

Roman Woman, Culture, and Law

By  
Heather Faith Wright

Senior Seminar: HST 499  
Professor John L. Rector  
Western Oregon University  
June 5, 2010

Readers  
Professor Benedict Lowe  
Professor Laurie Carlson

Copyright @ Heather Wright, 2010

The topic of my senior thesis is Women of the Baths. Women were an important part of the activities and culture that took place within the baths. Throughout Roman history bathing was important to the Romans. By the age of Augustus visiting the baths had become one of the three main activities in a Roman citizen's daily life. The baths were built following the current trends in architecture and were very much a part of the culture of their day. The architecture, patrons, and prostitutes of the Roman baths greatly influenced the culture of this institution.

The public baths of both the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire were important social environment to hear or read poetry and meet lovers. Patrons were expected to wear special bathing costumes, because under various emperors it was illegal to bathe nude. It was also very important to maintain the baths; they were, at the top of the Roman government's list of social responsibilities. The baths used the current trends in architecture, and were very much a part of the culture of the day. Culture within the Roman baths, mainly the Imperial and Republican baths was essential to Roman society. The baths were complex arenas to discuss politics, have rendezvous with prostitutes and socialize with friends. Aqueducts are an example of the level of specialization which the Romans had reached in the glory days of the Republic. A network of aqueducts fed the many baths and the gymnasiums spread across the Roman World. The social, business, and political relationships which took place within the baths had far reaching impacts on the many cultures within the Roman World.

The living conditions of most of the city's population caused public spaces to be greatly valued. These public places provided an escape from domestic squalor. The senators lived in vast villas with gardens, two dining rooms, bedrooms and storage. Merchants or middle class had their shops at the front of the house with the living space behind consisting of courtyard, dining room, bedrooms, shop and storage rooms. Poor people lived in a simple one room home with

three walls and a roof. The fourth side of their square shaped house was open to the street, which meant that their possessions quickly became covered in dust. The baths grew in popularity with the masses as an attractive public haven, although they were not required to be immaculate and luxurious, they were regarded as better than staying home. They were utilized primarily by the elite between the sixth and eighth hour (2:00-4:00 PM), when the baths were hot. The wives of senators were part of the elite; they created their own sense of fashion, and made it fashionable to visit the baths. City space was structured by the activities of the elite. Bathing in the Roman world was not just about washing; there was a whole culture to the Roman bathing ritual.<sup>1</sup> Beautiful slaves became prostitutes their master either rented them out as a sex-slave or made them their lover. Even if a slave was the lover of their master or mistress, they had no choice with their intimacies. This was true for both male and female slaves.<sup>2</sup>

Roman honor was totally dependant on how a Roman was viewed by others. The bath houses were one of the few places where large groups of people informally gathered. The baths were where Romans indulged in leisure and promiscuity.

Other important facts are who maintain the baths, when the bath became popular in Rome, and what their sociological function was on the hierarchical social order of the Roman Empire. There was a specific kind of architecture and specialized technology that was used in the construction of the Roman bath. Bathing culture was later transformed across Christian and Byzantine cultures. The two options are that the Roman baths are either copies of Hellenistic baths or Greek baths. Greek baths had individual tubs, while Hellenistic baths had a cold bath and gymnasium. Roman baths were different from both of these, mainly because they were heated baths with communal bathing.

---

<sup>1</sup> Fikret Yegul. *Baths and Bathing in Classical Antiquity*. The MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts. (1992) 1-200

<sup>2</sup> Tomas Wiedemann; Jane Gardner. *Representing the Body of the Slave*. (2002) 1-230

Baths required extensive personnel, money, and administrators to run and maintain the baths. Bathing became a habit because it was a psychologically and physically satisfying experience.<sup>3</sup>

The clear, warm water, steamy atmosphere, shiny marble, murmuring of genteel sounds, the aroma of perfumed ointments, the intimacy of massage and public nudity, was an extremely powerful stimulant for the creation of the feeling of happiness, relaxation, comfort, and well-being. Bathing was thought to clean moral and physical stains. People were light and optimistic after a bath.

The origins of the Roman baths were traced by Francesco di Capua to the traditions of folk medicine in central Italian villages. The efficacy of a good sweat in front of the kitchen oven was believed to be of fundamental importance to curing seasonal ailments, such as the flu, rheumatic pains, and colds. In Latium and Campania, villas and farmhouses often displayed a special room for this purpose. It was a small circular room covered by a dome. Conceived in its more developed forms as a rustic *caldarium*, this was also the *laconicum*, or the *assa sudatio* later described by Vitruvius. A moderately heated chamber joined the sweat room, in order to protect the bather from the cold. This chamber served as a changing room and a passage. It was later combined with the ancient *lavatrina*, a type of cold washing unit or *frigidarium*, which are frequently seen in Italian farms today. The first stage in the evolution of the Roman bath was a suite; it was composed of the three basic elements: a *caldarium/laconicum*, a *tepidarium/apodyterium*, and a *lavatrina/frigidarium*. The main characteristic of these private bathing suites was their functional location next to the kitchen, with which they shared a heating apparatus such as simple stove boilers or more specialized furnaces for floor and wall heating. While the earliest of these domestic baths date to the early second century B.C., those with more

