The Genesis of the Roman Public Bath:
Recent Approaches and Future Directions

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Abstract
The problem of the origins and early development of the Roman public bath has proven an intractable one for classical archaeologists. In the absence of hard ancient evidence, many modern propositions have been put forward to explain the process of development. In this paper, the six most influential of these approaches are presented and critiqued for their strengths and weaknesses. It is found that none is sufficient in itself to explain the appearance of the Roman-style bath but that most advance the analysis in some measure. Consideration of the often bypassed literary and epigraphic material is also included to help identify the third and second century B.C. as the crucial period in the history of this building type’s evolution. Finally, it is argued that the case for Campania remains the strongest, but not (as often claimed) as the place where Roman baths exclusively evolved. Rather, Campania provided an apt context for the final appearance of an architectural genre that had demonstrable roots extending farther afield and deeper into the past. Throughout, directions for future research are suggested.*

In the recent surge of work on Roman baths, the problem of origins and early development ranks high among the most contentious and insoluble issues.¹ In the absence of a consensus, a variety of propositions has been advanced to explain the unusual form of the typical Roman bath, with its system of variously heated rooms and communal bathing pools. It is the purpose of this paper to collate, present, and analyze these propositions, and thereby help identify not only their individual strengths and weaknesses but also future directions for further research.

Before proceeding, it must be appreciated that the main problem facing an investigation into the early history of Roman baths is the sparsity of source material, so that a handful of available archaeological sites has tended to be used as a basis for extrapolating general schemes of early development. The issue of typology has usually not been seriously considered.² Similarly, literary testimony either has been glossed over or addressed only in the most general fashion.³ The epigraphic evidence, which derives from a period when bathing culture appears well entrenched in Roman life, is largely uninformative as to origins but offers contemporary documentary evidence as to use and construction from the late second century B.C. onward. Overall, these difficulties inherent in the early evidence have resulted in a greater latitude for varied modern interpretations.

In any investigation, it is essential to be clear what one is looking for. The truly vital question, therefore, is what constituted a Roman-style public bath in contrast to, for example, a Greek one. Two features define the Roman bath: first, it comprises gradients of heat in a clear sequence of rooms (usually termed in modern studies frigidarium, tepidarium, caldarium) that channels the bather purposefully from one room to the next; second, the Roman-style bath features heated communal bathing

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2The main works are: Brödner 1992; DeLaine 1997; DeLaine and Johnston 1999; École française de Rome 1991; Fagan 1999a; Heinz 1984; Manderschied 1988; Merten 1983; Niels-

en 1993; Pasquinucci 1987; Weber 1996; Yegül 1992. There have also been numerous articles on the subject, especially those by DeLaine 1988, 1989, 1992, 1993, 1999. (Most of these works feature discussions of the problem of origins and will be referred to in more detail below.) In 1993 the International Association for the Study of Ancient Baths was established, and two international conferences on Roman baths have been staged in 1992 and 1996. DeLaine (1988, 14; 1993, 354–5) has briefly surveyed the disagreement over the question of origins.

3For a lengthier discussion of the evidence for the baths and the difficulties of interpreting it, see Fagan 1999b.

4E.g., Yegül (1992, 48–91) very briefly surveys the testimony of Plautus, Varro, Livy, and others who allude to early bathing conditions (infra, pp. 419–21). In contrast, Niels (1993, 16–36, esp. 1:28–30) addresses this evidence more fully but without close critical analysis.
pools (termed solia or alvei). It would be fair to say that a truly Roman bath cannot be identified unless both of these elements are present in conjunction. The search for origins must not therefore become sidetracked by optional secondary features that came to be associated with Roman baths as they developed, such as exercise grounds, (palaestrae), sweat baths (sudatoria or laconica), strigiling rooms (destricaria), ball courts (sphaeristaria), or open-air pools (natations or piscinae). All of these elements are indeed found in Roman baths, but they are not in themselves defining features of those baths. What is characteristic of Roman practice is communal bathing in heated pools deployed in a sequential arrangement of heated rooms. For the proper functioning of this sort of bathing establishment, the underfloor heating technique called the hypocaust (termed suspensura) proved to be particularly effective. The suspensura raised the entire floor on pillars and, in a subsequent development, rendered the walls hollow to produce rooms all but lined with surfaces radiating heat. So many Roman baths feature a version of the suspensura that the first appearance of the hypocaust has been considered by many researchers as synonymous with the genesis of the Roman-style bath itself. This is certainly the case with those who propose Sergius Orata or the Greeks as the progenitors of the form.

THE HYPOCAUST, SERGIUS ORATA, AND THE GREEK CONNECTION

Until quite recently, the issue of the origins of Roman baths did not appear to be an issue at all. Ancient literary notices about a certain Sergius Orata seemed conclusive: Orata, living near Baiae in Campania in the early first century B.C., is reported to have invented pensiles balinae (literally, “hanging baths”) which he fitted into villas to great profit. In the minds of many the pensiles balinae were none other than the hypocaust, leading to the conclusion that Roman baths must have appeared in Campania after Sergius Orata. The Stabian Baths at Pompeii, with their second-century B.C. hypocaust predating Orata, generally did not feature in the discussion. The literary sources seemed clear enough, and some proponents of Orata’s role ig-

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5 See Sen. Ep. 90.25; Vitr. De arch. 5.10.2.
6 Fagan (1996) and Wikander (1996) collect and discuss the pertinent references but come to divergent conclusions about them.
7 For earlier, largely Italian works propounding this view, see DeLaine 1988, 14–5. See also Benedum 1967; Hilton Turner 1947–1948; Niehen 1993, 1:20–2. Wikander (1996) considers Orata as the inventor of the system, though he admits the

details are unclear.

8 Di Capua (1940, 97–115) offers a good example: the hypocaust is Orata’s invention (97–9); the Stabian Baths are mentioned in connection with Greek gymnasia (100) and with medicinal bathing (115), but the date of the hypocaust in the facility is not addressed.

9 Fagan 1996.
pered with it in some unspecified way. On close inspection, however, his case is far from cogent.

The two cardinal buildings for Ginouvé’s theory are the “thermal establishment” at Gortys in Arcadia (fig. 1) and the “Greek hypocaust bath” at Olympia (fig. 2). At Gortys, Ginouvé was convinced that the two requisite components of the Roman bath could be identified in a building dated to the middle of the third century B.C., while at Olympia a Greek antecedent for the developed Roman hypocaust could be found dating to ca. 100 B.C. At a stroke, not only was Sergius Orata’s contribution to the history of baths placed under a cloud, but the Greeks could now be shown, through a direct line of descent linking Gortys, Olympia, and Roman baths, to have fully evolved the form of the public bath that had previously been considered peculiarly Roman. While an exhaustive description of the two buildings is unnecessary here, some discussion of their form is essential if the thrust of Ginouvé’s argument is to be assessed.

Gortys, Arcadia

The features of the “thermal establishment” at Gortys that most impressed Ginouvé were the sophistication of the heating and the water supply/drainage systems, and the complexity of the internal room arrangement (fig. 1). The underfloor heating system comprised a furnace (Y) with a subterranean corridor running out from it, under a water heating system (G’), immersion tubs (D), and a round room (E), and then turning south to run under the east apse of the central room (C) and the north apse of the vestibule (B). It is worth noting that here, in one of the earliest examples, the hypocaust is used to heat both water (in G’ and D) and space (in E, C, and B). An aqueduct-fed reservoir (X) supplied the facility with water, and drains placed to take advantage of the sloping topography dealt with the effluent. The capstone in Ginouvé’s thesis was the arrangement of the rooms, where he saw a precursor of the room sequence normally associated with Roman baths. Ginouvé went so far as to reconstruct the path of the bather through the building: from the portico (A), into the vestibule/changing room (B), and thence to the central room (C). Here a series of possibilities presented themselves. One could wash at the fountains in the central room (θ and λ in room C) or avail of various amenities, such as the immersion tubs (D), the sweat room (E), the waiting area (F), or the hip-baths in the adjacent tholos (G). The presence of the hip-baths placed the building firmly in the Greek tradition, since these curious little tubs are the hallmark of Greek bathing practice. For Ginouvé, this ground plan constituted a recognizable series of rooms and was the final proof that the Greeks had fully developed all the elements of Roman baths. The construction date was firmly fixed by numismatic and ceramic evidence at the fourth or early third century B.C., with the hypocaust installed in the middle of the third century B.C.  

