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The Daemon and the Nymph: *Abraxas* and *Anna Perenna*

In October 1999, during the excavations for an underground parking lot in Rome the remains of a rectangular-shaped fountain were found, at a depth of 6.20m to 10.30m below street level (fig. 1). The fountain had been built using a late masonry, with a mixture of bricks and tufa blocks. In the front were embedded two blocks and one altar, all with inscriptions. Two of them have the dedication "NYMPHIS SACRATIS ANNAE PERENNAE"¹.

This finding is of extraordinary importance both because in Rome it is the first example of epigraphs with the name of the deity and her nymphs², and because it provides new information on the cult.

Anna Perenna, the ancient Latin goddess

Anna Perenna was an ancient Roman goddess who had a festival "via Flaminia ad lapidem primum", on the *Idus* of March according to the Vatican, Antiates and Farnese *Fasti* (*Fasti Vat.*, *CIL XII*, 342; *Fasti Ant.*, *Fasti Farn.*, *CIL XII*, 311). She is widely mentioned by Ovid (*Fasti*, 3, 523-696) and Silius Italicus (*Pun.*, 8, 49-201) and, as Macrobius (*Saturn.*, 1, 12, 6) recalls, with

the occasion of the feast of the goddess people gathered public and privately in her wood to make sacrifices that enabled them to pass happily the rest of the year (*eodemque quoque mense et publice et privatim ad Annam Perennam sacrificatum itur, ut annare perennareque commode liceat*). Pliny the Elder (*Nat. Hist.* 35, 94) and Martial (4, 64, 17) mention *Anna* but only Ovid in his *Fasti* describes the festival on the 15th March,



Fig. 1 – An overview of the area (courtesy Adriano La Regina). The red dot indicates the findspot.

¹ PIRANOMONTE 2001, 51–55; 2002; FARAONE 2003, 48–53; PICCALUGA 2003, 162–163; SCHEID 2003, 906–912; PIRANOMONTE 2005, 87–104; PIRANOMONTE 2006; LAURANT 2005, 49–50; BLÄNSDORF 2010a; 2010b; PIRANOMONTE 2010a, 2010b, in press a, in press b, in press c; PIRANOMONTE and RICCI 2009; FARAONE 2010.

² FRIGGERI 2002.

the day of the *Idus*, the primitive Roman New Year's Eve. The feast³ had a licentious nature and was held in an area not far from the Tiber banks. During the celebrations abundant wine libations were poured and the couples laid down on the grass or withdrew under tents or improvised shelters. Everybody thus celebrated the coming of the new year and of spring drinking as much wine as possible since they were convinced that they would live as many years as cups of wine they had drunk.

Ovid gives an explanation about the identity and origin of this ancient deity and offers three different versions in this respect. According to the most popular one, Anna was Dido's sister: at the death of the queen she fled to Malta and hence landed on the shores of Latium, where she was welcomed by Aeneas. Yet, despised by Lavinia, who caused her death in the waters of the Numicus river, Anna became the nymph of those surroundings and took the second name of Perenna from the "*amnis perennis*", that is, the Numicus river which had welcomed her (*Ov., Fasti*, 3, 650). In another version she was identified with the Moon, with Themis, with Io or even Hagno, Zeus' nurse (*Ov., ibid.*, 657, 658, 659-660). According to Ovid Anna was also the old woman from Bovillae who fed the Roman plebeians gathered at Monte Sacro with the bread she baked (*Ov., ibid.*, 661-674). As a reward for this generous deed, she was bestowed a "*signum perenne*".

The Fons Annae Perennae

The fountain of *Anna Perenna* had a very long life of at least ten centuries, from the 4th century BC to the 6th century AD⁴. The rectangular tank -lined with *opus signinum*, a floor of *bipedales* and built in rough *opus vittatum*- was a *krene* and the water hole from which the spring gushed out was placed at the bottom of the reservoir, at the back. This method was widespread in Greek environments⁵ (figs. 2-3).



Fig. 2 – Front view of the fountain at the moment of the discovery (AFSAR, photo L. Mandato).

³ See LAMACCHIA 1958.

⁴ PIRANOMONTE and RICCI 2009.

⁵ For a definition of *krene* in the Greek world see LARSON 2001,10, 26.