---

<sup>3</sup> Inge Nielsen. *Thermae et Balnea: The Architecture and Cultural History of Rome Public Baths*. Aarhus University Press (1993) 1-475

advanced heating technology were from much later dates; many incorporated important technical innovations following the earthquake of 62 B.C. The original and overriding impetus for the artificial heating systems of the early Roman baths came from the thermo-mineral establishments of Baiae and the Phlegraean Fields, rather than from any significant contact with the Greek world.' From the early days of the republic these extensive thermal baths and spas took full advantage of the copious natural steam and hot water sources of the region. They were also immensely popular as cure centers in the early days of the republic. Thus they influenced public taste, promoting the use and enjoyment of bathing, and also provided excellent technical models that could be imitated in artificially heated baths. Furthermore, these culturally and technically accessible models may have spread with greater momentum than those provided by the tenuous Greek presence in the Bay of Naples, or the distant, isolated Greek baths in the eastern Mediterranean, southern Italy, and Sicily. The role of the thermo-mineral establishments of Baiae in the development of suspended floor systems of heating (hypocaust) is a plausible, even provable, hypothesis. Four early examples of a bath type can be found at Pompeii: the Stabian Baths of the second century B.C.; the Republican Baths of Region VIII, 100-80 B.C.; the Forum Baths of 80 B.C.; and the Central Baths, which were still unfinished at the eruption of Mount Vesuvius.<sup>4</sup>

The two options are that the Roman baths are either copies of Hellenistic baths or Greek baths. Greek baths had individual tubs, while Hellenistic baths had a cold bath and gymnasium. Roman baths were different from both of these, mainly because they were heated baths, with communal bathing.

The Greek hip bath is from 300 B.C. The earliest evidence that we have of the Roman baths is in Pompeii. So like the Stabian baths which are about 100 B.C. The Republican baths are about

---

<sup>4</sup> Nielsen 22-23, 32, 35, 48-51, 57

the same time. There established just around the time, sort of 100 to 80 B.C. when Sulla found the Roman colony and they appear. And they are the first baths that we have for the Roman time. The city of Rome was founded in 753 B.C. It is a monarchy until 510 B.C., when the Republic was founded. The Roman Empire began when Augustus won the battle of Attium in 31 B.C. and initiated a gradual transition from a Republic to a monarchy over the next ten years. In A.D. 476 the Roman Empire falls with the deposition of the last western Roman emperor.<sup>5</sup>

The Republican Baths of 100-80 B.C. fell out of use by the Augustan period.<sup>6</sup> The baths appear to have been available from the sixth hour until at least the eleventh hour. It seems that from the sixth hour to be the eighth hour. This was probably because the baths were at their hottest from the sixth hour until about the eighth hour; this was when they began to cool down. The availability of the baths was designed to coincide with this rest period at midday. If a person's leisure or *otium* commenced at the sixth hour, they could use the baths at their hottest. It is apparent that the owner of a shop or *popina*, and the *mercennarii* could not utilize the baths at this point in the day, because of the need to attend to their work or business. Thus, the baths were utilized primarily by the elite between the sixth and eighth hours, when they were hot. If the majority of the population did not bathe until after the tenth hour, it is possible that they did not experience hot baths. City space was structured by the activities of the elite. In the morning the elite received their clients at their house; from there they went to the forum, and were accompanied by their clients. Then they went to the baths from the forum, again accompanied by their clients, then finally returned home. The temporal aspect of this routine articulates city space. The elite migrated to the forum between the second hour and the third hour. Unless public

---

<sup>5</sup> Dr Ben Lowe. *HST 316 Ancient Greece*. Monmouth, Oregon: Western Oregon University. Winter Term 2008. February 21, 2008, 1:25 P.M.

<sup>6</sup> Alison E Cooley; M. G. L Cooley. *POMPEII A sourcebook*. Routledge 2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4EN (2004) 45-46

business delayed them, the elite went to the baths at the sixth hour. If they were delayed by public business, they would go later, but before the tenth hour.<sup>7</sup>

