

## CLOACINA: GODDESS of the SEWERS

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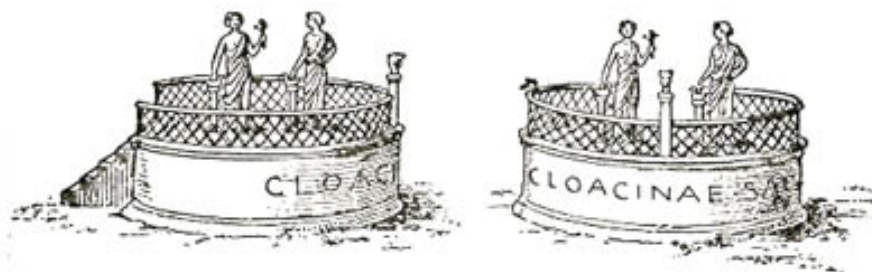
Mankind has routinely sought, through the ages, strength and guidance from the spirit world. The Romans, during the course of their Empire (650 BCE – 400 AD), worshipped many deities ... one of them being the Goddess Cloacina – in whom they placed their faith/trust for the wellbeing of Rome’s sewers (and workers); a facet of Rome’s public works infrastructure that was considered vital to their desired way of life - good health through sanitation.

Cloacina was the patron goddess of the Cloaca Maxima (the *main* drain of the City) and the city’s overall sewer system. Over time, the Romans came to also think of her in a multitude of other ways including; as the goddess of purity, the goddess of filth and the protector of sexual intercourse in marriage. As such, over the ages, she came to be affiliated with Venus; and, gradually became known to many as the Venus Cloacina.

The first “sewer” segments (as opposed to Rome’s initial surfaced and open topped drainage ditches) of the Cloaca Maxima were started in the late 500’s BCE; the craftsmen were Etruscan – Rome’s neighbors to the North. Soon thereafter, it is told that a statue of a woman was found in the sewer. She became known as the Goddess Cloacina; a deity that likely had its origin in the mythology of the Etruscans. Cloacina’s name is possibly derived from either the Latin verb “*cloare* or *cluere*” (to wash, to purify or to clean) or, from the Latin word *cloaca*, meaning “*sewer*”. The need for the Goddess of the Sewers soon became recognized as an important aspect of the Romans’ lifestyle/beliefs during the next 600 or more years - as Rome grew and its sewer system was completed.

Recognition was paid to Cloacina in many ways:

- A shrine (aka: Sacrum Cloacina) was built in her honor in the Forum, in front of the Basilica Aemilia; directly above the Cloaca Maxima Sewer. [In fact, it is believed that an entranceway (i.e., a “manhole”) to the sewer was once present within the physical confines of the shrine.] Only the foundations of the original shrine remain evident today.



*Sketch of the Sacrum Cloacina in Rome*



*Ruin of the Sacrum Cloacina showing its circular foundation. Source: University of California Los Angeles*



*Model of the Basilica Aemilia showing the Sacrum Cloacina in the foreground. Source: Robert W. Garbisch*

- Certain of the Roman coins minted in the times following the death of Julius Caesar (44 BCE) had an image of the Shrine of Cloacina embossed on one side of them.



*42 BCE Roman coin showing the Sacrum Cloacina.  
Source: [www.wildwinds.com](http://www.wildwinds.com)*

- Rhymes, Poems and Prayers:

“Then Cloacina, goddess of the tide,  
Whose sable streams beneath the city glide  
Indulged the modish flame, the town she roved,  
A mortal scavenger she saw she loved.”

A prayer that might have been offered by a Roman to Cloacina:

“O Cloacina, Goddess of this place,  
Look on thy suppliants with a smiling face.  
Soft, yet cohesive let their offerings flow,  
Not rashly swift nor insolently slow.

One can only hope that the spirit of Cloacina has remained with us through the ages; and, is still available to help with the well being of our sewers and of the people who work so hard to plan, design, construct, administer, operate and maintain them today.

Faith may indeed work wonders!