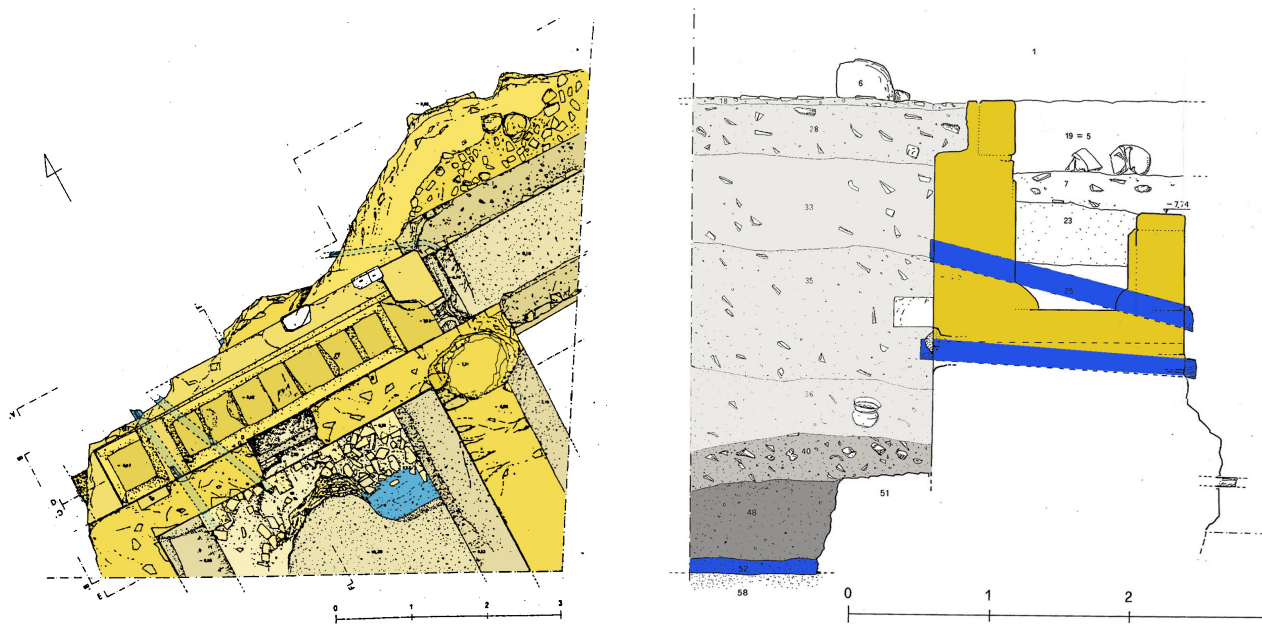


Fig. 3 – Plan and section of the fountain (drawings by Coop Parsifal and Rilievi).

It was inside the spring reservoir, at the back of the fountain, that the most extraordinary findings took place. The basin was 2.93 m long and about 2.50m high, but its length is unknown to us, since it was cut by the garage piling sheets. Whereas the fountain was abandoned at the beginning of the 5th century AD, as its filling with wine amphorae seems to show, it is likely that water - pouring from the spring - kept into the reservoir and that the argillaceous and sandy strata were deposited, thus preserving the materials it contained in perfect condition.

Inside the reservoir various items were found, perfectly preserved in a quasi-anaerobic environment: 549 coins, 74 oil lamps, some of which with *defixiones* inside, some curse tablets scattered in the clay, 9 lead containers with 7 anthropomorphic figurines inside, three ceramic jugs, a big copper bowl (*caccabus*) with burn signs, 7 pine cones, egg shells, twigs and tablets made of various kinds of wood. It is hard to chronologically distinguish the materials. Some of them properly concern the religious sphere, some others the magic one, but they all certainly provide an extraordinary insight in the relationship ancient people had with divinity and magic.

The inscriptions

One altar and two bases of *donarium* are embedded in the front of the altar; they are clearly previous to its restructuring, which is datable at least to the 4th century AD (fig. 4). The fountain had been evidently damaged and the votive gifts supported by the *donarii* had been removed. This latest arrangement was probably meant to restore dignity to this place, which was still very frequented during the Imperial Age. The first inscription visible on the left belongs to a marble base dedicated in iambic *senarii* by the *libertus* Eutychedes to Anna Perenna's nymphs on the occasion of his *patronus* Caius Acilius Eutyches' victory⁶. The marble altar in the middle of the fountain and the small *donarium* base on the right⁷ must be considered together because they show the same characters and deal with the same votive occasion. It is the case of Sve-

⁶ *Votum sacratis quondam / Nymphis feceram, / boni patroni meritis ob victoriam / C(ai) Acili Eutychetis reddimus / et esse sanctas / confitemur versibus / aramque gratis dedicamus fontibus / Eutychedes lib(ertus)* (FRIGGERI 2002, 26).

⁷ *Suetonius Germ anus s / Nymphis sacra tis / Annae Perennae d(ono) d(edit)* (FRIGGERI 2002, 29).