Fig. 2. Olympia. Groundplan of the “Greek hypocaust bath.” (After Kunze and Schleif 1994, fig. 19)

13 DeLaine (1988, 16) has forcefully argued that the hypocaust was developed first and foremost to heat water and was only extended to heat spaces in a secondary development. The arrangement at Gortys undermines her position to some degree.
14 There are numerous examples of Greek establishments with hip-baths, usually fitted into rotundas: e.g., those at Olympia, Eretria, Oeniadae, Athens, Piraeus, and Eleusis; in Magna Graecia they are found at Megara Hyblaea, Morgantina, Syra-cuse, and Gela (infra, pp. 414-7; see figs. 10 and 15); in Africa, they are found in the rock-cut baths at Cyrene. For the hip-bath as the trademark of the Greek bathing establishment, see Ginouvé 1962, 101-3, 185-7; Yegül 1992, 24-9.
16 Ginouvé 1959, 135-45. An earlier bath had been built ca. 370 B.C. but was destroyed in the middle of fourth century and replaced with the current structure.
Ginouèves’s propositions, however, fall into difficulties when closely scrutinized, especially his re-constructed room sequence. For instance, there is no recognizable frigidarium, since all the bathing rooms are at least partially heated, and it is equally difficult to identify specifically a caldarium or tepidarium.17 The supposed series of rooms is therefore largely illusory, especially when one considers that once in the central room (C) the bather had at least four possibilities available (five, if one counts the bench and fountain in F), with none clearly leading to any other. More importantly, there is no facility for communal immersion in either hot or cold water at Gortys, and without this we cannot think of Roman-style bathing taking place there.18 Unlike the alleged room sequence, the hypocaust is an undeniable feature of the building, but the extent to which it can be linked directly with the Roman-style suspensura is less clear-cut. The system at Gortys, like other Greek hypocausts (e.g., at Gela, Syracuse, or Megara Hyblaea), is quite different from the familiar Roman suspensura.19 In the latter, the entire floor area of a room was raised and heated, while in the Greek “annular” models only sections of rooms were heated by means of a subterranean corridor (although at Gortys, the entire floor area of the small room E was raised). The two systems are similar only to the extent that they share the same basic principle of underfloor heating. But from this feature alone, a formal line of descent from Greek to Roman baths can be traced only very tenuously.

Finally, broader contextual considerations cast doubt on a direct link between the establishment at Gortys and the developed Roman bath. It is difficult to see how a backwater such as Arcadia could contribute a major new form to leisure architecture, especially in the context of the instability of mid-third century central Greece.20 The structure is also the centerpiece of a sanctuary of Asclepius, whose healing cult required rites of purification and bathing.21 Other sanctuaries of this god featured baths among their buildings and tended to be situated in well-watered places.22 Ginouèves downplays the cultic aspects the establishment’s function; he argues that it was primarily a regular thermal establishment, although under the patronage of a god.23 But this division of function strikes a hollow chord. The building’s patrons would have been frequenting it not merely to get clean and to socialize, but to meet requirements of purification or to implement the god’s remedial prescriptions.24 There are indications from the building itself that this was so. Two statue bases were found (in rooms A and I), quite possibly for images of the god or his associates (such as Hygieia). In the northeast section of the establishment, two rooms (H and I) had no discernible function in the bathing process and may well have served as a shrine or healing rooms, to be used after purification in the establishment’s facilities; it may be significant that they are accessible only through the hip-bath tholos (G). An inscribed terracotta votive foot was found in the reservoir (X). This is a familiar element of the cult attested at other Asclepieia, where model body parts were regularly used to call the god’s attention to an afflicted limb or organ. Other inscriptions of a religious or votive nature were found reused in the Roman walls on the site, although none could be definitely connected with the thermal establishment.25

In short, while the establishment at Gortys shows beyond doubt that the Greeks developed certain rudimentary forms of technology later commonly employed in Roman baths, it is difficult to see the building as a direct forerunner of those baths. To the best of our knowledge, it stood in a relative backwater of Greece, lacked elements essential to Roman baths, and, for all that, operated in the religious context of a sanctuary of Asclepius. Whatever else may be claimed about the building, this last point is surely important as it suggests a function for the Gortys establishment quite distinct from the mundane services offered by the civic baths of the Roman era.26

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17 Heinz (1984, 48) and Ginouèves himself (1959, 167–8) concede some of these weaknesses.
18 But note that room Y was once a large cold pool, before it was converted into the furnace of the hypocaust in the mid third century B.C., see Ginouèves 1959, 56–7. Room D contains hot immersion pools but they are for individual use. Nothing like the Roman piscina or alveus is found here.
20 A point well made by DeLaine 1988, 15.
21 Bathing featured in the preparatory rituals before sacrifice and often in the cures “prescribed” by the god; see Boule- on 1994; Ginouèves 1962, 349–61. A concise summary of this cult is provided by Jackson 1988, 140–55 (note especially the place of bathing in the cult, ibid., 145). In fact, baths played a significant role in Greek religious life in general: over half of Ginouèves’s magnum opus (1962, 254–428) is concerned with the

“la propreté et la vie religieuse.”

23 Ginouèves 1959, 47, 156.
24 Ginouèves (1959, 48) practically admits as much when he concedes that the immersion baths in room D in particular, and the whole building in general, would have been visited mainly by the ill.
25 For all of this, see Ginouèves 1959, 7–19 (room A), 44–6 (rooms H and I), 139 (votive foot), and 143 (inscriptions).
26 It is certainly the case that the Romans later equipped Greek sanctuaries with “regular” baths (e.g., at Epidaurus, Olympia, Delphi, and Eleusis, among others), which were identical in form to those found in civic contexts, but the role such sanc-
Olympia

The other key facility in Ginouvès’s case is phase four of the baths at Olympia, usually termed the “Greek hypocaust bath.” The establishment as a whole had a long history stretching back at least to the fifth century B.C. The first three structures were all Greek-style facilities, equipped with hip-baths. With phase four a new departure was evident. A room was built featuring a full Roman-style suspension on 90 pillars supporting the entire floor area of the room (fig. 2). In addition, there was a heated communal pool (A) at one end, and, at the other, an apse (B) that yielded vestiges of an emplacement for a labrum (a raised basin for dousing). There was even a place in the rear wall of the communal pool for setting the device (C) called a “pool tortoise” (testudo alvei), which was used to keep all the water in the pool at an even temperature. This bath was dated by the excavators, rather shakily, to ca. 100 B.C. Ginouvès believed that it clinched the case for the mainland Greeks’ development of a Roman-style caldarium, in all its details. Moreover, the building was a decade or more older than Sergius Orata and had been constructed a century and a half after the baths at Gortys. It appeared to be a missing link.

As with Gortys, however, there are serious questions. The excavator himself expressed the opinion that phase four marked a sharp change in bathing practices at the site, here expressed architecturally. What could have caused such a change? There is no evidence for a local, gradual evolution from the use of hip-baths to communal bathing. Rather, the change at Olympia is abrupt. A reasonable explanation is that phase four, rather than evolving organically from what came before, marked the grafting of new, already evolved forms onto earlier structures. The source for those forms is not far to seek: Rome and Italy. By the time the Olympia caldarium was built in the first century B.C., the Roman public bath was well established in Italy.

Figure 3. Pompeii. Groundplan of Stabian Baths. (After Yegul 1996, fig. 59)

Furthermore, Romans had been directly involved in Greek affairs for over a century, and some had emigrated to live there. In particular, there is evidence for Roman architects at work in the Greek east in the early second century B.C., and Romans had been given permission to participate in panhellenic athletic games at least since the late 190s B.C. Romans would undoubtedly have been spectators at the great Greek athletic festivals throughout the second century B.C. Roman suppression of the Achaean revolt and the destruction of Corinth in 146 B.C. can reasonably be seen as heralding a more lasting Roman presence in the area. Given all this, it is more likely that phase four of the baths at Olympia is the result of Roman influence on Greek bathing practice, so that the supposed “Greek hypocaust bath” was really a “Roman hypocaust bath at Olympia.” Recent work at the site redates it to ca. 40 B.C. and argues forcefully for the structure being an import from Italy into Greece. The absence of the other requisite rooms of a Roman-style bath found usually in association with sanctuaries and therefore possibly of religious function (e.g., at Olympia, Delphi, Delos, Nemea).

