

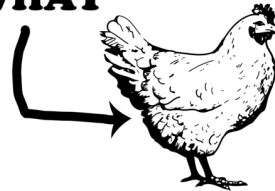
BIFFY HISTORY: Ancient Rome #1: All hail Cloacina!

The Romans, during the course of their culture (753 BCE – 476 CE), worshipped many deities. One of them was Cloacina, the goddess of Rome's sewers and workers. Rome's public works infrastructure was considered vital to 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. With time, she evolved into 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.

Cloacina's name is derived from either the Latin verb "cloare" or "cluere" (to wash, to purify or to clean) or, from the Latin word cloaca, meaning "sewer". Today, we use "cloaca" as the term for a single posterior orifice that vents the digestive, reproductive, and urinary tracts in birds, reptiles, amphibians, most fish, and monotremes.

**GUESS
WHAT**



42 BCE Roman coin:
The Sacrum Cloacina.

A shrine, the Sacrum Cloacina, was built in her honor in the Forum, 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.

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

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

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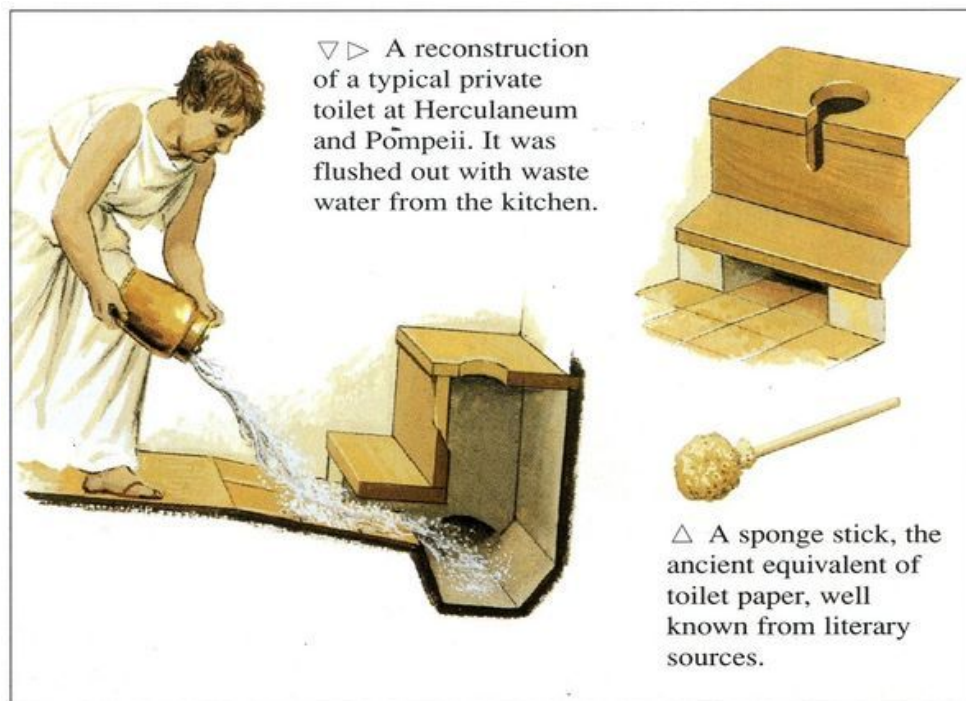
BIFFY HISTORY: Ancient Rome #2: Private toilets

The ancient Romans weren't physically shy. Nudity and bodily functions weren't as big a deal as they are in the modern world.

Chamber pots were kept in bedrooms. In a wealthy villa, they would be carried by slaves to be emptied into the kitchen toilet. In the poorer apartments (In most areas, only bottom floors had toilets. The higher the floor, the smaller and cheaper the apartment.), you'd have to get rid of your own nightsoil by carrying it down to the street... or tossing it out the window if passing pedestrians were unlucky.