In the last years of the Republic the importance of baths had increased to the point that it was one of the three central points of a Roman political day. After a morning in the Forum and before retiring to their homes for the evening dinner parties the elites would spend their afternoons at the baths. It was not solely for cleanliness, many reasons went into the bath's purposes. In the last days of the republic it was important to be seen by key elite figures to insure social and political advancement. Bathing in the ancient world, especially in the world of Romans, went far beyond the functional and hygienic necessities of washing. It was a personal regeneration and a deeply rooted social habit – in the full sense of the word, an *institution*. Visiting the baths was an irreplaceable part of the average Roman's daily routine. Physical exercise and various games in the *palaestra* ordinarily preceded hot bathing. The Romans, as direct inheritors of the Greek gymnasium the Greek ideal of a balance between body and mind, sought to incorporate an intellectual dimension into the wide scope of their bathing activities. A critical issue in the development of Roman bath was the relationship between the gymnasium and the baths. Ancient bathing represented a balance between a mentally oriented life style and a physical one. The Roman baths appeal to the masses regardless of wealth, color, creed or gender. They were inclusive rather than exclusive, and were the epitome of democratic institutions and ideas. Small baths were ordinary open to the public, but were owned privately, and operated as a commercial enterprise. The entrance fee was so trifling that few citizens were so poor that they could not afford it the state, city, or wealthy private person partly or wholly subsidized the larger establishments. The Roman state and its leading citizens were fully aware of the beneficial role

---

<sup>7</sup> Ray Laurence. *Roman Pompeii: Space and Society*. Routledge 11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE (2003) 124,126,128-129

the baths played in the entertainment, education, and health of the people. They strove to make the baths as accessible and attractive as possible to the masses.

Everyone, except for the slaves and the Imperial family, went to the baths. From senators, to peasants, and prostitutes, frequent bathing and visits to the bathes gymnasium insured longer healthier lives. The Roman Baths were the mall of Classical Rome. They were you went to see and be seen. Senators gather new allies at the Bathes, just as prostitutes collected new clients. The Baths were the Classical Roman equivalent of malls, clubs, and love hotels all rolled into one. Prostitutes met their clients there, just as adulterers rendezvous with their lover, to avoid getting caught. Women were allowed to use the Baths of Trajan, so imperial thermae were not off limits to them. Then there are Clement of Alexandria's comments that one could meet noble ladies naked in the baths. So that means that less-respectable women were not the mixed bath's only female patrons. Strict chronological boundaries between periods of when mixed bathing was acceptable and when it was not are hard to establish.<sup>8</sup>

Women were an important part of the activities and culture that took place within the Roman baths. The woman of the Roman World had more freedom than woman of other cultures during the Roman era, but many laws restricting their actions were also passed during this period. Women went to the baths to exercise, bathe, meet lovers, and hear poetry read. The baths were an important social environment in the classical Roman world. They were built following the current trends in architecture and were very much a part of the culture of their day. The culture within the Roman baths was vital to Roman society. The baths were used as complex arenas to discuss politics, have rendezvous with prostitutes, and socialize with friends.

---

<sup>8</sup> Garrett G. Fagan. *Bathing in Public in the Roman World*. The University Of Michigan Press. (1999) 26-27



Prostitutes who worked in the baths were an accepted part of Roman society, and worked in private rooms among the bath suites. Customers purchased types of service based on art relief depictions which were hung above the doorways of the private rooms. A prostitutes' earnings varied and were based on how long and how complicated the tasks she or he was paid to perform. However, baths had to maintain a respectable reputation and if a prostitute went too far in trying to please their clients, then they would be removed. The baths also had male prostitutes who were there for the female clients. As long as a woman's rendezvous with male prostitutes did not interfere with satisfying her husband, he did not mind if they visited them. Gay, lesbian, and bi prostitutes work at 'alternative' baths, which were different from the standard form. This was done because fights tended to break out when partners discovered that their lover was bi, even if they had been paid to be lovers.

Mixed bathing was unpopular in the Republic, but accepted after the reign of Caesar Augustus. The reason mixed bathing was not popular during the Roman Republic was because it went against their moral traditions, and was believed to promote prostitution. During and after the Augustan period, new Roman laws about women's chastity played a key role in how women were treated and what affected they had on Roman culture. Augustus enacted these laws after his daughter Julia's indiscretions of having too many lovers and publicly acknowledging these affairs. One of Augustus' laws was that woman patrons were expected to wear special bathing costumes, because Augustus made it illegal for women to publicly bathe nude. Bathing costumes were short white cotton togas, which came down to mid thigh.

The everyday clothing respectable women wore to the baths were by modern standards, simple. It served to conceal them from the eyes of strange men. In Classical times respectable women usually used wool or linen to make their clothes, but prostitutes wore saffron-dyed

material of gauze-like transparency. Ionian or Dorian was the style of dress. A shawl could be worn with either style, and was drawn over the head as a hood. The Ionic Gredrobe tended to only be the garment worn in public, since it was so confining. A shorter tunic was worn inside the house and as a nightdress or petticoat. There was also a large variety of slippers, sandals, sandals with thongs between the toes, sandals with straps bound around the lower leg as far as the knee, and some women wore shoes with platform soles to increase their height. Both housewives and prostitutes used cosmetics and rouge was used on the cheeks. Jewelry and hairdos could be complicated, even though clothes were simple. Women wore their hair surmounted by a coronet or headband and loose, or up in a chignon or net. False curls were sometimes also used.<sup>9</sup>

