the time these elements, whether above or below ground, disappear without a trace. Yet changes in the pedogenesis of the soil may indicate the presence of burial mounds, while woody traces that of the initial presence of a coffin, unless the stratigraphy shows the effects of some kind of constraints. The position of the grave goods and some remains such as stones can also, in some contexts, guide our thinking. Other disciplines explore the documentary potential of sediment (micromorphology...) or the micro-elements it contains (phytoliths, pollen, seeds, wood, charcoal, snails, insects, etc). How does this evidence help to reconstruct the layout of the graves?

#### ***III – The organic material placed in the grave***

Artefacts which resist decay over time constitute only a fraction of what was originally deposited in the grave. Outside exceptional preservation conditions, organic material is usually not present anymore at the time of the excavation. Some of these artefacts and material, containers and contents, may be reconstructed with the help of microscopic observations (mineralised textiles), chemical analysis (vessel content), x-ray images, tomography or radiography. What do the results of these different analyses contribute to our understanding of funerary deposition? In what way do these approaches enrich our perception of the tomb as a whole? Do they allow us to approach a more 'sensory' aspect of funerary practices? This theme aims to show how different elements in the grave can be revealed and how they change our perception of the burial.

#### ***IV – And when ‘the archaeological invisible’ becomes visible***

Following a tradition previously established at the Gaafif, this conference will also open up to documentary sources in order to offer a counterpoint to archaeological contributions. We hope to hear from historians of all periods, ethnologists, anthropologists and also archaeologists who have access to exceptionally well-preserved sites and who are able to present the different organic elements seen. These presentations are intended to show the scale of the archaeological absences, but not only! We are particularly interested in the material and sensory qualities of graves and the elements which constitute them: colour, aspect, smell, texture, sound. How do these qualities participate to the funeral rites? Are they part of the rites?

#### **Organizers:**

Stéphanie Desbrosse-Degobertière (Inrap, UMR 6273), Isabelle Le Goff (Inrap, UMR 7206), Cécile Paresys (Inrap, UMR 7264), Isabelle Richard (Inrap, UMR 7264).

#### **Scientific committee:**

Elisabeth Anstett (CNRS, UMR 7268), Yann Ardagna (Aix-Marseille Université, UMR 7268), Gautier Basset (SRA, UMR 5199), Mathilde Bolou (Antea Archéologie), Gaëlle Clavandier (Université Jean Monnet Saint Etienne, UMR 6872), Sylvie Coubray (Inrap, UMR 7209), Geneviève Daoulas (Inrap, UMR 7209), Stéphanie Desbrosse-Degobertière (Inrap, UMR 6273), Kai Fechner (Inrap, UMR 7041), Nicolas Garnier (indépendant, UMR 8546 et 8009), Sacha Kacki (CNRS, UMR 5199), Pauline Kirgis (Université de Bordeaux, UMR 5199), Isabelle Le Goff (Inrap, UMR 7206), Sophie Martin (Inrap, UMR 5140), Fabienne Médard (Anatex, UMR 5138), Théophile Nicolas (Inrap, UMR 8215), Cécile Paresys (Inrap, UMR 7264), Amélie Péliissier (Archéologie Alsace), Elodie Reboul (Metz Métropole), Isabelle Richard (Inrap, UMR 7264), Aurore Schmitt (CNRS, UMR 7268), Pascal Verdin (Inrap, UMR 7264), Julia Wattez (Inrap, UMR 5140).



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Châlons-en-Champagne, 28-30 May 2024

**PRESENTATION PROPOSAL**

Deadline **30 November 2023**

rencontre2024@gaaf-asso.fr

**Last name, first name:**

**Institution:**

**Email:**

**Phone number (+ country code):**

**Theme:**       1               2               3               4

**Type of participation:**       oral presentation       poster

**Title of the presentation:**

**List of speakers and institutions:**

**Abstract (poster – max 200 words); oral presentation – max 400 words):**

Presentation proposals should be submitted to the organizers via email before **30 November 2023**. An abstract of a **maximum of 400 words for an oral presentation** and **200 words for a poster** is requested, and the theme of the communication should be specified.

The time allotted for each oral presentation will be **20 minutes**. A brief **5 minute** presentation of each poster will be scheduled during the course of the conference.

The scientific committee will evaluate and select the proposals in January 2024.

Presentation proposals should be submitted using this document and sent to [rencontre2024@gaaf-asso.fr](mailto:rencontre2024@gaaf-asso.fr)