

THE JOURNEY TO THE AFTERLIFE: PUNIC FUNERARY RITUALS 525-25 BC

The Punic period on the island of Ibiza commenced around 525 BC. This culture attached extraordinary importance to the funerary world and all its rituals, from preparing the body and the funeral rites associated with burial to the acts of worship performed after death.

PREPARING THE CORPSE

Punic society believed that the soul of the deceased (*rouah*) made a transcendental journey to the afterlife, and consequently the body had to be properly prepared by following a series of rites. The first step was to purify the corpse by washing it with lustral water. Next, the body hair was removed and the hair on the head was combed, or perhaps shaved. The hygienic process was completed by anointing the corpse with ointments and oils scented with resins or aromatic plants. The eyes, nose and mouth were almost certainly sealed with an object, although none of the thin sheets of gold or silver that have appeared in the necropolises at Carthage have ever been found in Ibiza.

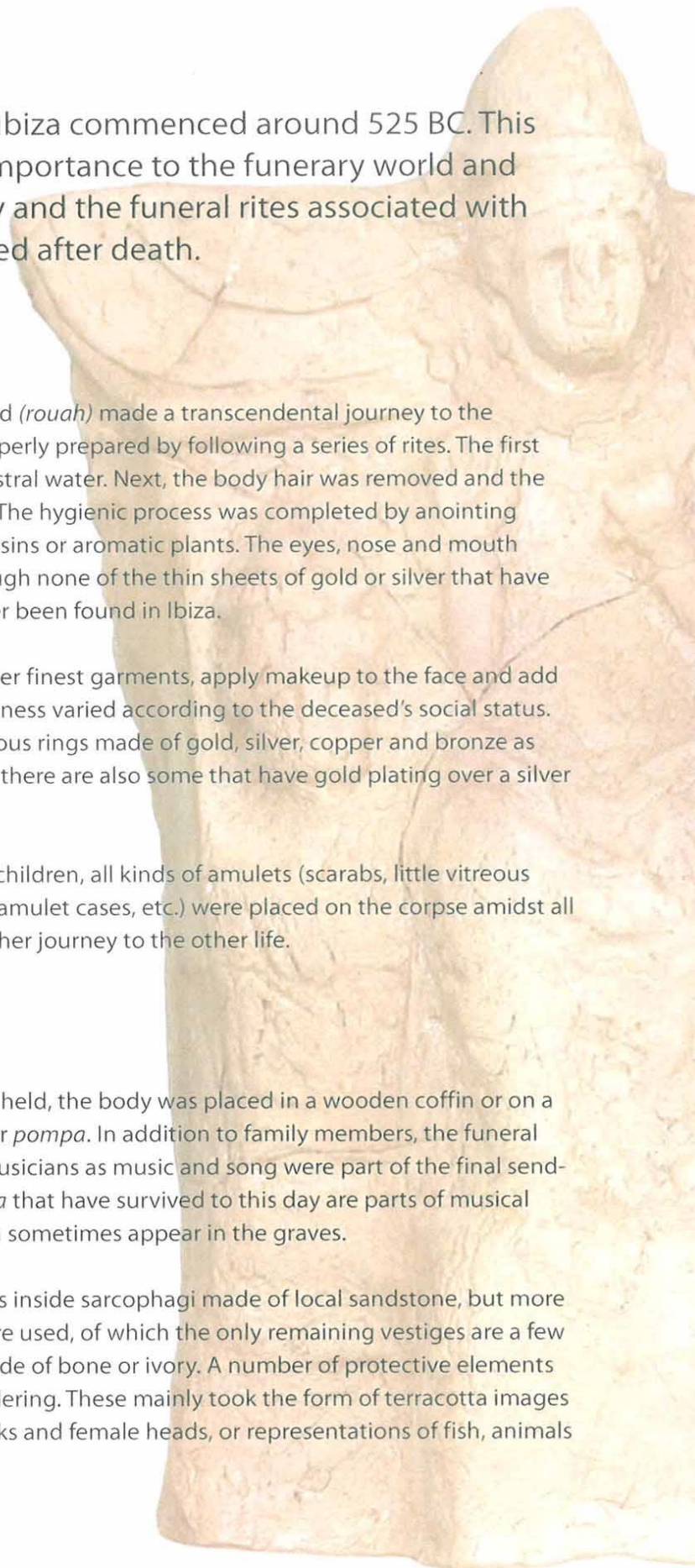
The next step was to enshroud the body in his or her finest garments, apply makeup to the face and add jewels and other personal adornments, whose richness varied according to the deceased's social status. The graves at Puig des Molins have yielded numerous rings made of gold, silver, copper and bronze as well as gold hoop and pendant earrings, although there are also some that have gold plating over a silver or bronze core.