28 The terms are given in Vitruv. De arch. 5.10.1.
29 Kunze and Schleif 1944, 79–80 (on the basis of pottery).
30 Vitr. (De arch. 5.10.) provides the classic description of the caldarium. See also Ginouvès 1959, 168; supra, n.11.
31 Kunze and Schleif 1944, 51.
32 This excludes the occasional Greek communal cold pool.
may suggest that phase four was experimental in some way, a local and partial adaptation of the more elaborate forms of a Roman bath. It certainly has no parallels among Greek baths and, like Gortys, it is located in a religious sanctuary.

While Ginouvé’s work established beyond doubt that the Greeks had evolved a culture of public bathing and had developed technology to serve it well before the Romans, his Greek connection is not sufficient in itself to explain the origin of the Roman-style bath as defined above. When one inspects the evidence, there are serious problems with the two sites he adduces as the chief support for his view. Nevertheless, his opinions appeared to find strong confirmation when the Stabian Baths at Pompeii were subjected to a close investigation in the early 1970s.

THE STABIAN BATHS AT POMPEII: FROM GREEK TO ROMAN?

Eschebach’s Scheme

The Stabian Baths at Pompeii are the oldest near-intact set of Roman public baths to survive from antiquity (fig. 3). H. Sulze was carrying out analytical work on the structure when his investigations were interrupted by the Second World War. His notes were subsequently destroyed in the firebombing of Dresden. His student, architect H. Eschebach, returned in the 1970s and carried out a close analysis both of the building’s surviving fabric and, through sondages at various points around the building, of the underlying strata. His results were startling. Although the middle of the second century B.C. had been established as the construction date for the Stabian Baths, Eschebach deduced a traceable history in seven distinct phases dating back into the fifth century B.C. What is more, for the first three phases—covering the fifth to the second century B.C.—he reconstructed the building as largely Greek in form.\(^\text{36}\) Here, at a single site, the evolution of a set of baths from Greek-style to Roman could be charted (figs. 4–7). Ginouvé’s Greek origin for Roman baths seemed fully vindicated, and Eschebach’s reconstruction of the building’s history has met with widespread acceptance, so that it is now frequently cited as established fact.\(^\text{36}\) In reality, it is largely conjecture.

Eschebach’s principal means for deducing his building phases is construction technique, a weak basis for determining detailed chronological relationships within or between structures. On a broad perspective, it ought to be a matter of concern that this analytical method works so well for the early periods of the building’s alleged evolution, for which the evidence is scarcest, but less effectively

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\(^{30}\) For the original dating of the building’s construction, see Mau and Kelsey 1907, 189–201. For Eschebach’s investigations, see Eschebach 1970, 41–5; 1979.


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**Fig. 4.** Pompeii. Eschebach’s phase one for the Stabian Baths. (After Eschebach 1979, fig. 43a)

**Fig. 5.** Pompeii. Eschebach’s phase two for the Stabian Baths. (After Eschebach 1979, fig. 43b)
Fig. 6. Pompeii. Immersion tub in north wing of Stabian Baths (measuring tape set at 0.5 m) (G. Fagan)

for the later periods, when more of the structure is available for examination. It seems strange that his first three (Greek) phases can be so precisely distinguished and dated while the last two phases, the sixth and seventh, embrace over a century of the building’s history during which numerous alterations, repairs, and extensions were carried out that Eschebach has great difficulty identifying as discrete operations. More troublingly, Eschebach’s chronology rests on unstable stratigraphic foundations, a fact commented upon by reviewers when his major publication of the site first appeared but largely overlooked since.37 The dating of his early phases remains unclear. Indeed, only the fifth phase is truly datable, on the basis of an inscription recording the activities of the duoviri Uulius and Aninius in ca. 80 B.C.38 A pottery sherd discovered under the floor of a room in the north wing (the present-day latrine) establishes only a terminus post quem for the laying of that floor, that is, sometime after the fourth century B.C. No more precise a date for Eschebach’s phase three can be offered. Aside from these dating difficulties, the form and nature of Eschebach’s first three phases raise more questions than they answer. A closer look is in order.

The supposed fifth-century bath (phase one) is most unusual, without parallel in any Mediterranean context (fig. 4). It comprised a hip-bath complex, in which the tubs were deployed in five individual “bathing cells” (Badezellen), as opposed to being arranged around the inside walls of an open room, which was the norm for such early balaneia (compare figs. 1, 11, 13). The hip-baths themselves were of unusual form, not least their orientation within their cells: the bather would have been re-

37 E.g., Ling 1981; Yegül 1981. For the unreliability of drawing chronological conclusions primarily from construction technique at Pompeii, see Fulford and Wallace-Hadrill 1998.

38 CIL 1.1635 = CIL 10.829 = ILS 5706 = ILLRP 648 = Fagan 1999, 250 (no. 61).
Fig. 8. Pompeii. Some entrances to the Stabian Baths. (G. Fagan). A, entrance vii.1.48 on Vicolo del Lupanare; B, entrance vii.1.9a on Via dell’Abbondanza; C, entrance vii.1.17 on Via Stabiana; D, entrance vii.1.51 on Vicolo del Lupanare; E, entrance vii.1.14 on Via Stabiana.
required to sit in the tub facing the far wall with his or her back to the door, which was the main light source for these gloomy little spaces. This disposition contravenes all known Greek examples, where the hip-baths face outward from back walls. Eschebach’s curious hip-bath complex was then associated bodily with a palaestra to form what he believed was an “athlete’s bath” (Athletenbad). No such association of hot-water bathing and palaestra came into existence on the Greek mainland until the third century B.C. It strains credibility to accept that here, at the very edge of the Greek world, such a farsighted development had taken place two centuries earlier. Furthermore, the shape of Eschebach’s palaestra in this early bath presupposes the later road system at Pompeii; his attempt to explain the shape by arguing that the original town wall ran along the western side is unconvincing and lacks supporting evidence. The same can be said for his belief that this early bath was buried in an eruption of Vesuvius at the end of the fifth century B.C. If this were the case, it is curious that the building was reconstructed along identical lines in Eschebach’s phase two—dated on no secure grounds to the fourth or third centuries B.C.—but now stripped of its most innovative feature, the hip-baths in their bathing cells (fig. 5). Instead, the rebuilt cells were fitted with individual immersion tubs (still to be seen today, fig. 6), although they remained associated with a palaestra. He contends that some ancillary “gymnasial” elements of unclear function were added in this phase along the northern and southern flanks of the exercise court (A in fig. 5). As with phase one, this whole arrangement is entirely without parallel in the contemporary Mediterranean basin. It is also worth noting that the bathing cells with their supposed immersion tubs show no sign of plumbing and may well have served needs unrelated to bathing proper.

With Eschebach’s phase three, the rudiments of a Roman-style bath make their first appearance in the scheme (fig. 7). There was now a sequence of rooms (I–III) arranged diagonally, although the function of each remains uncertain and there was no clear evidence of heating or plumbing in any of them; the use of braziers should not be ruled out. What is more, the bathing cells continued in use. Eschebach gives no indication how this building was to be used. The inspiration for the introduction of a room sequence is also unclear, since the period to which Eschebach assigned this phase (the fourth century or earlier) was that of the Oscan occupation of Pompeii, and the Oscans were known neither for their devotion to public bathing culture nor their architectural innovation.

Eschebach’s remaining phases (four through seven) rest on more solid ground, since they cover the period of the building’s generally accepted existence, from the mid second century B.C. onward. Throughout these periods the baths were fully Roman in type, with communal pools and clear sequences of rooms heated with hypocausts. It is therefore unnecessary to review them in detail. The difficulties lie primarily with Eschebach’s first three phases, which are critical for establishing the Greek-Roman development of the Stabian Baths. Richardson has offered an argument that, in my opinion, settles this debate. He noticed that five of the public entrances to the building, on the three sides that front onto streets, were constructed of the same material (tufa) and fashioned in the same style (e.g., fig. 8a–c; the location of all entrances is indicated in fig. 3 with the tufa examples underlined). Three entrances are of a noticeably different design and construction (e.g., fig. 8d–e). The conclusion seems inevitable that the whole building, as suggested by the five tufa entrances, was conceived as an entirety and erected in a single operation, probably ca. 140–120 B.C., as originally proposed by Mau, or slightly later. The alterations and repairs of the Sullan, Augustan, and early Imperial

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30See Yegül 1992, 21–4 with ample reference to earlier studies. Later Greek-style baths in the West (e.g., at Gela, Syracuse, Megara Hyblaea, all dating to the fourth and third centuries B.C.) were not associated with a palaestra, so one cannot argue that this was a regional innovation.


32On the absence of water supply or drains in the “bathing cells,” see Eschebach 1979, 38–9. Compare the uncertainty over the function of a similar row of cells in the later Sarno Baths at Pompeii; Ioppolo 1992, 72; Koloski-Ostrow 1990, 94–5.

