

## **BATHING CULTURE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF URBAN SPACE CASE STUDY POMPEII**

### *Members of the Team*

Theano Anagnostopoulos (Naples); Fabrizio Baiano (Naples); Flavio Biasi (Naples); Rita Cappiello (Naples); Marco Capurro (Naples); Maria Cuomo (Naples); Martina De Simone (Naples); Dr. Domenico Esposito (Berlin); Francesco Fanara (Naples); Dr. Antonio Ferrandes (Rome); Domenico Garzillo (Naples); Fryni Gevenioti (Naples); Prof. Dr. Marco Giglio (Naples); Carmela Granata (Naples); Nicoletta Granito (Naples); Katharina Grunert (Berlin); Mattia Guida (Naples); Chiara Improta (Naples); Blanca Kupke (Berlin); Chiara Mattei (Naples); Christiana Merluzzo (Naples); Dr. Asja Müller (Berlin); Gianmarco Nannino (Naples); Maria Lucia Papalaios (Naples); Prof. Dr. Giacomo Pardini (Salerno); Laura Parlato (Naples); Gemma Rodriguez (Naples); Alessandra Pegurri (Rome); Marco Rocco (Naples); Palma Sabbatino (Naples); Marcia Sorrentino (Naples); Prof. Dr. Monika Trümper (Berlin); Clementina Vanni (Bologna); Flavio Ventre (Naples); Jonathan Vitelli (Naples); Francesca Zandonai (Berlin)



Fig. 1: Excavation Team, June 2022

The fifth excavation campaign in the Stabian Baths took place from May 30 to June 24, 2022, in a collaboration between the Freie Universität Berlin and the Università degli Studi di Napoli L'Orientale. It was generously funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG).

The four excavation campaigns carried out in the Stabian Baths between 2016 and 2021 showed that the complex was built only after 130/125 BC in accordance with the typical standards of Roman public baths. Three major phases of remodeling can be reconstructed (phase 2: after 80 BC; phase 3: in the early Imperial period; phase 4: after the earthquake of AD 62), in each of which the technology, architecture, decoration, and bathing standards of the building were significantly modernized. The 2021 campaign revealed parts of a house that coexisted with the baths from approximately the mid-1st century BC to AD 62 when it was integrated into the baths and transformed into the complex with natatio (pool) and lateral nymphaea visible today.

The fifth excavation campaign in the Stabian Baths aimed to clarify the following remaining open questions: a) for the house, final clarification of the construction, development, and plan; b) for the baths, the development and function of the southern tabernae, which presumably belonged to the baths from the beginning.