Fig. 4 – The inscriptions mentioning Anna Perenna (AFSAR, photo L. Mandato).

tonius Germanus and his wife Licinia who, declared winners for the second time, are gratefully fulfilling the vow of dedicating an altar to Anna Perenna if they had won. The altar was dedicated on 5th April 156 AD⁸. We do not know which certamen the victories attested were referring to. One hypothesis could be that the dedication alludes to the competition relative to drinking the biggest number of cups of wine on the festival on 15th March (on the tympanum of the altar a *simpulum* can still be seen) or to singing, mime and poetry duet contests, as ancient sources clearly indicate, since the dedication of the altar took place only twenty days after the celebration of the goddess' feast. The archaeological findings inside the fountain explicitly refer to wine, too. As a matter of fact, at the moment of its abandonment, the fountain was filled with wine amphorae and inside the reservoir, in contact with the spring water hole were found two miniature *kyathoi* which are also associated with sacred libations of this precious nectar (fig. 5)⁹.



Fig. 5 – The miniature *kyathoi* found at the bottom of the cistern (photo D. Rosati) .

Coins, pine cones and egg shells

In the basin 549 coins were found, almost all coming from the deeper layers, which attests to the consolidated practice of throwing money as a sign of devotion to the nymph or deity protecting the place (fig. 6). Here we have evidence only of the Imperial age, from Augustus to Theodosius, with some accumulations belonging to the periods of Domitian, Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, Commodus, Aurelianus, Constantius II, Julian, Valente, or Valentinianus up to Theodosius, of the kind of the *Salus Reipublicae*. The fact that no coins of a period previous to the Augustan age could be found may be explained by the periodic cleaning of the fountain



Fig. 6 – Some of the coins found inside the cistern.

bottom or by the fact that our fountain is actually the one restored in imperial time. Yet, as already observed, more ancient walls in *opus reticulatum* can be seen leaning against the fountain, but these have been destroyed by the garage piling sheets. Archaeological data appear to perfectly coincide with history, endorsing

⁸ *Nymphis sacratis / Suetonius Germanus cum / Licinia coniuge / Annae Perennae votum, / quod susceperant si se victo- / res statuerent aram mar- / moream se posituros, denuo / victores facti, votum me- / riti solvimus. Ded(icata) non(is) apr(ilis), Silvano et Augurino co(n)s(ulibus)* (FRIGGERI 2002, 30).

⁹ About the two *kyathoi*, see PIRANOMONTE and RICCI 2009.

the abandonment of the cult of Anna Perenna in concomitance with Theodosius' edict¹⁰.

Seven pine cones and many egg shells were found in the basin, which are noteworthy for their symbolic association with fertility and for the fact that the "Istituto Centrale del Restauro" has proved there were no pine trees growing nearby or in the *nemus*. Thus, we infer that the pine cones had been evidently thrown into the fountain for good luck. In archaic Greece, pine plants were consecrated to Rhea, the great Mother, and it is very likely that such tradition had been assimilated by the most ancient Roman cults, like that of Anna Perenna¹¹.

A scene of magical practices

Most of the materials discovered in the fountain, can be definitively associated with the tools of a professional sorceress¹². It might be thought that the link between the nymph Anna Perenna and the kind of magic performed at the fountain could be made easier by the origins of Anna's myth as handed down by Augustan poets: she was (see *supra*) the sister of Dido, who abandoned by Aeneas decided to take her own life staging a complex magic ceremony at the presence of her unaware sister Anna (Virgil., *Aen.* 4, 450-705)¹³. Anna's identity and that of her sister Dido are so much alike that they can be almost completely identified. Seen from this perspective, Anna the nymph was a foreign deity within Roman religion, and she was accordingly celebrated outside the sacred city area. Her festival had an almost orgiastic nature and was characterised by a looseness of conduct which could not be conceived within the urban territory¹⁴. But the antiquity of the cult of this Latin goddess is obvious -her feast being a fertility cult celebrated at the very starting of the year- and demonstrated in the case of the Fontana excavated¹⁵.

The caccabus and the oil lamps

Among the original materials found there was also a remarkable cylindrical copper container -25 cm in diameter- which can be associated on one hand with the kitchen, and on the other with the magical recipes (fig. 7). Ancient magic sought to manipulate the forces of nature resorting to a number of very complex rituals, from love filters to curses, which have been transmitted through the *Papyri Graecae Magicae*¹⁶. Fire played a predominant role in most of these charms, not only because spells were performed mainly at night time, but also because, in addition to the repeated formulae and rituals, it was the unifying element for the recipes, because the herbs and the other things that had to be mixed to obtain the magic potion, were burned like the fire of passion¹⁷.



