

The celebration of the lizard: The iconography and iconology of a magic ritual against the evil forces

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is the analysis of the meaning of the iconography of the month of September in Late Antique Roman illustrated calendars. This image alludes to the apotropaic ritual of the grape harvest done through the suspension of a lizard above bunches of grapes or containers of wine. The use of this image attests to the continuity of the Dionysian cult in Late Antiquity, even if only at a popular level, because of the definitive affirmation of Christianity. At the same time, the new religion included this iconographic pattern, which has acquired an eschatological meaning related to eternal life.

KEYWORDS

Roman illustrated calendars, iconography of September, ritual of the lizard and the grape harvest, Dionysus, Christianity

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INTRODUCTION

The research presented in this paper¹ focuses on the analysis of the meaning of the iconography of the month of September in Late Antique Roman illustrated calendars. This image alludes to the apotropaic ritual of the grape harvest done through the suspension of a lizard above bunches of grapes or containers of wine.

The main characteristic of illustrated calendars was the representation of the twelve months of the year. Their iconography, that symbolized the eternal cycle of time, was a common subject in various media, above all in floor mosaics and, more rarely, in stone reliefs, wall paintings, glass and manuscripts.² During the first chronological phase of their production, from the 2nd to the 5th c. AD, the figurative calendars were concentrated mainly in Italy and North Africa, where they adorned the houses of members of the upper class, while in the second phase, during the next two centuries, they ornamented especially Christian churches in Greece and Arabia. From an ideological point of view, the Pagan calendars expressed the wealth of the aristocracy expressed in the idea of eternity as derived from imperial propaganda, while the Christian calendars, commissioned by the high clergy who had partially inherited pagan cultural values, alluded to the richness of divine creation.

The iconography of the months was divided into astrological, rural and festive themes, recurring only in Late Antiquity, and never totally standardized. In regard to illustrated calendars of the first type, concentrated in the 2nd half of the 2nd c. AD, the months are represented through the images of the zodiac signs and those of their tutelary deities, as testified, for example, by the Altar of the Twelve Gods from Gabii (Antonine Age).³ The second category includes the images of the months which alluded to the most important rural activities, in particular pastoralism, sowing and reaping, and the grape harvest. These calendars, like the painted calendar fresco discovered under the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome (early 3rd c. AD),⁴ began to spread in parallel with the great success of the so-called *latifundia* cycle and continued beyond the Middle Ages. During this same period, there developed a third type of iconography for the months, which referred to some religious rituals performed on the occasion of the *feriae publicae*, *dies natales templorum* and *dies natales imperatorum*, such as, respectively, the *Compitalia* in January, the dedication of the Mercurius temple in May, and the birthday of Alexander Severus in October. One the most famous examples of this iconographic theme is the mosaic of the *Maison des Mois* of Thysdrus, near El Djem in Tunisia (1st half of the 3rd c. AD),⁵ but its production gradually ended in the 2nd half of the 4th century, simultaneously with the definitive affirmation of Christianity.

¹I am particularly grateful to the organizers of the conference *2018 Symposium Classicum Peregrinum: Blessings and Curses in Antiquity. June 21–24, 2018 Lonato di Garda, Italy*, P. A. Johnston, C. Faraone, A. Mastrocinque, L. Takács and E. Zentilini for their kind support. The title of my contribution is a tribute to the *Celebration of the Lizard* by J. D. Morrison (*Absolutely Live*, 1970).

²STERN, H.: Les calendriers romains illustrés. *ANRW* II.12.2 (1981) 432–475; D. PARRISH in *LIMC* VI.1 (1992) 479–500, s.v. *Menses*; V. HUET in *ThesCRA* VII (2011) 233–239, s.v. *Calendriers en images*; PARODO, C.: *Immagini del tempo degli dei, immagini del tempo degli uomini. Un'analisi delle iconografie dei mesi nei calendari figurati romani e bizantini e del loro contesto storico-culturale*. Oxford 2017.

³Paris, *Musée du Louvre*. STERN (n. 2) 434–435; PARRISH (n. 2) 488, n. 29; PARODO (n. 2) 43, 180.

⁴Rome, Basilica of St. Mary Major. STERN (n. 2) 453–454; PARRISH (n. 2) 489, n. 33; PARODO (n. 2) 47–49, 181.

⁵Sousse, *Musée Archéologique*. STERN (n. 2) 435–439; HUET (n. 2) 234–237; PARODO (n. 2) 59–67, 184.



Although generally the subjects of the festival calendars were the most popular religious festivals of the Roman world, there are also images of months connected with rituals not officially codified. Emblematic examples are the cases of the June's iconography of the rural labours of St. Romain-en-Gal (1st half of the 3rd c. AD)⁶ concerning the sacrifice in honour of Taranis, the Celtic deity assimilated to *Iuppiter frugifer*, the divine protector of the cereal harvest, and September's personification represented in the Chronography of 354 AD and in the calendar mosaic of the Acton Collection, which alluded to a folkloric ritual of the grape harvest.

THE IMAGE OF THE LIZARD AND THE GRAPES IN THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

The first calendar is that represented on the *Fasti* of Furius Dionysius Filocalus, the calligrapher of Pope Damasus I (366–384), an illuminated manuscript which was realized in 354 AD for a wealthy Roman Christian named Valentinus, probably a high official of the *Symmachi* clan, the main protagonists of the revival of paganism in Late Antique Rome. The *Fasti Furii Filocali* included the images of all the months of the year accompanied by the verses of the *Tetrasticha* and the *Disticha de mensibus* from the *Anthologia Latina* 395 and 665, which explained the meaning of their iconography. Today there exists only a limited number of copies of the original calendar, with the most complete being the so-called *Romanus*, which was drawn by N.-C. Fabri de Peiresc in 1620.⁷

The month of September is illustrated by a young man wearing only a cloth, who holds a lizard on a string suspended above two buried jars, while a bunch of grapes is represented on his right side⁸ (Fig. 1). This image is accompanied by the verses of the *Tetrasticha de mensibus*:

*Turgentes acinos, varias et praeseecat uvas
September, sub quo mitia poma iacent,
Captivam filo gaudens religasse lacertam,
Quae suspensa manu mobile ludit opus*

September cuts off the swelling barriers and grapes of various types
under whom lie the ripe fruits,
He has fun holding a captive lizard lifted with one hand
which fidgets while tied to a thread.

