

BATHING CULTURE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF URBAN SPACE CASE STUDY POMPEII

Members of the Team

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Fig. 1: Excavation Team, September 15, 2021



Fig. 2: Excavation Team, October 1, 2021

From August 30 to October 8, 2021, the fourth excavation campaign was carried out in the Stabian Baths, in a cooperation of the Freie Universität Berlin, Oxford University, and the Università degli Studi di Napoli L'Orientale. This year's campaign was generously funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft.

The three previous excavation seasons in the Stabian Baths, carried out between 2016 and 2018, had shown that the complex was built after 130/125 BC and followed typical Roman-style bathing standards from the outset. Three large remodeling phases could be reconstructed (after 80 BC, in the Augustan period, and after the earthquake of AD 62), each of which entailed a significant improvement of the technology and bathing standards and redecoration of the bathing rooms.

The goal of this campaign was to clarify the following open questions: a) the shape of the west wall of the palaestra (colonnaded courtyard) in phase 1 of the baths; b) the development of devices for heating and water management in room VIII; and c) the construction date and development of the house to the west of the baths, which was only integrated into the baths after the earthquake of AD 62 when it was transformed into the currently visible complex with natatio (swimming pool) and nymphaea (richly decorated fountain rooms).

Excavation was carried out in nine areas (fig. 3: XIV-XXII), among them the palaestra, troom VIII, five tabernae, and two corridors.

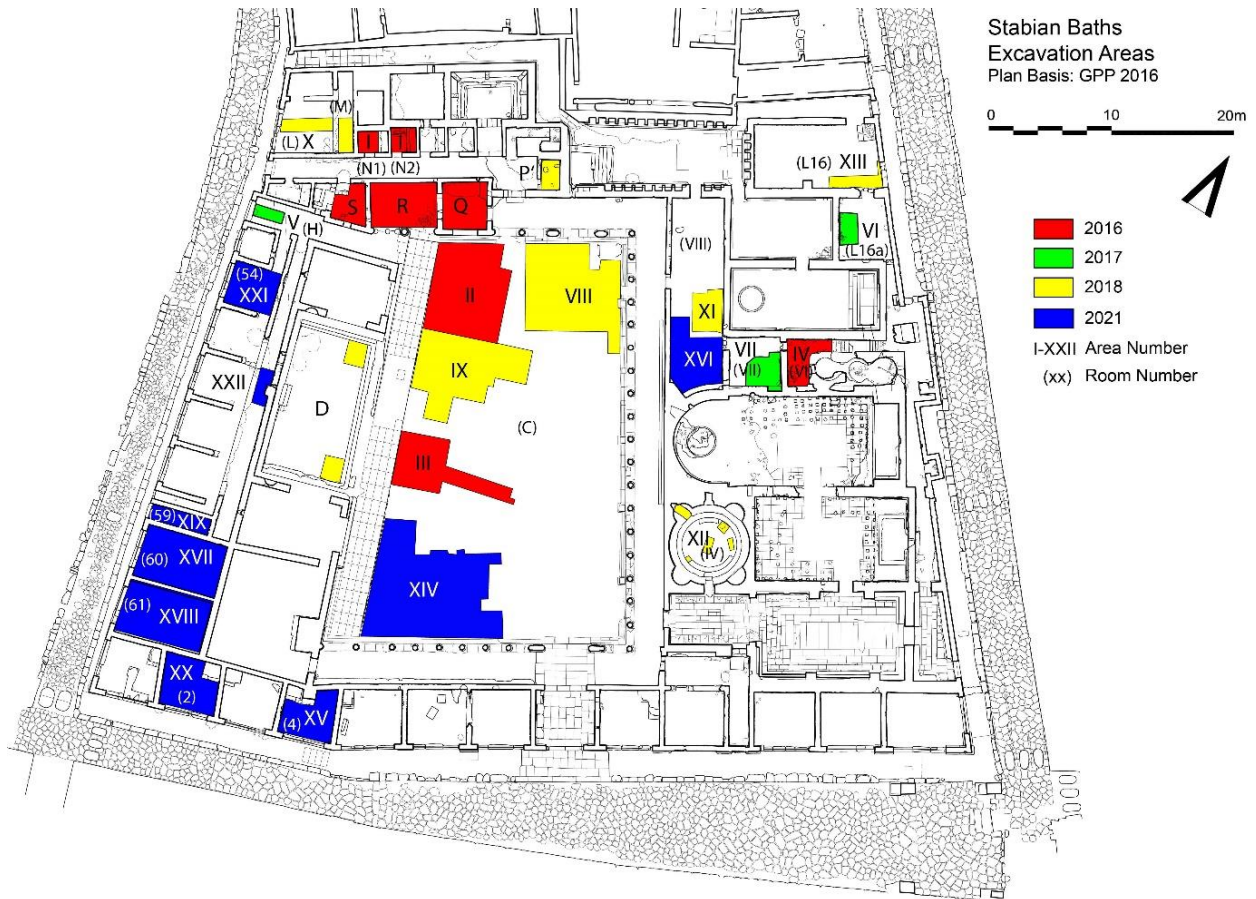


Fig. 3: Stabian Baths, Excavation Areas 2016-2021; © FU Berlin

The following (preliminary) results were achieved:

In **Area XIV** in the southwest corner of the **Palaestra C**, a large round room with a diameter of c. 8m was found, which served most likely as a sweat bath (laconicum) in the first phase of the baths (fig. 4: no. 1). It was entered from the northwest and heated by a device (e.g. brazier or cauldron) that was set up on a large centrally placed round socle. The laconicum was bordered by a corridor and presumably a rectangular palaestra with porticoes on 2-3 sides (north, east, and possibly south) in the east. The finding is very important because the laconicum had not been touched and identified in earlier excavations (1940, 1970s) and testifies to the creative merger of different cultural and functional concepts: a “Greek-type” palaestra (training grounds) with a large laconicum for men, and a new “Roman-type” public bathing facility with separate sections for women and men.



Fig. 4: Area XIV, Palaestra: orthophoto; © Università degli Studi di Napoli L'Orientale

The laconicum was presumably razed after 80 BC when two duumvirs of the new Roman colony built a new (more fashionable) laconicum and destrictarium (massage/oiling room) and remodeled the palaestra and porticoes. A large drainage channel built in the Augustan period was found at the eastern border of the trench, running from north to south (fig. 4: no. 2). A second large channel, running from the northwest to the southeast and cutting right through the northern half of the former laconicum, was built after AD 62 in order to drain the new large swimming pool for the men (fig. 4: no. 3). A large round pit was dug sometime between AD 62 and 79 in the western half of the former laconicum for quarrying pozzolana ash that served to make cement (fig. 4: no. 4)

In **Area XVI (Room VIII)**, several service installations were uncovered that can be assigned to the two last phases of the baths. When the men's caldarium was provided with an apse in the west and a labrum (basin) with running cold water in phase 3, two staircases were built in the southwest (fig. 5: no. 1) and southeast (fig. 5: no. 2) corners of room VIII. Both allowed to service the new experimental installations above ground and underground. A channel running from east to west to the north of the staircases drained water from the eastern praefurnium (furnace) section (fig. 5: no. 3). This channel was replaced by a much larger example further north after the earthquake of AD 62 (fig. 5: no. 4).



Fig. 5: Area XVI, Room VIII, view from N; © FU Berlin

Unexpectedly, a vessel with 24 coins and an accumulation of small balsamaria (bottles for ointments and perfume) was found next to the southeast staircase. The balsamaria may stem from ritual activities carried out in the service room (which once included a now-lost painted lararium) or may have been discarded here after use in the bathing rooms.

The excavation of the service section was complemented and much enriched by work of speleologists Mauro Palumbo, Mario Cristiano, and Marco Ruocco who investigated and fully documented for the first time all accessible water channels, cisterns, and the hypocaust system of the baths (fig. 6).



Fig. 6: Palaestra, large drainage channel; © M. Palumbo

The house that coexisted with the baths until AD 62 was explored by excavating the palaestra (Area XIV), five shops of the baths (tabernae 2, 4, 54, 60, 61 – Areas XV, XVII-XVIII, XX-XXI), and two corridors (59, H – Areas XX, XXII). Several razed walls and different pavements were found that belonged to at least eight confined rooms (several cubacula, a vestibule, and other rooms) and two large spaces (possibly an atrium and a peristyle).

The pavements include high quality examples of decorated opus tessellatum mosaics and opus signinum (cement) floors in the closed rooms and lithostrota (decorative floors made from small irregular variously colored stones) in the large spaces (figs. 7-8). While a precise date can only be determined based on the comprehensive evaluation of diagnostic finds, typological comparisons of the pavements suggest a date in the 1st century BC. Coins found in the fills that served to raise the floors for the tabernae of the baths can be dated to AD 64 and confirm that the house was destroyed and abandoned after the earthquake of AD 62. The house must have been one of the richest residences in Pompeii, which is obvious from its prominent location, size (c. 900 m²), rich pavements, and the presence of a large cellar under its northern part.



Fig. 7: Area XVII, Taberna 60: opus tessellatum floor of a cubiculum, lithostroton floor (in the background) of the atrium (?), view from W; © FU Berlin



Fig. 8: Area XXI, Taberna 54: lithostroton floor of the peristyle courtyard (?), view from W; © FU Berlin