Fig. 7 – The kettle or *caccabus* (inv. 475573, AFSAR).

¹⁰ CATALLI 2002, 34–37.

¹¹ For a reconstruction of the sacred wood of Anna Perenna see ALTIERI and GALOTTA, 2002, 60–69.

¹² PIRANOMONTE 2005, 87–104.

¹³ See also PEREA 1998; PIRANOMONTE 2005.

¹⁴ LAMACCHIA 1958.

¹⁵ See LAMACCHIA 1958.

¹⁶ BETZ 1991, 244–259.

¹⁷ The *keleban* of a famous Idyll of Theocritus is a necessary instrument for the charm (Teocr., *Id.*, 2), but it is also present in the iconography of the 18th century -which represents a Roman relief, now disappeared- in which the nymphs of Nitrodi, on the Isle of Ischia, in their cave, mix beneficial waters, minerals and mysterious ingredients in a large bowl with a handle, identical to the bowl from Anna Perenna's fountain (Or., *Epod.*, V, 1-25).

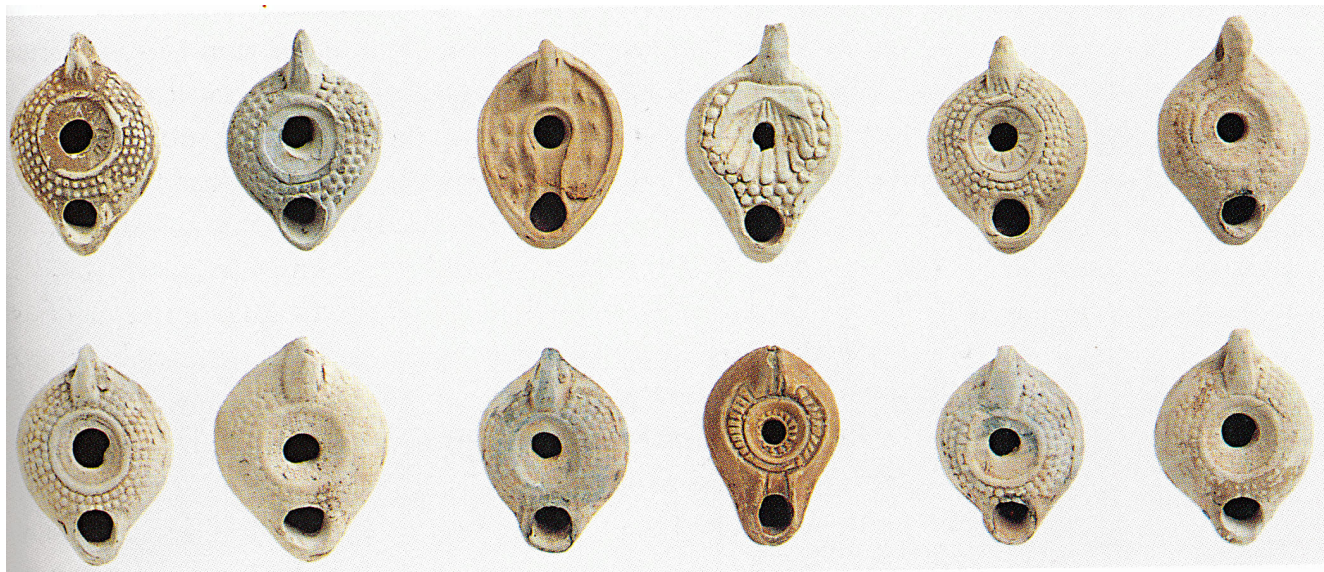


Fig. 8 – The lamps (AFSAR).

Inside our fountain were discovered 74 extraordinarily preserved oil lamps (fig. 8). Up to 54 are new, while 18 have already been used once or more¹⁸. In most cases (48 items) they typologically belong to the so called “warzenlampen”, commonly datable between the 4th and the beginning of the 5th century AD¹⁹. Four other items belong to the so called “catacomb lamps” datable to the 5th century²⁰.

What makes our context extraordinary is the fact that the lamps are, for the most part, “new”, in two cases they contain coins and in six cases they contain *defixiones* (fig. 9). These elements certainly place them in the context of the “lampenzauber” or magic lamps, widely cited both in the Magic Papyri and by authors of the imperial age like Apuleius²¹ (in both cases the lamps were used both lit and unlit). Their use in the fountain could be understood as love charms (the flame stood for the love actually burning the lover or was simply understood as a destructive force), but also as a ritual of transferred death: a lamp represented a person and the ritual was a symbolic homicide²².



Fig. 9 – Some of the lamps contained *defixiones* (AFSAR).

