

## **Symposium Classicum Peregrinum Lonato del Garda, Italy. 21-24 June, 2018 - Blessings and Curses in Antiquity News**

ACCADEMIA SICILIANA DEI MITICI NEWS

*Symposium Classicum Peregrinum* in Lonato di Garda (June 21th-24th 2018)

Last June 21th-24th our Academic Diego Romagnoli, as a regular member of Accademia Marchigiana di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti – Istituto Culturale Europeo, took part to Symposium Classicum Peregrinum 2018 in Lonato di Garda. He will do a report as follows.



The promoters of Convention: Prof. Patricia. A. Johnston, Prof. Attilio Mastrocinque, Prof. Elisa Zentilini and some of the participants

The Symposium was organized by Prof. Attilio Mastrocinque & Prof. Elisa Zentilini of University of Verona, by Prof. Patricia Johnston of Brandeis University of Massachusetts and by Prof. Lazlo Takacs of Péter Pázmány Catholic University of Budapest. Prof. Christopher Faraone of University of Chicago and Prof. Giovanni Casadio of Società Italiana di Storia delle Religioni participated in it. The Comune di Lonato del Garda, Associazione storico-archeologica La Polada and Le fornaci Romane di Lonato del Garda, have also contributed.

The topic of the Symposium was *Blessings and Curses in Antiquity*. Famous scholars, and university teachers, and many researchers from various countries took part in it.



### **La Rocca di Lonato**

La Rocca or Castle of Lonato is a fortified X century building placed above the residential area of Lonato del Garda (province of Brescia) looking at Lake Garda. Counts of Montichiari were the first owners of the Castle, which is strategic in terms of military defense. In 1376, it became property of Scaligeri and Visconti successively. Barnabò Visconti strengthened the Castle by means of building of extended walls including the inhabited hamlet.

In 1404, the rock and Lonato

switched to Gonzaga of Mantua. Then it became property of Republic of Venice, and from 1509 to 1515 came back to Marquises Gonzaga of Mantua. Isabel of Este, who was wife of Francis II Gonzaga, stayed here. In 1797, there was a bloody battle below the walls of Castle, known as *The Battle of Lonato*. It occurred between the French army commanded by Napoleon Bonaparte and the Austrian one guided by Feld Marshall Peter Vitus von Quosdanovich. Around 1920 Senator Ugo Da Como bought the building that actually is property of the foundation having the name of him.

Prof. Mastrocinque and Prof. Johnston expertly coordinated and moderated the sessions of the Symposium divided into panels and held within the impressive framework of Rocca di Lonato and the high-profile location of Biblioteca Civica. The final panel was within the Lonato's Roman furnaces. By giving full attention and general approval, lecturers expressed in a brilliant way an ample rank of pertinent arguments to the general matter.

### **Congress hall of Lonato's Castle**



On June 21 at Rocca di Lonato, after the opening ceremony of Symposium Classicum Peregrinum 2018 (held by Prof. Patricia A. Johnston of Brandeis University with the introduction of Prof. Chris A. Faraone of Chicago University), Prof. Francisco Marco Simón chaired the session of the opening day and initiated the proceedings. The participation of well-known British scholar R.L. Gordon of University of Erfurt was relevant. In his work, he treated the problem of the tables containing curses as representing a specific knowledge-practice, or better, if they are a result of knowledge of priests.



**Museo di Lonato. La Casa del Podestà.**

Senator Ugo da Como gave the custody of the Casa to Antonio Tagliaferri, architect in Brescia. He refurbished and enriched it with artistic treasures and a precious Library having got over 50.000 volumes dating from XII century. In accordance with the testament of the Senator, the Casa and its Library were assigned to the foundation Ugo da Como, approved in 1942

Both the second and the third day of Symposium were split into two sessions because of the wide participation and the extent of materials.

The first session specifically treated curses in Rome, in Italy and in the Greek-Roman world. Blessings were treated in the afternoon of June 23. In that context, Attilio Mastrocinque discussed the very important argument *The Roman consecratio as a public curse*.

Among all of the various high level works, some lecturers got inspiration from ancient writers like Homer (*Iliad* and *Odyssey*) and Vergil (*Aeneid*). In particular Lorina Quartarone highlighted that verses cited from Vergil's *Aeneid* about Aeneas and Dido contain formulas for blessings and curses.

Then Marie-Laure Freyburger made a reference to the sacred in Cassio Dione. In various fragments of this writer, she stressed that the *favor* and *disfavor* of gods were due to specific acts and words. Then she highlighted the divine nature of the Tribunes of Plebs' charge, usually conferred on men of great influence. They were responsible for *Augustalia* and must be *sacrosancti*, namely they must be *sacra*-walls and *sancta*-holy, i.e. pillars/walls/support for people.

Alain Blomart of University of Barcelona treated the definitions and the Roman rites of *Devotio* and *Evocatio*. The prayers of both included magical elements. In his analysis of ancient text, he stressed that the *Evocatio* was not only limited to a

military context, but also there was a similarity between *Devotio* and *Evocatio* and some juridical concepts. Indeed prayers created an oath/contract with divinities and a legal *status* enjoyed by things, persons, places and cities. This *status* could explain the fact that people caught by enemies incurred a *capitis deminutio* assimilating them to *status* of passed away and, consequently, of social disqualification. In this way, Imperialism and *Bellum iustum* were justified. Furthermore, in time of peace the *status* could be lessened by de-consecration.



**The Biblioteca Comunale**

During the session of the afternoon of June 23, our Academic Diego Romagnoli (who had already taken part to Symposium Classicum Peregrinum 2016 in Tarquinia with an article on *Mithras Demiourgos*) introduced his own paper entitled *Benevolentia et malevolentia deorum in Mithraic, magical and theurgic rites*. He treated both the affinities due to syncretism of late antiquity and the differences among various rites of these different disciplines.

On June 24, the last panel of the final session had as a topic “*Games, Fate and Chance*”. Salvatore Costanza treated the erotic oracles and the invocations to Aphrodite in the astragalomancy. He illustrated how such oracles by launching of astragals (dice made of animal bones) could have been obtained. They gave answers and advice and in this way, the sum of numbers attributed to gods pinpointed the fortune or the misfortune with respect to him who asked oracles for a reply.

At the end of last panel and works, nice refreshments followed. In addition to a visit to Fornaci Romane of Lonato, a wonderful Tour of the Grotte di Catullo in Sirmione took place.



**The Villa of Catullus, Sirmione.** The remains of one of most beautiful Roman villas in northern Italy placed in an extraordinary and scenic position, the far end of Sirmione's peninsula.

In his verses, the Latin poet Catullus, born in Verona and dead in 54 BC, sang of Sirmione as a jewel of isles and of peninsulas of every sea and lake. Most recent surveys have established that the villa was built in Augustan era (end of I century BC and beginning of I century AD). Abandoned from III century AD, the building fell to ruin. Nevertheless, because of its own strategic location for a visual inspection of most of Lake Garda, the villa was inserted in the structure of defense placed around the peninsula (end of IV-beginning of V century AD). Since then the remains of villa have hosted a necropolis.

Finally, we can assert that the *Symposium Classicum Peregrinum* 2018 obtained a full success in keeping with its purpose of analyzing the important reality of blessings and curses in Antiquity.

#### **Group shot**