Finally, and particularly in the case of women and children, all kinds of amulets (scarabs, little vitreous paste heads, tiny bells, images of different deities, amulet cases, etc.) were placed on the corpse amidst all the other jewels to protect the deceased on his or her journey to the other life.

FUNERALS

After the deceased had been laid out and the vigil held, the body was placed in a wooden coffin or on a litter and carried to the cemetery in a procession or *pompa*. In addition to family members, the funeral procession included professional mourners and musicians as music and song were part of the final send-off. The only material remains related to the *pompa* that have survived to this day are parts of musical instruments—mainly castanets and cymbals—which sometimes appear in the graves.

Occasionally, the corpses were placed in the graves inside sarcophagi made of local sandstone, but more often than not wooden coffins or funeral beds were used, of which the only remaining vestiges are a few nails, hinges, handles and decorative elements made of bone or ivory. A number of protective elements were also placed inside the tomb to prevent plundering. These mainly took the form of terracotta images of goddesses (initially Astarte and later Tanit), masks and female heads, or representations of fish, animals and stylised plants.



Some of the elements that were deposited in the tombs allow us to identify the gender, age or profession of the people who were buried there. For example, signet rings, knives, strigils and double-headed axes are associated with male graves, whereas pieces related to textile activities are commonly found in female graves and toys in children's tombs. The professions that have been identified at Puig des Molins are as follows: potter, fisherman and fishmonger, peasant, sheepshearer, butcher, scribe and merchant.

FUNERARY RITES

After the corpse had been placed in the grave, the burial proper began—namely, the presentation of the deceased to the deities. At this point offerings of food and ostrich egg shells were deposited in the grave alongside all the other goods, bloody and bloodless sacrifices were performed and the ritual libations were poured as a symbol of union between the dead and the telluric gods of the afterlife.

Another ritual that took place at this particular moment of the burial was the illumination rite, which consisted of lighting a lamp next to or on the corpse to illuminate the dark world of shadows and, by extension, the soul's way to the afterlife. Aromatic substances were also presented as offerings to the gods. The most common offering was incense, in grain or powder form, sometimes mixed with grains of cumin and balsam and myrrh. These were burned in special receptacles called censers, which for centuries were fashioned out of metal or clay and adopted very diverse forms, including heads of the goddess Tanit and little sandstone altars.

ACTS OF WORSHIP AFTER DEATH

Ibiza has not yielded any of the funerary monuments that were used in the East and in North Africa to mark graves, or any funerary inscriptions such as those found at Carthage, but archaeologists have discovered objects used either to identify tombs or for post-mortem worship: baetyli, altars and stelae. The baetyli, which are shaped like truncated pyramids or parallelepipeds, are thought to be associated with ancestor worship, as symbols of the underworld. The altars are shaped like oversized perfume burners and are associated exclusively with burial interments. Finally, the stelae are memorials to the deceased as well as grave markers. There are very few at Puig des Molins and none of them bear any inscriptions. A piece of sandstone shaped like a krater and a pedestal base fragment with painted decoration suggest the existence of funerary monuments that have not survived.