¹⁸ PIRANOMONTE 2005, 96–7; PIRANOMONTE and MELE 2006.

¹⁹ Dressel 30/ Bailey R, Provoost 4 types.

²⁰ Bailey U type.

²¹ MASTROCINQUE 2007, 86–99.

²² MASTROCINQUE 2007, 99. On the ritual of transferred death in *defixiones*, see MARCO SIMÓN 2008.

The defixiones, containers and figurines

A total of 22 tablets were found inside the basin, among which there were 15 lead ones, 2 whole copper ones and 4 fragmentary lead ones²³, and are being deciphered by prof. Jurgen Blaensdorf. They are really unique finds since the whole finding of the fountain is a “catalogue” of curses, invocations to infernal deities and the nymphs.

The 24 leaden containers (fig. 10) and three terracotta ones with a lead lid are an absolute rarity not only for their typology, but also because they contained in many cases figurines made of organic material²⁴. They were hermetically sealed, in some cases with a special sealing material or by pressing the lamina on the brim. One common element to all containers, except for the terracotta jugs, was the fact that they were all made up of three lead cylinders placed one inside the other (number 3 is certainly the magic number par excellence), in some cases with the opening towards the same direction and only one lid. The Scientific Police technicians who analysed the fingerprints preserved on the resins that sealed one of the containers, proved that this had been closed by a female hand, what leads to think of the possibility of a professional sorceress performing her magic by our fountain at Piazza Euclide²⁵.

Inside the containers were preserved manufactures with highly symbolic meaning, anthropomorphic figurines made of wax, sugars, herbs and liquid substances like milk (fig. 11). They were probably prepared at the moment, and were subsequently placed into the boxes. Our wax and flour figurines are nothing but the archaeological evidence of what has been often mentioned by ancient sources: the dolls made by witches²⁶ and then thrown into the fire to burn as the love flame burnt²⁷.

Our figurines, which were x-rayed, all turned out to have one bone as a skeleton. Only in two cases had the bones come out of the figurines, allowing us to directly observe that they also had inscribed letters (fig. 12). The *Papyri Graecae Magicae* have also provided an explanation for the presence of bones inside the figurines, between the chest and the head²⁸.



Fig. 10 – The lead containers (inv. n. 475549, AFSAR).



Fig. 11 – A wax figurine carved with letters and magical symbols (inv. n. 475542, AFSAR).

²³ On the *defixiones* found in watery deposits, see MARCO SIMÓN and VELÁZQUEZ SORIANO 2000.

²⁴ A significant parallel is a series of lead boxes from the *Kerameikos* of Athens containing lead figurines dating to an earlier period: see GAGER 1992, fig. 3 .17; fig. 17, 129.

²⁵ FARAONE 2003, 48–53.

²⁶ *PGM*, IV, 297–40; Verg. *Ecl.* 8, 64–109.

²⁷ *Or., Sat.*, I, 8, 23–50.

²⁸ *PGM*, III, 458.



Fig. 12 – Left, one of the figurines from the lead containers with a bone as skeleton. Right, the same figurine viewed at the x-rays (inv. n. 475540, AFSAR).

another two larger boxes, which were also sealed. The whole thing was then thrown into the fountain to complete the ritual.

Another container (inv. 475558), also made of three cylinders one inside the other, does show the name of the unfortunate *Leontius*, still legible in the innermost box. The box probably was a *defixio* itself and did not contain a figurine, but a carved bone and a parchment fragment which is unfortunately still illegible today (fig. 14). The outstanding element here is the remarkable image of the cock-headed demon on the container,

with some *charakteres* on the belly (the letters I X N I X in the first line, and N K Θ ΘΘ in the second). This figure reminds very closely of *Abraxas*, cock-headed demon often featured as a snake-legged creature with a human body and the head of a bird, holding a whip²⁹.

If the presence of figurines is rather uncommon in the ancient world, the presence of containers is yet more uncommon. In fact, they are not “dumb” objects but the carriers of curses and ritual magic formulae. One container (inv. 475549) is made of three boxes hermetically sealed with natural resins and has images and inscriptions engraved in the innermost box: the names *Seth*, *Mnu* on the left side of the male figure, and *Decentias* on the right side. A snake-shaped monster is coiled around the male organic and lead figurine inside the innermost box, on the verge of biting its face (fig. 13). At its front, a leaden tablet imprisons it and two nails are fixed in it; one in its feet and the other in its belly. Examining the tablet very closely some *charakteres* can be observed. Among them there is a legible *theta* and, at the height of the feet, a male silhouette whose face perfectly coincides with the nail in the belly of the victim. It can be inferred that nothing is left to chance in this ritual: the figurine is wrapped by a coiling snake and covered by a lead tablet; it has inscriptions and was placed into a box, which was sealed with resins and, in turn, engraved and placed into



Fig. 13 – The figurine with a snake biting its face (inv. n. 475550, AFSAR).

