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**Archaeology
of Thermalism.
New studies
on healing waters**

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Archaeology of Thermalism. New studies on healing waters

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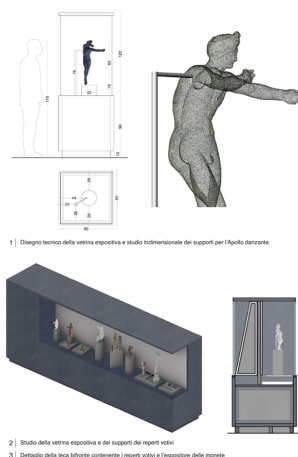
Encountering the Thermo-Mineral Spring of Bagno Grande in the Design of the Exhibition at the Archaeological National Museum of Naples

Massimo Osanna, Jacopo Tabolli



1 | The new display of the Sacred Spring (photo by G. Malizia and C. Bonanni).

After the conclusion of the exhibition at Palazzo del Quirinale in Rome the design of the new display at the Archaeological National Museum of Naples, in the synergy between the continuation of the excavation at Bagno Grande of San Casciano dei Bagni and the conservation of the bronze and organic artefacts, has significantly enhanced the previous concept (see Osanna, Tabolli 2023; Tabolli 2023). During fieldwork in the summer of 2023, a travertine donarium with a rare bilingual Etruscan and Latin inscription mentioning the “hot spring” was



- 2 | Apollo in the new display at the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli (photo by G. Malizia and C. Bonanni).
- 3 | Study for Apollo and the last room of the new display at the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli (designed by G. Malizia and C. Bonanni).

discovered in this sanctuary, which seems to have been reused in a later wall (Tabolli 2024; Tabolli forthcoming; Mariotti, Salvi, Tabolli 2024). The inscription reads “[fon]s caldus – flere havens”, and probably dates from the first half of the 1st century AD. Although there is no data to confirm what the three holes located on the upper surface of the *donarium*, with traces of lead inside, held up in antiquity (and we hope that the continuation of the excavation will provide new data to understand this artefact), the role of the hot water within the ‘context’ of the excavation and associated research (Tabolli 2023a), is therefore once again stressed by the bilingual inscription.

As we have already outlined in the exhibition at Palazzo del Quirinale, the consistent presence of multilingual communities among the thermo-mineral spring, especially between the 2nd century BC and 1st century AD was exemplified by the encounter between visitors and two different bronzes both referring to the hot spring. The female deity of Havens, dating from the 2nd century BC (see Papini 2023; for the inscription Maggiani 2023) was associated in the display with the naked man, probably healed after an illness *Marcus Grabillus*, dating to the beginning of the 1st century AD (Papini 2023; for the inscription Gregori 2023). The first statue represents the Spring itself, as its Etruscan inscription specifies in the dedication, while the second one refers to the hot spring via its Latin text engraved on the right leg. These two small statues represented at Quirinale the sacred concept of the shrine and were therefore isolated in the first room, following the experience of the lightning bolt, which symbolically referred to the ritual of the *fulgur conditum* (Tabolli 2023b).

In the light of the discovery of the travertine *donarium* and of its inscription, we asked the architects of the exhibition, Guglielmo Malizia and Chiara Bonanni (Decima Casa studio asso-



4 | Final room of the exhibition at the new display at the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli (photo by G. Malizia and C. Bonanni).

ciato) to rethink the first encounter with the sacred thermo-mineral spring. The scenographic apparatus in Naples was conceived to enhance the qualities of the finds and to evoke their context: water and its sacred sphere. It consisted in the creation of an environment isolated from the architectural context by a perimeter panelling in backlit glass panels and decorated with a mixture of chromatic tones, between light blue, green and sand. The sound, taken from a composition by William Basinski, enhanced the effect of isolation from the outside, disposed the visitor to meditation and enriched the sensorial experience. The newly renovated rooms in the Archaeological National Museum of Naples, allowed for a choral display in the space close to the bilingual inscription (Osanna, Tabolli 2024). The statues [Fig. 1] were no longer isolated in their surroundings, but were at this time associated with the ancient donors of the shrine, both male and female. The conclusion of conservation undertaken on the female statue in the act of offering, a masterpiece of the 2nd century BC (Papini 2024), allowed for a direct dialogue with the man in toga (Papini 2023). The result amplified the perception of the context, considering that the four bronzes were stratigraphically excavated in a small area of less than four metres, at the core of the sacred pool (see Mariotti 2023; Tabolli 2023c).

The final room of the exhibition also underwent major transformations. Reflecting the central role of the hot spring, the statue of Apollo played the leading role as the fulcrum of the space

[Figs. 2, 3]. Visitors firstly discovered the link between deities and medicine at the shrine. Actual references to medical knowledge were exemplified by the polivisceral plates and a surgical gouge found in the votive deposit. We broke down the separation of the display of ex votos, and enlarged the space [Fig. 4]. The bronze ex votos and coins on two sides of this space allowed for the visitor to understand that despite the passage of time, between the 3rd century BC and the late 4th century AD, bronze was the most relevant type of offering to the sacred thermal spring, regardless of its form.

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Abstract

This paper presents an overview on the exhibition "Gli dei ritornano. I bronzi di San Casciano" on display at the National Archaeological Museum of Naples (February/June 2024). The two main themes of the exhibition are the sacred thermal baths (both in Etruscan and Latin script and represented by various bronze statues) and Apollo. Visitors perceive the sacred space around the spring through an 'immersion' in the display. Details of the design by G. Malizia and C. Bonanno are also presented.

keywords | MANN; San Casciano dei Bagni; Bronze; Immersive Display.

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