33Note here the “rudimentary” private bath in a house at Roccagliorosa in Lucania; see Fracchia 1999. Public bathing does not feature as an attested part of Samnite life; see Salmon 1967, 50–64; Tagliamonte 1996, 156–78, 236–42. Most of the remains of “Oscan Pompeii” are usually dated to the second or early first century B.C., see Zanker 1998, 32–60.

34Mau based his dating on overall construction technique (Mau and Kelley 1907, 35–44, esp. 40; see also Richardson 1988, 103). This method has come under serious assault recently (Fulford and Wallace-Hadrill 1998), but the presence of a sundial bearing an Oscan inscription in the east portico of the palaestra (Eschebach 1979, 197 and abb. 5) probably suggests an early date for the building, before 100 B.C. at the latest. Stratigraphic work on the site could clarify the matter. Whatever the case, Eschebach’s scheme requires that each of the tufa entrances was constructed at different times over his early phases (compare figs. 5 and 7 with fig. 3), necessitating the builders to adhere closely to a particular door design up to his fifth phase, when they changed over to a new model. This is an example of the illogic of Eschebach’s entire reconstruction criticized by Richardson (1988).
periods—corresponding to Eschebach’s fourth through seventh phases—then account for the three, evidently later entrances. Finally, no features of the construction techniques employed in the north wing suggest that it existed independently of and earlier than the rest of the facility. If these arguments are accepted, there was no Greek bath on the site.44

**Nielsen’s Scheme**

The notion of its existence, however, persists. Nielsen, who accepts Eschebach’s overall scheme in a slightly modified form, has offered an alternative version of the Greek-to-Roman evolution of this building. She reconstructs Eschebach’s phase four (of the second century B.C.) as a Greek balaneion, with dozens of hip-baths occupying the bathing rooms in the east wing (fig. 3). In contrast to Eschebach, she believes the building lacked hypocausts at this time: they were added later. Unfortunately, no trace of hip-baths remains in the Stabian Baths, so Nielsen deduces their existence from the presence of niches in some of the surviving structure’s rooms. They are most clearly visible in the men’s and women’s changing rooms (*apodyteria*), although she presents evidence that they once featured also in the other bathing rooms (fig. 9). Nielsen reasons that, since analogous niches were found over hip-baths in Greek-style establishments to accommodate the bathers’ belongings as they soaked in the tubs, so hip-baths must once have stood beneath these niches in the Stabian Baths. Therefore, the Stabian Baths of the second century B.C. may be identified as a fully-fledged Greek balaneion.45

Once more, however, closer inspection renders this position questionable. In the first place, that no trace of a single hip-bath has survived in the Stabian Baths is at least suspicious, since they would have numbered 100 or more, and the niches supposedly associated with them can still be traced with such facility.46 Second, the presence of niches is

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44 It remains unclear what exactly Eschebach found in the Badezellen, since he provides no photographs of the hip-baths in his book, only drawings (1979, 51 abb. 16 and taf. 33c). Indeed, there are neither photographs nor full-scale drawings of the crucial north wing in the book, although the other wings enjoy ample illustration. In an attempt to clarify this issue, the author plans to conduct investigations in the cells in the future.


46 DeLaine (1989, 118) suggests that as many as 35 hip-baths stood in the women’s apodyterium alone. As Nielsen (1993, 1:27) reconstructs four or five hip-bath chambers, a total of 150 hip-baths is not inconceivable for the complex. Nielsen (1985, 86) avers that the hip-baths were made of terra-cotta and may have been movable. But even portable hip-baths often leave some trace of their presence, as at the Greek Harbour Baths at Eretria, or the Greek bathhouse at Morgantina; see Ginouvès 1982, 189–98 (Harbour Baths) and Allen 1974, 379, 381 (Morgantina). Also, Greek baths that were later transformed into Roman-style facilities can leave indications of their original Greek character; see the examples cited by Nielsen (1993, 1:101) from Athens, Egypt, and Pergamon. This is not so for the Stabian Baths.
not, in itself, justification for postulating hip-baths beneath them. The Forum Baths at Pompeii, for instance, feature niches in the men’s and women’s tepidaria (fig. 10). There is no suggestion that hip-baths ever stood under these niches, since the Forum Baths were built in ca. 80 B.C. and indisputably served Roman-style bathing habits. The same can also be said for other examples of Roman public baths, where the niches appear to have served as both decorative elements and temporary storage shelves for bather’s gear as they proceeded through their routines.\(^4^7\) Third, according to Nielsen the hip-bath rooms were later transformed into hypocau
tusted and tubulated Roman-style bathing rooms. This renovation would require that the \textit{ousta} of the hypocau
t was installed by digging down below the hip-bath floor-level, a dubious procedure that risked destabilizing the foundations; thus the hy-
pocau and the niches are more likely contempo-
raneous.\(^4^8\) Finally, if all the rooms in the east wing were fitted with hip-baths, there seems little reason for their linear sequence and their deployment on either side of a centrally located furnace. Rather, the room sequence alone suggests that a Roman-
style bathing habit, not a Greek one, was being ca-
tered to in the building’s design.

After all this discussion, it must be concluded that the Stabian Baths cannot offer any secure evidence concerning the supposed transition from Greek to Roman baths. The evidence of the site is ambiguous and debatable, and short of total exca-
vation of the lower strata the picture is unlikely to be clarified. It seems more plausible that this building was constructed as a Roman-style facility in ca. 140–120 B.C., with its sequence of rooms, hypocau
stus, and heated communal pools all present at

\(^{4^7}\) For instance, the Central Baths at Cales (built ca. 90–70 B.C. according to Nielsen’s catalogue entry, C.35), featured niches which Nielsen (1993, 1:32 n. 59) explains as “presum
ably merely decoration adopted from the earlier establishments at Cumae and Pompeii.” Other examples of niches in hypocau
stus-heated bathrooms are found in Spain at, e.g., Baetulo (C.100 in Nielsen’s catalogue; first century B.C.) and Los Bañáles (C.113; mid first century A.D.). On the functional

\(^{4^8}\) As noted, DeLaine also accepts the presence of hip-baths in the Stabian Baths (supra nn. 45, 46) and therefore seems to think the hypocau
t and hip-baths were utilized contempo
raneously; see also DeLaine 1989, 119–20. This seems unlikely, since hip-bath chambers and hypocau
stus are routinely sep
arate installations in surviving Greek baths.
the outset. There are indications in the confident hand of the architect that these features had as yet unidentified predecessors of uncertain location and date, perhaps reaching back into the early years of the second century or beforehand. A detailed examination at some future date of other early but ill-investigated establishments—such as the Central Baths at Cumae or Cales—may answer some of the questions that remain open about the early appearance of the Stabian Baths, but for now only speculation prevails. In any case, even if a Greek-to-Roman evolution could be securely identified at the Stabian Baths, the issue of typicality surely advises caution before extrapolating wholesale from this one building an entire development scheme for the Roman public bath as an architectural genre.

THE ROLE OF MAGNA GRAECIA

While the case for the Romans adopting their bathing habits wholesale from the mainland Greeks no longer appears convincing, that is not to deny the influence of Greek culture on Roman bathing habits entirely. The Greeks had a fully developed culture of public bathing, not just in athletic facilities such as gymnasia and palaestrae but also in balaneia, genuine public baths with heated water. Indeed, the initial stimulus for the Italic adoption of the public bathing practice in an urban context most likely came from the Greeks, since other Italic cultures (such as Oscan) show no overt penchant for a bathing in public.49 Ancient Italians would have encountered many models of public baths in the Greek poleis of Magna Graecia, and several balaneia have indeed been found in the Greek cities of the West. It therefore seems reasonable that some scholars have credited the Western Greeks with taking the critical steps toward developing Roman-style bathing habits, which were then picked up and adapted

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49 Supra n. 42. The intense hellenization of Etruscan civilization makes its contribution to Italian public bathing moot.
by neighboring Italians. Pointing especially to the fourth-century Greek baths at such sites as Syracuse and Gela in Sicily, J. DeLaine has detected the presence of communal immersion pools heated by hypocausts, used in conjunction with a tholos fitted with hip-baths (Figs. 11–14). It was but a short step from this arrangement to extending the hypocaust under an entire room, a process DeLaine sees presaged in the parallel heating channels of the Greek baths at Gela (Figs. 13–14). With these communal immersion pools, we are clearly on the road to the Roman-style bath. Thus the Roman bath owes its origins to the Greeks, not of the mainland, but of Magna Graecia.