²⁹ MARCO SIMÓN 1992, 485–510.

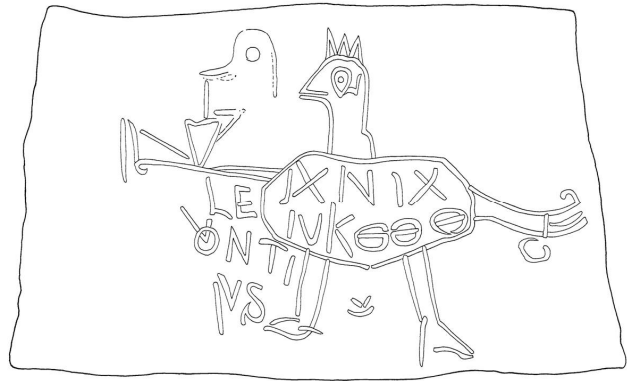


Fig. 14 – Lead container with *Abraxas* (inv. n. 475558, photo AFSAR, drawing D. Rosati).

In the third container the intermediate box is engraved with symbols and magic letters while the innermost one portrays a cock headed demon - again *Abraxas*-, with letters on its belly, similar to those of the daemon in the Leontius' cylinder but more legible: (I X N O Π in the first line X N K Θ in the second, Θ Θ in the third) (fig. 15). Besides, this figure has an object in its right hand, which seems to be *Abraxas*' shield or whip. If we read the letters by the head of our demon carefully, the Greek letters ΑΒΛΑΝΑΘΑΝΑΛΒΑ are clearly legible (fig. 16). It is the popular magic palindrome that some read as “you are our father” in the Jewish language, which here, by a figure resembling the daemon *Abraxas*, is evidently associated with Gnostic movements and a religion of the solar kind³⁰.



Fig. 15 – A lead container with its inner boxes (inv. n. 475539 B, AFSAR).

The whole manufacture is perfectly polished and accurately prepared to be more easily written on. The bottom has a concentric engraving and the male figurine inside it, which apparently lacks letters on its body, contains in fact a bone supporting its head, engraved with the letters LAN.

This container also has *charakteres* in the intermediate box, as well as what is surely the legend *Ablatanalba*. This time it was written in Latin letters and it lacked a syllable, probably due to an oversight of the sorcerer. In the innermost box is the usual image of the cock-headed demon with the same letters on its belly: I X N O Π / Γ in the first line, X N K Θ in the second one and Θ Θ in the third one (fig. 17). The hand that

³⁰ About *Ablanathanalba*: BEVILACQUA and COSENTINO 1999-2000; MASTROCINQUE 2003, 99, n. 375.

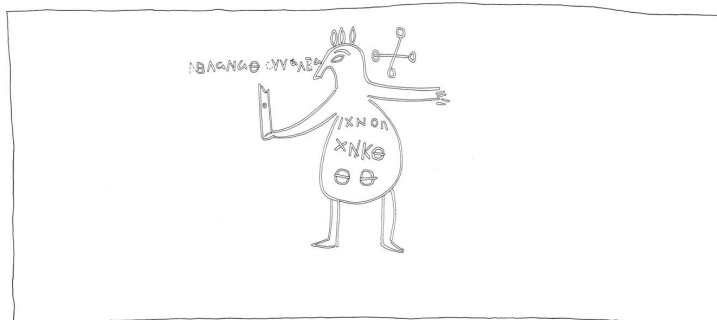


Fig. 16 – Lead container with Abraxas (inv. n. 475539 C, photo AFSAR, drawing D. Rosati).

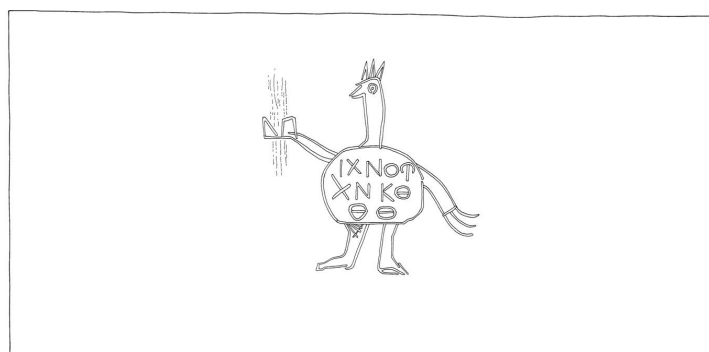


Fig. 17 – Lead container with Abraxas (inv. n. 475555, photo AFSAR, drawing D. Rosati).

drew this figure seems to be the same that drew the one on the box with *Leontius*, thus to the serial making of the lead containers almost certainly corresponds a repetition of the demon and the letters on its belly.