(*Anth. Lat.* 395. 33–36)⁹

⁶St. Germain-en-Laye, *Musée des Antiquités Nationales*. STERN (n. 2) 445–449; HUET (n. 2) 237–238; PARODO (n. 2) 50–54, 182.

⁷*Romanus* copy, Vatican City, Vatican Library. STERN, H.: *Le calendrier de 354. Etude sur son texte et ses illustrations*. Paris 1953; SALZMAN, M. R.: *On Roman Time. The Codex-Calendar of 354 and the Rhythms of Urban Life in Late Antiquity*. Berkeley 1990; DIVJAK, J. – WISCHMEYER, W.: *Das Kalenderhandbuch von 354. Der Chronograph des Filocalus. Teil I: Der Bildteil des Chronographen. Teil II: Der Textteil, Listen der Verwaltung*. Wien 2014; PARODO (n. 2) 78–86, 189–190.

⁸STERN: *Le calendrier* (n. 7) 263–266; SALZMAN (n. 7) 103–106; DIVJAK–WISCHMEYER (n. 7) I 177–178, 299–300; PARODO (n. 2) 84.

⁹COURTNEY, E.: *The Roman Months in Art and Literature*. *MH* 45 (1988) 33–57, at 52–54; DIVJAK–WISCHMEYER (n. 7) II 338–339. PARODO, C.: *Il rituale della lucertola. Una gemma romana con iconografia dionisiaca del Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Cagliari*. *Otium* 5 (2018) 1–35, at 7–8.



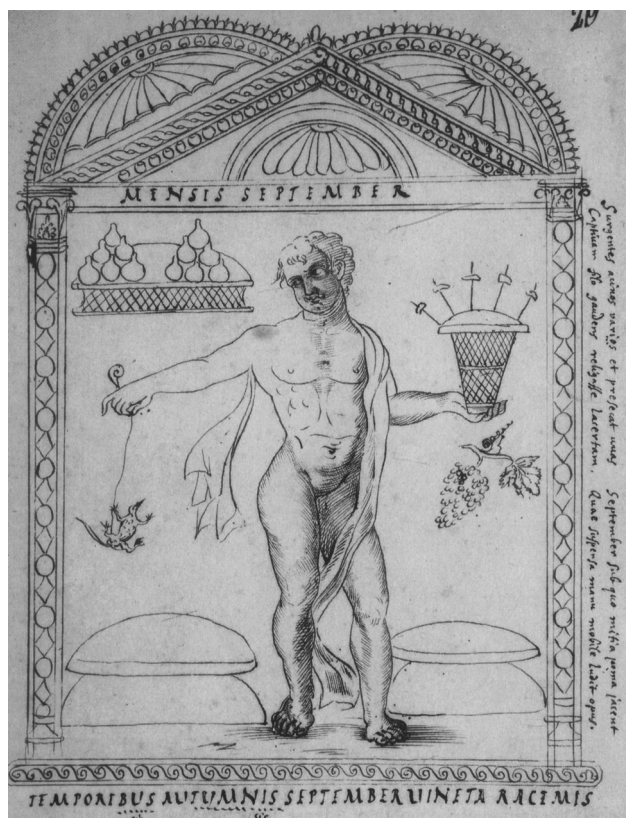


Fig. 1. Mosaic of Bacchus with Lizard from the *Maison de Bacchus* in Thysdrus (Tunisi, *Musée National du Bardo*). DUNBABIN (n. 13) pl. XXXVII, 68

A similar iconography characterizes the second calendar. Based on stylistic reasons, the polychrome months' mosaic of the private collection of M. H. Acton is dated at early 5th c. AD, and it probably comes from Carthage. The calendar has not completely survived; only the images of May, June and September remain.¹⁰ The last month, accompanied by the inscription *SETEMBRIS*, is personified as a young man dressed in a short tunic, who holds with his right hand a lizard hanging over a basket full of grapes, which he with his left hand (Fig. 2). Both the images, probably derived from a common iconographic pattern,¹¹ have been correctly compared with the polychrome mosaic of Dionysus from the *Maison de Bacchus* in Thysdrus (2nd half of

¹⁰Florence, Villa La Pietra. STERN: *Le calendrier* (n. 7) 217–219; STERN: *Les calendriers* (n. 2) 465–466; PARRISH (n. 2) 484, n. 14; PARODO: *Immagini* (n. 2) 92, 192.

¹¹STERN: *Le calendrier* (n. 7) 290–291, 365; STERN: *Les calendriers* (n. 2) 463–464; PARRISH (n. 2) 484; PARODO: *Immagini* (n. 2) 129–131.



Fig. 2. *Fasti Furi Filocali, September (Vatican City, Vatican Library). SALZMAN (n. 7) fig. 20*

the 4th c. AD),¹² in which the god holds a *thyrsos* and a captive lizard hanging from a thread, while on the right side he is accompanied by a panther and the vine shoots come out from a *kantharos*¹³ (Fig. 3).

A similar iconographic pattern also marks the images of a limited archaeological record composed of three mosaics and three sarcophagi. The first artefact is a polychrome mosaic from Thugga, near Téboursouk in Tunisia (2nd half of the 4th c. AD), where two winged naked Erotes

¹²STERN: *Le calendrier* (n. 7) 263; SALZMAN (n. 7) 104–105, n. 206; DIVJAK–WISCHMEYER (n. 7) I 178; PARODO: *Immagini* (n. 2) 84.