Despite the cleverness and attractive elegance of this theory, a closer look at some of DeLaine’s model Greek establishments generates doubts. None of them, for instance, has a clear room sequence; all retain the randomized internal arrangement that typifies the traditional Greek bathing establishment. The revolutionary feature of the Greek baths at Syracuse (which functioned in the fourth and third centuries B.C.) is the room B with an associated annex A that DeLaine interprets as a communal bathing pool heated by a hypocaust (see Figs. 11–12). But DeLaine’s communal pool A, while superficially resembling the Roman solium or alveus, was 0.35 m deep, which is considerably shallower than the habitual depth of Roman pools and rather meager for a sufficient bodily immersion. Yet pool A was certainly meant to contain water, since a drainage channel flowed from it into room B. The question really is how the pool was used. A genuine possibility is that it served as a tank out of which individual bathers collected their hot water for use in the associated larger room. That room B at Syracuse, and the analogous room in the Greek bath at Megara Hyblaea, bore indications of permanent fixtures around the inside surfaces of its walls (indicated in Fig. 11) could be a significant factor: the bathers may have collected water from pool A and used it individually in room B at wall emplacements, whether they were benches or basins. Such a practice would be consistent with what we know of Greek bathing practices that stressed the separateness of each bather’s experience and, coincidentally, was precisely the procedure followed by the author on a visit to a Tunisian hammam in 1995, where patrons collected water from a large communal pool and washed with it while seated on built-in benches. If so, the function of such heated pools at Syracuse and elsewhere in western Greek sites was quite different from that of the later Roman solium/ alveus, and the bathing habits the pools served were more Greek than Roman.

DeLaine argues that the double-channel hypocaust in the Greek bathhouse at Gela, dating to the late fourth and early third century B.C., offers a precursor to the hypocaust in the so-called Republican Baths in Pompeii, which was raised not on pillars but on walls radiating from the furnace (Figs. 13–15). On the basis of this unusual hypocaust,

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50 DeLaine 1989. Broise (1994) has argued a parallel position, apparently unaware of DeLaine’s important article. Note that both authors consider the hypocaust primarily a water-heating device.

51 See the original excavator’s report (Cultrera 1938, esp. 268–70) on this room. For parallel examples from Megara Hyblaea and Morgantina, see Broise 1994. The depth of the Syracuse bath’s “pool” (0.35 m) was measured by the author at the site in June 1998. By way of comparison, solia in typical Roman baths tend to be deeper: the two pools in the caldarium of the Baths of Neptune at Ostia: 1.09 m and 1.19 m; the three caldarium pools in the Forum Baths at Ostia: 1.21 m, 1.06 m, and 0.62 m; the men’s caldarium in the Forum Baths at Pompeii: 0.66 m; the women’s caldarium pool in the Stabian Baths at Pompeii: 0.61 m; the caldarium pool, Suburban Baths at Pompeii, 0.66 m. Cultrera (1938, 269) was struck also by the Syracuse pool’s shallowness and designated it “un ampio ma non profondo canale.”
DeLaine proposes a date for the Republican Baths in the mid second century B.C. DeLaine considers the system at Gela a departure from the arrangement at Gortys, since at Gela she identifies a “series of heating channels in parallel,” which is an antecedent to the multiple heating-channel system found in the Republican Baths (figs. 14–15). But the Gela “series” of channels is, in reality, a minor variation on the familiar Greek annular system where a single heating channel has been replicated to form a double channel (figs. 13–14). Furthermore, this duplex annular hypocaust is located directly opposite the entrances to the two bathing chambers fitted with hip-baths (rooms A and A’ in fig. 13), and one of the heating channels from this admittedly curious double arrangement continues further south, entering a rectangular subterranean area (B in fig. 13) from which two channels emerge as vents. The excavator could not decide whether this whole hypocausted arrangement was a continuous paved sweat bath or a partially paved system intended to heat water for use in the hip-bath chambers at Pompeii remains Maiuri 1950.

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bers; no walls survive to help determine its function. To my mind, it looks like both, a minor variation on the near-contemporary system at Gortys, where an annular hypocaust heated both space and a water tank located outside a hip-bath room (see the box Y in fig. 13; cp. the Gortys hypocaust, described above, p. 405). In terms of form and function, the Gela bath clearly belongs to the bathing tradition represented at Gortys rather than that served by the Republican Baths at Pompeii. In addition, the relatively crude nature of the hypocaust system in the Republican Baths need indicate nothing as to the earliness of its date but could have been generated by any number of intangible factors, such as cost-cutting or individual preference.54

What DeLaine has shown unquestionably, however, is that the technological potential for the development of the Roman-style suspensura was present in the cities of the Greek West. Moreover, these baths seem to offer varieties of bathing options to their customers, a feature later common in Roman facilities. The physical remains, however, are insufficient to prove that the Western Greeks in the Hellenistic Age had moved toward the familiar Roman practices of communal immersion and sequentially heated spaces. Instead, they appear to have developed and expanded techniques to facilitate their traditional bathing procedures.

**THE INFLUENCE OF PRIVATE BATHS ON PUBLIC ONES**

The archaeological record for private baths in Italy has also been brought into the debate, on the reasonable assumption that private leisure habits precede public ones. Seneca, in a famous passage (Ep. 86.4–12), describes the primitive simplicity of Scipio Africanus’s small bathing suite in his rustic villa and then rails against the bathing excesses of his own time, and Varro (Ling. 9.68) mentions the simple “washing room” (*lavatrina*) as a predecessor to the fully-fledged private bath, or *balneum.*

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54 Fagan 1999a, 59–60. Note a fragmentary bath constructed in *opus reticulatum* at Tibur that features an apsidal room with a central wall dividing it into two halves, lengthwise. This arrangement of substructures seems to be another variant of the wall-supported hypocaust. No firm date can be assigned to the facility, but the “età repubblicana” was proposed by Carducci (1940, 61–5). Similarly, Roman suspensurae in Britain (by definition of imperial date) can be of the channel variety, sometimes found side by side with the more familiar pillared form, as at the Chedworth villa (Goodburn 1979, 15–24), or even in combination with it in single rooms (Yegül 1992, 357–61, who also cites other examples from Asia Minor and Gaul). These hypocausts attest variations in design that do not reflect chronological or evolutionary relationships.

53 The major study remains Fabricotti 1976. The article has many flaws and is gradually being replaced by the work of N. De Haan (e.g., 1996, 1997, 2001). Note also the comments of Di Capua 1940, 124–38; Lafon 1991; Yegül 1992, 50–5.

52 See, for instance, Fabricotti’s discussion of simple private suites in villas such as those near S. Basilio in Nomentana (first century B.C.), at Centopiedi near Pompeii (late second/early first century B.C.), or at the Villa of Mysteries at Pompeii (late second century B.C.); see Fabricotti 1976, 32–3, 35, 37–8 respectively. In each case, the private bath suite dates to periods when Roman public bathing was already established (i.e., the second century B.C. and later), and this is true also of many of her other examples; see Yegül 1992, 377. Similarly, simple two-roomed bathing suites may seem, on formal grounds, to predate more complex suites with three or more rooms. In fact, many bicameral suites are coeval with or later than more com-
evidence from the houses at Cosa reflects this variety in the archaeological record. Here, several houses of quite late date (early first century B.C.) still contained very simple bathing suites, comprised of a single room attached to the kitchen, when both private and public bathing suites elsewhere in Italy were at this time displaying greater complexity and pretension.56

Some recently investigated facilities shed particularly interesting light on the issue. At Vulci a villa (the so-called House of the Cryptoporicus) was equipped with a four-roomed bathing suite. Recent arguments have redated the hypocaust in the sweat room (sudatorium) back from ca. 50 B.C. to 100 B.C., making it one of the earliest examples of the system in a private bath anywhere in Italy, and the earliest in Etruria.57 Assuming the earlier date is correct, this site demonstrates conclusively that private bathing rooms fully fitted with hypocausts could be found by 100 B.C. Less clear is the direct influence of the private habits of the rich (who owned the villas) on the form of the public baths used by all. While such examples as the Vulci villa may suggest a pioneering role for private baths, other examples confuse the issue. A villa unearthed at Ciampino near Rome, and perhaps dating to the mid-second century B.C., contained a bathing suite with a communal pool but no hypocaust.58 The Villa Pra-

plex sets of bathing rooms; see Fabricotti 1976; Bruno and Scott 1993, 161–91 (on the House of the Birds at Cosa; Augustan). In the imperial period, lavish public baths appear to have influenced the form, scale, and decoration of private ones; see DeLaine 1999, 73. Netzer (1989) notes that, among the bath-houses built by Herod the Great in his palaces ca. 35–15 B.C., some were of the older Judeo-Hellenistic style (with a minimal decoration and a characteristic stepped ritual bath) while others were of the fully Roman type. This constitutes a striking example of personal taste determining the form of private baths.