All this aggressive and repetitive ritual must be still completely interpreted and understood. The presence of *Abraxas* is attested three times on the containers, but his name, together with that of *Ablanathanalba* appears also on another copper *defixio* from the Fontana recently deciphered

by prof. Blaensdorff, and presented in a conference held in Mainz on April 2008³¹. Its text is extremely interesting, because here it is *Abraxas* and *Ablanathanalba* who are ruling the Nymphs, as if they have now become the actual titlars of the cult of the fountain that was once dedicated to Anna Perenna.

Abraxas in the fons Annae Perennae: a Late Antique magico-religious syncretism

Let us consider now the possible reasons of the presence of *Abraxas* at the fountain and of the relationship between the daemon and the nymph.

³¹ BLÄNSDORF 2010b.



Fig. 18 – A magic gem from the Staatliche Museen Kassel depicting *Abraxas* (from MICHEL 2001).

To our view, time seems to be the element that can explain from a theological perspective the appearance of the “magical” daemon *Abraxas* in the sanctuary of Anna Perenna and her nymphs. Many scholars have stressed the relation of *Anna* with the year (*annus*), and Wissowa³² already argued that *Anna* and *Perenna* represented both poles of the year, in a “functional reduplication”³³ of *Janus* and *Terminus*. The personality of the goddess that resumes the annual cycle is related to the Moon, and actually the feast of *Anna Perenna* is celebrated during the first Full Moon of the Romulean year (15th March), since *Anna* directs the rythm of the years, as the Moon does (Ovid. *Fast.* 3, 657), with great benefit for the fertility of the earth³⁴.

The appearance of *Abraxas* -frequently associated to *laô*, *Adonai* and *Sabaoth*- is conspicuous on gems (fig. 18) and in the “Greek Magical Papyri”, which in our opinion (coinciding with authors like Ritner) are less Greek than Egyptian³⁵. Christian heresiologists present *Abraxas*³⁶ as a god of the Gnostics. The most ancient and valid source –confirmed by the Nag Hammadi texts- is Irenaeus of Lyon. In his *Adversus haereses*, written between 180 and 190, he deals with the heresy of Basilides, who preached in Egypt during the reign of Hadrian (117-138): “Their (the Basilidians) mysteries cannot be explained, but they must be kept in remote silence. They locate the positions of the 365 heavens the same way as the astrologers do. They have assumed many of their theories adapting them to their own doctrines. Their Prince is called *Abrasax*, the numerical value of this name being 365” (*Adu. Haer.*, 1, 24, 6).

³² WISSOWA 1912, 241.

³³ PORTE 1971, 283.

³⁴ The feast of Anna Perenna was a *festum geniale* (LAMACCHIA 1958) had an apotropaic value and propitiated the fertility of the entering year.

³⁵ See RITNER 1995; MARCO SIMÓN 2007.

³⁶ The name *Abrasax* appears in the Greek texts, while the corresponding Latin variant is *Abraxas*. On the etymology of the name and its relation with ABRACADABRA, one of the most frequent *voces magicae*, the Hebrew *arba* (“four”) and the *tetagrammaton* proposed by Deonna or Barb, see MARCO SIMÓN 1992, with references.

According to the *gematria* or *isepsofia* (one of the most typical means of occult associations used in the magico-religious rituals, which gives numerical value to the different letters³⁷), Irenaeus, as later Tertullian, Hieronimus or Augustine, stresses that the numerical value of the name Abrasax is 365, that is, it is a “cosmic name” personifying, like Anna Perenna, the whole of the year as the sum of the 365 days³⁸. This isopsephic value of the word is also present in the *defixio* from Augustodunum (Autun)³⁹, where the daemon’s name is associated to others apparently *asémata onómata*, or names without sense, but with full sense when interpreted within the context of the *gematria*. The connections of *Abrasax* with the year is also clear in other sources: a love spell prescribes to tie a lead *defixio* -with a text inscribed- with 365 knots, accompanying the operation with the words *Abrasax katásjes*⁴⁰.