Wait – KITCHEN toilets? Yup! The cooking area had a hole down to the sewer for bones and other refuse. They also had a place to sit for elimination. One major disadvantage was that there were no traps or S-shaped bends in the pipes beneath toilets to keep out flies or fumes. They just dumped straight into the sewers below.



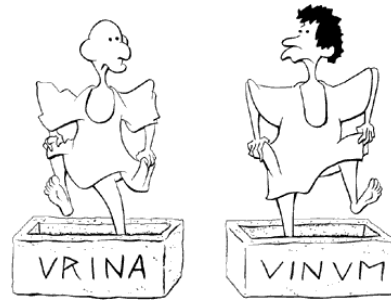
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BIFFY HISTORY: Ancient Rome #3: Public Pooping!

The ancient Romans weren't physically shy. Nudity and bodily functions weren't as big a deal as they are in the modern world, so it was common to bathe and relieve yourself in public spaces. The rich had plumbing and a semi-private toilet. The majority of the population had to use public restrooms.

A man feeling the press of nature might get lucky walking down the street. Fullers, who did laundry and some dyeing, put out jugs to collect the urine of passersby to use as a scouring agent.

Clothes were then stomped on in vats of the ammonia-containing fluid (by slaves, of course – can you imagine having that job?). The emperors Nero and Vespasian even taxed urine collectors, since they were benefiting from the public, which was the origin of the proverb *PECUNIA NON OLET*, meaning, “money doesn't stink.”



Urine vs. vino... chose your vat wisely!

For other calls of nature, the poor relied on public restrooms. Hike up your tunic, have a seat next to your neighbor, and pass the time while taking care of business. “Hey, who are you voting for?” “Have you seen the price of bread today!?” Then use a communal sponge on a stick (through the keyhole in front) to clean up.



Afterwards, the sponge gets rinsed in the trough of flowing water running past your feet. The next guy is going to have to use it too, you know! Notice how close the holes are. At full capacity, you'd be brushing thighs. Some cities had single stalls available, but of course... there was a fee for privacy.

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BIFFY HISTORY: Ancient Rome #4: Graffiti! And TP...

The Romans loved to leave their mark on all topics of life. Graffiti-covered walls touched every topic – elections, money, love, lust... and other bodily functions.



The Roman goddess Fortuna was believed to protect latrine users from the dangers of bad spirits.

This Pompeii fresco says “CACATOR CAVE MALUM,” meaning “Pooper, this is bad... don’t do it here.” Was this an honest warning about a perceived threat, or a shopkeeper who didn’t want a mess against his wall?

Some other scatological graffiti from Pompeii:

IN NONIS APRIL 19TH, EGO PANIS FIAT

Translation: On April 19th, I made bread.

This lovely sentiment was found in a bathroom stall, so it’s pretty safe to assume it’s a euphemism.

MIXIMUS IN LECTO. FAETOR, PECCAVIMUS, HOSPES. SI DICES: QUARE? NULLA MATELLA FUIT

Translation: We have wet the bed. I admit, we were wrong, my host. If you ask ‘why?’ There was no chamber pot. (Found at an inn).

APOLLINARIS, MEDICUS TITI IMPERATORIS HIC CACAVIT BENE

Translation: Apollinaris, doctor to the emperor Titus, had a good crap here.

**No sponge on a stick handy?
All of these have been found
in Roman sewers:**

Moss

Pottery shards (to scrape – ow!)

Fig leaves

Bits of worn-out cloth

Seashells

Pine cones (!!)



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Urine/Wine vat cartoon by Charles Cooper

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<https://followinghadrian.com/2013/05/09/how-the-romans-did-their-business-images-of-latrines-throughout-the-roman-world/>

If you want more – try *Latrinae et Foricae: Toilets in the Roman World*, by Barry Hobson or *Roman Toilets: Their Archaeology and Cultural History* by Gemma Jansen.
(I haven't yet had the pleasure)

The throne on the cover is from the baths at Caracalla.