56 For instance, the House of the Skeleton and its neighboring house, with their kitchen/washroom arrangements, were dated by coin finds to the period 89–70 B.C.; see Bruno and Scott 1993, 125–7 (House of the Skeleton), 153–8 (neighbor’s property). The House of the Treasure acquired a simple bathing room only in ca. 90 B.C.; see Bruno and Scott 1993, 21, 81–97. Such basic facilities are more evocative of supposedly early Roman washrooms (Sen. Ep. 86.4–5) than the elaborate bathing suites found at other Italian sites, which are often contemporary with and sometimes predate these Cosan examples (e.g., supra, n. 55).

57 Broise and Jolivet 1991, esp. 85–8. For the redating, see De Haan 1996. (My particular thanks go to N. De Haan for sending me the text of her paper and for several other relevant references.)

58 De Rossi 1979, 64–5 (no. 89); Lafon 1991, 113–4. Broise (1994, 28) implicitly dates the Ciampino bath to the ca. 150–100 B.C., while De Rossi (1979, 65) postulates the first century B.C. This is a good example of the difficulty that prevails in dating many examples of private baths.

Fig. 16. Sperlonga. Villa Prato bathroom. (EFR, neg. SP1254)
to at Sperlonga, dated to the third quarter of the third century B.C., contains a most unusual bicameral bathing suite. One room, with a pool and traces of a labrum, appears to have been a cold-bath and changing room. The other, apparently for hot bathing, contained a single-person immersion tub alongside an unusual variant of the hip-bath called a "boot-bath," which on the basis of its shape and dimensions cannot have been used to wash more than the feet and lower legs. Both the immersion tub and the boot-bath formed a single architectural element, a sort of raised bathing platform into which the tubs were sunk and which was accessible by a single step from the floor level (fig. 16). The nearly contemporary date of this odd arrangement with the private hypocaust bath at Vulci or the non-hypocausted private suite at Ciampino both highlights the variety apparent in private suites and raises questions about how direct the influence of private baths was on public ones, since nothing comparable with the Villa Prato arrangement is discernible in the public record. That influences flowed between public and private facilities is beyond question, but their direction and extent need to be more fully investigated before reliable conclusions can be drawn.

One scholar has detected the influence of private baths in one detail of the Roman public bath's form: the linear sequence of rooms. In all the early private baths, the bathing rooms are located near the kitchen, often in a restricted space. As a result, bathing rooms with two or more elements tend to assume a simple row arrangement with respect to each other and the heat source in the kitchen. In our earliest public baths in the Vesuvian cities, the bathing rooms are also in a simple linear alignment, conceivably derived from this domestic arrangement. The suggestion is a plausible one but is vitiated by the very simplicity of so many early private baths: most have two elements and one cannot really talk of a "row" of two. More importantly, the sequence of rooms in Roman baths does not seem to be the product of circumstance, as this suggestion holds, but rather a purposeful arrangement that met a need for varying grades of heated space and water. The origins of this need are far murkier and will be addressed below.

THE LITERARY AND EPIGRAPHIC EVIDENCE

In studies of the origins of Roman baths, the literary sources have tended to be treated only perfunctorily while archaeological data have dominated the discussion. Aside from the difficult issue of Sergius Orata, the literary evidence is quite informative, although there are certainly challenges in interpreting it. Livy (23.7.3) provides one of our very earliest references to public baths when he describes Hannibal suffocating the councilors at Capua in a bathhouse in 216 B.C. Given Livy's research methods and the transferal of the tale to Nuceria by Dio (15.57.30) and Valerius Maximus (9.6 ext. 2), it seems possible that we are dealing with a later tale inserted into the tradition about Hannibal. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the anecdote locates early baths in Campania, a region later attested as a focal point of bathing culture (and excess) in the Italian peninsula. Plutarch puts an accusation of ill-discipline into the mouth of Bibulus, tribune in 209 B.C., who accuses Marcellus of dereliction of his command against Hannibal: Marcellus, rails Bibulus, has devoted himself to Campanian pleasures, hot baths prominently among them. Somewhat later, a speech attributed to C.

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59 Broise 1994, 26–7; Lafon 1991, 102–11. A terra-cotta tub similar to the Sperlonga "boot-bath" was found broken and reused in the House of the Birds at Cosa (and is now in the museum at the site). The tub belonged to an undetermined phase predating the extensive remodeling of the Augustan era; see Bruno and Scott 1995, 38–42. Given the evidence for other private baths at Cosa (supra n. 56), the boot-bath is unlikely to be any older than the early first century B.C. and thus appears to offer yet another example of contemporary variations in private bathing practices at a single site. Another relevant site is the private bath in the peristyle house at Letas (Monte Iato) in western Sicily, which featured two rooms and a furnace. A single-person immersion tub and an emplacement for a labrum stood in one of the main rooms (cf. the arrangement at Sperlonga). Interestingly, in this facility the underfloor heating system for the immersion tub was discontinued in the third and final phase—the precise opposite of what one would expect, and yet another indication of the impact of personal tastes or circumstances on the form of private baths. The date of the bath has been suggested as falling between the fourth and second century B.C.; see Dalcher 1994, 37–9.

60 Broise (1994, 26–8) sees things a little differently and argues that the Villa Prato immersion tub was inspired by those he identifies in Greek public baths in Sicily. Even by his own argument, however, the public examples were for collective immersion (which is crucial) and the Villa Prato tub for individual use. In all such cases, the interpretation of the physical record remains difficult and highly contentious, especially in detecting and tracing the causal connections between specific facilities across regions and over time.

61 For this observation, see Yegül 1992, 63. For domestic examples, see Fabriciotti 1976, 31–41.

62 Plut. Mar. 26.4–27.2. For analogous sentiments about the ruinous effects of hot baths on military discipline (often set in Campania) see Livy 23.18.12; Plut. Mor. 785F; Dio 27.94.2, 62.6.4; SHA Comm. 11.5, Asid. Cass. 5.5, Ploc. Ng. 3.10, Alex. Sev. 53.2. Campania was also home to the notorious pleasure resort at Baiae, see Yegül 1996. Other thermal sites in the region also show clear evidence of development, see Crova 1953; Houston 1992.

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Gracchus locates baths in three Campanian towns, Cales, Ferentium, and Teanum Sidicinium (Gell. Na 10.3.1–3). Thus the early Roman tradition explicitly associated public bathing with Campania and adjacent municipia (in Latium Adiectum, for instance). It may well be that this tradition reflects the broader and later association of Campania with luxurious living and excess, but that observation does not detract from the historical significance of the notices: later Romans nevertheless associated very early baths with these regions.

With Plautus we are on more solid ground. In several plays written at the end of the third and the beginning of the second century B.C., the playwright refers to public baths and bathing as a regular part of the urban scene. While Plautus’s dependency on his Greek models might raise legitimate concerns about these passages’ applicability to Roman conditions, there are good grounds to believe that Plautus was relying on his audience’s familiarity with public baths to render his observations effective. A reference in Seneca supports the conclusion that Plautus’s public baths were real enough and not shadows cast by his Greek sources. Seneca (Ep. 86.10) comments that among the duties of aediles of old was the task of checking public baths for cleanliness and suitably heated water. Seneca specifically mentions the Cornelli, Fabius Maximus, and Cato the Elder in this connection—all contemporaries of Plautus. These references reveal unequivocally that public baths were a regular feature of Rome’s citiescape by ca. 200 B.C.

What type of bathhouse was Plautus alluding to? Nielsen has suggested that one particularly illustrative passage in Plautus (Rud. 382–85) indicates they were Greek-style balaneia. The passage reads:

etiam qui it lavatum in balinæas, cum ibi sedulo sua vestimenta servat, tamen surrhipiuntur, quippe qui quem illorum observat falsus; fur facile qui observat videt: custos qui fuerit sinit nesci.

When a man goes to the public baths to wash, though he watches his clothes like a hawk, they’re stolen all the same, as he doesn’t know which of his fellow bathers to watch. The thief easily spots the watcher; the guard doesn’t know who the thief is.