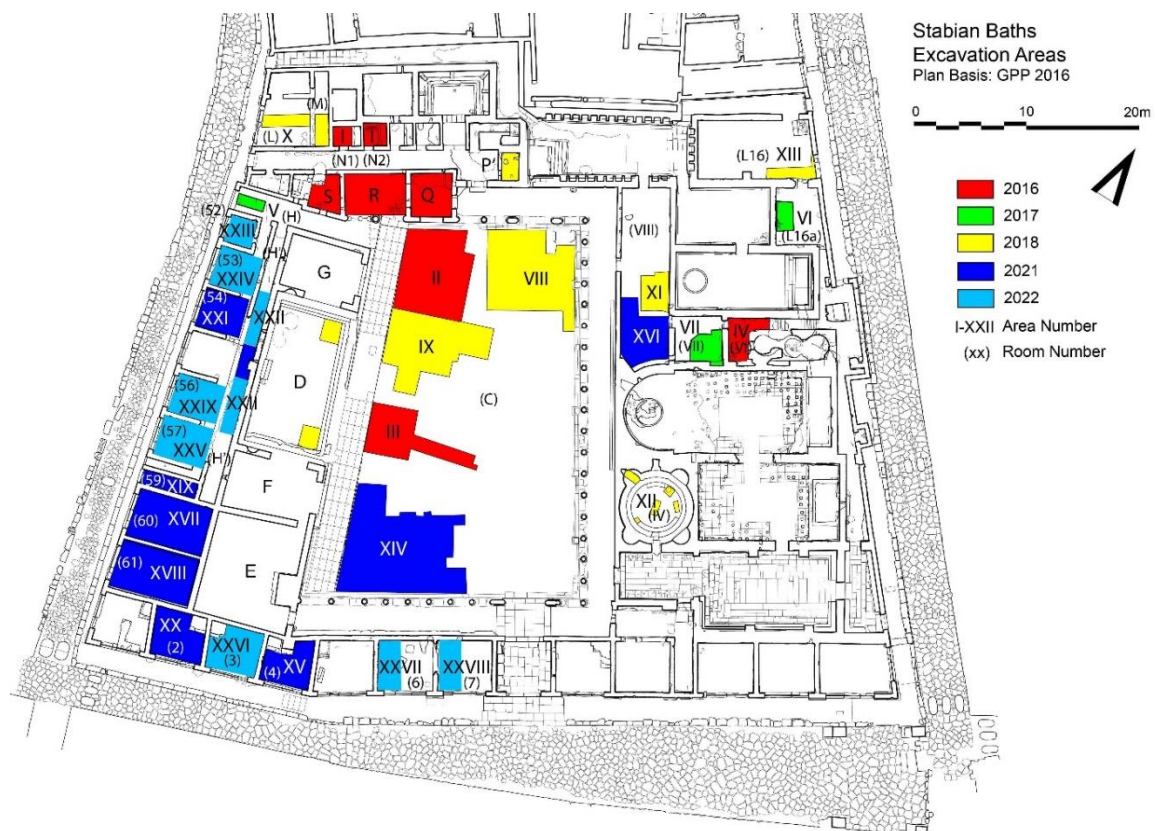


Fig. 1: Stabian Baths: Trenches 2016–2022

This campaign included trenches in eight areas: various tabernae (3, 6, 7, 52, 53, 56, 57) and one corridor (H') (fig. 1). The trenches in tabernae 3, 52, 53, 56, 57 and the corridor revealed large parts of the house that coexisted with the Stabian Baths. In tabernae 6 and 7 floors belonging to the first phase of the Stabian Baths (after 130/125 BC), various installations, and a turtle were found.

## Rooms of the House – Areas XXII–XXVI, XXIX

In Areas XXII–XXVI and XXIX (fig. 1) we discovered razed walls and floors of six different rooms that belonged to the house. Combining these results with the findings from previous campaigns (fig. 1: Areas II, III, IX, XIV, XV, XVII–XXI) we can propose a preliminary reconstruction (fig. 2). This house had a surface area of ca. 900 m<sup>2</sup>, was organized axially symmetrically, and included an atrium and an open space that was possibly a peristyle courtyard. The house was richly decorated with lavish floors and probably also figurative wall decoration of Second Style of which we have found some fragments (fig. 3).



Fig. 2: Preliminary reconstruction of the house



Fig. 3: Fragments of Second Style wall painting, from the fill of taberna 56 (Area XXIX)

The house included the following rooms:

- A centrally located vestibule to the south of the atrium (fig. 1: below tabernae 2 and 3, Areas XX, XXVI) was first equipped with a luxurious pavement made of irregularly cut tesserae of different colors; in a second phase, the level was raised and a new cement floor decorated with rosettes was made; this again was later embellished with pieces of different types of marble (fig. 4).



Fig. 4: Area XXVI: two pavements of the vestibule of the house (US 2635 = lower floor; upper floor = at lower border of photo)

- The vestibule was flanked by three or four rooms decorated with cement floors, none of which can be securely identified as a taberna (fig. 1: under tabernae 1–4, Areas XV, XVIII, XX, XXVI). The room under taberna 3 (Area XXVI) provided two levels of cement floors and under the original floor traces of a possible votive foundation deposit (fig. 5).