¹³Tunis, *Musée National du Bardo*. DUNBABIN, K. M. D.: *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa*. Oxford 1978, 258, n.12 a; YACOB, M.: *Splendeurs des mosaïques de Tunisie*. Tunis 1995, 340–341; SLIM, H.: Dionysus. In BLANCHARD-LEMÉE, M. – ENNAÏFER, M. – SLIM, H. – SLIM, L. (eds): *Mosaics of Roman Africa. Floor Mosaics from Tunisia*. New York 1996, 87–119, at 114; NOVELLO, M.: *Scelte tematiche e committenza nelle abitazioni dell'Africa Proconsolare. I mosaici figurati*. Pisa–Roma 2007, 93, 260.





Fig. 3. Calendar mosaic of the Acton Collection, September (Florence, *Villa La Pietra*). STERN (n. 2) pl. XXXVIII, 101

are represented among the branches of the vine, overflowing from a *kantharos* depicted in the centre. The putto on the left holds a *falcula vineatica*, a typical instrument of the harvest, and a basket full of bunches, while the one on the right holds the same sickle and a lizard on a string¹⁴ (Fig. 4).

Another very similar image is in the so-called mosaic of *ASINUS NICA*, a polychrome mosaic that ornamented the *frigidarium* of the *Maison de l'Âne* in Djemila, now Cuicul in Algeria (end 4 c. – early 5th c. AD), in which a winged, naked putto, among the vine scrolls emerging from a crater, holds a lizard hanging from a thread above a vine leaf¹⁵ (Fig. 5). In contrast, a more unusual iconographic scheme is used in the so-called fragmentary mosaic of Xenophont in Sufetula, now Sbeitla in Tunisia (end 4th c. – early 5th c. AD), that adorned the *oecus* of the *Édifice des Saisons*, where the personification of Autumn, a young man wearing a *nebrys*, holds a bunch of grapes with left hand and, with the other hand, a snake that has the same apotropaic function of the lizard¹⁶ (Fig. 6).

The archaeological evidence of the three sarcophagi decorated with this iconographic theme is connected with the iconography of the Seasons. The best known of these artefacts is the dogmatic sarcophagus of the *praefectus Urbi Iunius Bassus* (359 AD), which originally came from the St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Its front has been decorated with scenes of Old and New Testaments, while on the sides, divided into two registers, the Four Seasons are represented as *Erotes* performing rural labors, like reaping and grape harvest. More specifically the

¹⁴Tunis, *Musée National du Bardo*. MERLIN, A. – POINSSOT, L.: Amours vendangeurs au gecko (Mosaïque de Thugga). *RAfr* 100 (1956) 283–300, at 285–292; YACOB, M.: *Musée du Bardo*. Tunis 1969, 116; DUNBABIN (n. 13) 170, 184–185, 257, n. 64; PARRISH, D.: *Season Mosaics of Roman North Africa*. Roma 1984, 39, n. 141.

¹⁵Cuicul, *Musée archéologique*. MERLIN–POINSSOT (n. 14) 293; BLANCHARD–LEMÉE, M.: *Maisons à mosaïques du quartier central de Djemila (Cicuul)*. Paris 1975, 29–33; DUNBABIN (n. 13) 102, 117, n. 28, 184, n. 64, 256, n. 1; CARUCCI, M.: *The Romano-African Domus. Studies in Space, Decoration, and Function*. Oxford 2007, 139–140.

¹⁶Tunis, *Musée National du Bardo*. LEVI, D.: The Allegories of the Months in Classical Art. *ABull* 23 (1941) 251–291, at 268, n. 41; DUNBABIN (n. 13) 100, n. 45, 132–133, 268, n. 1; PARRISH: *Season Mosaics* (n. 14) 39, 44, 215–218, n. 56; L. ABAD CASAL in *LIMC* I.1 (1990) 510–538, s.v. *Horae* at 904, n. 135.





Fig. 4. Mosaic of the grape harvester Eros from Thugga (Tunisi, *Musée National du Bardo*) DUNBABIN (n. 13) pl. LXXII, 184

personification of Autumn, a completely naked Eros, holds a bunch of grapes with left hand and a lizard, suspended over a jar of wine, with her right hand¹⁷ (Fig. 7).

The images represented on the so-called sarcophagus “of Three Shepherds” (2nd half of the 4th c. AD), which came from the Praetextatus Catacombs in Rome, are quite similar. On the front of the artefact, three *kriophoroi* shepherds are depicted, standing on pedestals and surrounded by grape harvesting *Erotes*, while the sides are divided into two registers. The upper register is decorated with rural labors scenes, such as reaping, grape and olive harvest, and the

¹⁷Vatican City, *Treasury of St. Peter's Museum*. HANFMANN, G. M. A.: *The Season Sarcophagus in Dumbarton Oaks*. Voll. I–II. Cambridge 1951, 184, n. 540; BOVINI, G. – BRANDENBURG, H. – DEICHMANN, F. W.: *Repertorium der christlichen Sarkophage, 1: Rom und Ostia*. Wiesbaden 1967, 279–283, n. 680; HIMMELMANN, N.: *Typologische Untersuchungen an römischen Sarkophagreliefs des 3. und 4. Jahrhunderts n. Chr.* Mainz 1973, 13–28; MALBON, E. S.: *The Iconography of the Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus: Neofitus iit ad Deum*. Princeton 1990, 22–71.