Given the prevailing atmosphere of nakedness at the baths, be it complete or partial, the attested bathing together of men and women, came as a shock to many classical sensibilities. The reported imperial edicts that banned or permitted mixed bathing, imply that it was a widespread habit. It is possible that that mixed bathing took place only in less respectable establishments, and that only prostitutes and lowly women practiced it. Or that the habit varied from place to place, and the imperial *thermae* was reserved solely for men. Another view is that over time fashion changed. Mixed bathing was unpopular in the Republic, accepted in the Early Empire, and unaccountable in the modern literature. In the Roman world, the process of becoming a prostitute becoming: a *meretrix* (a woman who earns) which is from the Latin word *mereo*, and a *hetaera* or a *porne* (a woman who sells) which is from the Greek *pernemi*. Imperial writers, more or less incidentally, only recorded a handful of reasons for a woman to become a prostitute. Though they eschew the more baroque styles of making woman victim, they did not exactly offer

---

<sup>9</sup> Sarah B. Pomeroy. *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves, Women in Classical Antiquity*. Schocken Books Inc., New York. (1996) 83

her much choice and the matter. She could have been prostituted as a slave, a wife, daughter, or was be driven to systematically sell her body, either by her depraved lusts or indigence. Dio Chrysostom assumed that the bodies set out as sexual wares in the cities of the Empire have been captured or purchased for the purpose, an assumption also worked with in the assorted stories that circulated in the imperial world of well-bred maidens captured by pirates or bandits and sold to *lenones or pornoboskoi* (brothel-keepers).<sup>10</sup>

If a father did not meet any potential son-in-law, that he liked, at the Forum, he would go to the baths. Many son-in laws were found there. Roman marriages were not for love, but mainly for political reasons and to provide heirs. This meant many might have turned to adultery, except for the fact that adultery was considered a crime. Sex with a prostitute or slave was not considered adultery, and was used by many people as an outlet for their empty marriage. The Romans also thought that there was only so much exclusive sex someone should have with their spouse, and that they should take care of the rest of their 'business' with a slave or prostitute, someone who was completely loyal to them. The Roman baths were important to the elite as a place to be seen and carrying on their business. They were inexpensive to use and all citizens took advantage of the accessibility of the baths. People enjoyed the baths as a place to rejuvenate. The baths were a very important part of the ancient Roman culture.

A later age for marrying, probably late teens, was typical of *most* girls in Roman society. In the Roman Empire, the age of males at their first marriage seems to have been in their late twenties; unlike many young men in the western regions of the empire. Western empire families were a bit different. Girls tended to marry at a wider range of ages for their first marriage. Some marriages took place at rather young ages, and it was all part of the overall pattern for women

---

<sup>10</sup> Rebecca Flemming. *Quae Corpore Quaestum Facit: The Sexual Economy of Female Prostitution in the Roman Empire*. The Journal of Roman Studies, Vol. 89. (1999) 40-41

(this much being 'guaranteed' by the Christian example). Men tended to marry in their mid to late twenties. This meant that an age-gap of ten or more years tended to separate a husband and wife. This explains the high demand for prostitution.<sup>11</sup>

The building and maintenance of the baths was placed at the top of the Roman state's list of social responsibilities. The younger Pliny's donation of close to a million *sesterces* to his native town Como, in Northern Italy, for the construction, decoration, and upkeep of a public bath, was his crowning act of generosity. The emperor Tiberius granted 6 million *sesterces* for the rebuilding of Sardis, in Asia Minor, after the devastating earthquake of A.D. 17. A colonnaded avenue and a monumental bath-gymnasium complex, constituting the kernel of the city center, were what most of the money was spent on. In the development of Roman building technology, baths occupied a vanguard position. Bath buildings have some of the earliest uses of concrete as a building material, forming bold vaults, curvilinear forms, and domes. The baths were an effective testing ground for new ideas in architecture. Their position between the traditional forms of public and religious architecture, and purely utilitarian structures, made them instrumental in bringing wide spread acceptance of new ideas and revolutionary style into the realm of architecture proper. Roman vaults were combined with Greek orders in the grand interiors of the baths. They did this by defining and accentuating the immense vertical heights and curved surfaces of the walls with hard, horizontal cornice lines. Roman architects also did this by bridging cavernous, vaulted expanses with tightly stretched, straight entablatures and rows of columns. In this way familiar and accessible forms tame and contain the unfamiliar and inaccessible. The architecture of the baths gave classicism a new dimension as a formal synthesis between Greek and Roman sensibilities. This new visual order had been in the making from the