Fig. 5: Area XXVI: deposit under the original floor of the house

- The atrium was very large, with a length of 15.50 m (north-south), while the width cannot be securely determined; however, if the rooms to the west and east of the atrium had a similar east-west extension, the atrium would have been ca. 12–12.50 m wide (east-west). In the local context, this is a remarkable size: among the currently largest known atria are those of the Casa delle Nozze d'Argento (V 2, i) with 16.46 x 11.92 m and of the Casa dei mosaici geometrici (VIII 2, 16) with 14.58 x 9.28m. The atrium was decorated with a tessellatum pavement, made of black irregularly cut tesserae and decorated with pieces of different kinds of marble. We found this type of pavement under tabernae 57, 59, 60, 61 and corridor 2 (fig. 1: Areas XXV, XVII-XIX, XXII; fig. 6). The impluvium must have been under today's rooms E and F of the baths.
- The atrium was flanked by three cubacula and an ala to the west and most likely also to the east; moving from south to north, the floors of these rooms became increasingly lavish and included a simple cement floor (under taberna 61, Area XVIII), black-and-white tessellatum mosaics with regularly cut tesserae (under tabernae 59 and 60, Areas XVII, XIX) and a tessellatum floor with irregularly cut white tesserae and large pieces of different colors (under taberna 57, Area XXV, fig. 6, 7).



Fig. 6: Area XXV: pavement of the atrium (bottom); threshold (center); pavement of the ala (top)