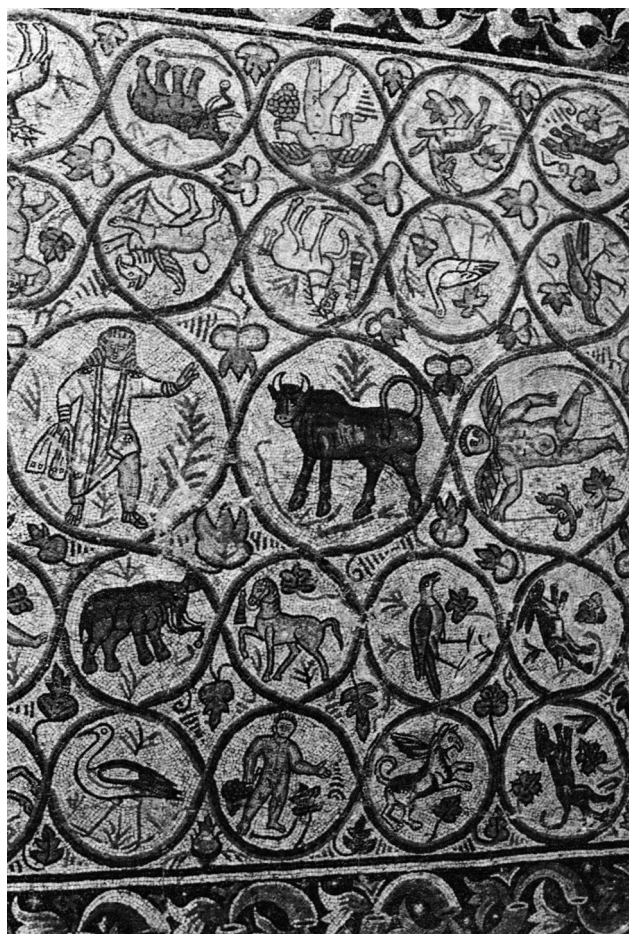


Fig. 5. Mosaic of *Asinus nica* from the *Maison de l'Âne* in Djemila (Djemila, Musée archéologique). DUNBABIN (n. 13) pl. LXXIII, 186

lower one with the personifications of the Four Seasons as winged *Erotes* wearing a *chlamys*. Autumn holds one bunch of grapes with one hand and, with the other one, a lizard hanging from a thread above a wine container¹⁸ (Fig. 8). The third artefact, which came from the necropolis of Tipasa, now Tipaza in Algeria (2nd half of the 4th c. AD), is fragmentary; on its front, there is the image of Christ on the throne at the centre, surrounded by the personifications of the Seasons between columns. In this case, the iconographic pattern is opposite to the usual one,

¹⁸Vatican City, Pio Cristiano Museum. WILPERT, G.: *I sarcofagi cristiani antichi*. Vol. I. Roma 1929, 142; HANFMANN (n. 17) II 184, n. 539; BOVINI–BRANDENBURG–DEICHMANN (n. 17) 26–27, n. 29; MALBON (n. 17) 81, 95–96, 99, 204.

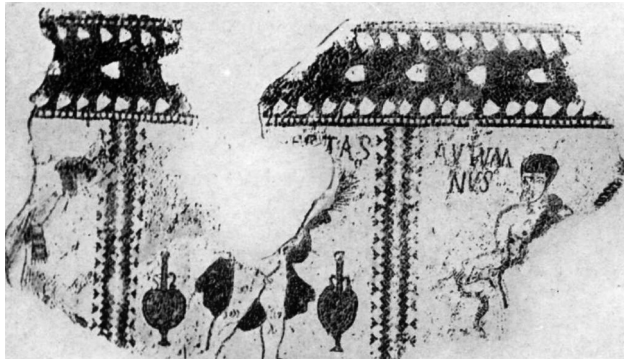


Fig. 6. Mosaic of Xenophon from Sbeitla (Tunis, *Musée National du Bardo*). LEVI (n. 16) fig. 16

because Autumn, illustrated as a young man wearing a *chlamys*, holds a grape above a lizard, but it has the same meaning¹⁹ (Fig. 9).

THE MEANING OF THE LIZARD'S RITUAL

According to the ancient sources, the meaning of the lizard is two-fold, on the basis of opposite but complementary symbolical and functional dynamics. In fact, from one side, this reptile symbolized the envy and consequently was associated in the Greek-Roman world with the evil-eye of which *Invidia/Phthonos* is the fundamental inspirational motif.²⁰ On the other hand, this creature, thanks to the accentuated mobility and the remarkable size of its eyeball, played an essential role in the treatment of ophthalmic diseases. In particular, the ancient Authors²¹ suggested putting a blinded lizard inside a glass or ceramic vessel together with stones, like obsidian and jasper, or with metal rings, notably of gold, silver and iron. After seven or nine days, the reptile regained magically its sight and the objects which were with it absorbed its therapeutic power. The people suffering from eyes problems used these stones on their eyes and wore these rings on their fingers and so could be healed of their illnesses.²²

¹⁹Tipasa, *Musée National Parc Trémaux*. LAWRENCE, M.: Season Sarcophagi of Architectural Type. *AJA* 63.3 (1958) 273–295 at 290; BUDRIESI, R.: Il sarcofago con geni delle stagioni nel parco archeologico di Tipasa (Algeria). In *Atti del III Congresso Nazionale di Archeologia Cristiana*. Trieste 1974, 497–518; KRANZ, P.: *Jahreszeiten-Sarkophage. Entwicklung und Ikonographie des Motivs der vier Jahreszeiten auf klassischen Sarkophagen und Sarkophagdeckeln*. Berlin 1984, 286–287, n. 585; MALBON (n. 17) 92, 101, 207, n. 53.

²⁰Plin. *Nat.* 30. 89; Antig. *Mir.* 20; Apul. *Apol.* 51.

²¹Plin. *Nat.* 29. 129–130; Ael. *NA* 5, 47; Marcell. *Med.* 8. 49; *Cyranides* 2. 14. 22–31.