Nielsen argues that, since the bather takes his clothes with him into the bathroom, Plautus is describing a Greek-style balaneion where the bather deposited his or her belongings in niches over the hip-baths. But early Roman baths can also have niches in the bathing rooms and presumably, if one could not afford to hire a clothes guard, such niches would have been used to house the bathers’ street clothes as well as their bathing gear. If the bather in Plautus’s bath were attending to his ablutions in a hip-bath while his belongings sat in an overhead niche, would not the thief have to lean over the bather to reach the clothes? How, then, could the bather be unclear as to who the thief was? But if, instead, the bather is envisaged sitting in a communal pool or perspiring on a bench in a crowded Roman-style tepidarium or caldarium equipped with storage niches, then Plautus’s scenario makes perfect sense: the bather has to watch his clothes from a distance, uncertain who in the surrounding crowd harbors larcenous intent. Plautus’s baths are Roman balnea, not Greek balaneia.

For the remainder of the second century we have merely bits and pieces of testimony. There are some references in Terence, a fragment of Caecilius Statius, and a questionable passage cited by Nonius. Two references in later writers are of particular interest. Varro (Ling. 9.68) implies that the first baths in the city were introduced to Rome from elsewhere, and Pompeius Trogus, as epitomized by Justin (Epit. 44.2.6), refers to the Roman introduction of hot-water bathing to the Spanish following the Second Punic War. Assuming both of these statements are accurate and do not anachronistically represent later conditions, they show, first, that the Roman bath evolved elsewhere than at Rome and, second, that the habit was sufficiently well ingrained by 204 B.C. to allow the Romans to export it to Spain. The latter conclusion, particularly, is consistent with the regular appearance of public baths in the works of Plautus. The epigraphic record is of little use, since most Republican inscriptions pertaining to baths date to the first century B.C., when public baths were already well established in Italian communities. A notable exception is the late second-century B.C. inscription from Aletrium in the hills bordering southern Latium, which records the general.

The Augustan Age is evocative of Tacitus’s acerbic observation in the Agricola (21.3) that the once hardy Britons were weakened by the pleasurable amenities of Roman civilization, including “porticoes, baths, and elegant dinner parties” (porticus, balneis et conviciis elegantum). The notion of introducing enervating hot baths to hitherto stout native populations might therefore have emerged as a literary topos by Trogus’s day.

66 See Ter. Haut. 655, Eun. 592, 596, 600; Caec. fr. 988; Non. 108M (155L), s.v. “ephippium.” For discussion of these references, see Fagan 1999, 46–7.
67 It is noteworthy that the comment in Trogus (a writer of the Augustan Age) is evocative of Tacitus’s acerbic observation in the Agricola (21.3) that the once hardy Britons were weakened by the pleasurable amenities of Roman civilization, including “porticoes, baths, and elegant dinner parties” (porticus, balneis et conviciis elegantum). The notion of introducing enervating hot baths to hitherto stout native populations might therefore have emerged as a literary topos by Trogus’s day.
erosity of a local benefactor in gracing the town with numerous functional structures. Among them is a \textit{lacus balnearius}.\footnote{\textit{CIL}. XV. 1529 = \textit{CIL}. X. 5807 = \textit{ILS}5348 = \textit{ILLP}528 = Fagan 1999, 285-6 (no. 157). For the location of Aletrium, see Talbert 2000, 44 D2.} Even if the precise meaning of this term remains unclear, the adjective balnearius surely suggests a familiarity among the people of Aletrium with baths and bathing; and since the benefactor’s other actions pertain to public structures, the lacus balnearius also must have served the local populace. The text, then, offers epigraphic support for the presence of public baths bordering Rome by this date, but we can say nothing as to the physical form of those baths, their construction date, or when they first had been introduced to the region.

The literary evidence, sparse though it is, plays an essential role in establishing the third century B.C. as a pivotal period in the early history of Roman public baths. By the end of that century, the Romans had already taken up the bathing habit in the capital; by the end of the following century it can be archaeologically attested in different regions of south and central Italy. The archaeological material would further suggest that the distinctively Roman form of bathhouse was already in existence by the middle of the second century B.C., quite possibly earlier. The question then begs, how and where did this form evolve?

\section*{THE CASE FOR CAMPANIA}

It was long ago suggested that Roman baths originated in Campania, a position recently supported forcefully by I. Nielsen.\footnote{Nielsen 1985; her position is recapped in earl. 1998, 1:20-2. Nielsen’s work builds on the observations of earlier scholars; see infra, n. 71.} The chief basis for the centrality of Campania is twofold: first, the tradition about Sergius Orata and his elusive pensiles balineae and, second, the presence there of volcanically heated pools and vents, especially in the Campi Flegrei near Cumae. While the role of Orata remains too uncertain to offer a concrete basis for argument, the case to be made from the Campi Flegrei is more cogent. Italian scholars of the early 20th century argued that local populations in Campania had used the natural pools for communal immersion bathing and the vents for steam-bathing, and that a desire to recreate artificially such conditions generated the Roman-style bath.\footnote{Crova 1953; DiCapua 1940; Sgobbo 1929. It should be noted that the political climate surrounding Sgobbo and DiCapua’s work made arguing for an entirely native Italian origin for Roman baths advisable, although this observation does not in itself vitiate their arguments.} This is essentially an evolutionary proposition: artificially-heated Roman baths grew out of the natural conditions occurring in Campania.

In recent years, however, there has been an appeal to move the focus of investigation away from Campania. It has been argued, for instance, that naturally heated pools and vents occur elsewhere than in Campania or that, as we have seen, the contributions of private baths in central Italy or public baths in Magna Graecia were crucial in determining the form of Roman baths.\footnote{De Haan 1996; DeLaine 1989; Yegül 1992, 48-91, 377-80.} In a parallel development, other leisure buildings traditionally argued to have originated in Campania have had their origins reassigned to other locations.\footnote{See the ingenious arguments of Welch (1994; forthcoming) for the non-Campanian sources of the amphitheater or the basilica respectively. See also the perceptive observations of Gros 1996, 235-44 (on basilicas) and 317-23 (on amphitheaters).} Many scholars of Roman baths today, therefore, downplay the importance of Campania and turn to other sources as critical to the genesis of the Roman public bath.

In my view, however, the case for Campania remains the strongest. Three factors in particular make it so. First, most of our earliest evidence for Roman baths points to Campania. Here are found our earliest physical remains (at Cumae, ca. 180 B.C., and the facilities in the towns buried by Vesuvius), and the region provides the setting from many early literary references to public baths (419-21). Even if the plays of Plautus suggest that there were public baths in Rome (or at least in an unspecified Roman urban setting) by 200 B.C., it will be remembered that Varro (\textit{Ling}. 9.68) expressly states that public baths were introduced to the city from without. At the very least, the focus of so much of the earliest material on Campania needs to be respected.

Second, wider contextual considerations make Campania an excellent candidate for the appearance of the Roman public bath. Campania in the third and second centuries B.C. was a rich and prosperous place. Many of Pompeii’s first grand houses, such as the House of the Faun or House of the Figured Capitals, were constructed during this period and several major public buildings were added to the city’s fabric, such as those clustering around the theater at the southern end of the city. But Pompeii was not alone in prosperity: other sites, too, reveal the region’s wealth.\footnote{Richardson 1988, 67-127; Zanker 1998, 32-60. On the history of Campania in this era, see Cerchiai 1995, 195-224; Frederiksen 1984, 221-84; Pugliese Carratelli 1991, esp. 151-91 (P. Somella on urbanization) and 193-233 (F. De Martino on economy and society).} The region was also

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culturally diverse and vibrant in the years before and after 200 B.C. Greeks, Oscans, and Romans all enjoyed a permanent presence in the area, and exposure to more far-flung cultures came daily through Campania’s many ports. An apt illustration of this cultural interaction comes from the House of the Faun at Pompeii. Here, the affluent Oscan owner of the property adorned one room of his palatial house with a magnificent mosaic. The subject he chose was thoroughly Greek, although set in the Near East: a victory of Alexander’s over Darius III, which was copied in tesserae from a painting of ca. 300 B.C. by Philoxenos of Eretria. The introduction into Campania of foreign cultural influences and the subsequent folding of those influences into local tastes could not be clearer. Although not specifically a Campanian phenomenon, concrete had also been introduced as a building material by ca. 200 B.C. The importance of this substance for the construction of Roman-style baths needs little elucidation. Without it, the erection of a series of barrel-vaulted chambers of the sort that characterizes surviving examples of early Campanian baths would have been far more difficult. All of the preceding factors found public expression in new architectural forms that are first found in Campania, such as the basilica and the amphitheater. In my view, the Roman public bathhouse can be added to the list. Recent objections notwithstanding, Campania still offers the first clear examples of each type, even if further levels of inspiration can be detected earlier and elsewhere. In this sense, Campania pro-

vided the context for the culmination of a developmental process that stretched back chronologically before the third century and extended geographically farther afield than the region itself. The evolution of complex architectural genres is unlikely to display a simple linear profile, so that the unique position of third and second century B.C. Campania as a prosperous and innovative cultural confluence offers all the more reason to look to it as the progenitor of the Roman bath’s peculiar form, itself clearly the product of multiple influences.