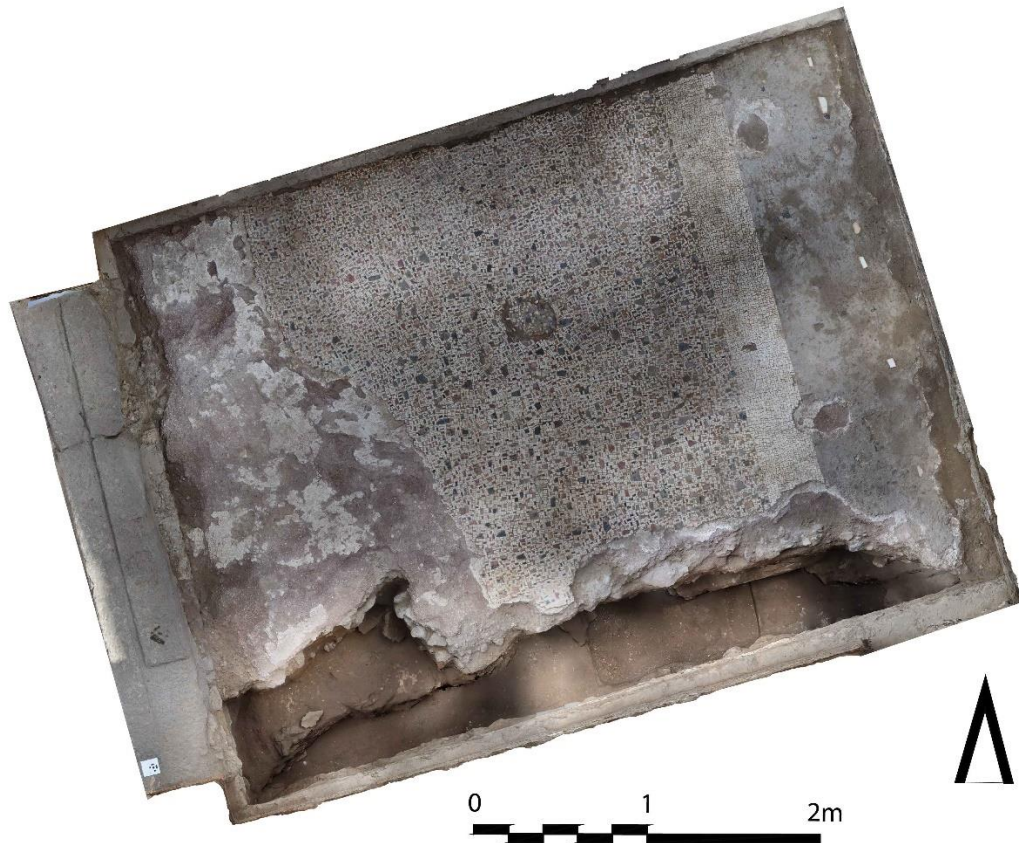


Fig. 7: Area XXV, taberna 57: orthophoto

- A wall of Sarno limestone blocks was found under the ala (Area XXV, taberna 57), which ran in an east-west direction and was oriented like the later walls of the house and baths (fig. 8). This wall may have been built before the construction of the baths (after 130/125 BC) and is therefore one of the few remains of an earlier building that we have discovered so far on the Stabian Baths site. It is possible that an earlier (private) building existed on the site of the Late Republican house that must have been respected during the construction of the baths and may explain the unusual L-shaped plan of the early baths (fig. 9).



Fig. 8: Area XXV, taberna 57: remains of walls of Sarno limestone (under the measure)