²²DUNBABIN, K. M. D. – DICKIE, M. W.: *Invidia rumpantur pectora*. The Iconography of *Phthonos/Invidia* in Graeco-Roman Art. *JbAC* 26 (1983) 7–37 at 10–19; VERSNEL, H. S.: Punish those who rejoice in our misery. On curse texts and 'Schadenfreude'. In JORDAN, D. R. – MONTGOMERY, H. – THOMASSEN, E. (eds): *The World of Ancient Magic. Papers from the first International Samson Eitrem Seminar at the Norwegian Institute at Athens, 4–8 May 1997*. Bergen 1999, 125–162, at 130–140; GIUMAN, M.: *Archeologia dello sguardo. Fascinazione e baskania nel mondo classico*. Roma 2013, 113–141; FARAONE, C. A.: A Case of Cultural (Mis)translation?: Egyptian Eyes on Two Greek Amulets for Ophthalmia. In HOLMES, B. – FISCHER, K. D. (eds): *The Frontiers of Ancient Science: Essays in Honor of Heinrich von Staden*. Berlin – New York 2015, 93–110, at 96–104.



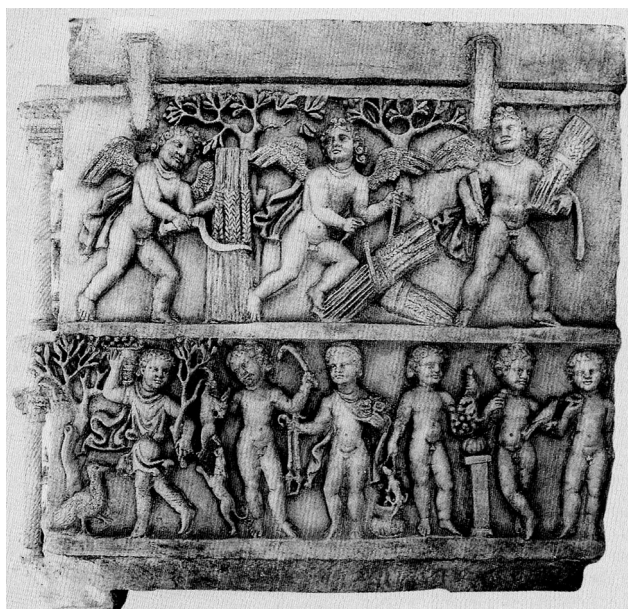


Fig. 7. Sarcophagus of *Iunius Bassus* (Vatican City, *Treasury of St. Peter's Museum*). HANFMANN (n. 17) II, fig. 149



Fig. 8. Sarcophagus of the Three Shepherds (Vatican City, *Pio Cristiano Museum*). WILPERT (n. 18) tav. CXVII, fig. 3





Fig. 9. Sarcophagus of the Seasons from Tipaza (Tipasa, *Musée National Parc Trémaux*). KRANZ (n. 19) taf. 126, n. 585

The image of the Bacchus in the mosaic of Thysdrus, near El Djem in Tunisia, alludes to the prophylactic nature of the lizard, because the function of the god is to defeat the forces of chaos, symbolically represented by fighting wild beasts around him during the amphitheatre games, by means of the reptile.²³ Similarly, with regards to the September iconography of the illustrated calendars of *Furius Filocalus* and the *Acton Collection*, several authors have affirmed that the lizard had an apotropaic function because it served to protect the grape harvest and the wine production from the evil forces.²⁴

This hypothesis is based on two elements: firstly, the presence of the grapes and the wine jars, which were pitched in September to contain the new wine, as written in the ancient agronomic sources;²⁵ secondly, this theory is founded on the ability of the lizard to remove parasites from the grapes.²⁶ In this respect, two documents are particularly interesting: a mosaic that

²³MERLIN, A. – POINSSOT, L.: Deux mosaïques de Tunisie à sujets prophylactiques (Musée du Bardo). *MMAI* 34.1–2 (1934) 129–176 at 154–175; MERLIN–POINSSOT: *Amours* (n. 14) 292–293, 295–299; DUNBABIN (n. 13) 184–185; FOUCHER, L.: Le culte de Bacchus sous l'Empire Romaine. *ANRW* II.17.2 (1981) 684–702, at 701.

²⁴MERLIN–POINSSOT: Deux mosaïques (n. 23) 165–167; MERLIN–POINSSOT: *Amours* (n. 14) 299–300; NOCK, A. D.: *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*. Vol. I. Oxford 1972, 271–276; GRAF, F.: *Magic in the Ancient World*. Cambridge–London 1997, 183–184.

²⁵*Men. Col.; Men. Vall.*: DOLEA PICANTUR; Cato Agr. 69. 1–2; Col. 12. 52. 16. DEGRASSI, A.: *Inscriptiones Italiae. Volumen XIII: fasti et elogia. Fasciculus 2: fasti anni numani et iuliani accedunt feriale, menologia rustica, parapegmata*. Roma 1967, 289, 291; WHITE, K. D.: *Farm Equipment of the Roman World*. Cambridge – New York 1975, 145–146; BALMELLE, C. – BRUN, J.-P.: La vigne et le vin dans la mosaïque romaine et byzantine, *La mosaïque gréco-romaine IX. Actes du IX^e Colloque international pour l'étude de la mosaïque antique et médiévale. Rome 5-10 novembre 2001, Vol. II*. Ed. H. MORLIER. Roma 2005, 899–920, at 902–904.