Finally, as earlier scholars emphasized, Campania offers ready explanations for the chief characteristics of the Roman public bath: the communal pools and the heated sequential spaces. While hard evidence for early Italic natural bathing practices is lacking, attention has focused especially on the monumental and confusing leisure complex at Baiae. Although the visible remains date to the Augustan period and later, the hillsides at Baiae are riddled both with natural caverns and man-made tunnels and chambers fashioned for sweating and bathing. That local populations had long used such subterranean places in an undeveloped state is surely beyond doubt; certainly Medieval manuscript illustrations of Peter of Eboli’s De Balneis Puteloani—themselves possibly derived from now-lost classical depictions—clearly show people bathing in natural caverns. Later classical authors also commented explicitly on the existence of these natural phenomena and their use by locals.

80 See Adams 1994, 79–81; Anderson 1997, 145–51; Boethius 1978, 126–9; Lamprecht 1996. The observations of Blake (1947, 324–30) remain instructive. It is not possible to locate the discovery of concrete in any particular region of Italy. The substance has long been thought to have arrived in Rome by 174 B.C., as represented in the remodeled Porticus Aemilia along the bank of the Tiber (Gatti 1934); however, a recent reevaluation of this structure (Tuck 2000) proposes a later date for it, in the Sultan era. The Temple of Magna Mater on the Palatine (constructed 204–191 B.C.) may well represent the earliest appearance of concrete in the city; see ITUR 3.206–8 (P. Pensabene).

77 Even if, as Welch argues (supra, n. 73), the amphitheater had its ultimate roots in Rome or the basilica in Hellenistic palaces, there is no reason to suppose that what might be termed the definitive form of each genre—that commonly designated “Roman”—did not first appear in Campania. The evidence would still suggest that it did.
81 Futrell (1997, 33–44) comes to an analogous conclusion about the origins of the stone amphitheater: it appeared in prosperous and innovatory Campania but under the influence of Roman colonists. Working from Jouffroy (1986), she notes (40) that 128 of 310 known public buildings in Republican Italy are located in Campania, strong testimony for that region’s prosperity and architectural vitality.

82 Yegül 1996, 142 (caverns) and 148–55 (illustrations). The manuscript depictions of the Balneum Gimbosorum and Balneum Orti Donici (ibid., figs. 25–26) are particularly noteworthy; note also the Balneum Foris Cryptae, Balneum Cryptae Palumbariseae seu Sybillae, Balneum Colme, and Balneum Spe- luncae (see the relevant entries in Di Bonito and Giamminelli 1992). Physical evidence for early human activity in the region, never mind the exploitation of the Campi Flegrei, is scattered, and the literary sources couched in myth; see Adinolfi 1982; Giacomelli and Scandone 1992, 16–25; and next note.
83 Dio 48.50–51; Livy 41.16.3–4; Vitr. De arch. 2.6.2. Note also Celsius Med. 2.17.1; Strabo 5.2.9 and 5.4.5. In the latter notice, Strabo cites the historian Ephorus (ca. 405–330 B.C.) in reporting that the first inhabitants of the region, the Cimmerians, lived entirely underground. Ephorus may well here be transmitting local traditions about age-old human use of the caverns in the region and possibly reflecting practices of his own day. Note also the tradition that Odysseus’s seersman Baio was buried here, giving rise to the name “Baia” (e.g., Lycoph. Alex. 688–91; Strabo 5.4.6); the notice suggests at least an awareness of Baia’s attractions among the learned of the Hellenistic Age.
The establishment of local bathing habits centered on communal immersion in hot water would have been an obvious corollary of such conditions. Furthermore, the putative use of caverns for sweating may well have generated the need for gradations of heated space, whereby an original, nonartificially-heated bathing ritual entailed exposure to steam in different degrees. In other words, the Campi Flegrei offered the natural conditions required to stimulate the development of existing technologies to fit specific, long-established needs. On a broad perspective, this order of events also makes the most sense, since the ancients rarely if ever modified technologies without a reason to do so. The Campanian desire to reproduce their natural bathing habits artificially offers a likely stimulus for the extension of the Greek “annular” hypocaust into a full suspensura. The Greek-style hypocaust, used from the outset to heat both water and space, was thus elevated into the suspensura primarily out a desire not to heat communal pools (which it could do already), but to recreate the conditions of a steam-cavern. If this were so, then it was the established bathing habits of the Campanians that provided the crucial factor in bringing the Roman-style bath to its final fruition.

The reconstruction proposed above is necessarily speculative. It is true, as some have pointed out, that hot pools and steam vents occur outside the Campi Flegrei, or that other possibilities exist for the evolution of the Roman sequence of bathing rooms. What makes the case for Campania compelling, however, is its cumulative cogency, not any one element of it. Thus, although the Campanians may have wanted to heat spaces in accordance with their established bathing practices, they did not need hypocausts to do it; braziers would have sufficed, and did in certain facilities. However, the presence in the region of hypocausted Greek baths offered alternatives, which, if adapted, proved far more effective, and new building technologies facilitated the entire endeavor.

A combination of factors generated the suspensura, not any single requirement or circumstance. Campania provides all the conditions conducive to the development of the Roman public bath, and at the very time suggested by the literary sources as critical for the appearance of that type of facility. Here was a wealthy and vibrant place, standing at a cultural crossroads not only of Italy but of the wider Mediterranean, displaying signs of architectural innovation, and boasting the local natural conditions to stimulate the move toward the development of the Roman-style bath. All of these factors combined make the case for Campania, despite its necessarily circumstantial nature, the strongest on available evidence; unless a more viable alternative can be found, it must remain our best option.

My reassertion of the centrality of Campania in the development history of the Roman-style public bath, it must be stressed, does not entail the abandonment or even the less vigorous pursuit of other lines of inquiry. The region in the third and second centuries B.C., as a crucible of cultural interaction, merely represents the final stage of an evolutionary sequence that surely has roots extending much farther afield and deeper into the past. Whereas earlier scholars attributed the Roman bath in its entirety to the region, it is argued here that Campania offered the context for its final appearance. The Roman public bath did not “originate” anywhere—it was generated by various circumstances, all of which are locatable in and around Campania. Narrowly focused claims that the origins of Roman baths lie specifically with the Greeks or with the private baths of Italy ought therefore to be replaced in favor of a more embracing search for diverse precursors. Previous unitary claims have all been found wanting as explanations for the appearance of the Roman bath in and of themselves although, in most instances, threads of influence can be detected. It is here argued that conditions in third- and second-cen-

81 Supra, n. 72. Various reasons for the development for the sequence of rooms can be speculated, such as the desire to make use of leftover gases from a single heated room (caldarium) led to the addition of a second, lesser-heated room (tepidarium); or the structural advantages of using a series of chambers as mutually-buttressing barrel-vaults; or by appealing to the “natural” orderliness of Roman architecture. All are essentially “accidental” explanations and are not particularly convincing: it is not immediately clear why a series of chambers intended to buttress barrel vaults should be sequentially heated, nor why leftover gases had to be used instead of vented (as they were in Greek hypocausted baths), nor how “natural” orderliness generates heated spaces. It seems far more likely that the bathers’ need for gradations of heat came first, and the sequence of heated rooms reflected that need.

82 One line of inquiry that might throw more light on this question is that of third- and second-century water supply and irrigation systems in Campania. It is true that most simple baths did not need aqueduct water and could function effectively from wells or cisterns (see Fagan 1999a, 73 n. 106), but nevertheless investigation of Campanian hydraulics in the crucial period could yield pertinent results. For some recent work on the subject of Campanian water supply (mostly dealing with later periods), see De Haan and Jansen 1996; Ohlig 2000 (non vidi).
tury B.C. Campania brought those threads together. Even if Campania was not necessarily the birthplace of every facet of the Roman public bath, it was surely the nursery of its final form.

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