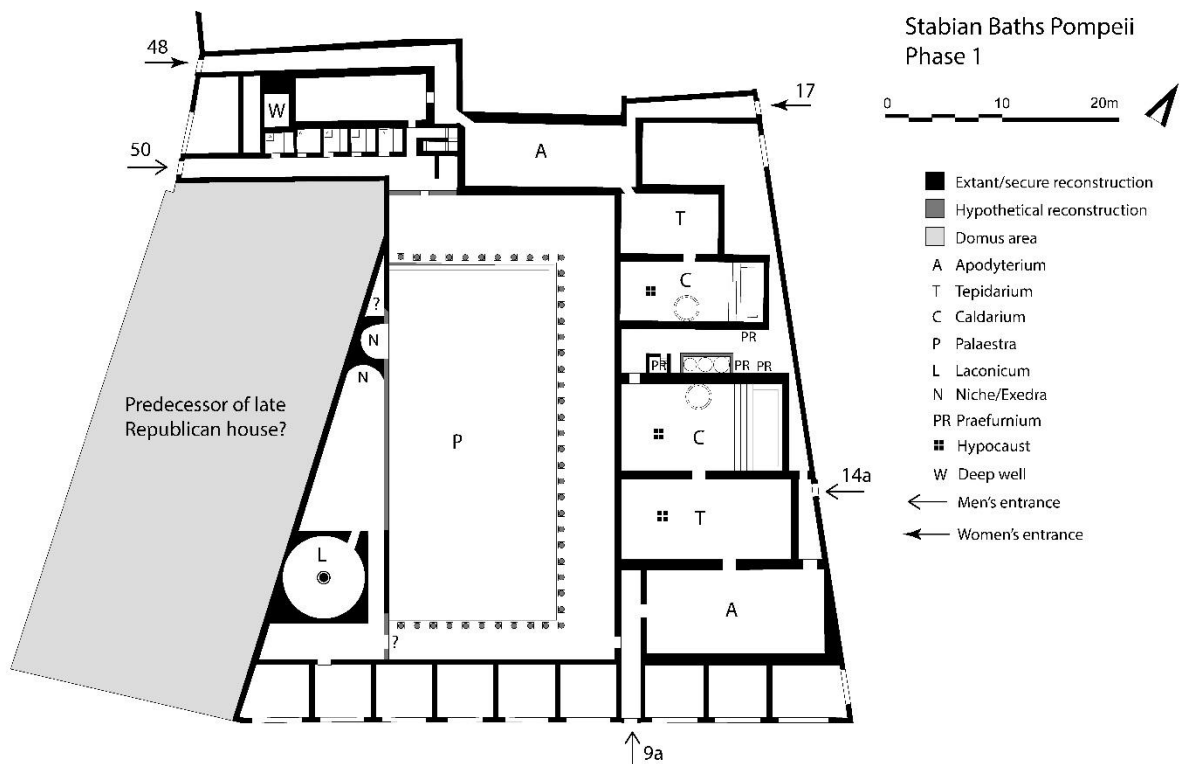


Fig. 9: Stabian Baths, reconstruction of the first phase

- To the north of the atrium was a tablinum with a polychrome tessellatum floor (small, regularly cut black, white and red tesserae), richly decorated with 15 arches that has few comparisons in Pompeii (Area XXII, corridor H'; fig. 10). To the west of the tablinum was a large triclinium with another tessellatum pavement made of regularly cut small black and white tesserae of which we have only excavated the southern limit (Area XXIX, taberna 56; fig. 11).



Fig. 10: Area XXII: orthophoto, razed west wall and pavement of the tablinum



Fig. 11: Area XXIX, taberna 56: orthophoto, razed south wall, tessellatum pavement, and decorated threshold of a triclinium; to the south of the razed wall remains of the ala pavement

- The porticoes of the potential peristyle were very wide (at least 4 m) and all had a tessellatum floor with large, relatively regularly cut pieces of four different colors (red, yellow, green, white; figs. 12–13). Traces of this pavement were found this year in Areas XXII–XXIV (corridor H', tabernae 52 and 53) and in past years in Areas II, IX and XXI (palaestra, taberna 54). No traces have yet been found of the peristyle proper, except for the fluted drum of a column found in 2017 deposited in a trench under corridor H; this drum is made of fine gray tuff and covered with white plaster.