²⁶Theoc. 7. 23; Verg. *Ecl.* 2. 9; Verg. *G.* 4. 13–14; Plin. *Nat.* 11. 91; 29. 7. TOYNBEE, J. M. C.: *Animals in Roman Life and Art*. Ithaca – New York 1973, 220–221; BODSON, L.: Amphibians and Reptiles. Evidence from Wall Paintings, Mosaics, Sculpture, Skeletal Remains, and Ancient Authors. In JASHEMSKI, W. F. – MEYER, F. G. (eds): *The Natural History of Pompeii*. Eds. Cambridge 2002, 327–356, at 335; KITCHELL, K. F.: *Animals in the Ancient World from A to Z*. London – New York 2014, 111–114.

ornamented the *frigidarium* of the baths of Bir el Caïd, near Sousse (end 2nd c. AD), where an Eros accompanies a lizard that catches an insect in a vineyard,²⁷ and a verse of the *Officia duodecim mensium* (half 5th c. AD), where September was defined as the month that *maturas munit* [...] *ab hostibus uvas*, that is, it “protects the ripe grapes from their enemies”.²⁸

The connection between the propitiatory nature of the lizard and the grapes is also documented by the Ancient Authors who have written about a recipe, made with the reptile, boiled into the wine, that served as remedy against the poisonous bite of the salamander, as a medicine to treat epilepsy and consumption, and as a magic potion to scare off the evil spells.²⁹ Wine, moreover, had a medicinal power, as testified by the ancient Roman festival of *Meditrinalia*, celebrated on 11 October, at the end of the vintage, when the Romans drunk the new wine, mixed with the old one, because it was believed that it could have healing properties.³⁰

The image of the lizard with the same regenerative function also appeared on the *Ara Pacis*, where the presence of the reptile among the animals of the acanthus frieze alluded to the idea of the prosperity of the Golden Age realized under the Augustan reign.³¹ A similar meaning is in the image of the reptile represented on the votive objects of the Sabazios cult, the Phrygian divinity of fertility often identified with Dionysus, in particular the pantheic hands and the so-called magician vases, like those discovered in the Complex of the Magic Rites of Pompeii (II 1. 11–12) (1st c. AD).³²

CONCLUSIONS

The ritual of the lizard suspended over grapes represented a sign of the wide spread of the Dionysian cult at the popular level. During the grape harvest, Bacchus/Liber Pater was prayed to

²⁷Sousse, *Musée Archéologique*. FOUCHER, L.: *Inventaire des mosaïques. Feuille n. 57 de l'Atlas Archéologique: Sousse*. Tunis 1960, 106–107; DUNBABIN (n. 13) 271, n. 26; SORABELLA, J.: Eros and the Lizard: Children, Animals, and Roman Funerary Sculpture. In COHEN, A. – RUTTER, J. B.: *Constructions of Childhood in Ancient Greece and Rome*. Athens 2007, 353–370, at 366.

²⁸*Anth. Lat.* 490a, 9. COURTNEY (n. 9) 52–53; SMOLAK, K.: Zur Textgestaltung von *Anthologia Latina* 665, 17f. In PRIMMER, A. – SMOLAK, K. – WEBER, D. (eds): *Textsorten und Textkritik: Tagungsbeiträge*. Wien 2002, 39–43 at 39; PARODO: *Il rituale* (n. 9) 9.

²⁹Plin. *Nat.* 29. 73. 76; 30. 86. 90; Ael. *NA* 3. 17; Dsc. 2. 70. MERLIN–POINSSOT: Deux mosaïques (n. 23) 167; STERN: *Le calendrier* (n. 7) 265; WAEGEMAN, M.: The Gecko, the Hoopoe... and Lice. *AC* 53 (1984) 218–225, at 218; DIVJAK–WISCHMEYER (n. 7) II 178.

³⁰Varro *ling.* 6. 21; Fest. 250 L. LATTE, K.: *Römische Religionsgeschichte*. München 1960, 74–75; SCULLARD, H. H.: *Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic*. London 1981, 192; DE CAZANOVE, O.: Jupiter, Liber et le vin latin. *RHR* 25 (1988) 245–265, at 249–250.

³¹POLLINI, J.: The Acanthus of the *Ara Pacis* as an Apolline and Dionysiac Symbol of Anamorphosis, Anakyklosis and *Numen Mixtum*. In KUBELIK, M. – SCHWARZ, M. (eds): *Von der Bauforschung zur Denkmalpflege. Fs. Alois Machatschek*. Wien 1993, 181–217 at 193–198, 214; KELLUM, B.: What We See and What We Don't See. Narrative Structure and the *Ara Pacis Augustae*. *ArtHist* 17 (1994) 26–45, at 36–38; CASTRIOTA, D.: *The Ara Pacis Augustae and the Imagery of Abundance in Later Greek and Early Roman Imperial Art*. Princeton 1995, 54–55, 80–81.

³²Pompei, *Antiquarium*. TRAN TAM TINH, V.: *Le culte des divinités orientales en Campanie*. Leiden 1972, 98, 126; PACE, R.: Il “Complesso dei Riti Magici” a Pompei II, 1, 11–12. *RSP* 8 (1997) 73–97, at 87–89; CHARLES-LAFORGE, M.-O.: Le “complexe des rites magiques” et le culte de Sabazios à Pompéi. In ROMIZZI, L. – MARCATTILI, F.: *Contributi di Archeologia Vesuviana II*. Roma 2006, 163–186, at 166–170.





Fig. 10. Calendar fresco from Ostia, August (left) and September (right) (Vatican City, Vatican Library – Aldobrandini Wedding Room). STERN (n. 2) pl. IX, fig. 24

improve the production of wine,³³ as confirmed by the inscriptions *VINDEMIAE* and *SACRUM LIBERO* (“vintage” and “sacrifice to Liber”) noted for the half of October in the ancient Roman farmers’ almanacs *Menologia Rustica*.³⁴ More specifically, there are two iconographic sources that document this phenomenon. The most ancient example is the painted calendar fresco of Ostia (209–211 AD) where the month of September is illustrated by a scene of sacrifice to Liber made by a group of kids who hold a beam with the bust of the god and baskets of grapes³⁵ (Fig. 10). A similar subject is reproduced on the polychrome Vintage mosaic of Cherchel, the ancient Caesarea, in Algeria (end 4th c. AD – early 5th c. AD),³⁶ where, among the scene of rural labours in the vineyard, a grape harvester sacrifices a goat to the god of wine, as written by Varro³⁷ (Fig. 11).