---

<sup>11</sup> Brent D. Shaw *The Age of Roman Girls at Marriage: Some Reconsiderations*. *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 77. (1987) 43-44

early Roman Empire onward the great *thermae* of the third and fourth centuries represent some of its most ambitious and successful creations. The Imperial Thermae in Trier and the Thermae of Diocletian are two of the better examples. The buttresses, the powerful massing of generously proportioned vaults, ribs and the broad facades, punctuated by large arched windows established an important link with medieval architecture. The breakthrough discoveries in heating technology, especially the form of radiant floor heating known as hypocaust, at the end of the second century B.C., caused the success and development of the baths. The hypocaust and various simpler versions appear to have been developed independently in Olympia, Greece and Pompeii, Italy. The Romans created its full architectural exploitation, which resulted in the creation of a bath design based on the gradation of ambient temperatures and the order of usage.

<sup>12</sup>

Small baths and baths that were located in exceptionally arid regions preserved their precious supplies of water in reservoirs and cisterns. They could function with surprisingly little water. Larger baths depended on aqueducts for their steady and generous supply, to feed their fountains, pools, and cascades. The spectacular aqueduct system that brought water in conduits, through hills, and on arches across valleys, from far away sources, to supply the urban public. Nine aqueducts, supplying a total of nearly one million cubic meters of water a day, three hundred gallons per person per day, served Rome during the time of Trajan. Distribution tanks that were linked to aqueducts served water directly to public baths in the cities. The public baths were accorded primacy over private uses. The Thermae of Diocletian and the Thermae of Caracalla, which were two of the larger baths, were served by special branch aqueducts tapped directly from the main line. The Thermae of Caracalla's reservoir had a capacity of approximately eight thousand cubic meters, which was about one-twelfth of the daily supply of Rome.

---

<sup>12</sup> Nielsen 1-2

There was an underlying structure to the plan of even the most experimental of bath designs, which reflects the traditional order of usage. This order consisted of a sequence of cold, tepid, and hot rooms. Asymmetrical and symmetrical are the two basic planning categories for the baths. There were many regional variations between these two, such as partially symmetrical or half-axial schemes, for example the Baths of Julia Memmia at Bulla Regia and the Baths of Faustina at Miletus. These baths were frequently of medium size and reflect the restrictions of a difficult site or the limitations of a modest budget. A number of rooms and halls are arranged as mirror images; about a main axis culminates in a large, single caldarium, the primary hot bath hall, in the fully symmetrical type of baths. Larger establishments represented this type of bath predominantly, though not exclusively. The more elaborate of these, known as imperial *thermae*, were created by the architects of the capital by the middle or the second half of the first century A.D. The asymmetrical type covers the great majority of smaller bathing establishments, the *balneae* were widely spread through the cities. An early and very predominant tendency was to arrange a row of parallel, barrel-vaulted halls next to a colonnaded exercise court. This important type, sometimes referred to as the Pompeian type, had started in Campania by the early second century B.C.; the earliest example we have is the Stabian Baths in Pompeii. It also found frequent but modest application in the layouts of the house and villa baths of the late republic.<sup>13</sup>

Centralized or partially centralized were created by an unsparing use of curvilinear elements. Many designs that defy categorization used tight, economic planning, polygonal forms, a near-obsession with circular, semicircular, oval, and a snug circumambivalent geometry set about diagonal axes. There were functional reasons for these configurations, the concentric arrangement of centralized shapes satisfies the primary requirement of a thermal building for heat conservation, a lesson that had long been Greek baths. The thrust-and-counterthrust

---

<sup>13</sup> Nielsen 3-5

principle of vaulted structures favors tight groupings. Their amazing irregularity, often quite freely and untidily expressed on the exterior and in elevation, was as much a response to dense urban conditions as a deliberate attempt to break free of the accustomed usages of Classical compositions. Examples of these are the Small Baths at Hadrian's villa in Tivoli, baths of Pompeianus at Oued Athmenia, the Forum Baths at khamissa, both in Algeria, the baths at Thenae in Tunisia, and the Baths on the Lechaion Road at Corinth. <sup>14</sup>

Few rules governed the distribution of the baths in the cities Pragmatic concerns, rather than theoretical principles, determined the manner in which public baths, large or small, related to the larger urban whole. Rome had 856 small baths by the end of the fourth century, Constantinople had 150, Athens, Ostia, and Timgad had over a dozen.

The morning hours of a Roman day were devoted to hard work and business, this left the afternoon and evening reserved for leisure. Spending a large part of the afternoon in the palaestrae and the public baths had become a tradition by the beginning of the empire. It was an unquestionable part of national life and identity. Bathing helped to integrate the individual into the mainstream of national culture. Barbarians, philosophers (their long, dirty beards always a subject of ridicule), and those (such as Christians) considered to be on the fringes of Roman society because of their beliefs disdained bathing, just as comparable elements of Greek society had once disdained the Greek love of gymnastics and the gymnasium. Not to bathe would have been un-Roman. Bathing became a habit because it was a psychologically and physically satisfying experience.