The emergence of Abraxas in the ritual practices of the *fons* of Anna Perenna is a prominent example of the religious transformations in Late Antiquity, concretely in the city of Rome. The closest parallel for the association of an exotic god or daemon and a very old Latin goddess is to be found in the *lucus Furrinae* of the *laniculus*, where the cult of the archaic *Furrina* persists in her *nymphae Furrinae* (as Anna Perenna’s cult persists in her Nymphs). The excavations in that place showed a new phase with the emerging of the Syrian gods (*Zeus Kerunios* o *Iuppiter Heliopolitanus*)⁴¹, but also brought to light in a later date (second half of the 4th century) the statue of the Egyptian god Osiris with a snake round his body among votive offerings consisting of eggs and quickly germinating seeds, what remind very closely the eggs and pine cones found in the fountain of Anna Perenna (by the way, Osiris appears in a *defixio* found in the *via Appia*⁴², but also one of his names is written as well as Seth’s in a *defixio* from our *Fontana*⁴³). In this last phase of the *laniculus*’ sanctuary also a severed human skull was found, interpreted by the excavator at the beginning of the XX century as a proof of “mysteric practices” (not very different to the magical practices attested in Anna’s *Fontana*) that show to what extent the pagan piety was private and occult after the prohibition of domestic sacrifices by Constantine (*CTh* XVI, 10, 1)⁴⁴, as well as the vitality of “oriental cults”, two features to be found in our sanctuary.

The offering of so many coins and lamps in the sanctuary of Anna Perenna⁴⁵ illuminate the changes in ritual⁴⁶ time before the prohibition of *inmolationes* (animal sacrifice) by the Theodosian Laws: incense, eggs, seeds and lamps were the typical offerings⁴⁷. A constitution datable to 392 (*CTh* XVI, 10, 12) informs that lamps were regularly offered to the gods. The great amount of coins found in the fountain are *stipes*, i.e. acts of cult consisting in throwing a coin into the divinity’s realm, like in the sanctuary of *Sulis Minerva* in Bath⁴⁸ or in other cult places⁴⁹. Lactance (*Inst.* 2, 2, 14-15) or Sozomenos (3, 4, 5) confirm the vitality of this votive modality along the fourth century.

The presence of the “magic” daemon Abraxas close to the Nymph seems to attest an evolution in the forms of religious authority as documented in other parts of the Roman empire, and excellently in Egypt: the shift from the priestly ritual, centred in the “fixed” space of the temple to the exoteric availability and mobility of the magus⁵⁰, a “ritual expert” handling more with the crisis of the ordinary life: blessings and curses (like in

³⁷ DORNSEIFF 1925; FRIESENHAHN 1935.

³⁸ The cosmic meaning implied in Abraxas’ iconography is confirmed by papyrologic texts: one of them calls Abraxas “The Cosmic Name” (*PGM* XXIII, 9).

³⁹ *AE* 1979, 407; MARCILLET-JAUBERT 1979.

⁴⁰ MARCO SIMÓN 1992, 491.

⁴¹ DE ROMANIS 2008, 151 and 156.

⁴² *IGUR*, 115.

⁴³ BLÄNSDORF 2010a.

⁴⁴ GODDARD 2006, 166–68.

⁴⁵ CATALLI 2002. For the deposit of lamps in Late-Antique contexts and its interpretation, see COLLINS-CLINTON 1977; MASTROCINQUE 2007; LAVAN 2007, 167–168.

⁴⁶ On the use -or conversion to other uses- of sanctuaries in Late Antiquity, see LAVAN *ET ALII* forthcoming, and SAUER forthcoming specifically on rituals at springs.

⁴⁷ See Porphyry (*Abst.* 2, 5; 2, 33, 1), Servius (*Ad Aen.* 6, 229) or Macrobius (*Sat.* 3, 2, 1, 5–8) questioning bloody sacrifice.

⁴⁸ WALKER 1988. Coins and *defixiones* (TOMLIN 1988) are the characteristic ritual deposits in Bath, as in the *Fontana Annae Perennae*.

⁴⁹ LAVAN 2007, 167-168.

⁵⁰ SMITH 1990.

our sanctuary of Perenna), births and protection, love or healing spells, amulets or domestic altars⁵¹. The temple priests become itinerant and assimilate their image to the magus, with the dissemination of the “institutional secrets”⁵².

Conclusion

The evidence of the sanctuary of Anna Perenna in the fourth century echoes a typically Late Antique cosmopolite syncretism, and the local solution adopted, the link of Abraxas -prince of the magical daemons- with the Nymph (on the base of their common relation to the year and the time), as well as the evolution from a fertility cult in the second century -as documented by the inscriptions- to those more gloomy rituals of the fourth century, is characteristic of times of crisis, social conflict, competition, anxiety and fear, in new darkness realms where, contrary to the vision of Frazer or the Victorian anthropology, it is impossible to separate religion and magic.

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⁵¹ FRANKFURTER, 1998, 203, 213–14, 220–22.

⁵² FRANKFURTER 1998, 233.

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