³³Col. 12. 18. 3–4; Fest. 423, 472. BRUHL, A.: *Liber Pater. Origine et expansion du culte dionysiaque a Rome et dans le monde romain*. Paris 1953, 19–20; DE CAZANOVE (n. 30) 526; BALMELLE–BRUN (n. 25) 906–907.

³⁴*Men. Col.; Men. Vall. Rust.* DEGRASSI (n. 25) 508, 521–522; PARODO (n. 2) 74–75.

³⁵Vatican City, Vatican Library – Aldobrandini Wedding Room. STERN: Les calendriers (n. 2) 440–441; HUET (n. 2) 234; PARODO: Immagini (n. 2) 54–56, 183.

³⁶Cherchel, *Parc des mosaïques*. GHEDINI, F.: Dioniso, la vite, la vendemmia nella produzione musiva dell’Africa romana. *Ostraka* 6.2 (1997) 215–247 at 242; BALMELLE–BRUN (n. 25) 907; LÓPEZ MONTEAGUDO, G.: Paisajes productivos del agro de los mosaicos del Norte de África. In COCCO, M. B. – GAVINI, A. – IBBA, A. (eds): *L’Africa romana. Trasformazione dei paesaggi del potere nell’Africa settentrionale fino alla fine del mondo antico. Atti del XIX Convegno di Studi (Sassari 16–19 dicembre 2010)*. Vol. II. Roma 2012, 669–690, at 682.

³⁷Varro *Rust.* 1. 2. 18.



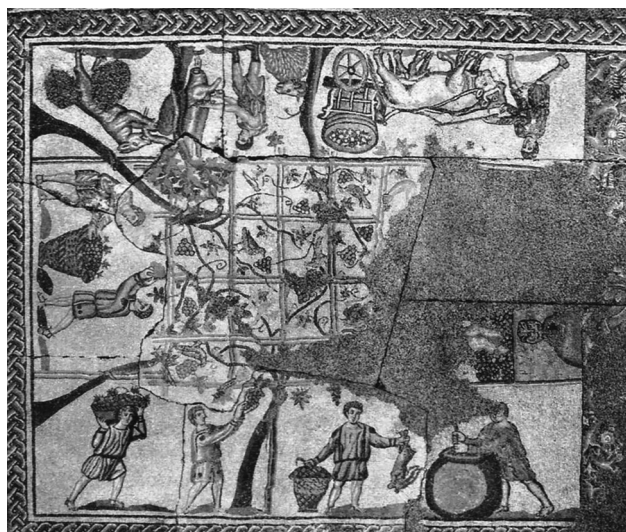


Fig. 11. Vintage mosaic from Cherchel (Cherchel, *Parc des Mosaiques*). LÓPEZ MONTEAGUDO (n. 36) fig. 10

The popularity of the Bacchic vintage festivals was still relevant in Late Antiquity. Their celebration is documented in many literary and epigraphic sources, in particular the already-mentioned *Fasti Furii Filocali*, the *Feriale Campanum* and the *Codex Theodosianus*. In all cases, as in the *Menologia rustica*, these feasts occurred in October, the month of the end of the vintage. For this reason, the personification of October in the Monnus illustrated calendar (end 3rd – early 4th c. AD), a polychrome mosaic which adorned a rich house near the imperial residence in Trier, is represented as the bust of a young Bacchus, crowned with vine leaves, who holds the *thyrsos*³⁸ (Fig. 12).

As regards the Chronography of 354, the 5th of October is noted as *Mammes vindemia*, a now obscure vintage holiday perhaps celebrated in a hypothetical place called “Mammes” not far from Rome.³⁹ It is more probable, however, that this name is linked with a feast dedicated by Severus Alexander to his mother Julia Mamaea on the Palatine,⁴⁰ owing to the great devotion of the Severan dynasty to the god Bacchus/Liber Pater.⁴¹ In the *Feriale Campanum*, an inscribed calendar found in the amphitheatre of Capua and recognized in 387 by the provincial priest *Romanus Iunior*, some popular festivals are mentioned, such as that of the vintage celebrated nearby, at Lake Acherusia (*VINDEMIAE ACERUSAE*) between Cumae and Cape Misenum, on

³⁸Trier, *Rheinisches Landesmuseum*. STERN: Les calendriers (n. 2) 443; PARRISH (n. 2) 488, n. 28; PARODO: Immagini (n. 2) 73–75, 187.

³⁹SALZMAN (n. 7) 105, 240; PARODO: Season Mosaics (n. 9) 11.

⁴⁰SHA *Alex. Sev.* 26. 9. DIVJAK–WISCHMEYER (n. 7) I 299–300; PARODO: Immagini (n. 2) 55.

⁴¹FOUCHER (n. 23) 698–700; CADOTTE, A.: *La romanisation des dieux: l'interpretatio romana en Afrique du Nord sous le Haut-Empire*. Leiden–Boston 2007, 253–256, 259–261, 264–266, 272; LICHTENBERGER, A.: *Severus Pius Augustus. Studien zur sakralen Repräsentation und Rezeption der Herrschaft des Septimius Severus und seiner Familie (193–211 n. Chr.)*. Leiden–Boston 2001, 27–37.