Republican sources preferred to apply the words *balneum*, *balnea*, and *balneae* to a bathhouse, but not *thermae*, which was used in reference to a private facility; this was not used until the first century A.D. In Martial's day, *Balnea* was used to denote baths of the older

---

<sup>14</sup> Nielsen 6-7

Republican type. *Balnea* of varying quality could be found all over Martial's Rome. It can no longer be ascertained with certainty, in the case of every bathhouse, what architectural features distinguished the older *balnea*-type of bathhouse from the *thermae*, because the two terms were so liberally applied to baths of various types. From the few Republican bathes that have been investigated, for example those at Pompeii, Herculaneum, Cumae, and Cales, we can determine that *balnea* were poorly lit facilities sporting stucco, rather than marble decoration, lacking other ornate refinements and statuary. Martial commented that older baths in Rome, the *balnea*, were gloomy and windy. When Martial writes about Silius, who rooted out the city's haunts, he said, "Nor does he scorn the *balnea* of fortunatus nor those of Faustus, not yet the gloom of Gryllus and Lupus' Aeolian cavern. As for the three *thermae*, he uses them again and again."<sup>15</sup> This was a joke on the quality of dinner Silius could expect from the users of such dingy baths as a *balnea*. Martial appears to assume that his audience would pick up on the names Gryllus and Lupus, and identify with his characterizations of their facilities. In the circles in which Martial moved these places were apparently baths of proverbial grubbiness. In a poem written by Baiae he agrees with this, "The dole at Baiae presents me with a hundred farthings. What is such poverty doing amid luxury? Give me back the murky baths of Lupus and Gryllus. When my dinner's this bad, why should my bath be so good?"<sup>16</sup> Just as the baths at Baiae are presented as a byword for splendor, so the *Balnea* of Lupus and Gryllus are presented as their antitheses. From the remains of Republican baths in Campania and Martial's references, tell us that such baths were small, dark, drafty, and generally unpleasant. As far as Martial was concerned, they were used only by the desperate and were below serious consideration. Bath culture was political as well as fashionable, especially with republican bathes. Which republican party someone

---

<sup>15</sup> Garrett G. Fagan. *Bathing in Public in the Roman World*. The University of Michigan Press (2002) 18

<sup>16</sup> Fagan (2002) 19



belonged to, determined which republican bath they went to. In the second first centuries B.C., the population of Rome rose significantly. The living conditions of most of the city's population caused public spaces to be greatly valued. They also provided an escape from domestic squalor. The growth in the popularity of bath baths, as attractive public havens for the masses, was probably caused by this. This growing attractiveness of the baths require not that all baths were immaculate and luxurious...but that staying at home was less preferable than going down to the local *balnea*. The republican bathes were considered functional by this point, instead of gloomy and windy.<sup>17</sup>

The Republican Baths at Pompeii have two sections, and date to the first century B.C. Republican Baths are small *thermae*, which do not fill a whole *insula*, and perhaps earlier than in the other establishments, a *rotunda* of the same type as in the other *thermae*. The *caldaria* have *suspensura* of a special type, parallel concrete walls, which are occasionally interrupted diagonally and connected to separate *praefurnia*. The *tepidaria* do not have *suspensura*. Another kind of bath that has a *praefurnia* is the *alvei*. They had a curved rear wall that was encased in *tegulae mammatae*, which seems to have served as insulation. This building is particularly interesting because it is confined to this period, being demolished before Augustan times and a private house being built upon it. It is not clear what the purpose of the *rotunda* was, but it was probably a *laconicum*. This building was constructed in *opus incertum*, and was possibly built earlier than the Roman colony. Since this building had a *rotunda* and *suspensura* from the outset, it is clear that Roman influence had nothing to do with these elements. Roman influence was probably limited to the introduction of the technique of *opus quasi-reticulatum*, as seen in the Forum Baths. Rather than a romanization of the Pompeians, we should expect in this period a hellenization of the Romans.

---

<sup>17</sup> Fagan. (2002) 17-21

Another establishment assigned to this period is the Central Baths at Cales, an old Latin colony. Quasi-reticulatum was also used by the Central Baths. That plus the stucco decoration in the apodyterium presumably dates to B.C. This structure had a hypocaust from the beginning, and originally had niches in the tepidarium and parts of the caldarium. There is also an associated rotunda, without recesses, reached via an anteroom to the tepidarium, which fits Vitruvius description; only he does not mention an anteroom. An apse in the caldarium at this time is surprising, and as it, unlike the rest of the structure, is built in opus testaceum, it possibly belongs to the subsequent period. The thermae underwent some reconstruction at a later date.