Fig. 12: Area XXIII, taberna 52: detail of West portico pavement

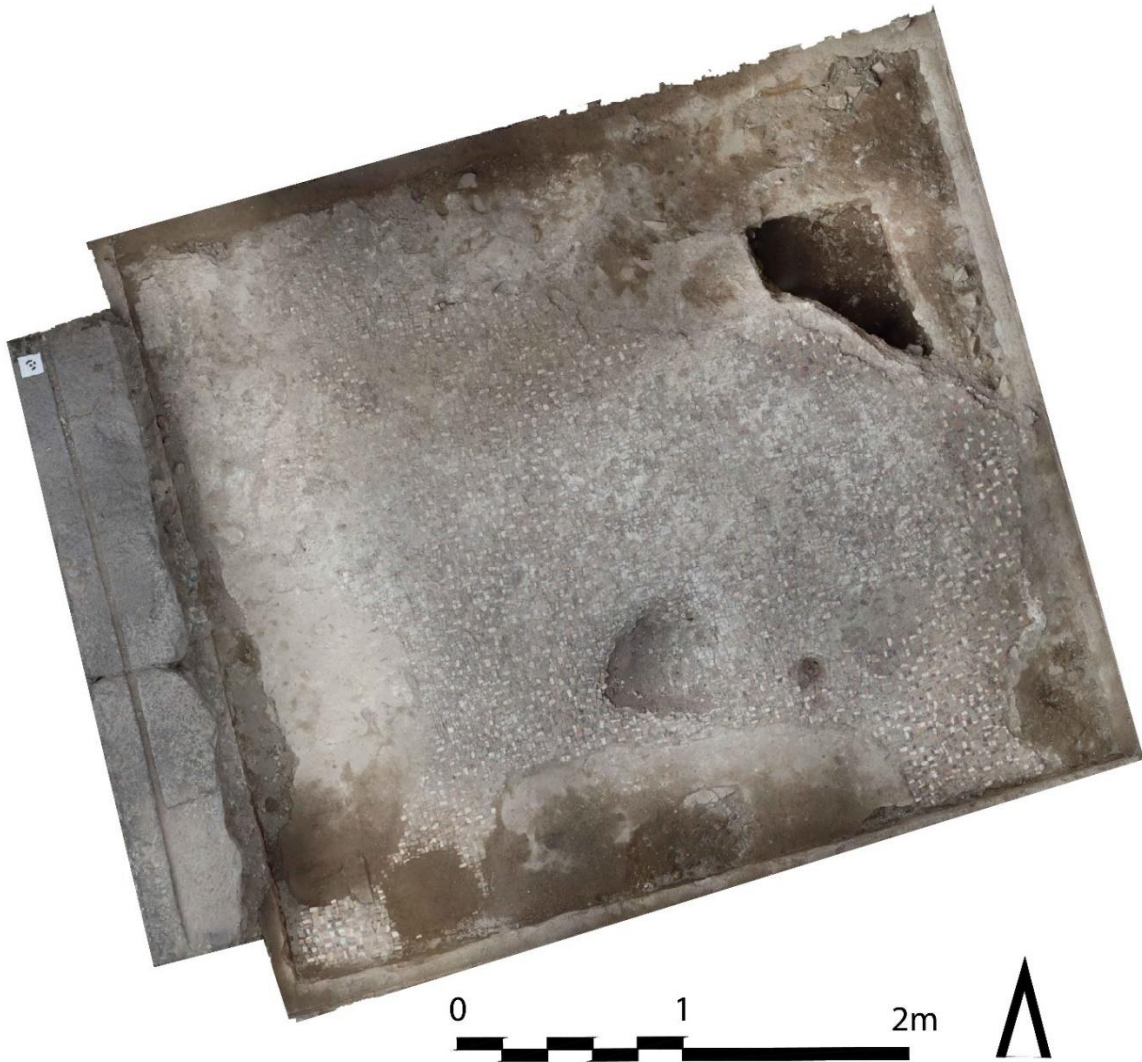


Fig. 13: Area XXIV, taberna 53: orthophoto, pavement of West portico in entire room

- Corridor H' (Area XXII) revealed not only three different floors of the atrium, tablinum, and peristyle courtyard, but also evidence of a modernization phase of the house and a repair phase of the baths shortly before the eruption of Vesuvius (baths phase 4b). In the early Imperial period the house was provided with a water pipe that fed a fountain in the impluvium of the atrium. The lead pipe was laid in a narrow trench that had been cut into the floors of the peristyle, tablinum, and atrium; remnants of the pipe are preserved in the tablinum (fig. 14). The decoration visible today (US 2235) west of the row of arches (US 2207) dates to this phase and was made after the pipe was laid. After the house had been abandoned in AD 62, the lead pipe was partially torn out for reuse. This is evidenced by the robbed-out trenches in the northern area of the tablinum and in the southern portico of the peristyle (US 2234, 2240). A lead pipe was found 20cm above the floor of the peristyle, which must have been intended to supply the natatio and nymphaea of the baths after AD 62. However, the pipe terminates in the center of corridor H', just north of a potential centrally placed supply line to the natatio. Consequently, at the time of the eruption of Vesuvius, the pipe was not finished or under repair. The fact that the baths had to be repaired immediately before the eruption and did not function has already been demonstrated elsewhere in the building with similar findings.



Fig. 14: Area XXII, corridor H': lead pipes of the house (phase 2) and baths (phase 4b)

- While the east and west porticoes of the peristyle did not serve any rooms, two richly decorated rooms and a large underground cellar (long misidentified as an Etruscan or Archaic tomb, fig. 15) opened onto the northern portico.



Fig. 15: Cellar under the northern part of the house (left) with access corridor (right); ©Mauro Palumbo

As a preliminary result, at least five construction phases can be reconstructed in the area of the house:

- 1) Structures built at an unknown point of time before the construction of the baths (wall under taberna 57; partition wall between house and baths?; wells under tabernae 2 and 4; cistern under rooms R and S). It is possible that a private dwelling already existed on the site of the house, which had to be respected when the baths were built after 130/125 BC (fig. 9).
- 2) Construction of the house around the middle of the 1st century BC, as suggested by the stratigraphy and type of floors. The floors are comparable to those of the Villa of the Mysteries and the House of Ceres (I.9,13-14) at Pompeii, but the house under the Stabian Baths was larger and had more rooms than the House of Ceres. It is possible, but stratigraphically impossible to prove with certainty, that the construction of the house took place at the same time as the remodeling of the baths (phase 2 of the baths), which was initiated by two *duoviri* of the new Roman colony (CIL X 829) and can therefore be dated to the period after 80 BC.
- 3) Modernization of the house (provision of a water conduit and fountains) in the early Imperial period, possibly concurrent with the transformation of the baths, which were also connected to the city's aqueduct in the early Imperial period (phase 3 of the baths).
- 4) Destruction of the house by the earthquake of AD 62 and abandonment; a complex with natatio, nymphaea, and tabernae was built on the grounds of the baths (phase 4 of the baths). While the natatio, nymphaea, and southern tabernae (fig. 1: 1–4) were certainly completed and used, the western tabernae (fig. 1: 52–61) were not completed. When Vesuvius erupted, the tabernae had not yet been equipped with wall plaster and floors. Several coins of the emperor Vespasian were found in the fills above the house floors that served to raise the level, providing a *terminus post quem* for the construction works carried out in the tabernae.
- 5) At an unknown point of time before the eruption of Vesuvius, an earthquake (or several earthquakes) again caused damage and required repairs. In the area of the house, this mainly affected the water supply to the natatio and nymphaea, which had not been fully repaired or completed (phase 4b of the baths).

### **Tabernae of the Stabian Baths – Areas XXVI–XXVII**

Investigation of tabernae 6 and 7 (fig. 1) revealed a complex stratigraphic sequence. In both tabernae, only the western third of the room was excavated. In both, the foundation of the west and north walls was reached, which rested on a foundation layer of earth mortar; the latter was 10–30cm wider than the walls themselves (fig. 19). We had found these characteristic earth mortar foundations in all previous campaigns under walls that can certainly be assigned to the first phase of the baths. The characteristic Nocera tuff pillars on the south facade of the tabernae rest on ashlar of Sarno limestone. While the pillars remained unchanged throughout the period of use of the tabernae, the thresholds were raised (probably several times) along with the level of the tabernae.

Taberna 6 was originally connected with the baths via a door in the northern wall whose threshold was located about 40cm below the uppermost (today's) floor level. This door led to a complex with a laconicum in the southwest corner of the original baths (phase 1 of the baths, fig. 9), which was at a comparable level. The door was probably closed after 80 BC (phase 2 of the baths) when the laconicum was destroyed and its terrain added to the palaestra.

Three ancient beaten-earth floors could be identified, at the levels of 24.26 MASL, 24.36 MASL, and 24.63 MASL. Diagnostic finds provide a terminus post quem of the early Imperial period for the upper two floors while the lowest belongs to the first phase of the baths.

A turtle, pregnant with a single egg, was found between the two lowest of these beaten-earth floors. Several artisanal installations of unknown function were found in the northern and southern part of the trench (fig. 16).



Fig. 16: Area XXVII, taberna 6: orthophoto at the end of excavation (left); turtle (above and right)

In the center of taberna 7, the large drainage channel that ran from the latrine of the baths through the palaestra to the Via dell'Abbondanza was excavated (fig. 17); it was covered with a vault of caementitium which in previous excavations has been attributed to the channel's construction phase in the early Imperial period. To the west of the canal we uncovered several floor levels that preceded the construction of the channel. In the southwest corner was a

structure containing several vessels that were stacked on top of each other, included ash, and show abundant traces of burning (fig. 18).



Fig. 17: Area XXVIII, taberna 7:  
orthophoto at the end of excavation



Fig. 18: Area XXVIII, taberna 7: vessels stacked on top of each other in southwest corner



Fig. 19: Area XXVIII, taberna 7: earth mortar under north and west walls

Marco Giglio – Monika Trümper

[mgiglio@unior.it](mailto:mgiglio@unior.it) – [monika.truemper@fu-berlin.de](mailto:monika.truemper@fu-berlin.de)

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