Fig. 12. Calendar mosaic of Monnus, October (Trier, *Rheinisches Landesmuseum*). PARRISH (n. 2) fig. 28

15th of October.⁴² Even in 389 AD, a law of *Codex Theodosianus* forbade the folkloric practices in connection with the grape harvest celebrated from the second half of August to the first half of October.⁴³ The edict was a part of the imperial legislation against all the private pagan cultic activities, from the forms of divination and prediction to the worship of household divinities, which still continued at the end of the 4th century AD.⁴⁴

In conclusion, the scene of the lizard's ritual characterizes the iconography of three subjects: the grape harvester Eroses, the personification of September and of Autumn, which are associated with each other on the basis of the shared Dionysiac sphere of the expulsion of evil forces

⁴²BEARD, M. – NORTH, J. – PRICE, S.: *Religions of Rome, Vol. II: A Sourcebook*. Cambridge – New York 1998, 76–77; TROUT, D. E.: *The Feriale Campanum* and Christianity in the Theodosian Age. In MATHISEN, R. W. (ed.): *Law, Society, and Authority in Late Antiquity*. Oxford 2011, 162–178, at 167–170. RESANO, E. M.: La cristianización del calendario oficial romano y la política religiosa de Graciano, Valentiniano II y Teodosio I. In GARCÍA-GASCO, R. – GONZÁLEZ SÁNCHEZ, S. – HERNÁNDEZ DE LA FUENTE, D. (eds): *The Theodosian Age (A.D. 379–455): Power, place, belief and learning at the end of the Western Empire*. Oxford 2013, 153–170, at 155.

⁴³*Cod. Theod.* 2. 8. 19.

⁴⁴*Cod. Theod.* 9. 16. 2; 16. 10. 12. CHUVIN, P.: *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans*. Cambridge 1990, 1–2, 10–11, 38–39; MCLYNN, N.: Pagans in a Christian Empire. In ROUSSEAU, P. (ed.): *The Blackwell Companion to Late Antiquity*. Oxford 2009, 572–578, at 575–577; CAMERON, A.: *The Last Pagans of Rome*. Oxford 2011, 61–62.



and the propitiation of fecundity. This image spread from the 2nd half of the 4th century to the early 5th century AD in Rome and particularly in Roman North Africa, where mosaics of vintage scenes⁴⁵ and of those with the Dionysiac *imagerie* were really numerous,⁴⁶ probably thanks to the influence of an indigenous cult that had favoured the great diffusion of the Bacchus religion in this area.⁴⁷

The use of the image of the lizard and the grapes attests to the continuity of the Dionysian cult in Late Antiquity, even if only at a popular level, because of the definitive affirmation of Christianity. At the same time, the new religion included this iconographic pattern, as demonstrated by the personification of Autumn with the reptile in the already-mentioned sarcophagi, which has acquired an eschatological meaning related to eternal life.⁴⁸ As a matter of fact, the topics of the endless flow of time and the cyclical renewal of nature evoked by the scenes of the Four Seasons, which the imperial propaganda employs to suggest, by means the theme of the *Felicitas Temporum* (“Blessedness of the Seasons”), the infinite prosperity of the Roman Empire,⁴⁹ were interpreted in Christian religion as the ideals of the eternity of the soul and the spiritual wealth obtained through faith in God.⁵⁰

⁴⁵BLÁZQUEZ MARTÍNEZ, J. M.: Técnicas agrícolas representadas en los mosaicos del Norte de Africa. In KHANOUSSI, M. – RUGGERI, P. – VISMARA, C. (eds): *L’Africa romana XII. Atti del XII Convegno di studio. Cartagine, 15-18 dicembre 1994*, Vol. I. Sassari 1998, 517–528, at 518–523; BLÁZQUEZ MARTÍNEZ, J. M.: La riqueza de África a través de los mosaicos. In GONZÁLES, J. – RUGGERI, P. – VISMARA, C. – ZUCCA, R.: *L’Africa romana XVII. Le ricchezze dell’Africa. Risorse, produzioni, scambi. Atti del XVII Convegno di Studio. Sevilla 14-17 dicembre*. Vol. I. Roma 2008, 67–83, at 72–75; LÓPEZ MONTEAGUDO (n. 36) 680–682.

⁴⁶DUNBABIN (n. 13) 173–183; YACOB: Splendeurs (n. 13) 40–59; SLIM (n. 13).

⁴⁷DUNBABIN (n. 13) 140–145, 183–187; FOUCHER (n. 23) 698–701; CADOTTE (n. 41) 253–275.

⁴⁸HANFMANN (n. 17) I 185–192, 230–245; TURCAN, R.: *Les sarcophages romains a représentations dionysiaques. Essai de chronologie et d’histoire religieuse*. Paris 1966, 532–534, 563–567, 608–620; KRANZ (n. 19) 16–19; ZANKER, P. – EWALD, B. C.: *Mit Mythen leben. Die Bilderwelt der römischen Sarkophage*. München 2004, 159–162.

⁴⁹MUSO, L.: Governare il tempo naturale, Provvedere alla felicitas terrena, Presiedere l’ordine celeste. Il Tempo con lo zodiaco: percorso, metamorfosi e memoria di un tema iconografico. In ENSOLI, S. – LA ROCCA, E.: *Aurea Roma. Dalla città pagana alla città cristiana*. Roma 2000, 373–388, at 377–379; QUET, M.-H.: L’aureus au zodiaque d’Hadrien, première image de l’éternité cyclique dans l’idéologie et l’imaginaire temporel romains. *RN* 160 (2004) 119–154 at 143–144; FACHECHI, G. M. – PARODO, C.: La Terra e il Tempo. Migrazione e mutazione dell’iconografia dei mesi dall’età tardoantica al pieno Medioevo. *RCCM LXII.2* (2020) 507–547, at 507–525.

⁵⁰MERRONY, M. W.: The Reconciliation of Paganism and Christianity in the Early Byzantine Mosaic Pavements of Arabia and Palestine. *LA* 48 (1998) 441–482, at 468–470; PARODO, C.: L’eternità ritrovata. Iconografia e iconologia delle immagini dei mesi nei calendari figurati degli edifici ecclesiastici cristiani. *LA* 69 (2019) 461–500; PARODO, C.: Everything in God’s Own Time. The Continuity of Pagan Iconography in the Christian Illustrated Calendars. In MICHAELIDES, D. (ed.): *Proceedings of the 14th Conference of the Association Internationale pour l’Étude de la Mosaïque Antique (AIEMA)(15–19 October 2018, Nicosia, Cyprus)*. Athens (in press).