The introduction of the hypocaust system, at the beginning of the first century B.C., was significant for the development of both balnea and thermae. This resulted in an expansion and refinement of bathing methods. It now became possible to attain the graduated temperatures which came to characterize the individual chambers included in the bathing cycle. Communal pools replaced bath-tubs as a result of this system. It is difficult to find the reason for the change, but we do know that it was breaking with everything that was practicable and moral. The steadily increasing use of spas is a possible reason for this change. An example of this is Baiae. Here it was usual to bathe in large communal pools, which were in fact the principal component of the baths. It was also technically easier to heat one large pool than several small ones, not least with the placing of tabulation around the pool, which was seen from early on in the alvei of Pompeii's Republican Baths, and which later became canonical. Moreover only in a large pool could an element such as testudo alvei function, keeping the water hotter than was possible in individual bath-tubs. There is thus a relaxation of the traditional disapproval of bathing together, and also of the old Italic tradition that this was not even allowed for members of the same family. Thus, in the Stabian Baths we find that the bath-tubs were placed in a common chamber as a

result of the Greek influence, and finally, with the introduction of the hypocaust system, bathing took place in communal pools.<sup>18</sup>

The public baths of both the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire were important social environment to hear or read poetry and meet lovers. Patrons were expected to wear special bathing costumes, because under various emperors it was illegal to bathe nude. It was also very important to maintain the baths; they were, at the top of the Roman government's list of social responsibilities. The baths used the current trends in architecture, and were very much a part of the culture of the day.

Large baths contained a gymnasium, hot baths, cold baths, private baths, and public baths. Smaller baths had less space and therefore fewer rooms. The smallest baths only had a cold bath and a warm bath. There are at least six types of Roman baths. These six are public bathes, which have to conform to a set size. The six types of public baths are the small Republic Baths, the medium size Republic Baths, the large Republic Baths, the small Imperial Baths, the medium size Imperial Baths, and the large Imperial Baths.

The other types of baths that do not fall into any of these six types or sizes of bathes are private bathes, which could be built to what ever size was wanted, and did not have to conform to the size regulation of the public baths.

Many types of people used the Roman Baths: senators, merchants, the rich, the poor, slaves, foreigners, and everyone within the city of Rome. The functions of the Roman Baths were to bathe, meet friends or co-workers, plan political maneuvers, rendezvous with a lover or favorite prostitute, and use the bathes' gymnasium to exercise. Houses were a lot smaller in classical Rome then they are today. This meant there was not room for a bathtub, and it would have taken

---

<sup>18</sup> Fagan (2010) 81-82

a long time to fill a six feet by six feet by three feet bath by hand. Another problem was that it takes a lot of fuel to heat a bath. Only the rich could afford private baths in their homes. Most of the population of the Roman Empire could not afford their own bath, so the public baths were invented.

During the Roman Republic one of the duties of the consul was to make certain that the baths of the Republic were maintained. It was very important for the baths to remain functional, because if they were not, the people would revolt. Then a legion of Roman soldiers would have to be called out to put down the uprising, and the baths would need to be repaired. Since these revolts only happen because the baths could not be used, a common saying was ‘a clean people, is a happy people.’<sup>19</sup> The Romans did not use soap; they used oil, probably olive oil.

The social, business, and political relationships which took place within the baths had far reaching impacts on the many cultures within the Roman World. Both of these affected the baths because it was the central meeting place of the era.<sup>20</sup> Other things which affected Roman culture and there by the Roman baths were religion, the economy, laws, politics, and philosophy in the Roman world. Roman society during the Republic from 509-27 B.C., and their views on family relations, philosophy of self and opinions on space, and time were considered very important to Florence Dupont.<sup>21</sup> A Romans honor was totally dependant on how he was viewed by others. The bath houses were one of the few places where large groups of people informally gathered. The baths were where Romans indulged in leisure and promiscuity. Fagan’s book 1999 *Bathing in Public in the Roman World* is the first to view Roman public bathing as cultural rather than architectural.<sup>22</sup> Other important facts are who maintain the baths, when the bath became popular

---

<sup>19</sup> Lowe. February 21, 2008, 1:25 P.M.

<sup>20</sup> J.P.V.D. Balsdon. *Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome*. McGraw-Hill Book Company: Great Britain. (1968) 1-230

<sup>21</sup> Florence Dupont. *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*. Blackwell Publishers: Cambridge, Massachusetts. (1993) 1-280

<sup>22</sup> Fagan (1999) 1-200

in Rome, and what their sociological function was on the hierarchical social order of the Roman Empire.

The lives of Romans, from the emperors to the baths, providences to politics and weddings to architecture are described in Showerman's 1931 book *Rome and the Romans: A Survey and Interpretation*.<sup>23</sup> The functions of the Roman baths, how they differed, and where they were located from providence to providence is important in understanding the effect the Romans had on the cultures they concord. The cultural and social aspects of bathing, how it affected the Roman world, and the rituals that went along with bathing in public are discussed by Yegul.<sup>24</sup> There was a specific kind of architecture and specialized technology that was used in the construction of the Roman bath. Bathing culture was later transformed across Christian and Byzantine cultures.

Bathing was a daily ritual of every Roman, and that no emperor or governor could afford to displease the people by neglecting the maintenance of the baths.<sup>25</sup> Both the Greeks and the Romans had bath houses, and therefore their own distinct architecture.

The living conditions of most of the city's population caused public spaces to be greatly valued. They also provided an escape from domestic squalor. The baths grew in popularity with the masses, as an attractive public haven. The baths were not required to be immaculate and luxurious. However staying home was less preferable than going down to the local bath house.

The Imperial Baths were built during the Augustan period, and were much grander than the Republican baths. Patrons were allowed to bathe in the nude and meet their lovers in the private

---

<sup>23</sup> Grant Showerman. *Rome and the Romans: A Survey and Interpretation*. The MacMillian Company: New York. (1931) vii-590

<sup>24</sup> Fikret Yegul. *Bathing in the Roman World*. Cambridge University Press: New York. (2010) 1-220

<sup>25</sup> Yegul (1992) 1-320

bathing rooms. The Republican baths had been more simplistic and had waffled back and forth on if bathing in the nude was illegal.

The sculptures which had greatly interested anthropologists are now being shoved aside for the designs of the architecture of the baths. The cultural choices of the Classical Roman people can be found in the marble sculptures of the baths, and historical works. Many scholars think that the presence of a bath house equals Romanization, because they believe that bathing was very important to the Roman people. Emperor Nero was the first ruler to create the largest bath house size. It included public bathing pools, private baths, a gymnasium and an area for socializing.

The large windows, vaults, and dome of later Roman buildings all originally were attempted in the Imperial Roman baths. The vast rooms within the Imperial Baths were heated by hypocausts. The hypocausts were hollow walls which were the same temperature floor to ceiling. For some reason this prevents the condensation of water on the walls and keeps the room warm. Although these are Roman baths they use the building techniques of the Far East. Because it would be too far to transport Italian marble, local stone was used to construct the baths in the provinces. Small thought it was interesting that the Romans had incorporated their style of public baths into the style of Palestine, instead making everything exactly like Rome.

The architecture, patrons, and prostitutes of the Roman baths greatly influenced the culture of this institution. Bathing was important to the Romans throughout Roman history, and became one of the three main activities of Roman citizens. They were built following the current trends in architecture and were very much a part of the culture of their day. The culture within the Roman baths was vital to Roman society. The rendezvous of lovers and prostitutes only add to the seductive lure of the baths, lending them an air of mystery and lust, with all of the promise of fulfillment.

## Work Cited

- Balsdon, J.P.V.D. *Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome*. McGraw-Hill Book Company: Great Britain. (1968) 1-230.
- Cooley, Alison E. and Cooley, M. G. L. *POMPEII A sourcebook*. Routledge 2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4EN (2004) 45-46.
- Dupont, Florence. *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*. Blackwell Publishers: Cambridge, Massachusetts. (1993) 1-280.
- Fagan, Garrett G. *Bathing in Public in the Roman World*. The University Of Michigan Press. (1999) 26-27, 1-200.
- Fagan, Garrett G. *Bathing in Public in the Roman World*. The University of Michigan Press (2002) 17-21, 81-82, 1-250.
- Flemming, Rebecca. *Quae Corpore Quaestum Facit: The Sexual Economy of Female Prostitution in the Roman Empire*. The Journal of Roman Studies, Vol. 89. (1999) 40-41.
- Laurence, Ray *Roman Pompeii: Space and Society*. Routledge 11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE (2003) 124,126,128-129.
- Lowe, Dr. Ben. *HST 316 Ancient Greece*. Monmouth, Oregon: Western Oregon University. Winter Term 2008. February 21, 2008.
- Nielsen, Inge *Thermae et Balnea: The Architecture and Cultural History of Rome Public Baths*. Aarhus University Press. (1993) 1-11, 22-23, 35, 48-51, 57, 66, 74-75, 136-137, 390, 464, 1-475.
- Pomeroy, Sarah B. *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves, Women in Classical Antiquity*. Schocken Books Inc., New York. (1996) 83.

Shaw, Brent D. *The Age of Roman Girls at Marriage: Some Reconsiderations*. The Journal of Roman Studies, Vol. 77. (1987) 43-44.

Showerman, Grant. *Rome and the Romans: A Survey and Interpretation*. The MacMillian Company: New York. (1931) 1-590.

Wiedemann, Tomas; Gardner, Jane. *Representing the Body of the Slave*. (2002) 18-19, 48-51.

Yegul, Fikret. *Baths and Bathing in Classical Antiquity*. The MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts. (1992) ix, 1, 6, 30 -31, 48, 92, 128, 184-185, 250, 316, 1-320.